

LT360: Trauma and Literature

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Office Hours: By Appointment

Course Description

Day/Time: Mon & Wed 15:45-17:15
Credits: 8 ECTS, 4 U.S. credits

In response to the tumultuous events of the twentieth century, contemporary literature is increasingly characterized as a "literature of trauma." The literary trauma theory that emerged in the 1990s proposes that literary practices should be seen as "sites of trauma" (S. Freud) in which particular strategies are developed to speak of the unspeakable, to bear witness to the impossible, and to find particular ways of reliving experience through writing. Novelists often grapple with the challenge of adequately representing the impact of trauma by mimicking its forms and symptoms, resulting in narratives marked by collapsed temporality, disrupted continuity, and constant repetition. This course engages in a comprehensive exploration of diverse approaches to the study of trauma and its representation in literature. We will reflect on how collective and individual trauma can be represented, how a text can become a testimony, and how trauma interacts with memory and with oblivion. Students will develop analytical and interpretive skills, examining texts that depict traumatic experiences through the lenses of narrative theory, trauma studies, and reception theory. Problems of representation of traumatic experience will be considered in conjunction with related concepts of experience, empathy, the sublime. The conceptualisation of trauma will be carried out with reference to the works by S. Freud, C. Caruth, J. C. Alexander, R. Barthes, D. LaCapra, M. Rothberg, P. Ricœur, and others. Special attention will be paid to contemporary autofiction focused on traumatic experiences ("founding fault", according to A. Genon) and the search for ways to narrate them. The material for discussion in the course will be novels of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that represent traumatic experiences.

Requirements

Course texts:

Students are expected to purchase or borrow six texts in paper or electronic format:

- G. Perec «W, or the Memory of Childhood» (1975)
- R. Federman «Shhh: The Story of a Childhood» (2008)
- W.G. Sebald «The Emigrants» (1992)
- E. Vodolazkin «The Aviator» (2016)
- H. Guibert «To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life» (1990)
- E. Carrère «The Adversary» (2000)

All other texts will be uploaded to Brightspace, the course's learning management system.

The syllabus on Brightspace will be the official, updated version for this course.

The library owns copies of the course texts, which can be consulted or borrowed by students. A reserve shelf with relevant texts and suggested readings will be available for study and research connected to the course.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory, and active participation in discussions will be an essential part of the course. Participation consists in contributing productively to class discussion in a respectful manner, and in demonstrating a sound knowledge of the texts assigned. Readings should be done in advance of the class for which they are assigned. Participation also requires coming to class with the relevant texts and seminar materials.

To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Assessment

Students will be assessed on the basis of regular participation and on the basis of written and oral assignments (listed below).

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.

Assignments

- Essay One: 1000 words
- Padlet posts: 500 words in total (ongoing) - calculated as part of the participation grade
- Two response papers: 1000 words each; each paper responds to an assigned text, due the night before class on the day on which the text is assigned. Sign-up in advance.
- Final presentation: 1500 words (the presentation notes should be handed in to the instructors after the presentation and will be evaluated together with the presentation.)

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Assignments that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept assignments that are more than 24 hours late. If the instructors agree to accept a late assignment, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

- Participation (including 2 posts on Padlets): 30%
- Essay 1 (1000 words): 17.5%
- Response Essay 1 (1000 words): 17.5%
- Response Essay 2 (1000 words): 17.5%
- Final presentation (1000 words): 17.5%

Schedule

Unit/ Assignment	Week	Date	Theme	Readings
I. Theoretical Backgrounds	1	2 September	Trauma in Literature	<i>Literature:</i> Paul Celan “Deathfugue.” (1948)
		4 September	Trauma from Psychology to Literature	<i>Theory:</i> Freud “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” Nicole A. Sütterlin “History of trauma theory“

Unit/ Assignment	Week	Date	Theme	Readings
	2	9 September	Trauma in Time: Trauma and its Temporal Structure	<p><i>Theory:</i> Cathy Caruth «Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History» (excerpts).</p> <p><i>Literature:</i> G. Perec, «W, or the Memory of Childhood» (1975)</p>
		11 September	Trauma and Limits of Representation: The (Un)representable experience	<p><i>Theory:</i> R. Eaglestone «Trauma in Fiction»; B. Stampfl «Parsing the Unspeakable»</p> <p><i>Literature:</i> G. Perec, «W, or the Memory of Childhood» (1975)</p>

Unit/ Assignment	Week	Date	Theme	Readings
	3	16 September	Trauma Narrative, Trauma Fiction - 1	<i>Theory:</i> Eric Santner «History beyond the Pleasure Principle» <i>Literature:</i> Raymond Federman "Shhh: The Story of a Childhood» (2008)
		18 September	Trauma Narrative, Trauma Fiction - 2	<i>Theory:</i> Jakob Lothe «Narrative» <i>Literature:</i> Raymond Federman "Shhh: The Story of a Childhood» (2008)
Padlet #1. «For and against the concept of ‘The Unspeakable’ » Deadline: 22 September				
II. Key concepts				

Unit/ Assignment	Week	Date	Theme	Readings
	4	23 September	Acting-out / Working-through	<i>Theory:</i> S. Freud «Mourning and melancholia»; D. LaCapra «Writing History, Writing Trauma» (excerpts)
		25 September	Traumatic Realism	<i>Theory:</i> M. Rothberg «Traumatic realism» (excerpts) <i>Literature:</i> Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn «The Gulag Archipelago: An Experiment in Literary Investigation» (1973)(excerpts)
	5	30 September	Cultural trauma	<i>Theory:</i> Jeffrey C. Aleksander «Toward a Theory of a Cultural Trauma» <i>Literature:</i> Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn «The Gulag Archipelago: An Experiment in Literary Investigation» (1973) (excerpts)

Unit/ Assignment	Week	Date	Theme	Readings
		2 October	Witnessing and testimony - 1	<p><i>Theory:</i> G. Agamben «The Witness»</p> <p><i>Literature:</i> W.G. Sebald «The Emigrants» (1992)</p>
	6	7 October	Witnessing and testimony - 2	<p><i>Theory:</i> S. Felman, D. Laub «Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History» (excerpts)</p> <p><i>Literature:</i> W.G. Sebald «The Emigrants» (1992)</p>
		9 October	Memory - 1	<p><i>Theory:</i> Jan Assman «Communicative and Cultural Memory»</p> <p><i>Literature:</i> Eugene Vodolazkin. «The Aviator» (2016)</p>

Unit/ Assignment	Week	Date	Theme	Readings
	7	14 October	Memory - 2	<p><i>Theory:</i> Paul Ricœur «Memory, history, forgetting»</p> <p><i>Literature:</i> Eugene Vodolazkin. «The Aviator» (2016)</p>
		16 October	Perpetrator Trauma	<p><i>Theory:</i> Erin McGlothlin «Perpetrator trauma»</p> <p><i>Literature:</i> Jonathan Littell «The Kindly Ones» (2006) (excerpts)</p>
Essay 1. Deadline: 20 October				
		21 October	Fall Break	
		23 October	Fall Break	

Unit/ Assignment	Week	Date	Theme	Readings
	8	28 October	Postmemory	<p><i>Theory:</i> Marianne Hirsch «The generation of the Postmemory» (excerpts)</p> <p><i>Literature:</i> Maria Stepanova «In Memory of Memory» (2017) (excerpts)</p>
		30 October	Empathy, Therapy, Care - 1	<p><i>Theory:</i> Isabelle Galichon, « La littérature en médecine narrative, une expérience (du) sensible » [«Literature in narrative medicine: a sensitive experience»] (<i>transl. into English</i>)</p> <p><i>Literature:</i> Hervé Guibert «To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life» (1990)</p>

Unit/ Assignment	Week	Date	Theme	Readings
	9	4 November	Empathy, Therapy, Care - 2	Alexandre Gefen «Face à la maladie» [«Confronting illness»] <i>(transl. into English)</i> <i>Literature:</i> Hervé Guibert «To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life» (1990)
Padlet #2. «Can literature be a means of therapy for trauma?» Deadline: 5 November				
III. Trauma across media and genres		6 November	Trauma in autobiography/ autofiction - 1	<i>Literature:</i> Marguerite Duras «The War: A Memoir» (1985) (excerpts)
	10	11 November	Trauma in autobiography/ autofiction - 2	<i>Literature:</i> Oksana Vasyakina «Wound» (2021) (excerpts)

Unit/ Assignment	Week	Date	Theme	Readings
		13 November	Trauma and Photography	<p><i>Theory:</i> R. Barthes «Camera Lucida», M. Iversen «Photography, Trace and Trauma» (excerpts)</p> <p><i>Literature:</i> A. Ernaux & M. Marie «The Use of Photography» (2005)</p>
	11	18 November	Trauma, Document, and Archive	<p><i>Theory:</i> Arlette Farge «The Allure of the Archives», Jacques Derrida «Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression» (excerpts)</p> <p><i>Literature:</i> Maria Stepanova «In Memory of Memory» (2017) (excerpts)</p>
		20 November	Guest Lecture #1	

Unit/ Assignment	Week	Date	Theme	Readings
IV. Ethical Implications	12	25 November	Trauma and Writing: Appropriation of Experience	Vanessa Springora «Consent: A Memoir» (2020) (excerpts)
		27 November	Trauma, Trial, and Inquiry	<i>Theory:</i> Laurent Demanze «Un nouvel âge de l'enquête» [«A new age of inquiry»] (excerpts; trans. into English). <i>Literature:</i> Emmanuel Carrère «The Adversary» (2000)
	13	2 December	Trauma, Trial, and Inquiry	<i>Literature:</i> Emmanuel Carrère «The Adversary» (2000)
		4 December	Guest Lecture #2	
	14	9 December	Presentations	
		11 December	Presentations	

Essay Deadlines

- Essay 1: 20 October
- Padlet #1: 22 September
- Padlet #2: 5 November
- Two response papers: depending on the sign-up schedule
- Final presentation: week 14

Grades Submission

- Midterm grades are due end of week 8, i.e. 1 November 2024
- Final grades for graduating students are due 16 December 2024
- Final grades for all students are due on 3 January 2025