

University of Pittsburgh
Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures
SLAV 1225

Behind Bars: Cross-Cultural Representations of Prison in the 20th Century

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| Fall 2011 | Instructor: Erin Alpert |
| Time: MW 3:00-4:15pm | Office: CL 1417 |
| Room: CL 352 | Tel: 412-624-5715 (no voicemail) |
| CRN: 24439 | Office hours: Tues 3:30-4:30; Wed 1-2 |
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Other Contacts

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Credits, Prerequisites, and Format:

This course carries three credits and satisfies the A&S requirements in literature and comparative foreign culture. The course has a demanding reading load and challenging writing assignments; it is an upper-level course best suited for juniors and seniors. This course also addresses a variety of sensitive and controversial topics and students should be prepared to discuss them in a mature and intellectual manner.

The course meets twice a week and combines lecture and discussion formats. Participation will be a vital component of the class, and students will be required to share their opinions and ideas. I encourage every student to consult with me during my office hours regarding any concerns, questions, or ideas that they have about the course.

Course Description:

This course examines artistic works produced in prison and artistic works about prison, addressing both the allure of the criminal world as a form of entertainment and the function of art within prison as escapism and survival technique. In structure the course is broken into three parts: the first part focuses on the forced-labor camp system known as the Gulag in the Soviet Union; the second part examines Europe (Germany and Eastern Europe) during the Holocaust; and the third part concentrates on prison writings and criminal culture in America.

Analyzing cultural products from prisons allows for discussion of key philosophical issues of human existence. These issues are often centered on a system of dichotomies, such as freedom vs. captivity, mind vs. body, master vs. slave. The content of the course provides the opportunity to compare not only cultures—American, Russian, and German/East European—but also the variety of prison experience according to race, gender, and religion.

Since the space of the prison is a fertile ground for producing many different types of artistic expression, the course incorporates an assortment of media, including: literature, film, life-writing, songs, and even tattoos. Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Approach the relationship between prison and art from a critical perspective
- Assess different experiences of imprisonment according to race, gender, and religion
- Trace literary motifs relevant to the course through different works and different time periods
- Value the importance of studying multiple media when approaching a cultural topic
- Produce a coherent, well-researched, and well-reasoned paper engaging in literary and cultural analysis

Required Texts:

The following books are available for purchase through the University Book Center. Students will also find copies of these texts on two-hour reserve in Hillman Library.

Borowski, Tadeusz. *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*. NY: Penguin Classics, 1992.

Davis, Angela. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Toronto: Open Media, 2003.

Levi, Primo. *Survival in Auschwitz*. NY: Touchstone, 1996.

Shalamov, Varlam. *Kolyma Tales*. Trans. John Glad. NY: Penguin Classics, 1995.

Spiegelman, Art. *Maus II: A Survivor's Tale*. NY: Pantheon, 1991.

Texts on Reserve or E-Reserve:

All of the shorter texts (selections from the works below) for this course can be found either on reserve in Hillman Library or by using E-Reserve. The password to access the documents will be given as soon as it is available. You can access the E-Reserve system through PittCat on the library's home page.

Abbot, Jack Henry. *In the Belly of the Beast: Letters from Prison*. NY: Random House, 1981.

Applebaum, Anne, ed. *Gulag Voices: An Anthology*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2011.

Auerbach, L. et al, eds. *Belomor: An Account of the Construction of the New Canal between the White Sea and the Baltic Sea*. Westport, CT: Hyperion, 1977.

Baldaev, Danzig. *The Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopedia*. Göttingen: Steidl/Fuel, 2002.

Berenbaum, Michael, ed. *Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis*.

NY: New York UP, 1990. [Available online through PittCat]

Berkman, Alexander. *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*. NY: Schocken Books, 1970.

Burns, Robert E. *I Am a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang*. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1997.

Cleaver, Eldridge. *Soul on Ice*. NY: Delta, 1968.

Hassine, Victor. *Life Without Parole: Living in Prison Today*. NY: Oxford UP, 2008.

Himes, Chester. "Prison Mass." *The Collected Stories of Chester Himes*. NY: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1990.

Jackson, George. *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*. NY: Coward-McCann, 1970.

Peltier, Leonard. *Prison Writings: My Life Is My Sun Dance*. NY: St. Martin's Press, 1999.

Shapovalov, Veronica, Ed. and Trans. *Remembering the Darkness: Women in Soviet Prisons*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001.

Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr I. *The Gulag Archipelago: An Experiment in Literary Investigation I-II*. NY: Harper, 1973.

Films and Television Episodes:

The following films and sound documents are available for viewing and listening in Hillman Library's Media Resource Center:

Benigni, Roberto, dir. *Life is Beautiful*. 1997.
 Goldovskaia, Marina, dir. *Solovki Power*. 1988.
 Polanski, Roman, dir. *The Pianist*. 2002.
 Rosenberg, Stuart, dir. *Cool Hand Luke*. 1967.
Oz: The Complete First Season. 1997.
Prison Break: Season One. 2005.

Supplementary Texts:

The following texts are not required for the course, but students may wish to consult them as accompaniments to their readings and for their final papers.

Applebaum, Anne. *Gulag: A History*. NY: Doubleday, 2003.
 Des Pres, Terrence. *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camp*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1976.
 Ginzburg, Evgeniia. *Journey into the Whirlwind*. San Diego: Harvest, 1967.
 Glinka, Elena. "Kolyma Streetcar."
http://www.opendemocracy.net/arts-Literature/gulag_2791.jsp
 Gonthier, David Jr. *American Prison Film since 1930: From The Big House to The Shawshank Redemption*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006.
 Levine, Michael G. *The Belated Witness: Literature, Testimony and the Question of Holocaust Survival*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2006.
 McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. NY: Harper, 1994.
 Milliken, Stephen F. *Chester Himes: A Critical Appraisal*. Columbia: U Missouri P, 1976.
 Parker, Alan, dir. *Midnight Express*. 1978.
 Toker, Leona. *Return from the Archipelago: Narratives of Gulag Survivors*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000.
 Wilder, Billy, dir. *Stalag 17*. 1953.

Course Requirements and Grading:

You will be required to:

- Complete reading assignments for each class meeting and be prepared to discuss them intelligently in class on the pertinent day. Pop quizzes will be given on the readings. There will be at least five quizzes, the best four of which will be counted towards the student's grade.
- Participate actively in class discussions
- Submit a total of three 2-page response papers; these short papers are due at the end of each section and are designed to help you connect readings and in-class discussions
- Complete two preparatory writing assignments for the final paper (thesis statement/proposal; outline with bibliography)
- Write one final 8-10-page paper
- Optional: Complete an extra credit assignment – details to be announced in class

Your grade will be determined by the following components:

- One 8-10-page paper (30%)

- Paper assignments: thesis/proposal, outline with bibliography (20%)
- Participation in class discussions and in class assignments and quizzes (25%)
- Response papers (25%)

Submitting Assignments:

All written assignments (response papers, outline, final paper) **MUST** be submitted via turnitin.com by 5pm on the date due. Instructions for using turnitin.com will be handed out in class before the first assignment is due.

Grading scale:

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| 98-100—A+ | 87-89—B+ | 77-79—C+ | 67-69—D+ | |
| 93-97—A | 83-86—B | 73-76—C | 63-66—D | ≤ 59 = F |
| 90-92—A- | 80-82—B- | 70-72—C- | 60-62—D- | |

Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to attend all classes. Missing classes jeopardizes your participation record and puts you in danger of missing important discussions. There are no excused absences. Each student gets two “free” absences. After two missed classes, each additional absence counts as a zero in class participation for that day. As the lowest quiz grade is dropped, no quizzes may be made up. In the event of a serious emergency that results in an extended absence, please talk to the instructor.

In case of absence, it is your responsibility to obtain from your classmates any information passed out during the class you missed. You are, therefore, encouraged to exchange telephone numbers and e-mail addresses with your classmates.

Academic Integrity:

By remaining enrolled in the course, you not only agree to abide by the above stipulations, but also understand that I will follow rigorously the rules spelled out in the Arts and Sciences Academic Integrity guidelines regarding cheating and plagiarism, available at:

<http://www.as.pitt.edu/faculty/policy/integrity.html>. Any infraction of this policy will result in automatic course failure.

Disability Policy:

If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, you are required to notify both me and Disability Resources and Services by the second week of the term. You may be asked to provide documentation of your disability to determine the appropriateness of accommodations. To notify Disability Resources and Services, call 412-648-7890 (voice or TDD) to schedule an appointment. The Internet address is:

<http://www.pitt.edu/~osaweb/drs/drs.html>. The office is located in William Pitt Union, Rm. 216.

Email Policy:

Each student is issued a University e-mail address (username@pitt.edu) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by the University for official communication with students. Students are expected to read e-mail sent to this account on a regular basis. Failure to read and react to University communications in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. The University provides an e-mail forwarding service that allows students to read their e-mail via other service providers (e.g., Hotmail, AOL, Yahoo). Students that choose to forward their e-mail from their pitt.edu address to another address do so at their own risk. If e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to official communications sent to their University e-mail address.

| PART I: Russia | | |
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| The Criminal and the Political Prisoner in the Soviet Gulag | | |
| <i>Day</i> | <i>General Theme & Homework Due That Day</i> | <i>In-Class Discussion Topics</i> |
| August 29 | INTRODUCTION AND SYLLABUS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Functions of art in prison -Purpose of prison? |
| August 31 | THE POLITICAL PRISONER HW: <i>The Gulag Archipelago</i> (565-615) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Introduction to the Gulag -The historical approach -Testimony and its challenges -Comparison with <i>One Day in the Life of...</i> |
| Sept 7 | HW: <i>Kolyma Tales*</i> (3-49) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The male narrative: Solzhenitsyn vs. Shalamov -Fiction vs. “facts”: what better represents the experience? |
| Sept 12 | HW: <i>Kolyma Tales*</i> (68-79, 107-13, 173-83, 284-91) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Issues of loyalty in the camps -Identity and self-definition -Importance of “remaining human” in camps -Special advantages in the camps |
| Sept 14 | THE FEMALE PRISONER HW: <i>Remembering the Darkness</i> (Chapter 4), <i>Till My Tale is Told</i> (Chapter 1 – pages 1-28; Chapter 15) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Relating women’s experiences to the Gulag in general -Arrest and interrogation |
| Sept 19 | HW: <i>Remembering the Darkness</i> (Chapters 16, 18), <i>Till My Tale is Told</i> (11), <i>Gulag Voices</i> (8) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Women’s experience in the Gulag -Specific issues: pregnancy, rape, health care -Differences between male/female narratives |
| Sept 21 | None | In-class screening of <i>Solovki Power</i> If you are not in class, you must watch the film on your own in Hillman |
| Sept 26 | HW: <i>Solovki Power</i> (if you missed the in-class screening) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -How film documentary helps us to understand the Gulag |
| Sept 28 | THE CRIMINAL PRISONER HW: <i>The Russian Tattoo Encyclopaedia</i> (introduction and images) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The criminal body as text -The secret language of Gulag prison tattoos |
| Oct 3 | HW: <i>The History of the Construction of the White Sea Canal</i> (17-26, 125-155) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The notion of “re-forging” and the re-education of criminal prisoners |

| PART II: Europe and the Holocaust | | |
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| Representations and Testimony: Culture and the Concentration Camp | | |
| Oct 5 | HW: Gulag Response Paper | Introduction to the Holocaust |
| TUESDAY Oct 11 | THE CLASSIC TESTIMONY HW: <i>Survival in Auschwitz</i> * ("Author's Preface" - "The Drowned and the Saved" [approx. 9-100]) | -Representing the Holocaust: specific challenges -Discussion of life-writing and current theories -Preserver/distorter: dual role of the memoir |
| Oct 12 | HW: <i>Survival in Auschwitz</i> * ("Chemical Examination"- end [approx.101-73]) | -Issues of memory -Comparison with Gulag testimonies -Comparison with other Holocaust memoirs |
| Oct 17 | NON-JEWISH PRISONERS HW: <i>Mosaic of Victims</i> (available online through PittCat) (Required: Chapters 8, 16; Optional: 14-15, 18-21) Student meetings to discuss paper topics | -Differences between Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners (experiences and narratives) |
| Oct 19 | FICTION VS. TESTIMONY HW: Tadeusz Borowski stories* (29-49, 82-97) | -Fiction vs. testimony: similarities and differences -Can we compare the Gulag and concentration camps? |
| Oct 24 | HW: Tadeusz Borowski stories* (98-142, 177-80) Be prepared to share your paper topic in class! | -Freedom vs. captivity, inside vs. outside -The Holocaust as "normal" |
| Oct 26 | NEW APPROACHES IN REPRESENTING THE HOLOCAUST HW: <i>Maus II</i> , 41-117* | -Introduction to reading graphic novels -How does this medium work? Well or with serious limitations? |
| Oct 31 | HW: <i>Life is Beautiful</i> | -Introduction to representing the Holocaust in film -Approaching the Holocaust with comedy: offensive or penetrating? |
| Nov 2 | HW: <i>The Pianist</i> | -The theme of resistance during the Holocaust -Can the ghetto be considered a prison? -The role of art in procuring advantages |

| PART III: America From Anarchists to Chain Gangs, from Pulp Fiction to Crime Film | | |
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| Nov 7 | HW Holocaust Response Paper | –Introduction to prison in American |
| Nov 9 | TURN OF THE CENTURY: FEAR OF THE OTHER HW: <i>Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist</i> (95-158) | –Fear of anarchy as the “other;” Ukrainian anarchist vs. Pittsburgh industrialist –Industrialization and inequality |
| Nov 14 | 1910S-1920S: THE CHAIN GANG HW: <i>I Am a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang</i> (37-81) Paper outline/bibliography due | –The chain gang phenomenon –Issues of race –Birth of the blues: slavery, the chain gang, and prison songs –The connection between labor and song –Social justice and the chain gang |
| Nov 16 | 1930S AND 1940S: PRISON AND THE CRIMINAL ALLURE HW: Chester Himes “Prison Mass” | –Himes and his relationship to creativity in prison –Beginning artistic careers in prison –Popularity of pulp fiction and crime comics |
| Nov 21 | THE 1960S FILM AND SENSATIONALISM HW: <i>Cool Hand Luke</i> | –Prison on the big screen –Representation of the 1960s |
| Nov 28 | THE 1960S AND 1970S: PRISON LETTERS HW: <i>Soul on Ice</i> (3-17), <i>Soledad Brother</i> (232-250), <i>In the Belly of the Beast</i> (135-154) | –Issues of race continued –The Black Panther Movement –Purpose of letter writing? |
| Nov 30 | THE 1970S AND 1980S HW: <i>Prison Writings: My Life Is My Sun Dance</i> (1-39), <i>Life Without Parole: Living in Prison Today</i> (58-64) | –Issues of race – beyond black and white –Impact of prison writing |
| Dec 5 | PRISON ON THE LITTLE SCREEN HW: <i>Oz</i> (episode 1: “The Routine”) <i>Prison Break</i> (episode 1: “Pilot”) | –Prison on TV, contemporary crime and prison dramas |
| Dec 7 | FINAL QUESTIONS HW: <i>Are Prisons Obsolete?*</i> | –Course wrap-up: ideas and conclusions |
| Final Deadlines | | December 10: American Prison Response Paper December 12: Final Paper |