Although it has been taken largely out of context, T.W. Adorno’s famous pronouncement—“to write poetry after Auschwitz is a barbaric act”—has set the terms of various debates about literary responses to the Holocaust. Holocaust literature has been at the center of questions about the limits of representation and the representation of pain, trauma, and survival. Among the questions we will address are: What are the connections between imaginative literature and history? Between history and memory? How do we understand the documentary and testimonial impulse in much of Holocaust literature? How does this literature shape a contemporary sense of exile, diaspora, or home? How do these texts challenge our notions of national and linguistic borders? What difference does translation make in our understanding of these texts? What is the relationship between public and private memory?

We will read poetry and fiction originally written in English, German, Yiddish, Hebrew, French, Polish, and Italian (all in English translation; there are no language requirements for this course). Films, critical, theoretical, and historical texts inform each of our discussions.

Requirements include lively participation in class discussions, two essays of varying length, a final project (exam or paper) to be discussed.