

# CREATIVE WRITING SEMINAR ON HOLOCAUST MEMORY

By Daniel Múgica.



## ■ INTRODUCTION

Imre Kertész (Nobel Prize in Literature 2002) holds that there is a culture of the Holocaust. The existence of this culture is an objective fact, of which we have knowledge through art and the study of its history. It comes into being in the death camps through the texts and drawings, sketched with the courage of those who know they are condemned to death, among the misery, hunger, and the blows of the SS or the barks spouting out of the Kapo's mouth. The culture of the Holocaust extends to the present by way of essays, novels, autobiographies, pictorial exhibitions, movies, photographs, comics; created by Jewish authors following two different paths: the one that serves as reminder of the horror, and the one that bubbles up in a fictional settings through the feverish imagination of its author.

Imre Kertész dislikes the assertion: "The Holocaust cannot be explained." There are reasons and facts to the contrary, according to the Hungarian author, which explain, but not justify, the extermination of Jews in Europe. I do not believe the Holocaust, or Shoah, to be a historical anomaly; it is the logical and political conclusion of "German idealism." The Jewish people have been persecuted during all their history because human beings, even when they show themselves to be indecent and inhumane, as with Nazism, are generally afraid of those who are different, hounding them to their death. The roots of the Jewish people's journey, both lay and observant, are to be found in The Book, The Torah. The cultural and spiritual elements that bring them together, and define their idiosyncrasies, and singularity, have their origin in words, and therefore, from the written word.

The "Jewish Self" in the death camps, including those in the Diaspora previous to the proclamation of the State of Israel, lacked a homeland, a physical place where to project itself. In spite, and because of it, Jewish people possess up to the present day one of the most magnificent cultures in the world, of which the Holocaust is, unfortunately, part. The Jewish spirit can be felt in trade, science, and especially in the arts, i.e., in the world of ideas, which expresses itself through the written word.

The "Western Self," as a shared belief, comes to us from Greece, and then Rome; and after that the French and American Revolutions, and then the European Union and the US. The "Western Self," founded on a spirit of concord and solidarity, was shattered to pieces by Nazism, which overthrows the spirit of the law, establishing a new order of segregation and death.

Judaism became rooted, throughout its history, across the various European cultures and nations. All of it, including Nazism, everything that is Jewish, and that is not Jewish, come together as part of an enriching exchange.

The roots of Judaism are to be found, past and present, in the written word, be it fiction or non-fiction. The Holocaust is the 20th century's most traumatic event (yes, an event, however much it might grate us to define it as such); and in Jewish consciousness, be it at a historical, personal or family level, the greatest outrage ever committed.

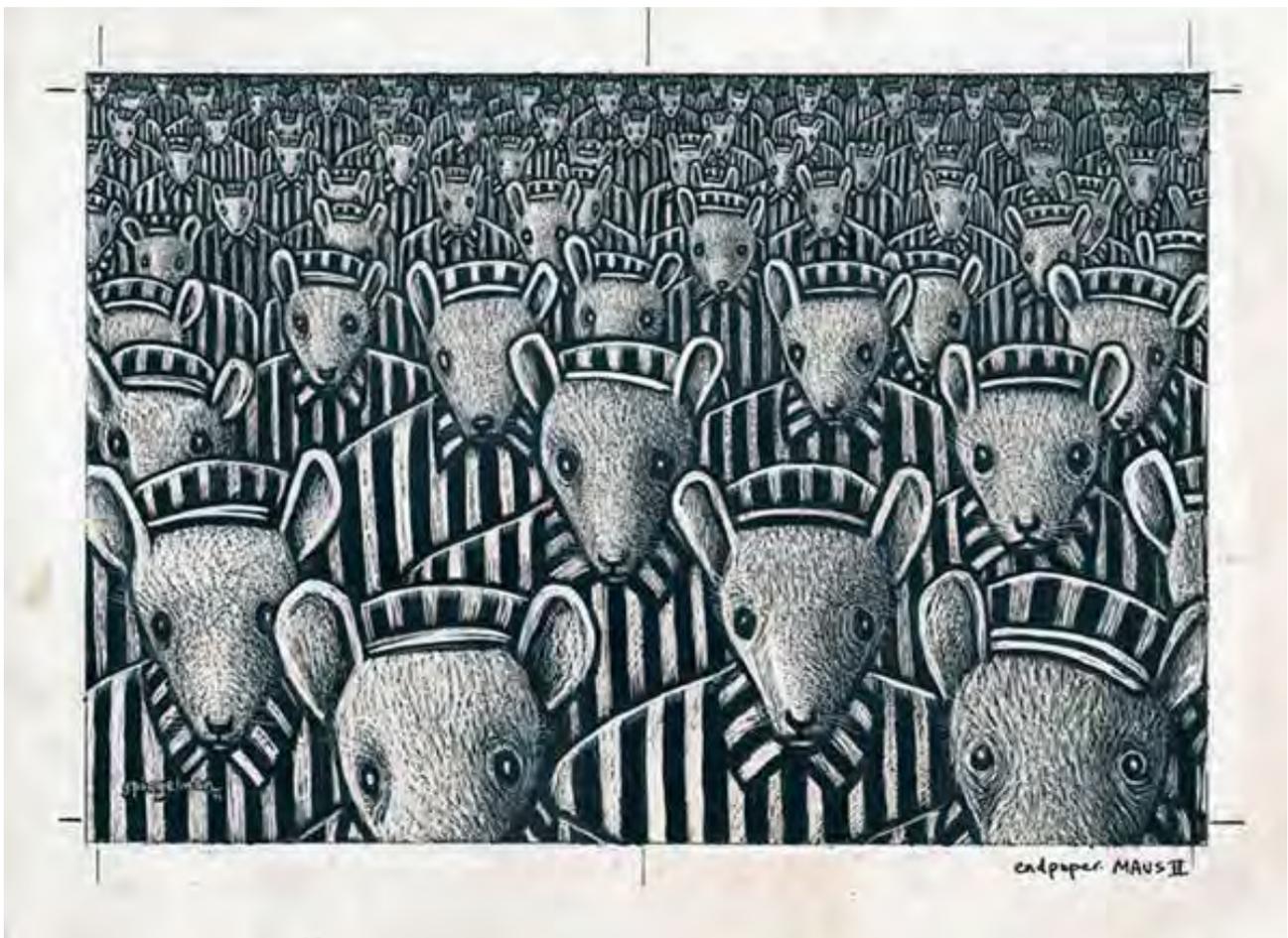
The art of writing again both the word, and The Book, The Torah (the law, and thus justice), is an individual act of self-liberation, which becomes collective when the experience is shared with the readers, especially in the case of fiction. The author of fiction challenges reality's wasteland with his flourishing imagination, making us freer by expanding reality's craggy boundaries into any shape or form we desire, affording us pleasure, and allowing us to escape from the prison of our body.

In the seminar that I will lead, the art of writing is but a humble, yet not diffident, piece of wood to which to hold on through the dangerous and vast waters of Western Jewish Consciousness. This plank is carried forward by the wind on its three masts. The first mast is the "Jewish Self;" together with the "Western Self." The second mast is Jewish history and how it intertwines with non-Jewish European history, and vice versa. The third, and most essential, mast, the key, is the memory of the death camps.

The majority of us Jews, if not, frankly, all of us, has relatives that were dehumanized and murdered in the Nazi extermination camps. We must continue paying homage to their legacy, and inquiring into the causes of Nazism, although from an act of self-liberation; again through the word, the written word, and the creativity of fiction writing. My hope with this seminar is to contribute my bit, however small, to prevent the words by Primo Levi (a Jewish writer, and death camp survivor) about Auschwitz from coming true: "It happened, therefore it can happen again."

This seminar would compliment, as well, a humanities course, as at the beginning of each class there will be an explanation of the root causes of Nazism; from a philosophical, historical, sociological and psychiatric perspective.

The seminar is structured as an exercise in collective and personal memory for the Jewish Self, as well as an introductory study into morality. Above all, it is professional course on creative writing techniques.



MAUS II. Art Spiegelman. 1991

# PROGRAM

- C1**                    **Class 1: Elements of fiction writing.**  
1.2: Conflict, characters, mood, synthesis.  
1.3: Narrator's point of view.  
Presentation on "If This is a Man." / Q&A. Discussion.
- C2**                    **Class 2: Building a character**  
2.2: The character.  
2.3: Plot. The unconscious.  
Presentation on "Fateless." / Q&A. Discussion.
- C3**                    **Class 3: The meeting of fiction and nonfiction writing.**  
3.2: Mood and seeking out a style.  
3.3: Geographical landscapes in a novel.  
Presentation on "The Night Trilogy." / Q&A. Discussion.
- C4**                    **Class 4: General narrative techniques**  
4.2: Conclusive narrative. Spherical narrative.  
4.3: Poetic language.  
Presentation on "Smoke over Birkenau." / Q&A. Discussion.
- C5**                    **Class 5: Interior monologue.**  
5.2: A character's interior conflict  
5.3: Change in the mood as a result of the character's perspective.  
Presentation on "Anne Frank's Diary." / Q&A. Discussion.
- C6**                    **Class 6: Literary dialog.**  
6.2: Differences between the dialog in novels, movies and theatre.  
6.3: Direct and indirect writing styles.  
Presentation on "Beyond Guilt and Atonement." / Q&A. Discussion.
- C7**                    **Class 7: Structure of the novel.**  
7.2: Novel narrative styles.  
7.3: Use of cinematographic elements in creative writing.  
Presentation on "The Human Specie." / Q&A. Discussion.
- C8**                    **Class 8: Recap.**  
8.2: Fractal narrative techniques.  
8.3: Overlapping past / present narrative styles.  
8. 4: Collective writing technique.  
Presentation on "Maus". / Q&A. Discussion.
- C9-14**                **Classes 9-14: Story writing following a fractal structure.**
- C-14**                    **Class 14: Literary issues.**  
14. 2: Preliminary draft.  
14. 3: Balancing the ego and the unconscious.
- C14-16**                **Classes: 14-16: Correction and final draft.**

## ■ CLASSWORK

**After class 1:** Writing exercise: the arrival by train of a Jew with his father to Auschwitz station.

**After class 2:** Writing exercise: a Kapo, either a man or woman

**After class 3:** Writing exercise: a death camp survivor's travel to Israel.

**After class 4:** Writing exercise: a poem about a death camp.

**After class 5:** Writing exercise: the interior monologue of a death camp survivor.

**After class 6:** Writing exercise: a dialog between two death camp prisoners, in a barrack.

**After class 7:** Writing exercise: an action scene in a death camp, using cinematographic techniques

**After class 8:** Writing exercise: developing five elderly characters that have survived Auschwitz.

**After, and during classes 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16:** Writing collectively a story following a fractal structure, based on the elderly characters (three men, two women) overlapping past and present, entering Auschwitz separately, visiting the camp, meeting and talking to each other.

Every exercise done at home, up to class 9, should be sixty lines, without any spacing between paragraphs, and a line spacing of 1.5. Font Times New Roman, 12 size.

The exercises will have to be delivered by mail after every class.

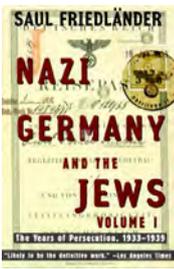
A few days later they will be returned, corrected and with suggestions, to every student.



*Jewish school in Koenigsberg. Germany. 1935-1939... Yad Vashem Photo Archive*

## Bibliography (english - spanish)

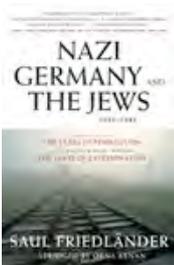
### Pre-seminar readings



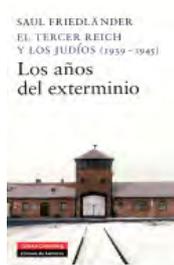
*Nazi Germany and the Jews.  
The Years of Persecution 1933-1939*  
Saúl Friedländer  
Publisher: Harper Collins  
ISBN10: 0060928786;  
Pages: 464



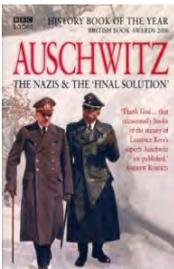
*El tercer Reich y los judíos (1933-1939)*  
*Los años de la persecución*  
Saúl Friedländer.  
Editorial: Galaxia  
Gutenberg. (Col. Historia)  
ISBN: 978-84-8109-795-5  
Páginas: 620



*Nazi Germany and the Jews.  
The Years of Extermination. 1939-1945*  
Saúl Friedländer  
Publisher: Harper Collins  
ISBN10: 0061350273  
Pages: 512



*El tercer Reich y los judíos (1939-1945)*  
*Los años del exterminio*  
Saúl Friedländer.  
Editorial: Galaxia  
Gutenberg. (Col. Historia)  
ISBN: 978-84-8109-796-2  
Páginas: 1.140

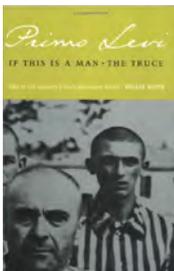


*Auschwitz :The Nazis & The 'Final Solution'*  
Laurence Rees.  
Publisher: BBC Books; New Ed edition  
ISBN10: 0563522968  
Pages: 400



*Auschwitz. Los Nazis y la "solución final"*  
Laurence Rees.  
Editorial: Booket.  
ISBN 9788484329138  
Páginas: 464

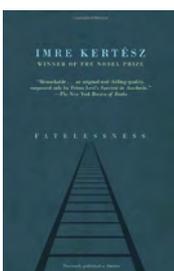
### Readings for the seminar



*If This is a Man.*  
Primo Levi  
Publisher: Abacus; New  
Ed edition  
ISBN10: 0349100136  
Pages: 400



*Si esto es un hombre*  
Primo Levi  
Editorial: Muchnik (Col.  
Personalia)  
ISBN 9788476694008  
Páginas: 212



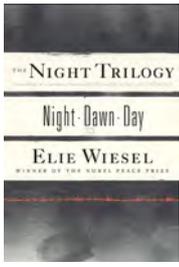
*Fatelessness*  
Imre Kertész  
Publisher: Vintage  
ISBN10: 1400078636  
Pages: 272



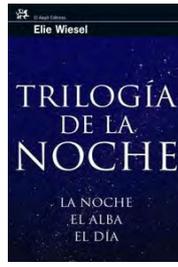
*Sin destino.*  
Imre Kertész  
Editorial: Acantilado (Col. Narrativa del  
Acantilado, 15)  
ISBN: 978-84-95359-53-7  
Páginas: 264

C1  
Reading prior

C2  
Reading prior

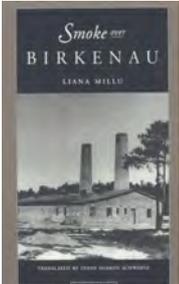


**The Night Trilogy.**  
**Elie Wiesel**  
 Publisher: Hill and Wang  
 ISBN10: 0809073641  
 Pages: 352



**Trilogía de la noche.**  
**Elie Wiesel.**  
 Editorial: El Aleph (Col. Modernos y Clásico).  
 ISBN: 978-84-7669-816-7  
 Número de páginas: 344.

C3  
 Reading prior



**Smoke Over Birkenau.**  
**Liana Millu**  
 Publisher: Northwestern University Press  
 ISBN10: 0810115697  
 Pages: 200



**El humo de Birkenau**  
**Liana Millu.**  
 Editorial: El Acantilado, 116 (Col. El Acantilado, 116)  
 ISBN:978-84-96489-19-6  
 Número de páginas: 200

C4  
 Reading prior



**The Diary of a Young Girl.**  
**Ana Frank.**  
 Publisher: Everyman's Library  
 ISBN10: 0307594009  
 Pages: 320



**Diario de Ana Frank.**  
**Ana Frank.**  
 Editorial: Debolsillo.  
 ISBN: 9788497593069  
 Número de páginas: 384

C5  
 Reading prior

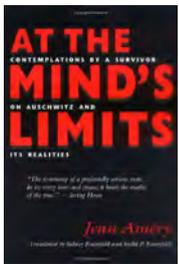


**The Human Race**  
**Robert Antelme**  
 Publisher: Marlboro Press  
 ISBN10 0810160617  
 Pages: 298

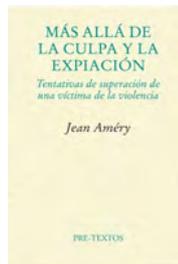


**La especie humana**  
**Robert Antelme**  
 Editorial: Arena Libros  
 ISBN: 84-930708-6-6  
 Páginas: 304

C6  
 Reading prior

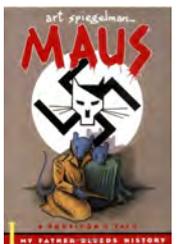


**At the Mind's Limits.**  
**Jean Améry.**  
 Publisher: Indiana University Press  
 ISBN10:0253211735  
 Pages: 128



**Más allá de la culpa y la expiación**  
**Jean Améry.**  
 Editorial: Pre-Textos  
 ISBN: 84-8191-400-2  
 Páginas: 152

C7  
 Reading prior



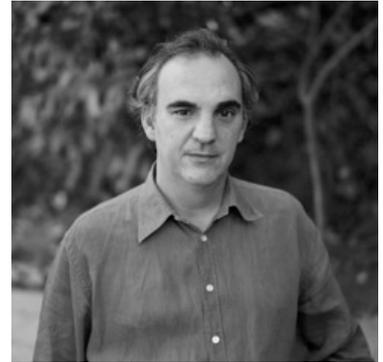
**Maus**  
**Art Sipielgeman.**  
 Publisher: Pantheon  
 ISBN10 0394747232  
 Pages: 160



**Maus**  
**Art Sipielgeman.**  
 Editorial: Mondadori  
 ISBN: 9788439720713  
 Páginas: 296

C8  
 Reading prior

## ■ SEMINAR BY DANIEL MÚGICA



Daniel Múgica, born April 4, 1967 in San Sebastian, is a writer of novels. He has directed and he has done screenwriting in movies.

Columnist in several national spanish newspapers as ABC, El País, El Mundo, Público and various magazines. He takes an active part in radio and televisión debates.

### **Books:**

En los hilos del títere (Novela. Plaza & Janes. 1988).

Uno se vuelve loco (Novela. Planeta. 1989. Premio Ateneo de Sevilla).

Mar Calamidad (Relatos. Mondadori. 1990).

La mujer que faltaba (Novela. Planeta. 1993).

La Bici Cleto (Relato infantil. Anaya. 1994).

Alba y los cazadores de arañas (Novela juvenil. Anaya. 1995).

Alba y la maldición gamada (Novela juvenil. Anaya. 1995).

Alba y el recaudador de aguas (Novela juvenil. Anaya. 1995).

Alba y el laberinto de las sombras (Novela juvenil. Anaya. 1995).

La ciudad de abajo (Novela. Plaza & Janes. 1996).

El Poder de la Sombra (Novela juvenil. Alfaguay. 1998)

Corazón Negro (Novela. Plaza & Janes. 1998).

Malasaña (Novela. Plaza & Janes. 2000).

África en Invierno (Novela. Notodo.com. 2000).

Bienvenido a la tormenta (Novela. AK editorial. 2012).

### **Teatre:**

Autor de La habitación escondida (Festival de otoño. 1993).

### **TV:**

Creador y guionista de La virtud del asesino (Serie de TVE. 1997).

### **Films (Director and Writer):**

Pepo (Mediometrage en blanco y negro. 35 mm. 1991 Con Juan Diego y Enma Suarez).

Vientos de Mal (Mediometrage. 35 mm. 2000. Con Chete Lera)

Ausías March (Mini serie de 2 capítulos. 2001. Con Miguel Hermoso y Eusebio Poncela.)

Matar al Ángel (Largometraje. 2003. 35mm. Con Miguel Hermoso y Yael Barnatan).