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Charlotte Werbe, Assistant Professor of French

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Charlotte Werbe, Assistant Professor of French

Abstract

In this *Next Page* column, Charlotte Werbe, Assistant Professor of French, shares her love of cinema and the films you should watch next, as well as the text that first inspired her research on the Holocaust and the challenging but important work of translating Holocaust memoirs.

Keywords

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What are you reading now (or have read recently) that you would recommend? Why?



Since I'm currently teaching the French senior seminar on comics, I've been diving into the world of comics! I most recently read *Aya de Yopougon* and I really enjoyed it. *Aya* is a fictional story about people living in the Ivory Coast. Some of the major themes include family and community.

Do you have a favorite writer or writers? Is there an author where you look forward to their next book?

When it comes to literature, my favorite writer is Faulkner, and my favorite book of his is *Light in August*. I'm also a big fan of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*. Of late, I've been reading lots of thrillers, and I'm looking forward to Tana French and Gillian Flynn's next works.

Charlotte Werbe, Assistant Professor of French

One of your academic focus areas is Holocaust literature. What are some important memoirs or other works on the Holocaust that everyone should read?

There are number of memoirs with which people tend to be familiar, these include Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* and Elie Wiesel's *Night*. These are foundational texts, and absolute must-reads. But there are also lesser-known works, such as Charlotte Delbo's trilogy *Auschwitz and After* and Ruth Klüger's *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*. These moving memoirs offer insight into what it was like to be a woman in the concentration and extermination camps, and also, life in the postwar period.

You are also interested in graphic novels and comics. What is different about reading a work in a graphic format? What are your reading recommendations in this genre? What would you suggest to someone who hasn't read a graphic novel?

Some people might think reading a comic book is easy, but that's far from the case. A good comic is intricately designed, calling attention to the relationship between word and image, more specifically to the disjuncture of representation. I have a few favorites: Art Spiegelman's, *Maus I* and *Maus II*, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen*, and Keiji Nakazawa's *Barefoot Gen: A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima*. These texts are foundational and would be a great place to start! If you want to know more about the theory behind comics, and ways to read the medium, I would recommend Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, it's handy, easily accessible, and easy to follow.

What, in general, are your reading habits? Do you read electronically, or print? Write in the margins, or keep your books clean?

I tend to read print, mostly because I'm used to that. I recently bought a Kindle, though, and it's definitely changed the way I read. It's easy to carry around — great for the beach! I tend to scribble all over my books, to me they are objects that should be handled rather than kept pristine.

Although this is a reading column we know you have a strong interest in cinema. Are there any films that are of special interest to you?

I think there is nothing I love more than watching a good movie. I'm particularly interested in film festivals, so I'm always sure to watch as many movies as I can that are entered into competition at Venice, Cannes, and Berlin. My favorite directors are Olivier Assayas, Alfred Hitchcock, Michael Haneke, Lars Von Trier, Harmony Korine, and David Fincher. For anyone interested in film, a go-to is definitely Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. But for something a little more contemporary, I would recommend Haneke's *The White Ribbon*. And I can't forget to mention that I love horror movies — watch *It Follows* if you have a free moment!

Is there a particular book, article or film that has inspired you to take some sort of action? Or put another way, what book or other piece of writing or film has had the biggest impact on you and why?

George Perec's *W, ou, le souvenir d'enfance* is the text that propelled me into researching the Holocaust. It's an incredible, moving, and experimental work that I highly recommend. I read it when I was 22, and since then, my work has almost entirely revolved around thinking about the challenges of Holocaust representation.

Let's talk about translation. I know you were awarded a translation fellowship by the Yiddish Book Center. Tell us what work you translated. What are the challenges a translator faces?

It's a longstanding goal of mine to translate as many Holocaust memoirs as I can (from Yiddish to English). Unfortunately, there are many important stories that remain inaccessible to English-speaking audiences. Translating Holocaust memoirs is complicated. On the one hand, I need to remain objective as I translate, in order to render the narrative as honestly as I can. On the other hand, it is important to also engage emotionally with the story. It's a tricky balancing act, but one that I feel is essential for anyone encountering these narratives, whether for research or for general knowledge. I most recently translated J. Lemel's memoir *Days of Terror*, and am hoping to publish it. My next project is to translate Alfred Grant's 1958 work, *Paris: A City on the Front*.

What you are planning to read next?

My next read is a book on the Rwandan Genocide titled *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families* (1998). The French Department at Gettysburg has invited a Belgian artist whose comic *Deo gratias* engages with the aftermath of the Rwandan Genocide. Right now, I'm trying to learn as much as I can, so that I can participate in the roundtable (taking place April 3rd) and get as much as I can out of it.