

Time: Tuesdays, Noon–1:00 p.m.
Location: 124 Sparks Building
Lunch will be provided.

The Humanities Institute Presents: The Spring 2024 Faculty Scholars in Residence

“Holocaust Horror: A Cultural History”

Talk Date: Tuesday, March 19, 2024

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About the Talk:

Countless wartime diaries and postwar memoirs of Holocaust victims integrate images, concepts, and episodes from fictional horror tales and films drawn from diverse cultural environments. They speak of Nazis as real-world incarnations of horrific fictional figures, such as vampires, mention terrifying monsters from Jewish apocalyptic traditions, and depict ghettos and camps as actual manifestations of medieval depictions of hell. I argue that in the very blurring the boundaries between the real and unreal, the historical and fantastic, these victims' accounts display familiar features of horror, a feeling that emerges in extreme situations and articulates the breakdown of social expectations and modern conceptions of humanity. These features stand at the heart of many responses to Nazism and the Holocaust also today, exposing the fragility of human conduct and modern ethics and questioning the boundaries between “civilization” and “barbarism.” My project explores Holocaust victims' horror depictions in order to unravel their authors' contemplations of the very definition of humanity and the borders of rationality and civilized sociality.

