

PHIL 199-35933

First-Year Seminar: Memory in Literature and Philosophy Spring 2015

Professors: Veronica Alfano and Mark Alfano
Schedule: MW 2-3:50
Room: 353 PLC
Office Hours: W 4:30-7:30, 519 PLC (V. Alfano); MW 4-5, 403 Straub (M. Alfano)
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Course Description

It might seem that memory is simple and functional: we remember things we've encountered and heard, which helps us navigate the world, predict the future, coordinate with friends, and avoid threats. Yet memory is both more complicated and less obviously useful than it appears. Sometimes we reminisce about the past for its own sake, rather than using memory to guide our actions. Such nostalgia is often bittersweet, even regretful; moreover, nostalgic memory frequently distorts the past instead of faithfully representing it. We also mourn our dead loved ones by remembering their lives and achievements. And we publicly celebrate and memorialize those who died heroically or tragically, such as soldiers in war or victims of the Holocaust and the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In such cases, remembering is downright agonizing, yet we feel that we have a duty not to forget these events. On a more positive note, philosophers like John Locke have argued that memories constitute personal identity: the continuous stream of memories connecting your present self with your past self ensures that you are the same person today that you were five years ago. What happens, though, when someone forgets or even represses certain experiences? Does she become a different person? Perhaps what holds you together is not just the continuity of your own memories, but also others' memories of you. This can make it hard to forgive and forget – to move into the future without dwelling on the past. In this course, we will engage with these issues through philosophical texts ranging from ancient Greece to the present day, as well as through literary texts (primarily from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) that span the genres of poem, novella, graphic novel, and play. As we investigate the phenomenon of memory, we will also build a sophisticated critical vocabulary, sharpen our composition and reasoning skills, learn to engage in productive classroom discussion, and develop techniques both for finding the complexity in texts that appear simple or transparent and getting to the heart of texts that appear difficult or obscure.

Texts

- *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, the Major Authors* (Volume 2, 9th Edition)
- Art Spiegelman's *Maus*
- William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*
- *Empire and the Ends of Politics* (with texts by Pericles and Plato)
- Supplementary readings to be distributed in hard copy and/or digitally

Course Structure

While this class will involve a good deal of open-ended seminar-style discussion (along with short lectures in which we provide crucial background information and context), it will also feature a variety of less traditional activities. Most of our meetings will include one or more

brief oral presentations given by students. We will devote a day to student recitations of memorized poetry, and another two days to workshopping rough drafts of your papers. Your weekly journal-style responses will help shape the content of each class meeting, and will also help you discover and fine-tune promising paper topics.

Course Requirements, Policies, and Grading

In this course, you will write two thesis-driven *essays*; the first (3-4 pages) will require you to analyze a single text, and the second (4-6 pages) will require you to compare a literary text and a philosophical text. Before turning in this second paper, you must come to at least one professor's office hours for a consultation. You will complete drafts of both papers for in-class peer review.

You will also email us a *brief response to the readings each Sunday or Tuesday by 10 pm* (you'll be assigned one of these days), with exceptions that we will explain. These responses should be between 100 and 200 words. The content of the response is up to you, but all responses should deal directly with the reading assigned for the next day. You may want to choose a sentence or paragraph you find especially provocative, difficult, or remarkable, explaining precisely why you find it provocative, difficult, or remarkable. Alternatively, you may want to argue that one of the authors is right or wrong in making some particular claim. Or you may wish to connect two passages in the reading that illuminate each other. You may even just pick a passage and ask a few questions about it. These responses – though they are required – will not be given individual grades, are not meant to be stress-inducing or burdensome, and should not exceed the 200-word limit. We will read selected responses aloud in class, asking their authors to comment and expand on them.

You will also give a brief *oral presentation* to the class. In this presentation, which should be no longer than five to ten minutes, you will open the discussion by unfolding one “burning question” that you would like to be sure we address as a group. This “burning question” may also help you begin to brainstorm possible paper topics.

Finally, you will recite a *memorized poem* of your choosing in class. This poem must be at least 12 lines in length, and it cannot appear on the syllabus. You will speak briefly about how the process of memorizing the poem changed your understanding of its meaning.

More details about these assignments will be forthcoming. Please note that an Incomplete will be granted only when there has been a genuine emergency beyond a student's control.

Here is the grading breakdown:

Paper 1:	20%
Paper 2:	35%
Weekly Responses:	10%
Recitation:	5%
Oral Presentation:	5%
Attendance & Participation:	25%

Please *check your UO email* frequently, particularly if you are absent, because we will be sending you important messages and documents! Please also keep your graded first paper on file to consult as you compose your second paper; reviewing your work is one of the best ways to become a better writer.

All materials should be submitted promptly. Last-second extensions will not be granted, and late papers will be graded down – or, if significantly late, not accepted. If you miss class the day an assignment is due, please place the assignment in one of our departmental mailboxes on that same day.

We hope that you look forward to – and enjoy – class. We will be reading and discussing some of the most amazing literature and groundbreaking philosophy ever written – what better way to spend an afternoon? On the slim chance that you disagree, though, remember that *attendance is both important and required*. Exceptions may be made in the case of unforeseen and dire emergency; however, you are expected to make this class your priority over all other engagements, unless you have a truly compelling reason not to do so. If you know that you must be late or absent, speak to us in advance. You are responsible for all work assigned and all material covered during absences.

Come to class in spirit as well as in body! Bring all the course materials; bring enthusiasm and engagement. (You'll find that said enthusiasm will be easier to muster if you have done the reading carefully, and you'll find that speaking up regularly will help you understand the material better.) *We expect every person to participate actively in class.* Ask thoughtful questions or share exciting insights, direct our attention to an important passage, respond to the perceptions of your peers. It is important for every member of the course to have a voice. If for any reason you feel uncomfortable talking in class, please let us know. Being absent, arriving late, or not contributing to our discussions will lower your attendance/participation grade.

And if at any point you feel that you are struggling with the material or would like extra feedback, *please contact us!* We are happy to talk about your papers at any stage of the writing process; as a matter of fact, we are happy to talk about any questions or concerns at any time. Find us after class, come to our office hours, send us an email, or make an appointment to see us. We especially encourage you to meet with us about paper ideas and theses before you start to write. You should also know that the Writing Lab, located in 72 PLC, can provide extra help.

Plagiarism involves using someone else's words or ideas without properly citing your source; this applies to direct quotations or paraphrases of *any* source material, printed or digital. *Do not attempt to pass others' work off as your own; doing so is unethical.* Students who are unsure how and when to cite should consult with us or with a librarian. Consequences of plagiarism may range from failing the assignment, to failing the class, to being reported to the university for disciplinary action. See also the UO Student Conduct Code.

If you anticipate needing accommodations for *accessible education* in this course, please make arrangements to meet with us soon. Please also request that the Accessible Education Center (<http://aec.uoregon.edu>; [541] 346-1155) send a letter outlining your needs.

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Texts with asterisks will be distributed in hard copy and/or digitally. All assignments will be announced and explained in advance.

Theme	Week	Day	Assignments
Identity	1	March 30	Introduction
		April 1	Robert Louis Stevenson, <i>The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i> (Norton 832-874)
	2	April 6	John Locke, from "Of Identity and Diversity"* Derek Parfit, from <i>Reasons and Persons</i> *
		April 8	Stevenson, Locke, and Parfit continued
Nostalgia	3	April 13	Plato, "The Myth of Er," in <i>Republic X</i> * Ian Hacking, from <i>Rewriting the Soul</i> *
		April 15	William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" (Norton 131); "I wandered lonely as a cloud" (177); "The Solitary Reaper" (181); "The world is too much with us" (185) Doris Lessing, "In the National Gallery"*
			April 20
	4	April 22	Rough drafts of Paper 1 due ; first paper workshop
		5	April 27
April 29	Pericles, "Funeral Oration" (in <i>Empire</i>) Plato, "Menexenus" (in <i>Empire</i>) Abraham Lincoln, "Gettysburg Address"* Paper 1 due in class: 3-4 pages		

Death and Mourning, continued	6	May 4	Tennyson/Rossetti and Plato/Pericles/Lincoln continued Martha Nussbaum, “The Mourner’s Hope”*
		May 6	Poetry recitations
History	7	May 11	Art Spiegelman, <i>Maus I: My Father Bleeds History</i>
		May 13	<i>Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began</i>
	8	May 18	Friedrich Nietzsche, from “The Uses and Abuses of History for Life”* Sigmund Freud, from “Remembering, Repeating, Working Through”* Examine images of war memorials and 9/11 memorial*
		May 20	Rough drafts of Paper 2 due ; second paper workshop
Forgiving & Forgetting	9	May 25	Memorial Day holiday – NO CLASS
		May 27	Kathryn Norlock, from <i>Forgiveness from a Feminist Perspective</i> * Bruno Frey, “‘Just forget it’: Memory distortion as bounded rationality”*
	10	June 1	William Shakespeare, <i>The Tempest</i> (acts 1-2)
		June 3	<i>The Tempest</i> (acts 3-5) Paper 2 due in class: 4-6 pages