

Time, Memory, & the Life Story

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ext. 2530

Office hours: Tuesday, 1:30-2:30; Friday, 10:30-11:30; and by appointment

Given that time heals and destroys, is lost and found, wasted and spent wisely, how then shall we live?

On one level, we live in “clock” time: as we go on living, time marches on, ever forward, into the future. On another level, however, time moves in a different direction; through memory, we move backward, revisiting the past and reshaping it along the way. We might thus speak of “narrative” time: past experiences become episodes in an evolving story, to be rewritten again and again, as new experiences come along and transform the meaning of what has come before.

This is where the mystery begins. Common sense tells us that we are “products” of the past, that who we are is determined by our histories. But these histories are continually being revised and rewritten in memory from the vantage point of the present. How can the past determine the present and the present determine the past? Given that the past is continually being rewritten, can there be a “true” story of the past? To what extent are the stories of our lives “fictions,” spun out of the narrative imagination? Drawing on classic and contemporary works in psychology, philosophy, and literature, we will seek to make sense not only of these difficult questions but of the very lives we lead.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Alter, *Genesis*

Augustine, *Confessions*

Freud, *The “Wolfman” and Other Cases*

Keller, *The Story of My Life*

Lightman, *Einstein’s Dreams*

Roth, *The Facts*

Slater, *Lying*

Zinsser, *Inventing the Truth*

OUTLINE OF COURSE TOPICS AND READINGS

Time, Memory, & the Life Story: Fundamental Questions

Wed., 9/2: Introduction(s)

Fri., 9/4: William Zinsser, "Introduction" (from *Inventing the Truth*)

Russell Baker, "Life with Mother"

Jill Ker Conway, "Points of Departure"

Frank McCourt, "Learning to Chill Out"

Living, Remembering, Telling

Wed., 9/9: Eileen Simpson, "Poets in My Youth"

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Lifting the Veil"

Alfred Kazin, "The Past Breaks Out"

CHQ Movie: *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button**

Thursday, September 10, 7:00, Seelos Theater

Alternate time:

Wednesday, September 9, 3:00 & 8:00 (Seelos)

Fri., 9/11: Annie Dillard, "To Fashion a Text"

Ian Frazier, "Looking for My Family"

Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory"

Life story reflections due in class on Fridays!

The Birth of the Life Story (As We Have Come to Know It)

Panel discussion on *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button**

Tuesday, September 15, 7:30, Wheeler

Wed., 9/16: Georges Gusdorf, “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography”
(ERes)

Karl Weintraub, “Autobiography and Historical
Consciousness” (ERes)

Fri., 9/18: MF, “Autobiographical Understanding and Narrative
Inquiry” (ERes)

Jens Brockmeier, “Lifetime and Eternity” (ERes)

The Multiplicity and Mystery of Time

Wed., 9/23: Alan Lightman, *Einstein’s Dreams*

CHQ Lecture by Alan Lightman, 7:00, Rehm Library*

Fri., 9/25: *Einstein’s Dreams* (cont.)

Telling “One’s Own” Story

Wed., 9/30: Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life*

Fri., 10/2: MF, “In the Name of the Self” (pdf; to be sent; time will tell)

The Problem of “The Facts”

Wed., 10/7: Philip Roth, *The Facts*

Fri., 10/9: MF, “Fact and Fiction” (pdf; to be sent; time will tell)

“Truth” and “Lies”

Wed., 10/14: Lauren Slater, *Lying*

Fri., 10/16: *Lying* (cont.)

To Probe the Depths

Wed., 10/21: Sigmund Freud, *An Autobiographical Study* (ERes)

Fri., 10/23: Sigmund Freud, “Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through” (ERes)

Sigmund Freud, “Constructions in Analysis” (ERes)

In the Beginning

Wed., 10/28: Robert Alter, *Genesis*, Chapters 1-3

Fri., 10/30: *Genesis*, Chapters 37-50

The Labyrinth of the Life Story

Wed., 11/4: Sigmund Freud, *The “Wolfman”*

Fri., 11/6: *The “Wolfman”* (cont.)

Peter Brooks, “Fictions of the Wolfman” (ERes)

From Now to Then (and Back)

Wed., 11/11: St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Books I-III

Fri., 11/13: *Confessions*, Books IV-VI

Wed., 11/18: St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Books VII-IX

Fri., 11/20: St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X

Time, Development, and the Question of the Good

Wed., 12/2: MF, “The Story of a Life” (pdf; to be sent; time will tell)

Fri., 12/4: We’ll see!

Course Requirements

Requirements for the course consist of:

- 1) Two 5-7 page critical essays and, toward the end of the semester, one 8 – 10 page “personal essay/mini-memoir” (typed, double-spaced)
- 2) An in-class final examination (on Monday, December 14, at 8:30)
- 3) A “life story reflective journal,” consisting of at least ten single-page entries (typed, single-spaced), to be completed and brought to class each Friday.
- 4) Active engagement in class and participation in class discussion
- 5) Preparation of one real, significant question for each class session

The three essays, taken together, will count for approximately 50% of your grade. The final exam will count 25%. The remaining 25% of your grade will be comprised of your work on the life story reflective journal as well as your engagement and involvement in class.

The life story reflective journal is an opportunity for you precisely to reflect, to *think*, on paper, about what you are reading *and* how it relates to the life you live. This does not mean that it’s merely an opportunity to offer opinions about the reading. Rather, and again, it’s an opportunity for you to really “take on” the ideas at hand, to interrogate them – and to have them interrogate you. As for how your journal entries will be evaluated, I will simply be giving you a grade of “check,” “check plus,” or “check minus” (along, of course, with some more substantial feedback).

In regard to involvement and engagement in class (and class discussion), my main message to you is that I am much more interested in quality than quantity. You needn’t volunteer an idea every time I ask a question. And please don’t worry if you see yourself as a more “reserved” student when it comes to offering your own perspective on things (though that might change!); there’s room in this class for everybody. More than anything, I need you to *be there* – not just physically but mentally and, at times, spiritually. (I will explain what I mean by this in class.)

A Few Words on Academic Integrity

Here is what I want to say, in the simplest of terms: *the work you do for this course must be your own*. This doesn't mean that you can't draw on others' work or be influenced by it; no one expects "one's own" work to be utterly devoid of external influence. What it does mean is that the product you create must reflect *your* efforts, *your* efforts, *your* imagination. This will involve proper citation and so on. As importantly, though, it will also involve a moral promise on your part – a promise that you must uphold and enact as you go about your work. **Please familiarize yourself with the Academic Honesty Policy outlined in the College Catalog. You are responsible for knowing the Policy and abiding by it.**

Academic integrity is not only about honesty, however. It is about preparedness for class, intellectual commitment, openness to new ideas, the capacity to listen to others, the ability to engage in sustained dialogue and debate about important issues, and much more. Let's work together to create the best possible learning environment.

As concerns outside-of-class (i.e., co-curricular) events and activities, some will be required of the entire cluster, others will be required of particular sections, and others still will be considered optional (which is not to say unimportant!). Indeed, my main message here is that the co-curricular events and activities are an integral part of our cluster and of Montserrat. They are what link together learning and living and are vitally important to our work together.