History 190 - 001
“The World We Have Lost”? Remembering the Past in Fact and Fiction

Thematic Description

Historical memory is generally composed of both traumatic and nostalgic remembrances of things past. Much of 20th-century history seems traumatic, with two world wars, fascism and communism, and the recent resurgence of world violence despite the collapse of communist regimes and the end of the Cold War. In light of such turmoil, regret or “nostalgia” (a literal term for “homesickness”) is natural for the loss of “the good old days” of one’s supposedly rosier past. Yet seeing the past through such “rose-colored glasses” may yield a distorted, even mythic, view. This class will look at a selection of portraits of the past – real and fictional, serious and comic – in an effort to understand the roots and the power of trauma and regret in a world in which change can be a mixed blessing. Our landscape will include both Europe and America, and our timeframe will extend roughly from the turn of the 20th century to the present day.

Our course title, drawn from a modern study of pre-modern England, highlights the sense of loss that has often accompanied the birth pangs of the modern world. In such cases, “historical memory” involves regret for a past that no longer exists – or perhaps never truly existed – more than feelings of trauma from facing up to painful realities that can’t fully be swept under the rug. Ironically, even wars and revolutions can evoke as much positive as negative sentiment, among those who choose to recall a time of great adventure or camaraderie – however traumatic their actual experience may have been. By examining the myths and realities of historical memory, we can understand better how the past lives on in the present, and what this says about our world in the present as well as about the “lost” world of the past.

Our class will meet once a week as a seminar. Our main responsibilities will be to read and discuss an engaging set of novels and memoirs, all chosen from among my longtime favorites: in a way, the books themselves created the initial idea for the class. Whatever else we do, if we read some good books and exercise our mental muscles discussing them, we will have fulfilled a large part of our mission. Writing assignments will include brief responses to class readings; a short “oral history” project; and a term project on a topic of the student’s choice. (See descriptions on pages 4-6, below.)

An Evidence-Focused Course

This course is one of the new Freshman Seminars that foreground the nature of evidence, and the way it is used across disciplines but especially (for us) in the study of history. “Evidence” can be defined as “a basis for belief; something that supports or challenges a claim, theory, or argument.” Evidence is used not just in police work or in the courtroom but as a key premise for the arguments and conclusions of most if not all academic disciplines. And as we will discover, history is not just a narrative of the past but an analysis and interpretation of evidence and argument. So a key aim of our course will be to learn how historians build arguments from evidence, what problems this process can raise, and what particular issues arise when the “evidence” (as in our class) comes primarily from autobiographical or fictional sources – with their mix of truth and falsity. What can we learn from even the “false” or fictionalized elements of novels and memoirs? Even when we “remember” things incorrectly, what historical truths can this “false” memory reveal? Put another way, how do we “know” what we think we know in history – or in any other field?
More specifically, the criteria for these evidence-focused courses include the expectation that we build certain “learning goals” into our class agenda. In our course, we will learn to:

1. **Distinguish uses of evidence in or between disciplines.** For example, what kinds of sources do historians use? How do we distinguish between primary and secondary sources? And what steps constitute the process of historical research?

2. **Access, locate, identify, analyze, and evaluate evidence.** For example, what can we find online or in the library (or elsewhere) to add to the evidence to be drawn from our novels or memoirs? How might these alternate types of evidence complement or conflict with each other? What different purposes might they serve, and how can we judge their relative reliability or merit as historical sources? What do we mean by “analysis,” in contrast to simple description, and how do we differentiate these in texts we read or texts we write?

3. **Build arguments based on primary evidence and assess the arguments of others.** For example, how do we pinpoint the argument or thesis in the writings of others, and how can we construct a thesis of our own? What kinds of evidence should we select to support and illustrate our arguments? What do we do when the full evidence (such as the private thoughts of a historical figure, or the “smoking gun” that might “prove” how or why something happened) cannot be found or does not exist? How credible are our arguments in the absence of genuine “proof”?

We will discuss these elements in class and build them into our written work, including a term project that will develop in several stages – as described further below. Note that most of these elements are already intuitively comprised in the study of history. But this seminar will make explicit what may otherwise be less than fully articulated or understood. Perhaps it is like the case of French playwright Molière’s character Monsieur Jourdain (“Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme”), who had not at first realized that he spoke always in “prose.”

**Main Sources / Book List:** The following books are available for purchase in the bookstore:

- Dalton Trumbo, *Johnny Got His Gun*
- Frank McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes*
- Julie Otsuka, *The Buddha in the Attic*
- Philip Roth, *The Plot Against America*
- Edith H. Beer, *The Nazi Officer’s Wife*
- Diane Ackerman, *The Zookeeper’s Wife: A War Story*
- Lucie Aubrac, *Outwitting the Gestapo*
- Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*
- Slavenka Drakulic, *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed*

For our last class, we will also view and discuss the film *Good-Bye Lenin*, to be viewed on your own outside of class time. A brief additional reading assignment, posted on Canvas, will complement this film.

**Class Schedule:**

**Jan. 16**  
**Introduction:** History, Memory, Trauma, Nostalgia -- and Evidence
Jan. 23  “The Great War”: Glory and Honor?

Read: Dalton Trumbo, *Johnny Got His Gun*

Jan. 30  “Hard Times”: The “Good Old Days” of the Great Depression

Read: Frank McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes* (selections)

Feb. 6  Memory and Oral History

** First paper due (see details below, p. 4); plus in-class oral reports **

Also read (and heed!) Lynne Truss, *Eats, Shoots, and Leaves* (selections posted on our Canvas site)

Feb. 13  A Promised Land? The Japanese in America

Read: Julie Otsuka, *The Buddha in the Attic*

Feb. 20  Fascism in America: Could It (have) Happen(ed) Here? (Or, what is the point of “counterfactual history”?)

Read: Philip Roth, *The Plot Against America*

Feb. 27  ** Project statement and annotated bibliography due for term project; plus in-class oral reports ** (See details below, p. 5.)

Mar. 6  “Sleeping with the Enemy”? Germans and Jews in World War II

Read: Edith H. Beer, *The Nazi Officer’s Wife*

Mar. 13  ** NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK **

Mar. 20  “Neighbors”: Poles and Jews in World War II

Read: Diane Ackerman, *The Zookeeper’s Wife* (selections)

Mar. 27  “A Self-Made Hero”? Myths of the French Resistance

Read: Lucie Aubrac, *Outwitting the Gestapo*

Apr. 3  “The Russia We Lost”? Dissidence and Exile

Read: Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch*
Apr. 10  ** First draft of term project due; plus in-class oral reports **
(See details below, p. 5.)

Apr. 17  “Stalin’s Ghost”: Remembering Communism

Read: Slavenka Drakulic, How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed

Apr. 24  Remembering Communism, II: “Ostalgia” in Film (and final remarks)

Film: Good-Bye Lenin (to be viewed on your own outside of class time);

Also read: Jokes of the (Not So) Humorous Struggle Against Communism in Hungary, by A. Fazekas, ed. (selections posted on our Canvas site)

May 8  ** Final draft of term project due (by 2:00 p.m.) **

Be sure to turn in a copy of your first draft along with the final draft.

Writing Assignments:

1) Reading responses or discussion questions: For each main reading assignment, students will prepare (in writing) a brief set of questions or comments to help propel the class discussion, as follows:

* Two students (in rotation) will draw up discussion questions based on our reading;
* Two students will report briefly on the historical context of the novel or memoir;
* Two students will present brief biographical highlights about the author;
* Two students will locate a news article or an obituary about the author and report briefly on its significance for understanding the author’s work;
* All other students will offer an observation or comment to share with the class. Focus especially on the nature of evidence in the text, whether it is in fictional or non-fictional form.

These written questions or comments are due in class the day of discussion, not after the fact. They will not be formally graded but will count as part of your discussion grade if they are exceptionally strong, exceptionally weak, or missing or late. (See also attendance policy, p. 6.)

2) Oral history project – “Memory and Oral History”: a paper of about 5 pages in length, based on an interview of a friend or relative about an event in his/her memory that is related to the themes of our course. Your essay should summarize the memories reported and analyze them from the perspective of a historian using this account as a documentary “source.” Consider these questions:

* How was the reported experience “remembered” and/or distorted in memory?
* Was this memory traumatic or nostalgic – or perhaps both?
* What changes in the person’s life or experience since the events occurred may have shaped the ways they were remembered or interpreted retrospectively?

(Description continued on next page.)
* How does your interviewee’s account compare (as a piece of evidence) to the novel or memoir we have just read and analyzed?

* What special benefits or shortcomings does it offer as a source?

* What distinctive tone or mood is apparent from its vocabulary (use direct quotes where especially revealing)?

* How do we explain the unique individual viewpoints (or possible discrepancies from the “big picture”) that you may see in this account?

Note that the “memory” for this paper does not have to be of a personal “lived” experience but can be of an event recalled from family stories, or learned about in school, seen in a film, etc. All students will also report orally to the class on the day that the paper is due (Feb. 6).

3) **Term project -- “Remembering the Past in Fact and Fiction”:** a paper of 12 to 15 pages in length (plus notes), based primarily on a film, novel, or memoir that deals with an issue of memory of historical events. Your choice may treat events in any time period or geographic setting. Your project can but does not need to be on the same topic as your oral history report. A list of suggested topics and readings or films will be provided by the instructor early in the term.

   Term projects are to be developed in three stages: a project statement and annotated bibliography (main source plus at least three supplementary sources), due on Feb. 27; a first draft (but not a “rough draft”), due on Apr. 10; and a final draft, due on May 8 (by 2:00 p.m.). All students will also report orally on their projects in class on the days that the two preliminary assignments are due (Feb. 27 and Apr. 10).

   **For Feb. 27:** In your project statement and annotated bibliography for your term project, you should (in about 3 to 4 pages total):

   * Select the topic or general area of your final project;
   * Select a principal source: a film, novel, or memoir;
   * Select a complementary source: a scholarly article or book chapter that sheds light on the topic, author, or style of your principal source (for example, a historical or biographical essay, or a thematic discussion of historical films, novels, or memoirs on your subject);
   * Select at least 2 additional short references – news articles, book or film reviews, or other short pieces – that comment on the subject of your paper or help you to analyze the book or film you have chosen to write about;
   * Identify and summarize a central argument or thesis from your complementary source, and indicate the evidence that is used to support it;
   * Pose a research question or hypothesis about your principal source that you plan to develop in your final paper. (For example, indicate how this research question compares or contrasts to the thesis of your complementary source. Do you agree or disagree with that author’s viewpoint? How do you propose to present and defend your own point of view?)

   Your bibliography should also be in “annotated” form; that is, you should:

   * Identify and describe each of these sources and indicate how you plan to use each one in your final paper. What kinds of evidence do they offer to support your analysis?

   **For Apr. 10:** Your first draft should not be a “rough draft”; it should be as complete as possible, and as polished as possible, having gone through as much revision as you are initially capable of doing on your own. Remember that all important writing, including professional
writing, goes through multiple editing stages. Your editing of your work will start but not end with this first draft.

In the weeks after your first draft was submitted, you should plan further revisions of your work based on my comments and on these other types of input:

* class discussion of in-class reports;
* visit to the Writing Center (recommended);
* swapping papers with a classmate (recommended).

For example, beyond simple stylistic corrections, think about what might you add (or subtract) to strengthen your arguments. How might you find evidence in support of a counter-argument? How might you defend or challenge the conclusions you initially reached?

For May 8: Final draft of term project is due, by 2:00 p.m. You may submit this paper electronically or in hard copy to my office (324 Bowden Hall). Remember to include first draft!

Attendance policy: Our weekly discussions are a major part of the course. As there will be no exams, regular attendance is required. For any absence beyond the first one, regardless of the reason, a short paper (2-3 pages) that summarizes and comments on the reading for that week will be required. If discussion lags, there may be a quiz.

Grading will be based approximately 50% on the term project; 25% on the short oral history paper; and 25% on class participation plus written reading responses or discussion questions. Note that grammar and composition will factor into the grading of all assignments. Be sure to proofread your work before turning it in; use a spell-checker; consult with the Writing Center (www.writingcenter.emory.edu) for further assistance as needed; and use proper means of quoting and crediting all outside sources to avoid any suspicions of plagiarism. Even good writers can become better writers with Writing Center’s help. The Honor Code will apply to all assignments (see below).

Honor Code
Upon every individual who is a part of Emory University falls the responsibility for maintaining in the life of Emory a standard of unimpeachable honor in all academic work. The Honor Code of Emory College is based on the fundamental assumption that every loyal person of the University not only will conduct his or her own life according to the dictates of the highest honor, but will also refuse to tolerate in others action which would sully the good name of the institution. Academic misconduct is an offense generally defined as any action or inaction which is offensive to the integrity and honesty of the members of the academic community.

- The Honor Code, a list of offenses and the Honor Council process may be found: http://college.emory.edu/home/academic/policy/honor_code.html

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:00 to 4:00 p.m., or by appointment.

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