

## Writ 3030

### Writing Selves Across Cultures: American Encounters with Memory and Identity in Italy (Narrative, Memory, and Identity)

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At the dawn of the twenty-first century, we face an unprecedented gap between generations as well as new global problems from rifts cutting across cultures and nations. Millennials – those of you born at the turn of the century – have been born into a technological world defined by digital inter/networks, social media, and high-speed everything – from computers to cars, nanotechnology to high frequency stock trading. In this extremely fast-paced, quickly changing world, amidst national and global conflicts (the Tea Party v. Occupy Wall Street, crisis in the Ukraine, the War on Terror, just to name a few), how do we define ourselves (and, most crucially, how might these definitions rely upon us/them oppositions)? What stories of our families, our communities, our countries, tell us who we are and who others are, who is the "us" and who is the "them"? How do we imagine our futures – how we will make money, where we will live, if or whom we will "marry," what kinds of families we might have?

These questions about who we are, where we come from, what kinds of futures we imagine, are at the heart of a course on memory and identity. *American Encounters with Memory and Identity in Italy* brings students across the ocean, to a center of ancient Western civilization, in order to re-imagine the past, re-interpret the present, and (re)imagine the futures we are forging. For the purposes of re-imagining and re-interpreting, the course will use the Exarchic Greek Abbey of St. Mary at Grottaferrata (established before the East-West schism and home to what may be the last generation of Basilian Monks in the region)<sup>1</sup> and the catacombs in the Castelli Romani / Rome region (forgotten and "rediscovered" over multiple centuries)<sup>2</sup> as poles through which to study processes of collective and cultural memory formation, historical remembering and forgetting, and the relationship between remembering and forgetting.

Throughout our travel and study in Italy, we will be exploring the relationship between our individual identities – our sense of who we are, where we belong, what we value – and our understanding of

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<sup>1</sup> The **Abbey of Saint Nilus** was founded in 1004 by a group of monks from Calabria led by St. Nilus of Rossano. Monks who follow the teachings of St. Nilus and St. Bartholomew still live and work within the walls of this ancient Abbey. Today, Grottaferrata is the last of the many Byzantine-Greek monasteries that dotted Sicily, southern Italy and Rome itself in the Middle Ages. It is also unique in that, having been founded fifty years before the Great Schism that divided Catholics and Orthodox, it remained in communion with the Church of Rome while preserving the Byzantine rite and monastic tradition of its founders

<sup>2</sup> In pre-Christian Rome, the dead were cremated. With the rise of Christianity, the belief in resurrection led Christians to begin burying the dead. Between the 2nd and 7th centuries AD, Christians dug approximately 375 miles of tomb-lined burial tunnels. After the catacombs fell out of use, they were forgotten for almost a century, until archeological excavations in the 1600s brought them back into cultural consciousness.

cultural and national identities. How, for example, do we define "American," "northern," "southern," "Californian," "democrat," "republican"? How do we define "European" or "Italian"? We'll also be looking at the relationship between remembering and forgetting. At both individual and cultural levels, how are some stories remembered and told and others overlooked (or intentionally repressed), hence not told and left out of our identity narratives?

Food will link these two poles of the Abbey and the Catacombs. Food is a crucial part of religious feasts as well as death practices (from bringing food to the families of those who have died to funeral customs and rites). It is also a fundamental structure of community. From the family dinner to the birthday party, holiday celebrations to days of national commemoration (think the 4th of July picnic and Thanksgiving dinner!), food rituals bond people. As part of our study of food, culture, and identity, we'll eat and drink Italian style; guided by local experts, we'll study how food embodies our identities and cultures

As central part of this course will be developing relationships and building community with our neighbors in Italy. As the weeks progress, we will pay particular attention to how our understanding of ourselves and others changes. When we encounter the images people from other places and other cultures have of Americans, how does that change the way we see ourselves? The way we see "them"? And how does this changed understanding allow us to tell the stories of ourselves differently? What kinds of relationships does this expanded understanding make possible?

## **Texts**

*The following books are required for all students taking this course:*

- Tony Judt, *The Memory Chalet* (Penguin Books 2011) (available as an electronic book)

*The following books are recommended; selected chapters will be required, but these will be photocopies and available through Folio as pdf files:*

- Margalit Avishair, *The Ethics of Memory* (2013)
- Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, (Exeter 1989)

In addition, the following books are required for graduate students taking this course:

- Zvi Beckerman, *Teaching Contested Narratives* (2014)
- Christine Lavrence, *Global Memory Scapes: Contesting Remembrance in a Transnational Age* (2011)

It is best if the reading is completed before departure according to the schedule given below and you only need to review while in Italy.

In addition, a list of online video course materials will be distributed at our first meeting in April. All students should take the time to view these materials carefully before departure.

## **Course grade/requirements**

*Attendance and Participation – 25%*

*Blog / Journal – 25%*

*Mid-term Report – 25%*

## *Final Report & Annotated Bibliography – 25%*

### ***Attendance and Participation:***

Many class discussions will take place during site visits, over dinner, in the course of meeting the many people guiding us in Italy. Therefore, active participation in all classes, event-based meals, site visits, and with guest speakers is mandatory. This is SO important that the final grade will be reduced by a full letter grade for each class or site visit missed. You are a representative of Georgia Southern University and the United States of America, and you will need to conduct yourself accordingly: show respect, genuine interest, and a desire to reach out to and know our hosts in Italy. No cuts, period.

### ***Blog Postings:***

This course will ask each of us to ask how we have become who we are, how we know what we know, how and why we think, feel, and behave as we do – and, crucially, to re-engage ourselves through the process of engaging Italy. Your blog is the place where you chronicle this encounter. You may keep a public blog or a private blog, as you please, but I am especially interested in you writing in a blog fashion so that you can include pictures, videos, music. The blog also invokes an audience – think of your writing as an address to yourself, your family, friends, communities in the United States, and to your new communities in Italy. Your blog will continue to develop our encounters in this course, and we will use each others' blogs as part of the reading and reflection of the class throughout the summer.

### ***Mid-term Report:***

By the middle of our summer course, I'll ask you to write up a 3 – 5 page report explaining the most significant experiences you have so far had, connecting these to your readings, and thinking through your areas of interest so that you can more clearly focus an integrated research plan for the rest of the summer. By "research," I mean:

1. a combination of internet and database searching, which we will be doing in part during our scheduled class time (where class will function as a laboratory in which we are actively discussing, analyzing, and thinking – part of this process entails looking up references, referring to each others' blogs, find web links, you tube videos, and academic articles);
2. interviewing people in your newly developing networks in Italy;
3. exploring the local landscape and media. This involves joint field trips with our counterparts in history, site visits to the catacombs, the abbey, and farm-to-table facilities, watching television and listening to the radio.

Your mid-term report will thus help you to identify the most important thing to YOU to continue reading and writing about and reflecting on; this reading, writing, and reflection will form the basis of your final report and annotated bibliography.

### ***Final Report and Annotated Bibliography:***

Undergraduate students will write a 5 – 7 page final report and compile an annotated bibliography of resources in their interest areas. Graduate students taking this course will write a

more comprehensive 12 – 15 page research paper. The final report/ research paper will be on a theme of your choice, subject to approval by me.

All students are expected to follow the Georgia Southern Student Code on academic integrity and civil conduct while in this class.

### **Pre-travel preparation**

Students should try to complete as much of the reading as possible before we leave. In addition to the reading, students should see the following online video materials:

There will be three meetings in April and May prior to our departure for Italy (exact dates and times to be determined).

Meeting 1: Orientation, introduction to Italy and Rome

Meeting 2: Expectations and pre-trip planning

Meeting 3: Introduction to courses

## **Class Schedule**

*The following schedule of classes and field trips is provisional and may be adjusted to meet the needs of students, faculty, or the program generally.*

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Friday, May 15    | Flight from Atlanta to Rome  |
| Saturday, May 16  | Arrival in Rome<br>Transfer to hotel in Monte Compatri<br>Initial brief orientation  |
| Sunday, May 17    | Afternoon excursion of environs of Monte Compatri  |
| Monday, May 18    | Tour of San Nilo Abbey, lunch presentation, visit to Ad Decimum catacombs, visit archaeological site of Tuscolo  |
| Tuesday, May 19   | Class:   |
| Wednesday, May 20 | Tour of Vatican Museums and St Peter's Basilica  |
| Thursday, May 21  | Class:   |
| Friday, May 22    | Visit to Lake Nemi and Lake Albano   |
| Saturday, May 23  | Free day (optional visit to Trastevere for dinner in the evening)  |
| Sunday, May 24    | Free day   |
| Monday, May 25    | Class:   |
| Tuesday, May 26   | Ancient Rome Walking Tour Day 1: Baths of Diocletian/Santa Maria degli Angeli; Epigraphic Museum; National Roman Museum (Palazzo Massimo); walk through of Forum Boarium and Tiber area, including Theatre of Marcellus, Tiber Island, Porticus of Octavia/Jewish Ghetto |
| Wednesday, May 27 | Class:   |
| Thursday, May 28  | Ancient Rome Walking Tour Day 2: Capitoline Museums; Forum; Palatine; Colosseum; Imperial Fora   |
| Friday, May 29    | Class:   |
| Saturday, May 30  | Ancient Rome Walking Tour Day 3: Campus Martius. Temples in Largo Argentina; Crypta Balbi Museum; Theatre of   |

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|                    | Pompey/Campo di Fiori; Piazza Navona; Palazzo Altemps; Pantheon; Ara Pacis Museum; Trevi Fountain   |
| Sunday, May 31     | Free day  |
| Monday, June 1     | Class:  |
| Tuesday, June 2    | Day at the Abbey of St. Nilus in Grottaferrata  |
| Wednesday, June 3  | Class:  |
| Thursday, June 4   | Food-by-foot tour   |
| Friday, June 5     | Free day; optional walking tour of My Favorite Churches (Santa Maria Maggiore, Santa Prassede, Santa Pudenziana, and San Clemente), followed by dinner out in Rome. |
| Saturday, June 6   | Free day  |
| Sunday, June 7     | Free day  |
| Monday, June 8     | Class:  |
| Tuesday, June 9    | Tour of Hadrian's Villa and Tivoli Gardens  |
| Wednesday, June 10 | Class:  |
| Thursday, June 11  | Cooking local foods – home visit and cooking lesson   |
| Friday, June 12    | Free day  |
| Saturday, June 13  | Free day  |
| Sunday, June 14    | Depart for bay of Naples in the afternoon<br>Arrive at Hotel Villa dei Misteri  |
| Monday, June 15    | Tour Pompeii  |
| Tuesday, June 16   | Tour Herculaneum<br>visit Naples Archaeological Museum  |
| Wednesday, June 17 | Tour Oplontis (Villa of Poppaea)<br>Tour of Boscoreale villa and antiquarium<br>Return to Monte Compatri  |
| Thursday, June 18  | Free day  |

Friday, June 19

Free day  
Shopping, packing  
Farewell dinner

Saturday, June 20

Depart for Atlanta