

Class 5 : Memory

A. Childhood

1. Section title A (liner from *Amarcord*)

The class today will be about poets, composers, film-makers, a novelist, and a remarkable artist, all of whom returned to memories in their later works. The slide is a still from *Amarcord* (1973) by **Federico Fellini** (1920–93). The title, in Italian dialect, means literally “I remember.” And indeed, it is a virtually plotless movie, containing nothing but his memories of growing up in Rimini as a boy. Although he was only 53 at the time, the film’s experimental quality and freedom from normal concerns of narrative and form are already *LateStyle* characteristics. I hope to play a longer clip later, but in this one, a large ocean liner is due to sail past Rimini in the night, and the townspeople go out in boats to catch a sight of her.

2. Fellini: liner scene from *Amarcord* (1973)

3. Hood: “I remember, I remember” (first six lines)

4. Hood: “I remember, I remember” (first and last stanzas)

In poetry, the theme of memory came into flower with the English Romantics, notably **William Wordsworth**. But it can easily sink into sentiment. Here is a Romantic of a later generation, **Thomas Hood** (1799–1845). I have always thought his poem “I remember, I remember” was a minor piece of whimsy, for all that I could recall of it were the opening six lines. But complete that stanza, and read on through the other three, and you get quite a different story. Although only 44, Hood had been virtually bedridden for the past few years, and knew he was about to die, which he did in the following year. The late South African actor **David Baillie** had four decades on Hood when he made this recording, but it works as well in one’s eighties as from the sickbed of a poet in his forties.

5. Hood: “I remember, I remember” (David Baillie)

6. Hood: “I remember, I remember” (full text)

7. Sir Kenneth Branagh

I was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland. So I was eager to see the 2021 movie *Belfast* by **Sir Kenneth Branagh** (b.1960), who was also born there. It is another case of a director calling on childhood memories late in his career. Unlike Branagh, however, I spent my childhood in a seaside resort outside the city; I don’t share his experience of growing up in the streets. Nor do I recognize most of the features of modern Belfast with which he opens the film, moving back into memory. I’ll follow this with a later sequence in which Branagh’s childhood *alter ego* Buddy (**Jude Hill**) is seen with his grandparents (**Judi Dench** and **Ciarán Hinds**) and his classmate Catherine (**Olive Tennant**). Much of the film is about

the Troubles and the street violence between Catholic and Protestant, which I witnessed at a rather later age, but I am showing these scenes mainly for their sweetness.

8. Branagh: *Belfast*, opening
9. Branagh: *Belfast*, school sequence

B. Trauma

10. Section title B (Louise Bourgeois)
11. — the above, with one of the *Famille* series (2009)

As you can see from this photo, the French-American painter and sculptor **Louise Bourgeois** (1911–2010) lived to the advanced age of 98. I will tell you about her mainly through videos made by other people. In the second of them, she says: “I am the prisoner of my memories,” and much of her work is about memory, families, and identity. The print she is hand-coloring here, for example, is one of a series called *Family*, which suggests all kinds of warm, cuddly images. But when you look at any of them, you see something quite different. The first video I shall show is simply a clip of the artist peeling a tangerine, but there is a real punch behind it.

12. Louise Bourgeois peels a tangerine
13. Bourgeois: *Destruction of the Father* (1974)

Bourgeois expressed her anger against her father in a relatively early work, an *assemblage* from 1974 called *Destruction of the Father*. In this 10-minute documentary by curator **Robert Storr**, you will hear how these and other memories triggered her lifetime of work which, unlike most other artists, actually accelerated as she enter her eighties and nineties. But Storr also warns that it would be wrong to see the *oeuvre* merely as illustrations to her autobiography; it is too rich, too multifaceted, and too ambiguous for that.

14. Louise Bourgeois: *A Prisoner of her Memories*
15. Louise Bourgeois: *Structures of Existence* (c.2000)

Here is one of the late *Cells* that Storr was talking about. I guess if you had to categorize her, you might say that her mindset and methods owe a lot to **Surrealism**.

C. Culture

16. Section title C (C. P. Cavafy)

I am featuring the Greek poet **Constantine Peter Cavafy** (1863–1933) largely because Edward Said devotes ten pages to him in *On Late Style*. Living in Alexandria, Egypt, for his entire life, he was a member of the Greek diaspora, representative of an ancient culture in a decaying city far from Greece itself. He wrote apparently in a somewhat archaic form of the Greek language, and resisted formal publication of his poems, preferring to send them off newspapers or give them to his friends. More than half were never published at all until after his death. His privacy, his displacement in time and culture, and his homosexuality, places him on the sidelines of his world, not in the center of it. The novelist **E. M. Forster**, who was a friend, famously described him as "a Greek gentleman in a straw hat, standing absolutely motionless at a slight angle to the universe."

17. Cavafy: *From the Drawer* (1923)

Here is a relatively late unpublished poem of his, *From the Drawer* (1923). Of the four Cavafy poems I am going to give you today, this deals with memory in the most straightforward way, although the erotic encounter he is remembering is far from straight. I'll read it myself. Compare this to another poem that deals with memories, *The City*, in which he contemplates leaving Alexandria. I have a video spoken in Greek; there are subtitles, but I'll show the complete text immediately after.

18. Cavafy: *The City*

19. — text of the above

This also feels like an older man speaking, doesn't it? But in fact it is dated 1894, when Cavafy was only about 30. The reason he appears in Said's book, I think, is not because he underwent any significant late transition in style, but because he was writing in this disenchanting, old man's manner from the very beginning.

20. Greek: *Bacchic Procession*

Here is a later poem about leaving, or losing, a city. According to **Plutarch**, when Mark Antony was in Alexandria, under siege from his rival Octavian, he heard the sounds of a musical procession, which was his former protector Bacchus leaving him to fend for himself. Cavafy tells him not to lament, but be grateful for all that he experienced in the city. It is very much the attitude of the late poem I read two weeks ago by **Derek Walcott**, another poet who returns to the ancient past.

21. Cavafy: *The God Abandons Antony* (1910)

In fact, despite the immediate and highly personal nature of the memories in his erotic poems, such as the one I read at the start, Cavafy's memories in his most important poems belong to his *culture* rather than to him as an individual. So in what may be his most famous poem, *Ithaca* (also 1910), he goes back even further still, to Homeric times and the start of the *Odyssey*. This is a kind of *reverse-memory* poem,

looking at events *before* they happen and advising Odysseus—or *any* reader going to *any* Ithaca—to treasure them for the memories they have yet to bring. The reader is **Sean Connery**.

22. Cavafy: *Ithaca* (1910)

Back to Federico Fellini and *Amarcord*. His memories, too, are cultural just as much as they are personal. Although they only go back a few decades, they summon up a whole way of life, in which cities like Rimini had a small-town feel to their communities, before all had been swallowed up by commerce and globalization. I'll start after the credits and play as much as I have time for. Note, however, that Fellini disavowed any strict biographical interpretation of his work: "*It seems to me that I have invented almost everything: childhood, character, nostalgias, dreams, memories, for the pleasure of being able to recount them.*"

23. Fellini: opening sequences of *Amarcord* (1973)

24. Intermission title (still from the above)

D. Music and Madeleines

25. Section title D (Renoir)

26. Shelley: "Music when soft voices die"

OK, we're heading towards Marcel **Proust**, but I want to get there by way of a few musical clips and this famous poem by **Percy Bysshe Shelley** (1792–1822). Published posthumously, it is literally a late poem, but not a *LateStyle* one; Shelley had no idea he would be drowned in a sailing accident some weeks later. All the same, it is about how sweet memories linger on after the loved one has left; it does not specify death, but it is hard not to imagine it. I am including it here because of how perfectly it captures the idea that, of all the senses, music and scent or taste, are among the most powerful memory triggers, and both of course were important to Proust. I can't find a reader on YouTube that is not sentimental or overlaid with actual music, but I'll follow my own reading with a musical setting of the poem for singer, piano, and viola by **Frank Bridge** (1879–1941)

27. Frank Bridge: "Music, when soft voices die"

28. Carter and Rodrigo

I wanted to get some music into the class, but had to contend with the double fact that very few composers wrote strikingly original music in their eighties or beyond (Verdi is an exception, as we'll hear next week), and memory has very little to do with it when they did. Just for kicks, though, I looked up the longest-lived classical composers, and came up with these two: **Elliott Carter** (1908–2012), who lived to 103, and **Joaquín Rodrigo** (1901–99), who died at 97. Carter was surely the most uncompromisingly abstract composer in America, with no time for romantic sentiment. My eye was caught, however, by a

series of seven works he published for solo instruments after he had turned 100. Called *Retracings*, could these have something to do with memory? Here is the one for horn, played by **Jeff Fair**.

29. Elliott Carter: *Retracing II, for solo horn* (2011)

30. Victoria Kamhi: “Aranjuez, ma pensée”

It is not hard to imagine all sorts of memory images in this if you look for them, but in fact all the *Retracing* series is looking back in another way: they are repeats of earlier work, extracted from the composer’s more major works, and lightly edited so as to stand on their own. And it so happens that one of the last works of the other composer, Rodrigo, is also a return to an earlier work, his well-known *Concierto de Aranjuez* (1939) for guitar and orchestra. Rodrigo (who incidentally was blind from the age of 3) reused the music of the slow movement of that concerto as a setting for this love poem by his wife of 20 years, **Victoria Kamhi**, written in French. This is my own abridgement and translation of the poem, which remembers their honeymoon, walking in the gardens of the former royal palace. I’ll play the first few minutes of the video with soprano **Fleur de Bray** and guitarist **Thu Le**. I think you’ll find it haunting.

31. Joaquín Rodrigo: “Aranjuez, ma pensée”

32. Jacques-Émile Blanche: *Marcel Proust* (1892, Paris Orsay)

Music was certainly a powerful memory key for **Marcel Proust** (1871–1922). The seven volumes of his *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time, or Remembrance of Things Past*) are studded by references to the “little phrase,” an evocative earworm in the works of the fictional composer **Elstir**. The film *Time Regained*, from which I will be playing longer episodes at the end of the hour, shows Proust attending a recital for violin and piano in which one of the Elstir pieces is played. Although the music by the film composer **Jorge Arriagada** is perfectly in style, I have replaced it with what was most likely one of Proust’s actual inspirations, the late *Violin Sonata* (1886) by **César Franck** (1822–90).

33. Raúl Ruiz: *Time Regained, concert scene* (with the violin sonata by César Franck)

More famously even than his response to music, Marcel’s memories in *À la recherche* are triggered by scent: the taste of a madeleine dipped in tea. Here is the passage in question, read by **Tom Hiddleston**.

34. Marcel Proust: the Madeleine, read by Tom Hiddleston

E. An Entire Life

35. Section title E (Still from *Time Regained*)

Although *Time Regained*, the 1999 film by **Raúl Ruiz** (1921–2011) is nominally a setting only of the last volume in the series, it manages to refer to many other parts of the heptatych, using a series of cinematic devices to slip from a present in which the protagonist, **Marcel (Marcello Mazzarella)**, who is seen as a dapper but passive observer in his forties, slips back into earlier periods or, in one instance,

much later. Depending on time, I will play two sequences. In the first, set after the First World War, Marcel encounters his mentor the **Baron de Charlus (John Malkovich)**, escorted by his doctor and suffering apparently from the effects of a stroke. This leads to a flashback to the year of their first meeting and a variety of other memories that follow that, including his experience of the madeleine (a kind of reprise, much later than it comes in the original). Note the use of a single motor among all the horse carriages at the beginning of the sequence, a nice period touch.

36. Raúl Ruiz: *Time Regained*, postwar meeting with Charlus

My second clip is of the final seven minutes of the film. It juxtaposes the adult Marcel with a boy who is presumably his younger self. The final sequence takes him to the seaside resort of **Balbec** (most likely based on Trouville), his favorite holiday spot as a child; we have already seen it in the flashback with Charlus. The closing scene is strikingly similar to the end of *Death in Venice*, from two weeks ago.

37. Raúl Ruiz: *Time Regained*, closing scenes

38. Closing title (colorized photo of Proust)