Course Title: In Search of Marcel Proust and his Literary Philosophy
Course Dates: Mondays, September 21 - November 30 (no class November 23) 2015
Course Code: PHI 97
Instructor: Josef Chytry

Course Summary:
Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time (À la recherche du temps perdu)* is often regarded as the towering novel of the twentieth century, possibly of all time, rounding out the formal and expressive standards of the realist novel genre as refined by nineteenth-century French writers from Stendhal and Balzac to Flaubert and Zola. What is perhaps less often recognized is that Proust’s work is arguably one of the major philosophical ventures in the French language for modernity.

This course offers a unique opportunity to survey the entire work of 3,300 pages in English translation, as appropriately edited to 50-100 pages per reading, and to discuss its ramifications from a range of philosophical and cultural perspectives. Topics to be considered include the purposes and nature of Proust’s project, the role of the novel form for French intellectual life in articulating the nature of reality, the links between Proust’s work and major transformations in French *fin-de-siècle* society from 1890 to the outbreak of World War I, and the meaning of memory and time for Proust’s reading of the quest for being. The course also touches on gender, ethnic, religious and class themes in locating Proust as authorial presence and decisive factor in subsequent European cultural and philosophical thought.

Grade Options and Requirements:
Letter Grade: One Essay and One Final Examination, Solid Attendance and Participation
Credit/No Credit (CR/NC): Attendance and One Final Examination
No Grade Requested (NGR): Default option, no work required.

Tentative Weekly Outline:

Week 1: September 21
Proust and France of the Belle Époque
Introductory lecture on fin-de-siècle France and its relation to European cultural patterns. Some consideration of political conditions, including the outbreak of the Dreyfus Affair. Quick overview of Proust’s predecessors in the nineteenth-century French novel. Summary of the early career of Marcel Proust and consideration of the growing plans for *In Search of Lost Time*.

**Week 2: September 28**

**Proust’s Architectonic and its Beginnings**

Text: *Swann’s Way*

Overview of the final plan of the *Search*. Schematic account of main scenes, main characters, main plot patterns. Preliminary discussion of place and time, their interconnections, and the role of memory. Discussion of Proust’s Overture in terms of his approach to “origins”: country versus city, family, individual personality, dream states. Discussion of the role of involuntary memory in Proust’s account of the madeleine dipped in tea. Preliminary thoughts on Proust’s delineation of the “two ways.”

**Week 3: October 5**

**Affairs of the Heart (Swann and Odette) and the French Salon**

Text: *Swann’s Way & Within a Budding Grove*


**Week 4: October 12**

**Balbec and the Primacy of Place**

Text: *Within a Budding Grove*

Discussion of the role of Balbec and the Normandy coast in the *Search*: holiday and the theme of renewal through sea and recuperation. Consideration of the first appearances of Albertine and Robert de Saint-Loup, and the larger function of the character of Baron de Charlus in Proust’s philosophy. Comparison of Elstir and the expression of painting with Proust’s prior uses of theatre, music and literature. Consideration of the role of Place in Proust’s thought.

**Week 5: October 19**

**The World of Guermantes**

Text: *The Guermantes Way*
Consideration of the emergence of the historical status and appeal of the Guermantes family for young Marcel: discussion of status, snobbery and social power. Brief account of the history of class and rank distinctions in France since the French Revolution. Discussion of Marcel’s attitude to the Duchess of Guermantes. The role of Marcel’s friendship with Robert Saint-Loup as a Guermantes and as Marcel’s closest experience in friendship. Marcel’s ascension in society: the reception at Madame de Villeparisis and his meeting with the Duchess. Discussion of Proust’s account of the death of Marcel’s grandmother and its implications for Proustian associations between family, death, and renewal. Comparison with Proust’s developing account of the connections between aristocracy and vice. Discussion of the role of homosexuality in the *Search* and its influence on Marcel’s development. Introduction of the reception of the Prince and Princess of Guermantes in terms of dynasty and snobbery.

**Week 6: October 26**

**Affairs of the Heart (Marcel and Albertine)**

*Text: Cities of the Plain*

Discussion of Marcel’s second visit to Balbec and the changes in his response to “place.” New reflections on the meaning of his grandmother’s death. Consideration of the growing importance of Albertine for Marcel. Introduction of the theme of lesbianism: its relation to Proust’s thought on gender differences and identities. The role of the Verdurin parties as Marcel’s social context. Further development of the theme of homosexuality in the Baron’s relation to the violinist Morel.

**Week 7: November 2**

**Love and Possession**

*Text: The Captive*

Discussion of the significance of Marcel’s decision to marry Albertine. Implications in Proust’s change of the locale from Balbec to Paris. Interpreting Marcel as a tyrant. Comparison of the humiliations of Baron de Charlus at the hands of Morel. Discussion of the significance of music and its expressiveness at this stage in Marcel’s development: the Verdurin reception. Albertine’s departure. Discussion of the nature of Albertine’s death and its function in Proust’s portrayal of Marcel’s development. Account of Marcel’s visit to Venice. Overview of the major places in the *Search*. Overview of the unifying elements between the earlier and later sections of the novel.

**Week 8: November 9**

**Return to Childhood**

*Text: The Fugitive*

Discussion of Proust’s account of Saint-Loup and Gilberte as a married couple: significance for his treatment of dynastic factors, human connections and oppositions, homosexuality and
heterosexuality. Account and consideration of Marcel’s return to Tansonville and Combray and his mature response to the “idyll” of childhood. Discussion of Marcel’s discovery at this stage that the two ways literally meet. Consideration of Proust’s rendering of the Goncourt brothers’ journal about the Verdurin salon in a previous period: fiction and historical authenticity in Proust.

**Week 9: November 16**

**The Great War; Memory and Vocation**

Text: The Fugitive & Time Regained

Discussion of the role of the outbreak of World War I for Proust’s novel. Effect on Marcel’s mode of life in Paris, the hero’s death of Saint-Loup, and the final degradations of the Baron de Charlus. Overview of the development of Proust’s account of family servant Francoise throughout the Search. Marcel’s return to Paris in a state of resignation and boredom. Discussion of Marcel’s second participation in a reception by the Prince and Princess de Guermantes. Overview of the role of social receptions in the Search, such the Verdurin dinners, receptions at Villeparisis and Guermantes. Discussion of Marcel’s new sensations of involuntary memory. Overview of the varied examples of involuntary memory in the Search and discussion of their significance. Marcel’s meditations on the nature of art and literature and the growth of his sense of mission and vocation. Consideration of the self-reflexiveness in Proust as novelist and philosopher.

**November 23: NO CLASS**

**Week 10: November 30**

**Regaining Lost Time as an Individual and as Social Act**

Text: Time Regained

Discussion of the second and final Guermantes reception. Consideration of the varied manner in which Proust has transformed social relations in the course of the novel through marriage, money and nature evolution: the case of Madame Verdurin as the new Princess of Guermantes). The role of spiritual Awakening in Proust’s philosophy. Marcel’s meeting with Mademoiselle de Saint-Loup as daughter ofGilberte and Saint-Loup unifying the two ways of his childhood. Concluding thoughts on the closure of Proust’s novel in terms of development and cycle, experience and memory.