



# Memory

*Philippe Grimbert , Polly McLean (Translator)*

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**Memory** Philippe Grimbert , Polly McLean (Translator)

Twenty years after his mother and father jumped to their deaths from a balcony, Philippe Grimbert has written a gripping novel about the hidden memories that dominated their lives. A colossal bestseller in Europe, "Memory" is the story of a family haunted by the secret of their past: an illicit love affair, a lost child, and a devastating betrayal dating back to the Second World War.

"The day after my fifteenth birthday, I finally learned what I had always known.... "

Growing up in postwar Paris as the sickly only child of glamorous athletic parents, the narrator invents for himself a make-believe older brother, stronger and more brilliant than he can ever be. It is only when the boy begins talking to an old family friend that he comes to realize that his imaginary sibling had a real predecessor: a half brother whose death in the concentration camps is part of a buried family secret that he was intended never to uncover.

A spare, erotic, and ultimately cathartic narrative, "Memory" is a mesmerizing tale of coming to terms with one's shameful past through the unraveling of a series of dark desires.

## Memory Details

Date : Published February 12th 2008 by Simon & Schuster (first published January 1st 2004)

ISBN : 9781416559993

Author : Philippe Grimbert , Polly McLean (Translator)

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## From Reader Review Memory for online ebook

### Claudia says

4,5 Sterne. Review folgt.

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### Amandine says

3,5 étoiles

Dans ce roman bouleversant, Philippe Grimbert raconte comment le secret qui rongait sa famille a hanté son enfance avant de lui être révélé, le libérant de ses démons. Tout au long du récit, ce secret dévorant et destructeur est présent, créant un climat de malaise chez le lecteur même : on en ignore encore la teneur, mais le narrateur ne cesse de l'évoquer ou d'en révéler quelques bribes, par anticipation, comme s'il ne parvenait à le retenir en lui avant de le narrer tout à fait. Cela a eu pour effet de susciter ma curiosité, me laissant imaginer toutes sortes d'hypothèses et me faisant tourner les pages sans relâche, puis de me surprendre : je ne m'attendais vraiment à un secret si terrible, à une telle souffrance. J'ai donc été profondément émue par cette histoire si poignante, racontée avec simplicité et force, puis bouleversée en comprenant dans l'épilogue que ce n'était pas une fiction et que l'auteur avait vraiment vécu de cette manière le silence de ses parents et de ses proches.

Mon unique regret face à cette lecture concerne le style : fluide, agréable et facile à lire, il manque néanmoins d'un petit quelque chose, d'une particularité ou d'une touche propre à l'auteur.

Je vous le conseille !

<http://minoualu.blogspot.com/2011/12/...>

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### Lara says

Finally done.

It wasn't a bad book, the topic was even pretty interesting. But I didn't really understand all of it as it was in French. Maybe that's also why I found it rather boring at times.

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### Sophia says

It's easy to finish this slim volume in one sitting. But resist that urge--Memory is best savored over several sessions. Previously published as *Secret*, this little book is a catharsis for a deep family secret.

Philippe Grimert, a Parisian psychoanalyst, blurs fiction and autobiography in a sparse, lyrical telling of growing up as the sickly only child of beautifully athletic parents in postwar France. On his fifteenth

birthday he learns from an old family friend about his family's survival during the war, and that his imaginary stronger older brother really lived in occupied Vichy France. The horrors are not graphically depicted, but emotionally and symbolically palpable.

Brilliantly translated by Polly McLean, form fits function in this poignant novella about memory and guilt--personal and collective, blurred and never truly relived--best read with time to reflect.

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### Justine says

This one story is just stupefying... The author made it perfect and easy to understand !

I am shook

Read it :)

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### Denis says

Extremely moving. Brings back in our life the past that we, as French people, cannot get away from, and which comes back to haunt us, no matter what. History through the lense of a very personal and intimate story always seems more poignant. Grimbert's story, told in simple, effective ways, avoids the fake pathos that would spoil the emotion, and delivers a brutally powerful tale.

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## **Kathy says**

A very short but powerful novel (much of which I believe is actually autobiographical) about a fifteen year old boy who learns about his family's sorrow and history during the Holocaust. Self described as weak and sickly, Phillippe has always imagined an older brother - stronger, athletic (like his parents), and protective. He learns from a neighbor and family friend that the carefully constructed life his parents told him was fiction, and his dreams of a brother were true. Translated from French (not as beautifully as *The Housekeeper and the Professor*), *Memory* definitely has a very French feel about it when it is read.

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## **April says**

I was surprised at what a quick read this was. Although it was quick it touches on very deep issues. While all books concerning the treatment of Jewish people in areas of Europe during WWII are devastating and sad this book didn't go into the more depressing and gory aspects of the experience which lots of books do. Of course, like any book with this topic its story was sad and touching but it contained the element of healing on the part of the narrator which was a touching element to the book. It leaves me thinking about how an entire generation changed by war can never truly pick up all the pieces and how it is left to their children to come back from something like that and make sure the story is not forgotten.

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## **Patty says**

I went to the Holocaust Museum here in Dallas, TX the other day. They had a special exhibit, about the children of the Holocaust. I was fortunate to hear, Mike Jacobs' speak about his experience in the prison camps, he has written a book called, "Holocaust Survivor," that I purchased after hearing him speak. He was a child in the Holocaust, 14 years of age when the Nazis marched into his world. As was said by Brasillach during the war: "Above all, don't forget about the little ones." (pg 150)

A "Memory," is a very small book about a young boy, Philippe Grimbert, who narrates the book, he is living in Paris with his parents who own a sportswear shop. His parents seem quiet, sad and withdrawn, however they both care significantly about their bodies and exercise everyday perhaps to an extreme. Philippe is so lonely he pretends that he has a brother. "As a child, every day provided me with sorrows and fears that I fueled with my solitude. I needed someone with whom to share those tears."

Next door to him lives Louise who is basically a massage therapist. She tells Philippe that she has known his parents before they were married. She begins to tell Philippe about his parents lives before he was born, and about secrets that no one ever talks about.

I love it when I find a small book that packs so much emotion and reality into so few pages. Not a word is wasted in this book, each word written is on purpose and contains information you need to appreciate this book.

It is amazing the harm we can do as parents, without any intention of doing so, remember we too had

parents, and they too had a life before their children and the damage that they endured gets carried again and again through each of us as children, it may be a sadness, an aloneness, fears, anxiety and problems that we don't even realize. Each one of us that comes to terms with our own problems may also need to know the problems of our parents and come to terms with the result of growing up with those parents and their unique issues.

This is an amazingly small book with a large message.

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### **Michelle says**

Perhaps the best compliment a writer can get: this felt like it was a true story. And maybe it was - I don't know, and in some ways I don't want to know. Even as fiction, it's still hard to accept what happened. This is an emotional, painful novel. The Holocaust and the ripples of its legacy never gets any easier to comprehend. A haunting, but necessary read.

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### **Mari says**

A slim novel, Memory is translated from the original French. It was published first in the UK in English as "Secret." It's a novel that reads like a memoir, especially because the subject's first name is never spoken but his family name is the same as the author's. The timing/age of the author based on his jacket photo also make it confusing.

It's a novel about a family secret having to do with The Holocaust and missing family members. Some clunky writing in places, likely due to the translations, but in other places very nice. The plot itself moves quickly and is gripping. I read this book in two settings (would have been one, but hunger and dinner making triumphed).

I really liked it, and it brought back memories of my childhood reading materials, and how in about sixth grade I read everything I could get my hands on related to World War II and the Holocaust. I even had a timeline poster in my room. Probably not an unusual obsession, but still strange.

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### **Toreisii says**

This book was heart-rendering, but also sexist and exploitative. As a book of fiction, I felt it was masquerading as a non-fiction work and would have assumed it to be so if it hadn't been labeled. Although based on true events, introducing ambiguity when talking about the Holocaust removes it from the real world and leaves it vulnerable to sensationalism. Mr. Grimbert wants to reclaim his last name, "Grinberg," but he never publishes under that name and uses his imagination to fill in gaps between family history he has heard secondhand. I understand this as a piecemeal attempt at healing personal wounds and struggles to understand distant parents. Although he has my sympathy, I am not sure it should have been shared.

For a true, personal account about the Holocaust, I recommend Elie Wiesel's "Night."

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## **Anya says**

I read this book as part of my project to read every book that has ever won the Prix Goncourt des lycéens...

“Un Secret” is not a long book. At first glance, it looks simply to be the story of a young Philippe Grimbert, born in late 1940’s France, who invents an imaginary older brother to compensate for his self-esteem issues...

As the story progresses, it seems to develop into a look back at the life of M. Grimbert’s parents- namely, how they met and fall in love. However, the book soon takes a very chilling turn when a horrifying secret is revealed midway through. The last half of the narrative is devoted to the unpacking of this secret, as well as its impacts on M. Grimbert and his family.

“Un Secret” may not have been written by the greatest writer the French language has ever known, nor with the most artistic flourishes. However, it was written with a tremendous amount of heart.

**\*SLIGHT SPOILER BELOW\***

I don’t think that anyone would be left unaffected by the moving denouement of the novel. I have read many books about the Second World War, however, this slim tome is perhaps one of the books that has touched me the most. By compressing the horror into the scale of a single family tragedy, Grimbert rendered what happened all the more personal and terrifying.

A gripping novel that will leave you touched and contemplating the secret long after you turn the final pages. A good choice on the part of the lycéens, and definitely a book that I would recommend others to read.

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## **Nancy H says**

A well-written book, this novel tells the story of a Jewish boy in post WW-II whose parents kept his identity and their past hidden from him. He gradually finds out from his neighbor and aunt that he had a brother whom the Nazis killed, along with his father's first wife. Though short, it is a complex story that brings to the reader the horror and never-ending heartbreak caused by that war.

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## **SallWho says**

Ce roman bouleversant de Philippe Grimbert raconte l'histoire d'un jeune adolescent, peut-être lui-même (parce qu'il y a plusieurs éléments qui indiquent qu'il puisse s'agir d'une autobiographie), qui à l'âge de quinze ans lutte encore chaque soir avec un frère imaginaire et qui cherche la reconnaissance et l'estime de ses parents. Un jour, en visitant une vieille amie de la famille, Louise, il entendra parler pour la première fois du secret qui hante sa famille et au sujet duquel tout le monde se tait. Il pourra enfin découvrir ses origines et apprendre à les accepter. Après des années de silence et de souffrance, il pourra enfin délivrer ses parents du secret.

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J'ai bien aimé l'histoire du livre et le tournant qu'elle prend avec la découverte et la révélation du secret. L'auteur a surtout essayé de fournir une analyse psychique des caractères principaux. Généralement, je n'aime pas trop les livres parlant du Holocauste et des déportations parce qu'ils réduisent souvent ces événements tragiques et personnels à de simples faits avec des images crues et violentes. Ce n'était pas du tout le cas avec "Un secret" de Philippe Grimbert. Ici, on découvre peu à peu les événements à travers un récit rempli de personnalité et d'authenticité. L'histoire est vraiment touchante.

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En somme: j'ai bien aimé le concept du livre et la manière selon laquelle l'auteur arrive à nouer le secret dans cette histoire du Holocauste.

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### **pennyg says**

A French psychoanalyst and writer creates a fictional but autobiographical account of his family history amidst the horror of the Nazi occupation of France. It is a small pocket size book, sparse but powerful. Written from the perspective of a child as he discovers the devastating affect the war had upon his family. The surviving family members rely on secrets as surely a survival mechanism learned during and after the war trying to heal scars impossible to heal. Is left to their child to sort it all out. Lest we forget...

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### **Mavi says**

Cette histoire m'a touché. Après d'avoir visité Auschwitz il n'y a pas longtemps, j'ai imaginé tous les événements et je n'ai pas pu éviter de sentir douleur. Mes félicitations à l'auteur, je pense qu'il a écrit très bien, toutes les descriptions des lieux et des personnages sont bien composées, elles sont assez. Et bon évidemment l'histoire est magnifique, c'est une perspective différente de l'absurde seconde guerre mondiale.

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### **Kamilla says**

What a fantastic little book. I read it in one afternoon. This book is a memoir, written by a young boy as he comes to terms with the secrets of his family. He is a lonely, sickly little boy, growing up after WW2. He makes up his family's history as his parents don't like talking about their past. His version of their history is lovely, full of warmth and love. When he learns the truth at 15 from a family friend, his world turns upside down. His version couldn't have been further from the truth.

The story is mesmerising, haunting and captivating. There are no dialogues at all, but it is so well written, that the words of the little boy capture your heart. Through the family friend's memories his past comes to life, the horror of WW2 reemerges and through it all a young boy finds meaning and truth in his life. He learns where he really comes from, learns who he is, and understands his family's history.

I could not put this book down. It's beautiful in its haunting way. I can't say enough of it.  
Read it.

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### **Christine says**

A good friend of mine recommended this book, one of her favorite books of all time, to me. She said it could possibly change my life to read it. I don't know about you, but I am all for reading books that could shake the psychic ground beneath me.

And so I immediately bought it. It is a tiny book, less than 150 pages and the pages are about 6"x4", the size of large index cards—but oh my, it covers so much psychic and narrative ground in that spare ground! It is full of soul. And it makes me want to go back through all my novel pages and edit out all the lines and scenes without a soul, without a heart.

Because Grimbert shows us what happens when every line sings with heart and depth. This is now one of my favorite novels of all time, too. I am grateful to my friend for showing me this book.

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