

LLCU 201 Literature and Culture Topics

Topic: Narratives of Migration and Identity

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Tues. Thurs. 1-2:30

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Office hours: by appointment

Overview

A study of contemporary literary representations of migration that focus on questions of identity as they arise for migrants in their new places of residence. Geopolitics, race, ethnicity, social class and gender are some of the prisms through which these issues are viewed. However, students will do well to keep in mind that this is primarily a literature course, and that we will be focusing to a large extent on issues of literary representation.

To migrate, Salman Rushdie writes in *Imaginary Homelands*, is “to lose language and home, to be defined by others, to become invisible, or, even worse, a target; it is to experience deep changes and wrenches in the soul.” He adds, however, that “the migrant is not simply transformed by [this] act; he [or she] transforms his new world” (210). This course will invite students to examine a range of literary texts, all written in the twenty-first century, which focus on different experiences of migration and displacement. Ranging from the novel of immigration to novels of temporary displacement and return, they all consider what it means to “belong” in a world such as ours, in which so many people are on the move, and in which the forces of globalization appear to have erased borders and boundaries that once seemed clear and absolute. Some imagine hybrid or multiple identities and alternative, multicultural and multiethnic, national and transnational communities. Others struggle with identity conflicts, unable to reconcile their two realities. Our focus shall be on how these literary texts represent issues of identity that emerge as a result of contemporary migration and to what extent these issues do – or do not – differ from those that emerge in the arc of any individual life, regardless of geographical location and/or displacement.

Learning Outcome

Students will have familiarized themselves with the representation of identity issues raised by migration and will have understood the difference between older “immigration novels” and the kinds of novels that are produced as a result of globalization, increased mobility and elite migration. They will become familiar with concepts such as hybridity, postcolonialism, transnationalism which shall be used to explore such interrelated themes as diaspora and home(land); borders and border-crossings; exile and otherness; gender and sexuality; trauma and memory; intercultural and generational conflict and reconciliation; race, class and ethnicity.

Instructional Method and Expectations for Student Participation

Classes will consist of a combination of short lectures and group discussions to be held on Zoom. Each session will be based on a specific reading assignment, each of which will be accompanied by questions to focus upon. This is a fixed activity, meaning that each session will take place once, live. Students who are in a time zone which makes it difficult for them to be present at fixed sessions, will find them recorded and available on Mycourses. Depending on the number of students registered for this course after the add-drop period, I may decide to split the group into two sections for some of the sessions to enable discussion. In that case, each student will have one class per week, instead of two.

On Mycourses you will also find additional materials: scholarly articles in English or French, interviews with the authors, links to Youtube videos. Some of this material will be compulsory and be objects of discussion, other material is optional and there to supplement and support classes.

The sessions will be used primarily to give students a chance to bring their own questions and thoughts for discussions. They may be asked to choose passages they have prepared in advance that they consider important and to explain their choices.

The number of classes we shall spend on each book depends on its length and relative length and complexity (see Calendar); calendar dates are approximate and may change depending on how the classes proceed.

Students who are unable because of their time zone to be present at Zoom classes should let me know immediately. They will have to answer the questions provided for each reading in writing. They will also be able to meet with me on Zoom at pre-arranged times. There will no fixed office hours. Rather meetings will be arranged by e-mail individually.

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT FOR STUDENTS TO HAVE DONE THE ASSIGNED READING ON TIME. Participation in class discussion is essential. The student's attendance record and performance in class discussion will determine her/his participation mark. **STUDENTS MUST ALWAYS HAVE THE BOOK UNDER DISCUSSION WITH THEM AS FREQUENT REFERENCE WILL BE MADE TO THE TEXT.**

READINGS:

All books are available at the McGill Bookstore. Secondary materials will be placed on MyCourses.

Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake* (2003): a story of two generations of Bengalis living in America, with special emphasis on the identity crisis that plagues the second generation son, unable to reconcile parental expectation with his own desire to assimilate, loyalty to his background with the desire to erase it.

In conjunction with *The Namesake*, Nickolai Gogol's *The Overcoat* (on Mycourses)

Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007): a young Pakistani from a genteel but impoverished family leaves his country to study at Princeton University. He

embraces American values and aspirations and goes to work upon graduation for an American company specializing in “turning around” failing businesses, until the attacks of 9/11 change everything, and he slowly begins to understand aspects of himself that lay dormant prior to this event.

Chimamandah Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah* (2013): a young Nigerian woman leaves her country to study at Princeton University. Here she faces not only economic hardship, but also the sudden realization that she is “black”, something that she did not have to deal with in her native Africa. At the same time, her own experience of race differs from that of the American blacks with whom she comes into contact. She writes a blog in which she reflects on American society. Meanwhile, her boyfriend, who worships everything American but is unable to obtain a visa for America, lives as an illegal immigrant in London. A portrait of the distortions of post-colonial Nigeria and of its upper classes as they negotiate the larger world, as well as a pithy and perceptive outsider’s take on race in America.

Sayed Kashua, *Second Person Singular* (2010; translated from the Hebrew): two Palestinian citizens of Israel, one a highly successful lawyer, the other an impoverished student, both of whom have left their villages to live in Jerusalem, come together in an unlikely scenario that examines what it means to live as second-class citizens in their own land. They are migrants in that they have left their native Palestinian villages for an urban Israeli environment, but also are conditioned by the fact that they are citizens of the state of Israel, which prior to 1948 was Palestine.

Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Leaving Tangier* (2005; translated from the French): a young man, unable to find work in spite of his law degree because of lack of opportunity and corruption in post-colonial Morocco, dreams of crossing the straits from Tangier to Spain where he believes he will be able to fulfill his ambitions. Unlike those who are forced to resort to dangerous clandestine boat trips organized by ruthless traffickers to make the journey, many of whom drown in the process, he is sponsored by a wealthy Spanish art dealer whose only demand is that he become his lover. (trigger warning: this story contains descriptions of violence, rape, and explicit sexuality.)

Evaluation:

Final essay 40%

1 take-home test (end of term) 10%

Mid-term take-home 40%

attendance and participation 10%

Work submitted for evaluation as part of this course may be checked with text matching software within myCourses.

*****CALENDAR: (dates and topics are subject to change. Topics are neither exhaustive nor prescriptive, but are merely meant to provide an idea of the works under examination and some of the issues that will be discussed.**

Jan 7 and Jan 12 Introduction

Jan 14, 19, 21, 26 The Namesake: What's in a name? The second-generation story. Differences between Gogol and his parents: perceptions of American vs Bengali society. The rejection of his name. Gogol's relationships with American women vs his marriage to a Bengali. The role of family secrets. Fathers and sons, mothers and daughters. The representation of American society and the American family. Nikolai Gogol's **Overcoat** and its relationship to **The Namesake**.

Jan 28, Feb. 2, 4, 9 The Reluctant Fundamentalist: style of narration: why does the author choose the dramatic monologue? The representation of American society: Princeton, the business world, the American family. The love relationship. 9/11. The experience in the Philippines; the experience in Chile. The meaning of "fundamentalism". Male rivalry. The role of the reader. Ambiguity as the hallmark of this novel.

Feb 11, 16, 18, 23 Americanah: representation of post-colonial Nigerian society. Representation of American society. Black internationalism and the African diaspora: American blacks vs African blacks. Homesickness and estrangement from the self (Uju and Ifemelu and Obinze's experiences and how they change them). The role of literature. *Americanah* as transnational or global novel.

Feb 25 Second Person Singular: The Arab-Israeli problem. "The successful lawyer" (anonymous) vs. Amir. Third-person vs first-person narration. Representation of the lawyer and his world. *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Representation of Amir. Arab masculinity in Israeli society. Yonatan and his mother : Amir's perceptions. The lawyer meets Amir. "Death" of Amir. Representation of Palestinian society vs representation of Israeli society.

Feb. 16 Mid-term take-home assigned

Feb. 25 Mid-term take-home due

STUDY BREAK

March 9, 11, 16, 18 Second Person Singular

March 23, 25, 30 April 1 Leaving Tangier Post-colonial Morocco. "The call of the sea". Sex tourism, sexuality and colonial relationships: the relationship between Miguel and Adel as relationship between colonizer and colonized. *Leaving Tangier* as choral novel.

April 6, 8, 13 Open (may be used in the course of the semester as additional sessions)

April 20 Final essay due

Students who wish to observe religious holy days **MUST** refer to McGill University's Religious Holy Days Policy.

Deadlines

Deadlines must be met, unless an extension is granted.

There will be no supplemental and no additional work to upgrade marks.

PLAGIARISM

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures

(see <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity> for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site

<http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity>).

Student guide to avoid plagiarism

Academic integrity is important. Anything that undermines the evaluation process at McGill undermines the value of our degrees. McGill's **Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures** appears in Chapter 3 of the **Handbook on Student Rights and Responsibilities**. Article 15(a) of the Code, which is devoted to plagiarism, reads as follows:

No student shall, with intent to deceive, represent the work of another person as his or her own in any academic writing, essay, thesis, research report, project or assignment submitted in a course or program of study or represent as his or her own an entire essay or work of another, whether the material so represented constitutes a part or the entirety of the work submitted.

J. Raymond Hendrickson, in his book *The Research Paper* (Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1957), suggests the following guidelines for avoiding plagiarism:

When writing a paper try to use your own words the majority of the time.

When you do use another person's words, use quotation marks and give credit to the source, either within the text or in a footnote.

Don't make slight variations in the language and then fail to give credit to the source. If

the expression is essentially the same, the author still deserves credit.

Even if you aren't directly quoting the material, you should still document information and ideas that you use in your paper whenever they are new to you (i.e., something that you discovered in your research).

If you're unsure, add the footnote or citation. It is better to be extra cautious than not give credit when you should.

These rules concern information obtained from any source (e.g., books, journal articles, the Internet, other students) and apply to any written submission (term papers, essays, assignments, take-home exams and lab reports).

Remember that, according to McGill's Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures, plagiarism is an academic offence. Students who are suspected of violating the Code will be reported to the Disciplinary Officer of their faculty, and appropriate action will be taken.