

ENGL 661 Twentieth-Century Fiction or ENGL 685: Studies in Comparative Literature: Transnational Identities and Contemporary Innovation in the Novel

Anne Dewey

Spring 2013

3 credits

Class Time: Monday, 12:00-3:15

Office Hours: Monday 9:30-11:45, Tuesday 11:00-12:15 and 14:00-15:15,

Thursday 11-12:15

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

We will study the evolution of 20th- and early 21st-century fiction through the lens of transnationalism, as a force shaping American modernist fiction and the emergence of a global transnational literature that represents one of the most dynamic areas of innovation in contemporary writing. The course focuses primarily on literature in English but includes one work in translation. We will contrast the development of transnational consciousness from a first and second generation of US expatriates (modernists and post-World War II writers) to the contemporary branching of this tradition in Canadian, Irish, and postcolonial authors who write in English. Studying these works that span the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century will provide insights into how the liminal spaces we inhabit as outsiders living abroad, distanced views of home, and the need, attempt, or failure to establish roots in multiple “homes” shape not only representations of identity and culture but also contemporary formal innovations in the novel. Readings will include theories of transnational identity, postcolonial literature, and exile in addition to fiction and some memoir.

Some themes and formal questions we will consider are:

- The contexts (local, regional, national, international) in which authors frame characters and settings—nature, cities, places/vessels of transition, memory vs. the present
- The significance of distinctions between expatriates and transnational or global citizens and whether they exist
- Whether and how such writing challenges the naturalized connection between identity, nation, and (native) language
- What narrative voice and perspective authors writing between cultures adopt
- How the works’ language reflects or responds to a multilingual context and multiple cultural and literary traditions
- What is the significance of interpreting works in the contexts of national literary traditions? What new topics emerge if we analyze literature transnationally?

REQUIRED TEXTS

Edith Wharton. *The Custom of the Country*. 1913.
F. Scott Fitzgerald. *Tender is the Night*. 1933.
James Baldwin. Selections from *Nobody Knows My Name*. 1961.
James Baldwin. *Another Country*. 1962.
Kurt Vonnegut. *Slaughterhouse Five*. 1969.
Arundhati Roy. *The God of Small Things*. 1997.
Mavis Gallant. *Paris Stories*. 2002.
Orhan Pamuk. *Istanbul: Memories and the City*. 2006.
Colum McCann. *Let the Great World Spin*. 2009.
Ben Lerner. *Leaving the Atocha Station*. 2011.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

WEEK 1

Monday, January 14 Introduction

WEEK 2

Monday, January 21 Edith Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*
Henry James, "Occasional Paris"
Edith Wharton, "The Look of Paris"
Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile"

WEEK 3

Monday, January 28 Holiday – no class

WEEK 4

Monday, February 4 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night*
Jahan Ramazani, "Modernist Bricolage,
Postcolonial Hybridity"
Peter Middleton and Tim Woods, "Fictional cities
and urban spaces"
Desmond Harding, *Writing the City*, "The City as
Community" and "Visions of the Modern City"

WEEK 5

Monday, February 11 James Baldwin, essays from *Nobody Knows my
Name*
James Baldwin, *Another Country*, first half
Yunte Huang, Introduction and "Ethnographers-
Out-There" from *Transpacific Displacement*
First paper due, 4-5 pp.

WEEK 6

Monday, February 18 James Baldwin, *Another Country*, second half
Paul Gilroy, from *The Black Atlantic*
Magdalena Zaborowska, from *James Baldwin's Turkish Decade: The Erotics of Exile*

WEEK 7

Monday, February 25 Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse 5*
Paul Giles, from *The Deterritorialization of American Literature (Chs. 1 and 4)*

WEEK 8

Monday, March 4 Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*
Homi Bhabha, "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern"
Presentation on Roy criticism, 5-10 minutes

WEEK 9

Monday, March 11 Mavis Gallant, *Paris Stories*
Second paper due, 4-5 pp.

WEEK 10

Monday, March 18 Holiday – no class

WEEK 11

Monday, March 25 Holiday – no class

WEEK 12

Monday, April 1 Orhan Pamuk, *Istanbul: Memories and the City*, first half
Annotated Bibliographies due—10-minute presentation in class

WEEK 13

Monday, April 8 Orhan Pamuk, *Istanbul: Memories and the City*, second half
Arjun Appadurai, from *Modernity at Large*

WEEK 14

Monday, April 15 Colum McCann, *Let the Great World Spin*, first half

Rough draft of final project due, 15-20 pp.

WEEK 15

Monday, April 22

Colum McCann, *Let the Great World Spin*, second half

WEEK 16

Monday, April 29

Ben Lerner, *Leaving the Atocha Station*

Final Paper due Thursday, December 20, 12:00-15:00

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS AND ORAL PRESENTATIONS

Roy presentation: Because Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is on the MA exam list, you may wish to study it in more depth. The Roy presentation is an opportunity to develop your knowledge of criticism on Roy and some understanding of critical conceptions of postcolonial theory.

Papers: The paper assignments will be open topic, and we will develop ideas as your interests evolve. At least one of the papers must incorporate theory of transnationalism. You may focus on a novel or author, on transnational theory or postcolonial theory, or some combination of these areas. If you develop an interest early in the course, you may write your shorter papers on aspects of your topic for the longer final paper.

Annotated bibliography: Annotated bibliography of 12-15 items (books and articles) on a particular theme of your choosing related to your final research project. This may be interdisciplinary. Bibliography should include full citation of the item following MLA form and a brief (3-5 sentence) summary of the article's argument. Summary of your findings to be presented in class in a 10-minute presentation.

All written work should follow the guidelines of the *MLA Handbook* for scholarly form and correct citation of primary and secondary materials.