

What: ENGL 285.300

When: M-W 6-7:15 Where: HU 403 Who: Prof. Federica K.Clementi

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Office hours: M-W. 10:30-11:30 & 2:00-4:00 (please, announce your visit by email to make sure I wait for you) ~ One extra hour to be arranged by appointment

When we read a text we are either read by the text or we are in the text.

Either we tame a text, ride on it, we roll over it, or we are swallowed up by it as by a whale.

There are thousands of possible relations to a text—and if we are in a nondefensive, non-resisting relationship we are carried off by the text. We have to shuttle back and forth incessantly. We must try all possible relations with a text. At some point we have to disengage ourselves from it as a living ensemble in order to study its construction, techniques and its texture.

Hélène Cixous. *Reading with Clarice Lispector* (p.3)

DIASPORAS:

JEW & OTHER IMMIGRANTS WRITING THEIR AMERICAN STORY

How many times have you heard the expression, and perhaps (G-d forbid) used it yourself, “The melting pot” referred to America? Have you ever stopped and reflected on what this expression actually means and implies? You will now... This course is designed to examine this question, by framing it within its twentieth-century multi-cultural and transcultural American literary context.

We live, you might have noticed, in a world of hyphenated identities: American-Jew, Hispano-American, etc. Is our hyphenated culture the antidote to the universalizing force of the “melting pot”? What does it mean to become American today—and how is it different from a hundred years ago? How is that accomplished? Do all immigrants at all times—regardless of gender, race, ideology—experience immigration, assimilation, cultural transformation the same way? Through the examination of how the “ethnic story” and “ethnic identity” come together and are progressively constructed, students will gain a new understanding of “ethnicity” as a very dynamic notion: one that also entails struggle, conflict and resistance to the dominant culture’s oppressive forces as well as to the pull and oppression of one’s own culture of origin.

In particular, we will take one specific immigrant experience, that of the Jews in America—as expressed in some classics of American Jewish literature—and use it as the paradigmatic example, against which and in dialogue with which, other immigrant voices are going to be explored.

TEXTS

Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot*

Mary Antin, *The Promised Land*

Lynn Sharon Schwartz, *The Melting Pot* [handouts]

Gish Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land*

Junot Diaz, *Drown*

Bernard Malamud, *The Assistant*

Cynthia Ozick, *The Shawl/Rosa*

Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Interpreter of Maladies*

Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation*

Extra readings (hand outs) provided by instructor

Films: “Hester Street,” “Pawnbroker” and “Hollywoodism”

EXPECTATIONS

PARTICIPATION IS CRUCIAL. Your role will be a quite active and interactive one: you are expected to think, discuss, bring up issues, teach to and learn from your colleagues. **Your main task will be to read all the required texts. Your central duty will be to talk about them in class.** Reading and participation are expected and considered fundamental to each student's success. **The emphasis is on critical thinking, analysis and oral exposition.**

Quizzes and exams are extremely important factors: you will be tested on your ability to recognize, identify and contextualize a literary work, to explain critical terms and specific terminology encountered during our discussions, and to write about literature in a mature, deep, critical way.

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

PARTICIPATION	20%
QUIZZES	5%
EXAM #1	15%
EXAM #2	15%
MIDTERM	20%
FINAL	25%

Objectives/Learning Outcomes

Our reading selection and class discussions are designed to introduce students to questions of assimilation, national and group identity as revealed by the immigrant experience in twentieth-century America.

Through our readings, discussions, lectures and visual presentations students will:

- interpret texts in all their facets (literary, narrative, linguistic, historical, etc.);
- raise and address important questions regarding identity (racial, national, sexual, etc.), what constitutes identity and how one's identity coexists with other identities;
- acquaint themselves with various existing definition of "Jewishness" within the American context—some, in fact, specific to and created by the American context—and how America and Americanization play a role (or don't) within the various Jewish folds;
- draw interesting comparisons among various "ethnic" voices in contemporary American literature—Hispanic, Black American, Chinese, Jewish, etc.—appreciating commonalities/differences among the various experiences while understanding the shifting outsider/insider perspectives;
- learn to frame literary production in historical context;
- greatly improve their critical skills;
- raise interpretative questions about each text and relate texts to one another;
- recognize cultural uniqueness as well as compare what various ethnic cultures share in common.

Our Rules

- ❑ We maintain a respectful, democratic, open-minded, tolerant atmosphere in our classroom. Everybody's opinion, point of view, comment is welcome. Disagreement with others' points of view is also welcome, *but* it must be expressed with intelligence and extreme respect for our colleagues' freedom to think independently.
- ❑ Students must attend lessons, read assigned material and do their homework. Deadlines **CANNOT** be missed.

- ❑ Students are allowed 3 absences (of whatever nature): instructor will exact grade penalties (½ letter grade) for each exceeding absence. (25% absence is automatic Failure.)
- ❑ Thrice late = 1 absence.
- ❑ You will not be allowed to take a test, if you enter the classroom late and your colleagues have already begun working on the quiz or exam.
- ❑ In case of absence, it is **the student's responsibility** to get information about what was discussed in class, as well as copies of hand-outs, and to be up-to-speed with new assignments.
- ❑ **Plagiarism:** "Intentionally representing the words, ideas, or sequence of ideas of another as one's own in any academic exercise; failure to attribute any of the following: quotations, paraphrases, or borrowed information" (definition from Webster's English Dictionary). You are responsible for understanding accepted definitions of plagiarism before the first assignment is due. The general rule: if in doubt, ask.

If caught plagiarizing (no matter "how much"), students will Fail and report to the Dean.

- Don't forget two of the most important resources available to students: (1) The Library (USC library system and Public Libraries); (2) The Writing Center (for help with all your writing needs).

Email exchanges between this class and the professor will take place exclusively through university email accounts. If you like your public account better (yahoo, gmail, hotmail, etc.) make sure all correspondence is forwarded to that domain automatically or you may miss important communication, assignments, changes in the schedule, etc.

NO FOOD. NO TEXT-MESSAGING. CELLULAR PHONES MUST BE SILENCED during our lessons. Thank you.

Postum scriptum:

For those of you who, thanks to this course, will have discovered the pleasure of listening to the "outsider's" voice through literature, here is a list of FURTHER READINGS (a.k.a., books that didn't make it into this syllabus):

Mccourt, Frank. *'Tis*

Morrison, Toni. *Song of Solomon*

Abu-Jaber, Diana. *The Language of Baklava*

Dorfman, Ariel. *Heading South, Looking North: A Bilingual Journey*

Jen, Gish. *Typical American*

Kincaid, Jamaica. *Lucy*

Lee, Chang-Rae. *Native Speaker*

Alvarez, Julia. *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*