

Strangely Familiar: Family Stories, Cultural Histories Summer 2017

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Course Overview:

Contemporary writers, like most of us, cannot stop telling stories of their families-- and in doing so they invariably tell stories of their cultures. What happens when family members emigrate, what is the nature of home, how does memory work, how does sexual desire create and subvert families? We will study the literary forms that give shape to these familial and cultural experiences--why narrative has often been conceived as a quest for origins, how mundane experience gives rise to metaphor, how allusion locates stories within larger cultural traditions. Readings will include contemporary North American, English, and South Asian fiction and graphic memoir-- almost all written within the last ten years.

What you can expect to learn:

- How some contemporary writers represent, reflect on, and create the culture of our era through writing about families.
- How to read a text closely and critically, with an understanding of how narrative, metaphor, diction and other dimensions of literary form work to shape meaning in a literary text.
- How to pose a question, frame an argument, organize textual evidence, and write a critical essay about a literary text.
- How to make contributions to a class discussion of a literary text, including identifying issues, posing questions, and analyzing a literary text.
- How to give an oral presentation of your work.

Required Texts:

Jhumpa Lahiri. *Unaccustomed Earth*. (Random House, 2008)
Alison Bechdel. *Fun Home* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006)
Kazuo Ishiguro. *Never Let Me Go* (Random House, 2005)
Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (Penguin, 2002, Random House 2008)

Course books should be purchased prior to arrival. These are all paperback editions, and they are widely available. They can be purchased from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and other bookstores.

Course Schedule:

Week 1

Monday Introductory, Lahiri, "Unaccustomed Earth," "Hell-Heaven," "A Choice of Accommodation" (Please read these stories for this first class meeting)

Tuesday Lahiri, Part Two: Hema and Kaushik: “Once in a Lifetime,” “Year’s End,” Going Ashore”

Wednesday Bechdel, *Fun Home*

Thursday *Fun Home*

Friday *Fun Home*

Week 2

Monday Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*

Tuesday *Never Let Me Go*

Wednesday Roy, *The God of Small Things*

Thursday *The God of Small Things*

Friday *The God of Small Things*

Course Requirements:

- Active preparation and participation in class discussion.
- Four short (250 wd.) reading reflections, one on each text
- One 15-minute presentation, based on one of your reading reflections, and including questions for class discussion
- A critical paper of 7-8 pp. (1750-2000 words), due two weeks after the final class.

Grading:

- Class participation 20%
- Reading reflections 20%
- Presentation 20%
- Critical paper 40%