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Spring 2011

The National Imagination (Spring 2011)

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Recommended Citation

Tobin, Robert D.; Gale, Beth; and Valentine, Alice, "The National Imagination (Spring 2011)" (2011). *Syllabi*. 8.
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Clark University
Comparative Literature 130
The National Imagination
Spring 2011
Thursdays 2:50-5:50
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What images make people think of the United States of America? Cowboys? The flag? And are there similar icons in other cultures that help define cultural identity? The National Imagination explores the concept of a national community as constructed and critiqued through literary and cinematic narratives, as well as other cultural texts.

Our underlying premise is that national languages and cultures promote the identity of particular communities. We are interested in examining those subjective expressions of culture—images, symbols, narratives—that lead people to feel that they are members of the communities we call nations. We are also interested in discovering points of resistance to national identity.

Students are trained to examine the nature of the national imagination as a seminal idea that has shaped modern cultures. They explore a variety of cultural texts and contexts—such as architecture, painting, journalism, film, and literature—that may be said to embody the national.

Some of the goals of the course include:

- developing the ability to discuss the concept of the national. What makes a nation a nation? Where does nationalism come from? How does it differ from regionalism, globalism, localism?
- increasing our sophistication in discussing national characteristics and differences, in a way that avoids crude stereotypes, yet recognizes cultural distinctiveness.
- learning the specifics of the emergence of a national tradition in three different areas of the world (this year, Germany, France and Japan).
- becoming familiar with basic comparative methods.
- becoming aware of multiple layers of culture, including popular and folk genres as well as less accessible and elite culture forms.
- becoming better close readers of texts of all kinds.
- practicing collegial discussion in large and small groups, both real and virtual.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Regular attendance at all class sessions. More than one unexcused absence will adversely affect your grade. When you know you will be absent, please have the courtesy of contacting one of us in advance by e-mail.
2. Preparation of all assigned readings and viewing of all assigned films prior to of class.
3. Participation—in class and on line. Although this is a large class, we expect participation in both the small sections and, when possible, the larger group meetings.
Electronic Participation will consist primarily of weekly Cicada forum postings. Generally, each student should post at least one comment by midnight of the Wednesday preceding each class.
Pop quizzes and occasional small homework assignments count toward the participation grade.
4. After each of the three “National Experiences” students will complete a take-home examination. Instead of a take-home exam, students may, however, undertake one of the following alternative assignments:
 - a research paper (circa 8 pages) based on class readings, with a bibliography of at least five scholarly essays on the subject. Students must clear the topic with the appropriate faculty member at least a week before the due date.
 - a visual/aural culture project, involving the visual and aural dimensions of themes and materials presented in course readings. These may be collaborative projects.

Students must clear topics with the faculty at least a week before the due date for the take-home of each unit. Students who write research papers or develop visual/aural culture projects are encouraged to present them at Academic Spree day (April 28).

Due Dates for submitting take-home essays and analytic essays:

German Experience: February 21

French Experience: March 28

Japanese Experience: April 25

GRADING

Final grades will be based on the following percentages:

German Experience	25%
French Experience	25%
Japanese Experience	25%
Participation	25%

The faculty will collaborate on the grading—no single professor will be responsible for a single grade.

Plagiarism: Plagiarized papers will result in a grade of 0 for the unit in question, and may result in a grade of F for the class as a whole. We will report plagiarism to the Dean of Academic Advising. A second report of plagiarism may result in expulsion from the university.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Germany:

Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Faust I and II. Collected Works, vol. 2. Trans. Stuart Atkins. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Thomas Mann. Death in Venice and Seven Other Tales. Trans. Helen T. Lowe-Porter. New York: Vintage, 1989.

Plus several short readings that will be available on Cicada.

France

Romain Gary. The Life before Us. Trans. Ralph Manheim. New York: New Directions, 1986.

Faïza Guène. Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow. Trans. Sarah Adams. New York: Mariner Books, 2006.

Plus fairytales and poems that will be available on Cicada

Japan

Junichiro Tanizaki. Some Prefer Nettles. Trans. Edward G. Seidensticker. New York: Vintage, 1995.

Natsume Soseki. Kokoro. Trans. Edwin McClellan. New York: Gateway, 1996.

The following short stories will be available on Cicada:

Kurahashi Yumiko, "An Extraterrestrial" 1964

Nosaka Akiyuki, "American Hijiki," 1967

Oba Minako, "The Smile of a Mountain Witch," 1976

The Transnational

Yoko Tawada. The Naked Eye. Trans. Susan Bernofsky. New York: New Directions, 2009.

FILMS AVAILABLE AT GODDARD LIBRARY RESERVE DESK:

Please make every effort to watch the film versions recommended. We do not recommend that you watch these films from web sources, as they are often edited or cut and rarely have the visual or sound quality of the versions on reserve.

Germany

Jew Süss (1940), directed by Veit Harlan.

Head On (2004), directed by Fatih Akin

France

La Haine (1995), directed by Matthieu Kassovitz.

Japan

Tokyo Sonata (2008), directed by Kiyoshi Kurosawa.

COURSE INTRODUCTION

January 20: What is a National Imagination? Singing the Nation. National Anthems of Germany, France and Japan. How does the course work?

What would you list as your identity? What would you list as your national identity? What are your stereotypes about Germans, French and Japanese?

INVENTING GERMANY

January 27: Goethe's Faust: The Cultural Nation

Following the guidelines in the handout posted on Cicada, read the excerpts from Goethe's Faust I and II.

In the absence of a modern nation-state, how does Goethe's Faust present nationhood? How can culture unify a nation? How does Goethe's Faust become the basis of a national literature?

February 3: Thomas Mann: The Citizens' Nation

Read the following three stories: "Tonio Kröger," "Mario and the Magician," "Disorder and Early Sorrow."

In these stories, who and what is a citizen? Who is excluded from citizenship? What is the role of the artist in the nation?

February 10: "Jew Süss": The Fascist Nation

Watch Veit Harlan's "Jew Süss." Group screening on Tuesday, February 8. Otherwise watch in Goddard.

How does Harlan create a sense of national identity among his characters and for his audience? How does he use notions of citizenship to include and exclude people from the nation.

Guest lecture: Julia Ireland (Whitman College), "Natural Science or National Socialism: Sleuthing in the Heidegger Archives." Dana Commons, 5 pm.

February 17: "Head On": The Multicultural Nation

Watch Fatih Akin's "Head On." Group screening on Tuesday, February 15. Otherwise watch in Goddard.

How does Akin represent German, Turkish and other identities in a transnational era?

Border Crossing to the French Experience with Prof. Gale

INVENTING FRANCE

February 24: The Fairy Tale State and The Artistic/Poetic Nation

Read the selected tales from Charles Perrault posted on Cicada.
Charles Perrault is writing when France is still a monarchy. Despite his good relationship with the king, Perrault believed in giving the people access to formerly restricted places like the Tuileries gardens. He was known for being part of the famous Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns, coming down firmly on the side of Modernity. Though these tales are supposedly "of times past," what can they tell us about power, women, education, and family?

Read the selected poems from Charles Baudelaire posted on Cicada.
Baudelaire was an important Symbolist poet, writing well after France had become an official nation, but was also known or being a "poète maudit" or "cursed poet" for his decadent lifestyle and scandalous writings. What do the poems suggest about the role of the artist within the nation?

March 3: Pimps, Prostitutes, Orphans and Survivors: The Multicultural Family/Nation

Read Romain Gary's The Life Before Us.
This novel shows the multicultural tensions in France after its collaboration with the Nazis in WWII and the massive immigration waves from Algeria, a former colony. How does this novel call into question our notions of family? Of belonging? What does the novel reveal about mainstream France through its outsiders?

SPRING BREAK

March 17: Coming of Age in a Gendered Nation (Part 1): Boys in the 'Hood and Suburban Violent Masculinity

Watch Mathieu Kassovitz's "La Haine." Group screening on Tuesday, March 15. Otherwise, watch in Goddard or at Traina.
What do Kassovitz's three main characters represent? How do their experiences and behaviors inform our understanding of how boys come of age in suburban France? What does the film suggest about the nation as a whole?

March 24: Coming of Age in a Gendered Nation (Part II): Cultural Conflict and Media-Based Identity

Read Faïza Guène's Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow

What do Doria's life and preoccupations tell us about Western influences in France? What does the novel suggest about family, female coming of age and the immigrant experience in France?

Border Crossing to the Japanese Experience with Prof. Valentine

INVENTING JAPAN

March 31: A New Family Narrative: Imagining Self and Nation in an Era of Transformation

Read Soseki's novel, Kokoro, and explore the "Black Ship Scrolls" [see **Cicada link**].

The modern nation of Japan was invented in the Meiji period (1868-1912), a time of dizzyingly rapid and wholesale adoption of the West's values and institutions. We can read Soseki's search for the meaning of the self in this 1914 novel as a metaphor for Japan's search for a new national and international identity. What, then, do the narrator's and sensei's families tell us about this new nation? How can we understand Sensei's sense of loss and alienation in terms of the heroic Meiji quest for "Civilization and Enlightenment"?

April 7: Competing Family Narratives: Defining Japan against the Other as Modernity Challenges Memory

Read Tanizaki's novel, Some Prefer Nettles.

By the time Tanizaki wrote Some Prefer Nettles in 1928, Japan had experienced 50 years of modern nationhood. The uneasy balance between adopting (western) "civilization and enlightenment" while maintaining "Japanese Spirit," and the need to locate the modern Japanese nation state in a uniquely Japanese past, is the backstory of the novel.

What happens as feudal assumptions about social relationships and gender roles are called into question by increasing, and increasingly sophisticated, contact with the west? What are the competing family narratives, and what might they tell us about the nation? In this novel about traditional theater, how is national identity *performed*?

April 14: Contested Family Narratives: Re-Imagining Race, Gender, and Identity in Post-War Japan

Read the three stories posted on Cicada: Nosaka Akiyuki's "American Hijiki," Kurahashi Yumiko's "An Extraterrestrial," and Oba Minako's "The Smile of a Mountain Witch."

Written in the years following Japan's catastrophic defeat in WWII, these 3 stories reveal fissures in the pre-war understanding of self and role. National shame, a new constitution, and a dramatic economic recovery are the backdrop for a re-examination of the nature of power, race, and conventional gender norms. How do these stories unsettle our understanding of the Japanese family? How do they contribute to our understanding of the nation?

April 21: Ambiguous Family Narratives: What does it mean to be Japanese in the post-Post-War?

Watch Kurosawa Kiyoshi's *Tokyo Sonata*. Group screening on Tues., April 19th. Otherwise, watch in Goddard. Read Tawada Yoko's "Is Europe Western?" [[Cicada link](#)], and explore the Takashi Murakami links on **Cicada**.

How does Kurosawa use the microcosm of the family to reveal a changing Japan? How is the issue of Western influence revisited in the film, the Tawada essay, and in Murakami's art? How is cultural identity connected to commerce?

CONCLUSION: THE TRANSNATIONAL

April 28: Translating Transnationalism

Read Yoko Tawada's The Naked Eye.

Yoko Tawada is a writer of Japanese descent who lives in Germany and writes in both German and Japanese. In this novel, written originally in German, the Asian protagonist moves from Vietnam to Germany to France. Read this novel for its depiction of the national and the transnational. What connections do you see in it to the units on Germany, France and Japan?

Guest Lecture: Susan Bernofksy, translator of The Naked Eye, will speak on "Translating Transnationalism," Dana Commons, 5 pm.