Representing Migrant Experience: Modern Migration in Literature and Film

Course Description
The course will examine the representation of the migrant experience as it has been relayed through literature and film of the last century. Questions addressed: Can a generic transcultural representation of ‘migrant’ experience be distilled and analyzed? How do the particular circumstances of time, place, economic, social, political contexts inflect and alter this generic depiction? What differences do the modes of representation (film vs. fiction) make to the possibilities available to represent the experience of ‘migration’?

Through lectures, seminars, tutorials and the required reading and viewing, students will address these questions across the various genres of the novel, the graphic novel, fictional and documentary film.

The course is designed to be multidisciplinary and is suitable for students of all disciplines who have a strong interest in literature, film, history, the experience of migration particularly in the twentieth century. There are no prerequisites and no previous knowledge of migration history is required, though some previous experience with literature and film analysis would be an advantage.

Course Objectives
The aim of the course is to develop students’:
• understanding of the principal questions addressed and recurrent themes articulated in different generic representations of migrant experience in the last century;
• understanding of the literary, filmic and documentary strategies developed to represent ‘the migrant experience’;
• understanding of the extent to which a ‘typical’ ‘migrant experience’ can be identified;
• skills of literary and film analysis, use of relevant evidence, construction of a persuasive argument in writing and oral discussion.

Teaching Methods and Assessment
• 12 x 1.25hr Lectures (15hrs)
• 6 x 1.25hr Seminars (7.5hrs)
• 2 x 1.25hr Tutorials (2.5hrs)
Lectures will present the texts – whether novel, film, graphic novel or documentary – in their specificity and their relationship to the central concerns of the course. Students will be expected to have read the novels before the relevant lecture. Films will be shown independently of the lecture, and all films will be scheduled before the lecture in question.

Seminars and tutorials will allow for further discussion of the texts, of the theories of migration history and experience addressed in the lectures. In addition, students will be expected to give a short oral presentation on one of the texts in the context of the broader questions of migration and representation raised in the course.

**Final assessment:** An essay of no more than 3,000 words (40%), a final three-hour written examination (40%), oral presentation (10%) and participation in seminar discussion (10%).

**Lecture Schedule**

1. **Introduction: The Immigrant in Representation**  
   Film: Charlie Chaplin *The Immigrant*

2. **The Internal ‘Economic’ Migrant: America in the ‘30s**  
   Novel: John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939)  
   Film: John Ford, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940)

3. **The Italian American I**  
   Cesare Pavese, *The Moon and the Bonfires* (1950)

4. **The Dream of America**  

5. **The Italian American II**  
   Francis Ford Coppola, *Godfather II*

6. **Hybridity**  

7. **Colonial Migrations I**  

8. **Colonial Migrations II**  

9. **Middle Eastern Motifs**  
   Marjane Satrapi *Persepolis I and II* (2003-4)  

10. **Threat: Metaphor and Analogy**

11. **International Economics**

12. **The 21st century reads the 20th: Recent ‘Migrant’ Representations**

Further Required (*) and Supplementary Reading:
Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
   _____. ‘Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817’, *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 ““Race”, Writing and Difference” (Autumn 1985): 144-165.
*COMPAS Anthology*, COMPAS Oxford [Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, Banbury Road, Oxford]]: