Magical Realism and Modern Myth
Spring 2019
COML 117a

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office hours: Mondays 10:00-11:00, Thursdays 1:00-2:30

This course explores magical realism in contemporary world literature and film, along with similar forms of inventive storytelling and world-making. Magical and mythical realisms yoke together the supernatural and the historical, the wildly fantastic and the brutally factual. We will investigate these thrilling, strange modes of non-realisms as strategies for negotiating cultural change and social conflict, particularly in the contexts of postcolonialism, feminist struggles for equality, anti-fascism, mass migration, and racial oppression. These texts invent ways to imagine historical reckoning and justice, against despair, in times of political danger. As attempts to find unlikely new shapes for hope and possibility, these fictions will help us look in unexpected ways at the relation between the past and present, the imagination and reality, the given world and worlds that might be.

This is a four-credit course. I expect students to spend at least nine hours a week preparing for class sessions and completing assignments.

The learning goals for this course are:
• to conceptualize magical realism and mythical realism, as they can be both distinguished from and affiliated with other experiments in literature and film (the fantastic, surrealism, postmodernism)
• to write analytically and/or creatively in ways that engage the narrative techniques of magical or mythical realism
• to evaluate the cultural politics of non-realisms in literature and film, particularly as these relate to postcolonial societies, feminist critiques of gender subordination, racial caste systems, totalitarianism, and the condition of refugees
• to understand the relation between the literary imagination and academic historical narrative, i.e., magical realism as a response to historicism
• the ability to assess a piece of scholarship about an assigned text

Required Books (at Brandeis Bookstore, except for Okri. Note that these books are available used, at competitive prices, in local bookstores and online):
Gabriel García Márquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude
China Miéville, The Last Days of New Paris
Amos Tutuola, The Palm-Wine Drinkard
Ben Okri, Stars of the New Curfew [not at bookstore, but available used online]
Salman Rushdie, Midnight’s Children
Angela Carter, Nights at the Circus
Toni Morrison, Beloved
Mohsin Hamid, Exit West

Required Films (on LATTE):
Luis Buñuel, The Exterminating Angel
Guillermo del Toro, Pan’s Labyrinth
Benh Zeitlin, Beasts of the Southern Wild
Rules and Requirements:
• Laptops may be used in class only for accessing relevant course materials on LATTE. If you use a laptop for other purposes (email, web browsing), you will be asked to leave the class and be considered absent for the day. Bring other materials (e.g., paper, pens) for taking notes.
• All assignments must be completed and submitted to receive course credit. Late work will be penalized by one plus/minus for each day past due date.
• Three unexcused absences lowers the final course grade by one plus/minus, and each additional absence by another plus/minus.
• If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see us immediately.
• You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at LTS - Library guides.

Grades and Assignments:
Thoughts and Questions: Ten brief weekly comments and questions about readings, due on LATTE the night before class. Schedule to be distributed. In this writing, in a short paragraph, explain your interest in or curiosity about some aspect of our assigned reading. How would you start a conversation about it? What about this text do you find striking, challenging, significant? Credit/no credit. 2% each.
Assessment of Scholarship: In 2-3 pages, write a detailed summary of the arguments, ideas, and findings in a piece of published, peer-reviewed scholarship about an assigned text. This can be an article or book chapter, but shouldn’t be a book review (or other piece of literary or film journalism) or blog post. You can write your summary about scholarship relating to any text on the syllabus. It is due by the last day that we discuss this text in lecture or discussion section. You can find interesting, well-researched academic writing about our texts on JSTOR and Project Muse (databases of scholarly articles and books, available on Brandeis Scholar) and on the library shelves where books by your author are located. Include a full citation for your scholarly source. Credit/no credit. 5%
Essays: Three 5-7 page essays, topics to be distributed. Due 2/11, 3/25, 5/6. 25% each.

Schedule:
Wed 1/16: Origins of a concept
Thur 1/17
Borges, “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” [LATTE]

*Mon 1/21: No class, Birthday for Martin Luther King, Jr.*

*Tue 1/22: Brandeis Monday*
Wed 1/23
García Márquez, “Big Mama’s Funeral,” “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings,” “Blacamán the Good, Vendor of Miracles” [LATTE]

Thur 1/23: Meet in Sections

Mon 1/28
Borges, “The Mythical Founding of Buenos Aires” [LATTE]
García Márquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude (1-105)

Wed 1/30
García Márquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude (106-228)

Thur 2/1: Meet in Sections
Christopher Columbus, “The Green and Beautiful Land” [LATTE]
Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, “The Unique Monkey” [LATTE]
Gaspar de Carvajal, “Encounter with the Amazons” [LATTE]

Mon 2/4
García Márquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude (229-319)

Wed 2/6
García Márquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude (finish)

Thur 2/7: Meet in Sections
García Márquez, 1982 Nobel Lecture, “The Solitude of Latin America” [LATTE]

Mon 2/11
*Essay One Due*
Buñuel, dir., The Exterminating Angel [LATTE]

Wed 2/13
Miéville, The Last Days of New Paris (chs. 1-5)

Thur 2/14: no sections
Miéville, The Last Days of New Paris (chs. 6-Afterword)

2/18-2/22: no class for midterm recess

Mon 2/25
Rushdie, Midnight’s Children (Book One)

Wed 2/27
Rushdie, Midnight’s Children (Book Two)

Thur 2/28: Meet in Sections

Mon 3/4
Rushdie, Midnight’s Children (Book Two, cont.)
Wed 3/6
Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children* (Book Three)

**Thur 3/7: Meet in Sections**

**Mon 3/11**
Achebe, “Chike’s School Days,” “The Sacrificial Egg,” “Dead Men’s Path” [LATTE]
Tutuola, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (191-238)

**Wed 3/13**
Tutuola, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (239-307)

**Thur 3/14: Meet in Sections**

**Mon 3/18**
Okri, *Stars of the New Curfew* (“In the Shadows of War,” “Worlds that Flourish,” “In the City of Red Dust”)

**Wed 3/20**
Okri, *Stars of the New Curfew* (“Stars of the New Curfew,” “When the Lights Return,” “What the Tapster Saw”)

**Thur 3/21: Meet in Sections**

**Mon 3/25**
*Essay Two Due*
Carter, *Nights at the Circus* (Book One: London)

**Wed 3/27**
Carter, *Nights at the Circus* (Book Two: Petersburg)

**Thur 3/28: Meet in Sections**

**Mon 4/1**
Carter, *Nights at the Circus* (Book Three: Siberia)

**Wed 4/3**
Morrison, *Beloved* (3-59)

**Thur 4/4: Meet in Sections**

**Mon 4/8**
Morrison, *Beloved* (60-173)

**Wed 4/10**
Morrison, *Beloved* (174-235)

**Thur 4/11: no sections**
Morrison, *Beloved* (finish) and 1993 Nobel Lecture [LATTE]
Mon 4/15
del Toro, dir., *Pan’s Labyrinth* [LATTE]

Wed 4/17
Zeitlin, dir., *Beasts of the Southern Wild* [LATTE]

Thur 4/18: Meet in Sections

4/19-4/26, no class for Passover break

Mon 4/29
Hamid, *Exit West*

Wed 5/1: Final Considerations
Hamid, *Exit West*

*Thur 5/2: No class, Brandeis Friday*

*Mon 5/6, noon: Essay 3 Due*