

October 6, 2011

From: Phillip W. Weiss

To: Prof. Chou

Re: *Namesake*

Dear Prof. Chou:

Namesake, pages 1-47, deals with a number of themes:

1. The immigration experience. e.g., Ashira and Ashoke are immigrants.
2. Inter-generational relationships, e.g., Ashira and Ashoke with their families, pages 7-8, 12-13, 36-37
3. Post trauma, e.g., Ashoke and the train accident, pages 16-20
4. Indian culture, e.g., naming the baby, pages 24-29
5. Pregnancy, birth and motherhood, e.g., the birth of baby Gogol, pages 2-6, 22-23, 34-35
6. Courtship and marriage, e.g., Ashira and Ashoke's marriage, pages 8-10
7. Spirituality, e.g., Ashoke believes that his life is part of something bigger, pages 21

These are universal themes that should resonate with any reader.

An interesting feature of the book is the author's effective use of flashbacks and narrative style to develop the characters, Ashira and Ashoke. The development of these two characters is essential to understanding the story because if the reader does not know who these two characters are and cannot empathize with them, then the entire story collapses. For instance, we learn that Ashira is a devoted daughter, sister, wife and mother and Ashoke is a caring son, husband and father who values education and is grateful for being alive. In short, Ashira and Ashoke are characters that the author wants the reader to understand, appreciate and care about. Hence, there is no need for lengthy dialog, except to illustrate the characters' personality traits. The story is told in third-person, mostly in present-tense ("Now she is alone" - page 3), but also in past tense (the train accident). Through the skillful use of flashbacks and narrative, the author succeeds in developing the story and moving it forward, so that by page 47, the stage is set for further events as Ashira and Ashoke, with baby Gogol in tow, return to India. By now, the reader wants to know more.

Two other points:

1. The story is set in a time when there was no internet, when communication was restricted to mail, telegram and land-line telephone, which figures prominently in the story. Ashira may not have felt so emotionally isolated if she had access to a cell phone and PC allowing her to communicate instantaneously with her family in India.

2. The naming of the baby after a famous and celebrated Russian writer suggests that the baby is going to play a prominent role in the novel. This is an effective literary device that calls attention to the baby. It is reasonable to surmise that Gogol is going to figure prominently in the story, which is what the author would want the reader to think.

October 4, 2011

Form: Phillip W. Weiss

To: Prof. Chou

Subject: English 3032 - curriculum

Dear Prof. Chou:

I think the curriculum for the course does not need to be changed. Five books, plus classroom presentations, plus classroom discussions, plus one or two papers provides sufficient introduction to the subject of Asian-American literature. With the two books discussed thus far, the class has covered lots of ground on the Asian-American experience as told through both the short story and full-length novel formats. We have been introduced to the Japanese in Oakland, California and Seattle, Washington; we have covered generational conflict and the question of conflicting loyalties; we have discussed the immigration experience in general and "no-no boys" and those who served; and have discussed the history of the internment of the Japanese.