

ENGLISH 549-01:
THE CRITICAL CANON AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES (3.0 CR.)
Language, Representation, and Competing Paradigms in Criticism and Theory

Instructor: Christian Moraru
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McIver 227, M 6:00-8:50 PM
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“The limits of my language mean the limits of
my word.”

(Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus)

“Any refusal of language is a death.”

(Roland Barthes, Mythologies)

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS: This is a survey of the Judeo-Christian tradition in literary theory, criticism, and thought. Specifically, we will pursue major philosophies of language and their roles in the rise of various models of critical interpretation. Thus, on the one hand, the course has a historical component as we will discuss key works from Plato and the Zohar to contemporary responses to these works, by Saussure, Derrida, Gershom Scholem, and Harold Bloom; in fact, the course is organized around the dialogue across ages between the classics and the moderns--and we will make sure the postmoderns are not left out of this conversation, either. On the other hand, their conversation, as well as our own, has a focus, or a “history of ideas” component: the discourse on language, more to the point, on language’s fundamental relation to reality. We will see how, variously conceived, this relation has given birth to several ways of seizing literature and culture. In other words, the course will foreground the links between certain linguistic models and critical-theoretical paradigms derived, directly or indirectly, from these models: the ancient aesthetic of mimesis, medieval hermeneutics, modern formalism and poetics, poststructuralism, and identity studies (language and gender). Thus, we will reconstruct major developments in the history of critical thought around the dialogue of theory and criticism with language philosophy and linguistics before and after the “linguistic turn.” In addition to the linguists, critics, and philosophers already mentioned, we will read whole works by, or excerpts from, Augustine, Dante, Nietzsche, Borges, Eco, Jameson, and Irigaray among others.

CONTENT AND STRUCTURE: As specified above, the course is shaped both historically and typologically. We will examine several language theories that address the relationship between “reality” and its “expression” (“representation,” “copy,” “mirror,” “transfiguration,” “simulacrum,” etc.). We will look, in the case of each theory or model, at its main critical-theoretical upshots, at the traditional ones first and, then, at their modern/postmodern revisions. Examined materials will include both “pure theory” and “applications,” with emphasis on the former. We will also analyze works that blur this very distinction, as well as some thought-provoking literature (Poe, Trakl, Borges, etc.). We will proceed, by and large, chronologically in hopes to acquire a better grasp of theory as an evolving system. We will notice, e.g., how certain reading models have emerged in response to previous theories of criticism and literary discourse, from formalism and structuralism to the British and American “cultural” reaction to deconstruction in the late 80s and 90s.

METHODOLOGY: We will use both primary and secondary sources. Further, whenever possible, we will turn to specific literary materials our critics and theorists have employed to work out their interpretive (hermeneutic) paradigms. We will deal, for example, with Heidegger’s readings of certain expressionistic poems along with the poems themselves to better comprehend, on the one hand, the philosopher’s phenomenological approach itself and, on the other hand, its undergirding philosophy’s reaction to the ancient doctrine of truth as “analogy.”

CLASS FORMAT: Running for almost three hours, this class will resemble a seminar. Accordingly, it will combine lecture, extensive discussion, student presentations, and, occasionally, group work. Usually, our meetings will open with a lecture by the instructor providing historical and philosophical background and placing the scheduled readings in the culturally appropriate context. Following this introduction, students will give 15-20-minute individual presentations on specific aspects of those readings. Then, we will discuss collectively the materials for the day. I will set aside time to prepare and evaluate writing projects, exams, and other assignments.

* **NOTE ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** Students--especially graduate students--are encouraged to use this course to put their work in the larger, more demanding and competitive perspective of professionalism and academic performance. The class is geared, overall, towards graduate reading and writing carrying notable potential for presentation and publication outside UNCG. While fulfilling the course’s requirements is your major goal, I urge you to take these requirements as an opportunity to think about yourselves as part of the academic community, with its specific standards, language, methods, tools, and venues.

Here are some of the questions you may want to ask throughout the term: where do I stand as a scholar, teacher, critic and writer, and which are my goals? In what kind of scholarly conversation do I wish to intervene based on what I learn in this class? What steps do I have to take to do that? What are the resources? Which are the outlets for my work? What do I have to do, for instance, to turn my seminar presentation/paper into a conference paper/journal article/dissertation chapter/writing sample? (more details in class and individually).

REQUIREMENTS:

1. Writing Assignments and Exams. There will be two options for undergraduate and graduate students:

a) a midterm paper (10 pp.) and a final paper (25 pp. plus endnotes and Works Cited) for graduates (G);

b) a midterm and a final exam (6-7 p. each, both take-home) plus a final paper (10 p. plus endnotes and Works Cited) for undergraduates (U).

As you can see, each student will write at least a term paper, which is the most important writing assignment in the course. You are responsible for submitting (to the instructor and ahead of time), for duplicating and circulating (among class members) a 1-p., single-spaced proposal, which will be presented and discussed in class towards the end of the semester. We will meet individually to discuss your proposal before its presentation in class.

Note: All assignments are due in class on the day indicated in the syllabus.

2. Individual Presentations. Students sign up for their final project and oral presentations right away so that we can spread out the presentations over the course of the semester. Each student will give a brief, 15-20-min. talk on the scheduled readings. The presentations need not be written, but if they are, you should probably aim for 7-7.5, double-spaced pages.

Presentations cover a relevant aspect or material for the day. I do not expect you to fully analyze or explain the assignments or even one of these assignments. But I do ask you to a) briefly outline the argument or content of the readings you intent to talk about, and then to b) identify one major element (theoretical problem) in these works, which should help us open up our conversation. I urge undergraduates to consult with me before they present.

3. “The Question for the Day.” Each student will write up, before the class, one question on the scheduled readings. You need not have the answer to the question; nor does the question have to be fully formulated--you may, occasionally, phrase it more as a problem than a full-blown query. I request that you e-mail your question to me by 2:00 PM each Monday.

4. Attendance and Participation. Both are expected and will factor in the final grade (see below under course policies).

CONFERENCES: Please meet with me during my regular office hours or make an appointment to discuss your specific interests, goals, or any aspect of this class. I ask you to make a first, “formal” appointment early on in the semester. I will schedule these meetings immediately. I will also hold a second round of formal conferences, before the semester ends, to discuss your 1-p. proposals and your progress in this class.

COURSE POLICIES:

1. Late Papers: No late papers--and any other kind of work for that matter--accepted. However, if you foresee any deadline-related problems, please come to see me ahead of time. We shall work together to find a solution.

2. Absences: You are allowed no more than 2 (two) absences during the semester for illnesses (which you must document afterwards), religious holidays, or any emergencies preventing you from attending. No undocumented absences allowed. Should they occur, they will affect your final grade. I will subtract 5% from the latter for any undocumented absence. Since we meet once a week, attendance is particularly critical to the success of our work in this class. If you are the victim of an emergency, please stay in touch with me by e-mail or phone.

GRADING: As a general rule, no incompletes (but, again, come to see me if you anticipate any problems). The quality of your work will be reflected in the final grade as follows:

1. Papers and/or exams: 85%
2. Oral participation: 15%

Note: I would like to discuss these percentages and all requirements in general on the first meeting.

REQUIRED READINGS:

I.

1. Bachelard, Gaston. Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter. Trans. Edith R. Farrell. Dallas: The Dallas Institute Publications, 1994. ISBN: 0911005250 (pbk.)
2. Borges, Jorge Luis. Ficciones. New York: Grove/Atlantic, 1987. ISBN: 0802130305 (pbk.)
3. Derrida, Jacques. Of Grammatology. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Revised ed., 1997. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1997. ISBN 0801858305 (pbk.)*
4. Eco, Umberto. The Search for the Perfect Language. Trans. James Fentress. Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1997. ISBN: 0631205101 (pbk.)*
5. Genette, Gérard. Mimologies: Voyage en Cratylie. Trans. Thaïs E. Morgan. With a Foreword by Gerald Prince. Lincoln and London: Nebraska UP, 1995. ISBN: 0803270445 (pbk.)*
6. Heidegger, Martin. Poetry, Language, Thought. Trans. and Introduction by Albert Hofstadter. New York: HarperTrade, 1981. ISBN 0060904305 (pbk.)
7. Irigaray, Luce. Thinking the Difference. For a Peaceful Revolution. Trans. from the French by Karin Montin. New York: Routledge, 1994. ISBN 0415908159 (pbk.)*

8. Jameson, Fredric. The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1990 ed. ISBN 0691013160 (pbk.)

9. Plato, Cratylus. Trans., with Introduction and Notes, by C.D.C. Reeve. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 1998. ISBN 0872204162 (pbk.)

10. Saussure, Ferdinand de, Course in General Linguistics. Trans. Roy Harris. Open Court Publishing Co., 1990. ISBN 0812690230 (pbk.)

11. Scholem, Gershom. On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism. Trans. Ralph Manheim. New York: Schocken Books, 1996. ISBN 0805210512 (pbk)*

12. Steiner, George. After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation. Third ed. Oxford. New York: Oxford UP, 1998. ISBN: 0192880934 (pbk.)*

Note: Starred items: excerpts. The titles above have been placed on closed reserve, too.

II. Additional materials placed on reserve and marked R in the syllabus:

13. Abrams, M. H. The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition. New York: Oxford UP, 1953*

14. Aristotle. Poetics. Trans. Leon Golden (xerox copy)

15. Auerbach, Erich. Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1953*

16. Augustine. De Dialectica. Trans. with Introduction and Notes by B. Darrell Jackson. Dordrecht, Holland. Boston: D. Reidel, 1975 (xerox copy)

17. Barthes, Roland. "Proust and Names." New Critical Essays. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1980. 55-68.

18. Baudrillard, Jean. Symbolic Exchange and Death. Trans. Iain Hamilton Grant with an Introduction by Mike Gane. London: SAGE, 1993

19. --. The Perfect Crime. Trans. Chris Turner. London. New York: Verso, 1996*

20. Bloom, Harold. Kabbalah and Criticism. New York: The Seabury P, 1975

21. Borges, Jorge Luis. "The Kabbalah." Seven Nights. Trans. Eliot Weinberger. Introduction by Alastair Reid. New York: New Directions, 1984. 95-106 (xerox copy)

22. Culler, Jonathan. Literary Theory. A Very Short Introduction. Oxford. New York: Oxford UP, 1997*

23. -- . Structuralist Poetics. Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1975*
24. Dante. "Letter to Can Grande della Scala" (xerox copy)*
25. -- . Literature in the Vernacular. Trans. with an Introduction by Sally Purcell. Manchester, UK: Carcanet New P, 1981 (xerox copy)
26. De Man, Paul. Allegories of Reading. Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1979*
27. Eagleton, Terry. Literary Theory. An Introduction. Second Edition. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996*
28. Gilbert, Sandra and Gubar, Susan. No Man's Land. The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth-Century. Volume 1. The War of the Words. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1987. 227-271 (xerox copy)
29. Hemingway, Ernest. "Hills Like White Elephants" (xerox copy)
30. Irigaray, Luce. "The Three Genres." The Irigaray Reader. Ed. and with an Introduction by Margaret Whitford. London: Basil Blackwell, 1991. 140-153 (xerox copy)
31. Johnson, Christopher. Derrida. New York: Routledge, 1999
32. Moraru, Christian. "Exploring Names: Notes on Onomastics and Fictionality in Marcel Proust's Remembrance of Things Past." Names 43. 2 (June 1995): 119-130 (xerox copy)
33. Nietzsche, Friedrich. "On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense." Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language. Ed. and Trans. with a Critical Introduction Sander L. Gilman, Carole JBlair, David J. Parent. New York. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989. 246-257 (xerox copy)
34. Plato. Republic, X (xerox copy)*
35. Poe, Edgar Allan. Tales. New York: Grosset & Dunlap*
36. Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. Essay on the Origin of Languages, Which Treats of Melody and Musical Imitation. On the Origin of Language. Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Essay on the Origin of Languages. Johann Gottfried Herder. Essay on the Origin of Language. Trans, with afterwords, by John H. Moran and Alexander Gode. Introduction by Alexander Gode. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1966. 5-74 (xerox copy)
37. Smith, Roch C. Gaston Bachelard. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982
38. Sontag, Susan. Against Interpretation (xerox copy)*

39. Spanos, William V., ed. Martin Heidegger and the Question of Literature: Toward a Postmodern Literary Hermeneutics. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1979*
40. Starobinsky, Jean. Words upon Words. The Anagrams of Ferdinand de Saussure. Trans. Olivia Emmet. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1979*
41. Thiher, Allen. Words in Reflection. Modern Language Theory and Postmodern Fiction. Chicago and London: The U of Chicago P, 1984*
42. Trakl, Georg. Poems. Trans. Lucia Getsi. Athens, OH: Mundum Artium P, 1973*
43. Zohar. The Book of Enlightenment. Trans. and Introduction by Daniel Chanan Matt. Preface by Arthur Green. New York: Paulist P, 1983.*

I may add, as we go along, further items (brief excerpts and articles) to the course holdings on reserve in the Jackson Library.

COURSE SYLLABUS:

Week 1

Mon Jan. 8 MODELS OF LANGUAGE AND CRITICAL PARADIGMS BEFORE AND AFTER "THE LINGUISTIC TURN." LANGUAGE AND REFERENTIALITY
Introduction: goals, requirements, policies. Presentation of the topic and daily syllabus. Discussion.

Week 2

Mon Jan. 15 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday - no class

Week 3

Mon Jan. 22 LINGUISTIC MOTIVATION, OR, "CRATYLISM" VS. "HERMOGENISM": TWO TRADITIONS

Plato, Cratylus
Genette, Mimologics 7-27; 249-260 ("The Age of Names")
Optional: Barthes, "Proust and Names" R; Moraru, "Exploring Names" R

Week 4

Mon Jan. 29 CRATYLISM, MIMOLOGICS AND MIMESIS ACROSS AGES: FROM "EPISTEME" TO "TECHNE"

Plato, Republic, Book X R
Aristotle, Poetics R
Auerbach, Mimesis "The Brown Stocking" and "Epilogue" (525-557) R

Optional: Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp 3-29, 47-69 (On romanticism) R

Week 5

Mon Feb. 5

CRATYLIST REVISIONS AND “CONVENTIONALIST”
ANTICIPATIONS IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE MIDDLE AGES
Augustine, De Dialectica R
Dante, De Vulgari Eloquentia [Literature in the Vernacular] R
Eco, The Search for the Perfect Language 34-52
Genette, Mimologics 29-35. Optional: 37-62

Week 6

Mon Feb. 12

MIMESIS, MOTIVATION, ARBITRARINESS: FROM LINGUISTICS
TO POETICS

Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, especially Part One and Two (65-135)

Culler, Structuralist Poetics 1-31 R

Midterm exam assigned

Week 7

Mon Feb. 19

FORMALIST AND STRUCTURALIST POETICS AND THEIR
CRITICS

Culler, Structuralist Poetics 32-74; 255-265 R

Jameson, The Prison-House of Language (especially 1-98)

Optional: Eagleton, Literary Theory. An Introduction (2nd ed.) 1-15 R;

Culler, Literary Theory. A Very Short Introduction 55-69 R

Week 8

Mon Feb. 26

FROM LINGUISTICS TO GRAMMATOLOGY: SAUSSURE VS.
SAUSSURE (I)

Derrida, Of Grammatology, Part I (1-94).

Optional: Translator’s Preface; Christopher Johnson, Derrida R; Thiher, Words in Reflection 63-90 (on Saussure and Derrida) R

Midterm exam due (in class)

Midterm evaluations

Week 9

Mon Mar 5

Spring Break - no class

Week 10

Mon Mar. 12

LANGUAGE, RHETORIC, IDEOLOGY

Derrida, Of Grammatology, Part II (95-165)
 Rousseau, On the Origin of Languages R
 Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense" R
 Paul de Man, Allegories of Reading 79-90, 103-118, 135-159 R
 Optional: Genette, Mimologics 143-178

Midterm paper due (in class)

Week 11

Mon Mar. 19

POETIC LANGUAGE (I): BETWEEN ADEQUATIO AND DIS-CLOSURE

Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought 91-142, 189-229
 Trakl: "Radiant Autumn," "A Clearing in the Forest," "Winter," "To One Who Died Young," "Decline of Summer," "Springtime of the Soul," "In the Darkness," "Grodok." R
 Optional: Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought 17-87 ("The Origin of the Work of Art"); Thiher, Words in Reflection 35-62 ("Martin Heidegger") R; Spanos, ed., Martin Heidegger and the Question of Literature ix-xix, 271-294 R

Week 12

Mon Mar. 26

POETIC LANGUAGE (II): "THE LINGUISTIC IMAGINATION"

Bachelard, Water and Dreams
 Poe. "The Island of the Fay," "A Descent into the Maelstrom" R
 Optional: Genette, Mimologics 97-141; Smith, Gaston Bachelard R

Week 13

Mon Apr. 2

A(NA)GRAMMATICALITY AND THE "DECENTERING OF LINGUISTICS": SAUSSURE VS. SAUSSURE (II)

Baudrillard, Symbolic Exchange and Death 195-238 R
 Baudrillard, The Perfect Crime 1-105 R
 Optional: Starobinsky, Words upon Words: The Anagrams of Ferdinand de Saussure 93-129 R

Week 14

Mon Apr. 9

THE NEW AND OLD BABEL: FROM "HYPERREALITY" (BACK) TO KABBALISTIC "PANSEMIOTICISM." THE "WRITING OF THE WORLD" AND "UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE"

Steiner, After Babel, especially 51-114
 Scholem, On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism, especially 1-86
 Optional: Eco, The Search for the Perfect Language 1-33; 117-143

Presentations of final projects

Week 15

Mon Apr. 16

JEWISH MYSTICISM, TEXTUALITY, AND INTERPRETATION:
THE “PREHISTORY” OF DECONSTRUCTION

Dante, “Letter to Can Grande della Scala” R

The Zohar 43-90 R

Bloom, Kabbalah and Criticism R

Optional: Sontag, Against Interpretation 1-10 R

Presentations of final projects

Final exam assigned

Week 16

Mon Apr. 23

THE PROBLEM OF LANGUAGE AND MEANING IN “SACRED”
AND “CLASSICAL” TEXTS: OLD AND NEW INTERTEXTUALITIES

Borges, Ficciones

Optional: Borges, “The Kabbalah” R

Presentations of final projects

Final paper (U) due (in class)

Week 17

Mon April 30

ENGENDERING LANGUAGE: LINGUISTIC DIFFERENCE,
POLITICAL DIFFERENCES. COURSE OVERVIEW: LANGUAGE
AND THE HISTORY OF CRITICISM

Gilbert and Gubar, “Sexual Linguistics: Women’s Sentence, Men’s
Sentencing” R

Irigaray, Thinking the Difference, especially 39-112.

Hemingway, “Hills Like White Elephants” R

Optional: Irigaray, “The Three Genres” R

Last meeting

Final exam (U) or paper (G) due (in class)

Final evaluations