

## ENGLISH 551-01: MODERN LITERARY THEORY (3.0 CR.)

Instructor: Christian Moraru  
Spring 1999

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Only when we know--and it is a knowledge gained by taking pains, be renouncing what Freud calls instinctual gratification--what we are doing when we read, we are free to enjoy what we read. As long as our enjoyment is--or is said to be--instinctive it is not enjoyment, it is terrorism. For literature is like love in La Rochefoucauld: no one would ever have experienced it if he had not first read about it in books. We require an education in literature as in the sentiments in order to discover that what we assumed--with the complicity of our teachers--was nature is in fact culture, that what was given is no more than a way of taking. And we must learn, when we take, the cost of our participation, or else we shall pay much more. We shall pay our capacity to read at all. (Richard Howard, "A Note on S/Z." Roland Barthes, S/Z, Hill and Wang, 17th ed., 1991, ix)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES:** This is a survey of 20th-century literary and cultural theory, organized around influential models or reading that have come to the fore through Russian formalism, structuralism, poststructuralism, reader-response criticism, as well as through various types of cultural analysis focusing on issues of sex, gender, race, ethnicity, and other components of identity. In this class, we will discuss how linguistics, psychoanalysis, philosophy (mainly phenomenology), anthropology, sociology, and other pivotal disciplines have supplied tools and vocabularies for critical inquiry in particular sociocultural contexts throughout the century.

**CONTENT AND STRUCTURE:** The course is shaped both historically--it does purport to be a fairly comprehensive survey--and typologically, with emphasis on the latter aspect. That is, while we will retrace the main directions and moments in the development of modern critical theory, we will insist primarily on several reading paradigms (or models of reading) that are, for the most part, still influential, bearing upon how critics currently

interpret literature and related aesthetic and cultural phenomena. Nonetheless, we will proceed, by and large, chronologically. Thus, we will have a better grasp of theory as an evolving system, distinguishing, for example, how certain reading models have emerged as reactions to previous theories of criticism and literary discourse, from formalism and the structuralist “linguistic turn” to the “cultural” reaction to deconstruction in the British and American criticism of the 90s.

**METHODOLOGY:** We will use both primary and secondary sources. Whenever possible, we will look closely at the specific literary and cultural materials our critics and theorists themselves have employed to work out their interpretive (hermeneutic) paradigms: a short story by Leo Tolstoy, for example, to see more clearly what Victor Shklovsky means by the “defamiliarization technique”; a novella by Honoré de Balzac, to better understand how Roland Barthes moves from “orthodox” structuralism to poststructuralism in *S/Z*; a novel by Ishmael Reed to grasp more effectively Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s “Signifying” theory; a play by David Henry Hwang to illustrate the interplay of gender, ethnicity, and geopolitics in the cultural arena of identity, and so on.

**CLASS FORMAT:** Running for almost three hours, this class will resemble a seminar. Accordingly, it will combine lecture, extensive discussion, group work, and student presentations. Usually, our meetings will open with a lecture by the instructor providing historical and philosophical background and placing the readings for the day in the culturally appropriate context. Following this introduction, we will discuss collectively the materials for the day and students will give 15-minute individual presentations on specific aspects of those readings.

#### REQUIREMENTS:

1. Writing Assignments and Exams. Since this class includes a range of undergraduate and graduate students with different backgrounds, I am giving you the following options:

a) A midterm paper (10 pp. plus endnotes and “Works Cited”[\*]) and a final paper (20 pp.\*); recommended to graduate students.

b) A midterm exam (5 pp.) and a final exam (both are take-home) plus a term paper (10 pp.\*) due in class, May 3; and

c) A midterm exam plus a midterm and a final paper (10 pp.\* each) (options b and c recommended to undergraduate students).

As you can see, each student will write at least a term paper, which is the most important writing assignment in the course. They are responsible for submitting (to the instructor), 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.

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-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 day's 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.

3. "The Question for the Day." Each student will write up, before the class, at least 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: 80%
2. Oral participation: 20%

## REQUIRED READINGS:

### I. CRITICAL THEORY:

1. David H. Richter, ed. The Critical Tradition. Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends. Second Edition. Boston: Bedford Books. ISBN: 0-312-10106-6 (or pbk., if available).
2. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, eds. Critical Terms for Literary Study. 2nd ed. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995 (or latest pbk.) ISBN: 0-226-47203-5 (pbk.)
3. Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics. Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature.
4. Roland Barthes, S/Z. An Essay. Trans. By Richard Miller. New York: Noonday P/ Hill and Wang (latest pbk.).  
ISBN: 0-374-52167-0.
5. Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart, eds. Gender And Reading. Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, latest pbk. ISBN: 0-8018-2907-0 (pbk.)
6. Harold Bloom, A Map of Misreading. New York: Oxford UP, latest pbk. ISBN: 0-19-502809-0 (pbk)
7. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. The Signifying Monkey. A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism. Oxford UP, latest pbk. ISBN: 0-19-506075-X
8. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson, The Purloined Poe. Lacan, Derrida & Psychoanalytic Reading. Baltimore and London: the Johns Hopkins UP, latest pbk. ISBN: 0-8018-3293-4 pbk.
9. Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings. Ed. Mark Poster. Stanford: Stanford UP, most recent pbk. ISBN: 0-8047-1480-0 (pbk).
10. Jean Baudrillard, America. New York and London: Verso, most recent pbk. ISBN: 0-86091-978-1 (pbk.)
11. Edward W. Said, Culture and Imperialism. Random House (Vintage), most recent pbk. ISBN: 0-472-06521 (pbk).

### II. LITERARY TEXTS:

12. David Henry Hwang, M. Butterfly. Penguin (Plume), most recent pbk. ISBN: 0-452-27259-9 (pbk.)
13. Don DeLillo, White Noise. Penguin, most recent pbk. ISBN: 0-14-00.7702 2

14. Ishmael Reed, Mumbo Jumbo. A Novel. Atheneum/Macmillan Publishing Company, latest pbk. ISBN: 0-689-70730-4

Note: Items 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11: excerpts. All items on reserve, UNCG Jackson Library. These books may be purchased at the UNCG Bookstore (Elliott University Center), Barnes & Noble, and elsewhere.

Also on reserve are the following required and recommended readings:

15. Bharati Mukherjee, The Holder of the World. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1993.

16. James Weldon Johnson, The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man, Three Negro Classics (Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson).

17. Homi K. Bhabha, Ed. Nation and Narration. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

18. Simon During, Ed. The Cultural Studies Reader. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

19. H. Aram Veesser, Ed. The New Historicism Reader. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

20. Roland Barthes, Mythologies. New York: FSG, 1993.

21. Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter

22. Edward W. Said, Orientalism. New York: Random House, 1994 ed.

Shorter pieces and excerpts from works by Leo Tolstoy, Walt Whitman, Ernest Hemingway, Gerald Vizenor, David Cowart, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Meaghan Morris, and others. I may also add, as we go along, further items (primarily xeroxed excerpts) to the course holdings on reserve in the Jackson Library.

## COURSE SYLLABUS:

### Week 1

Mon Jan. 11 MODERN THEORY AND INFLUENTIAL MODELS OF READING THROUGHOUT THE 20-TH CENTURY. LITERATURE, CULTURE, INTERPRETATION.

Introduction: goals, requirements, policies.  
of the topic and weekly syllabus.

Presentation  
Discussion.

### Week 2

Mon Jan. 18 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday - no class

### Week 3

Mon Jan. 25 READING FOR THE DEVICE: RUSSIAN FORMALISM. TECHNIQUE, "LITERARINESS," AND LITERARY HISTORY

Assignments: Richter, "Formalisms," Richter 699-716  
Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," Richter 717-726  
Tolstoy, "Kholstomer," Tolstoy's Tales of Courage and Conflict 436-464 (on reserve)  
Tynyanov, "On Literary Evolution," Richter 727-735

### Week 4

Mon Feb. 1 STRUCTURAL READING: THE "LINGUISTIC TURN" AND STRUCTURALIST POETICS

Assignments: Culler, "Structuralism and Linguistic Models," Culler 3-54  
Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," Richter 835-844  
Genette, "Frontiers of Narrative," Richter 844-853  
Tolstoy, "Kholstomer"

Recommended: Rowe, "Structure," Lentricchia and McLaughlin 23-38

### Week 5

Mon Feb. 8 "READERLY" VS. "WRITERLY" TEXTS: POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND READING AS (RE)WRITING

Assignments: Barthes, S/Z (ideally the whole book, including Balzac's appended novella, Sarrasine)

Recommended: Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Richter 877-889

### Week 6

Mon Feb. 15 THE TEXT AS SYMPTOM (I): FROM SEMIOTICS TO PSYCHOANALYSIS OR, READING THE UNCONSCIOUS - FREUD, LACAN, AND EDGAR ALLAN POE

Assignments: Poe, "The Purloined Letter," The Purloined Poe 3-27

Bonaparte, The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe, The Purloined Poe 101-132

Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" The Purloined Poe 28-54

**Week 7**

Mon Feb. 22 THE TEXT AS SYMPTOM (II): DECONSTRUCTING LACANIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS - DERRIDA AND LACAN

Assignments: The Derrida essays in The Purloined Poe  
157-212  
**Midterm exam due (in class)**  
Midterm evaluations

**Week 8**

Mon Mar. 1 Spring Break - no class

**Week 9**

Mon Mar. 8 DECONSTRUCTION AND CREATIVE (MIS)READING:  
PSYCHOANALYSIS AND LITERARY HISTORY

Assignments: Bloom, A Map of Misreading 3-105; 160-  
206  
Whitman, Sea-Drift (on reserve)  
**Midterm paper due (in class)**

**Week 10**

Mon Mar. 15 FROM READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM TO FEMINIST READING:  
READING [AND] IDENTITY, I

Assignments: Richter, "Reader-Response Criticism,"  
Richter 917-934  
Jauss, Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,  
Richter 935-955  
Gender and Reading, ix-62 (essays by Schweickart and Flynn,  
Crawford and Chaffin)  
Recommended: Iser, "The Reading Process: A  
Phenomenological Approach," Richter 955-968  
Richter, "Feminist Literary Criticism," 1345-1361

**Week 11**

Mon Mar. 22 READING (AND) IDENTITY, II: FEMINIST (RE)READINGS

Assignments: Flynn, "Gender and Reading," Gender and  
Reading 267-288  
Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants," The short  
Stories of Ernest Hemingway 273-278 (on reserve)  
Fetterley, Introduction to The Resisting Reader, Richter  
991-998

Fetterley, "Reading about Reading," Gender and Reading 147-164

Recommended: Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (on reserve)

### **Week 12**

Mon Mar. 29 READING AND IDENTITY, III: RACE

Assignments: Gates, The Signifying Monkey 217-238  
Reed, Mumbo Jumbo

Recommended: Gates, The Signifying Monkey 9-126  
James Weldon Johnson, The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man in Three Negro Classics (on reserve)  
Appiah, "Race," Lentricchia and McLaughlin 274-287

### **Week 13**

Mon Apr. 5 READING AND IDENTITY, IV: IMPERIALISM, (POST)COLONIALISM, GLOBALISM

Assignments: Said, Culture and Imperialism, Chapter One, "Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories" [ix-62]  
Mukherjee, The Holder of the World (on reserve)

Recommended: Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter (on reserve)

Bhabha, "DissemiNation," in Bhabha, Nation and Narration 291-322 (on reserve)

### **Week 14**

Mon Apr. 12 READING AND IDENTITY, V: EMPIRE AND GENDER

Assignments: Said, Orientalism [1-28; 329-352] (on reserve)

Hwang, M. Butterfly

Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination,"

1513-1525

Richter

Recommended: Richter, "Gender Studies and Queer Theory," Richter 1431-1444

Cowart, Literary Symbiosis 105-126 (on reserve)

Giacomo Puccini, Madama Butterfly (on reserve, TLC)



M. Butterfly (1993, dir. David Cronenberg)

**Week 15**

Mon Apr. 19 READING (AND) CULTURE (I)

Assignments: Greenblatt, "Culture," in Lentricchia and  
McLaughlin 225-232  
Baudrillard, Selected Writings 1-56; 166-185

Recommended: Barthes, Mythologies 88-90; 109-159

(on reserve)

**Week 16**

Mon Apr. 26 READING (AND) CULTURE (II)

Assignments: Baudrillard, America, esp. 1-73  
DeLillo, White Noise

Recommended: Morris, "Things to do with shopping  
centers," During, ed. The Cultural Studies Reader 295-319 (on reserve)

**Week 17**

Mon May 3 READING AND CULTURE (III): IDENTITY, SIMULATION, POSTMODERN  
ETHNICITY (NATIVE AMERICAN CRITICISM AFTER POSTSTRUCTURALISM)

Last day of classes

Assignments: Vizenor, "Feral Lasers" and "Interstate  
Reservation," in Landfill Meditation 11-21 and 116-135 (on reserve)

Recommended: Vizenor, "Postindian Warriors,"  
Vizenor, Manifest Manners 1-44 (on reserve)

**Final exam/paper due (in class)**

Course review and final evaluations