

ENGLISH 650-01: MODERN LITERARY THEORY (3.0 CR.)
Models of Alterity: Saussure to Cultural Studies and Beyond

Fall 2005

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McIver 139A, M 3:30-6:20

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS: This is a graduate survey of modern literary and cultural theory, with emphasis on the relationships among language, literature, and culture. This particular course is organized around models of “alterity” embedded in twentieth-century theory from Saussurean linguistics to structuralism and poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, reader-response criticism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, and other types of cultural analysis pivoting on issues of sex, gender, race, and ethnicity. We shall note, there is a conspicuous urgency to this problematic. As Jean Baudrillard argued almost twenty years ago in *L’autre par lui-même*, ours is an age of “delirious,” “obscene” communication. Media and communication technologies shrink time and space, tend to eliminate not only the distance but also the distinction between subject and object, self and other, so much so that, Baudrillard contends, otherness has become a thing of the past. Derived from the increasing pressure “others” and their cultures face today, the other’s disappearance or, at the very least, the possibility of this disappearance, calls for some thorough and responsible examination.

A first step in this process would be of historical—or “archeological”—nature. Our seminar will take this step by exploring the fundamental role alterity has played in the setting up of various interpretation models across the humanities. Thus, we will discuss how the abovementioned disciplines have supplied tools and vocabularies for critical inquiry in dialogue with this most unstable and often abused notion of the modern critical vocabulary—the “other.” This discussion will draw from works by Saussure, Bakhtin, Lévinas, Buber, Beauvoir, Derrida, Paul Gilroy, and Appiah, among others. Whenever possible, we will look at the primary literary and cultural materials these critics and theorists had to turn to in order to work out their paradigms (in addition, we will apply what we learn to fictional works by Murakami and Chang-rae Lee. We will also try to understand the cultural-historical contexts in which such paradigms emerge.

More generally, the course aims at familiarizing the students with recent instruments in theory and criticism. Further, in this class students also apply the research methodology needed for the professional study of literature. Likewise, we will emphasize the ability to identify the dynamic and features of core concepts and models of current critical and cultural analysis including structure, text, intertext, and context, author/audience and self/other, modernism and postmodernism, identity and community. We will place these notions in their appropriate

contexts and traditions; we will study their origins in modern theory as well as their forms in cultural history. Classroom work and individual projects—to be presented orally or in writing—are geared toward this goal. See the Professional Development note below for more specific objectives graduate students (PhD's, MA's, MEd's, and MFA's) will reach in this class.

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

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES: 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 toward graduate reading and writing carrying potential for publication and presentation outside UNCG. While fulfilling the course's requirements is your main goal, I urge you to take these requirements as an opportunity to think about yourselves as part of the academic community, with its standards, language, methods, tools, and venues.

Here are a few questions for us: Where do I stand as a scholar, teacher, critic, and writer, and which are my goals? What is, or will be, my audience? 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 available 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. Papers and Exams. Given the amount of reading, there will be only a midterm and a final exam (both take-home, 4-6 double-spaced pages), and several brief responses (in-class). Students may choose—more advanced students are urged—to substitute a single, final paper (around 25 double-spaced pages) for the exams. They also sign up for 15-minute oral presentations.

For the final paper only, 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 toward the end of the semester. We will meet individually to discuss your proposal before its presentation. I urge you to consult with me on the topic of your paper. All assignments are due in class under 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.

Presentation guidelines: Presentations cover a relevant aspect or material for the day. Do not attempt to fully cover or explain the assignments or even one of these assignments. I ask you to a) briefly outline the argument or content of the readings you intent to talk about; b) identify one major element or theoretical problem in these works, which should help us open up our conversation; c) as an option, you may use criticism on your subject, but if you do so, you need to identify your source, present its thesis, outline its argument and research, judge it overall, and finally tell us where you stand vis-à-vis the critic's viewpoint. Feel free to consult with me before you pick your presentation topic.

3. Attendance and Class Participation. Both are expected and will factor into 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 suggest that you to make a first appointment early on in the semester. I am willing to schedule these meetings right away. I will also hold a second round of conferences before the semester ends, to discuss your 1-p. proposals for the final paper (should you choose this option) 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 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 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 (includes presentation): 15%

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

REQUIRED READINGS:

Appiah, Anthony. The Ethics of Identity. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004. ISBN: 0691120366.

Beauvoir, Simone de. The Second Sex. Trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley. Introduction to the Vintage edition by Deirdre Bair. New York: Random House, 1989 (pbk.).

- Brantlinger, Patrick. Crusoe's Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America. New York: Routledge, 1990. ISBN: 0415902843 (pbk.)
- Buber, Martin. I and Thou. Transl. Walter Kaufman and S. G. Smith. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976. ISBN: 0684717255 (pbk.).
- Connor, Steven ed. The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism. New York; Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004. ISBN: 0521648408 (pbk.).
- Derrida, Jacques. Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas. Transl. Michael Naas and Pascale-Anne Brault. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999. ISBN: 0804732752 (pbk.).
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. Truth and Method. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall. Revised ed. New York: Continuum, 2005.
- Gilroy, Paul. Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001. ISBN: 0674006690 (pbk.).
- Lee, Chang-rae. Native Speaker. New York: Penguin/Riverhead Trade, 1995. ISBN: 1573225312 (pbk.).
- Lévinas, Emmanuel. Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority. Transl. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1990. ISBN: 0820702455 (pbk.).
- Murakami, Haruki. Kafka on the Shore. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005. ISBN 1400043662 (pbk.).
- Taylor, Mark C. Altarity. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987. ISBN: 0226791386 (pbk.).
- Supplementary (on reserve):
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays. Michael Holquist, ed. Transl. Vadim Liapunov and Kenneth Brostrom. Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1990. ISBN: 0292704127 (pbk.).
- Derrida, Jacques. Monolingualism of the Other, Or, the Prosthesis of Origin, trans. Patrick Mensah. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. Course in General Linguistics, trans. Roy Harris. Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing Co., 1990. ISBN 0812690230 (pbk.)

WEEKLY SYLLABUS:

Week 1

Mon Aug. 15 Introduction to the course: topic, coverage, structure, format, requirements. Other and “other” subjects. The dynamic of self and other in modern theory.
 Planning ahead, getting organized: individual presentations, conferences.

Week 2

Mon Aug. 22 Saussurean linguistics, structuralism, structure; otherness and opposition.
Assignment: Saussure, Course, Part One and Two (65-135)
 Addendum: Texts, others, intertexts: the Saussurean and Bakhtinian legacies of 20th-century criticism and theory (lecture). Note: read from the Bakhtin book above esp. pp. 1-200 if you have the time.

Week 3

Mon Aug. 29 Phenomenology’s “other” paths: Lévinas
Assignment: Lévinas, Totality and Infinity, esp. 1-219; optional: Taylor, Altarity, 185-216

Week 4

Mon Sep. 5 Labor Day Holiday: No class

Week 5

Mon Sep. 12 Phenomenology and Hasidism, self/other and I/Thou: Lévinas and Buber
Assignment: Buber, I and Thou

Week 6

Mon Sep. 19 Phenomenology’s legacy: Lévinas, Derrida, poststructuralism: the other’s other, or the logic of deconstruction
Assignment: Derrida, Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas; Taylor, Altarity 261-303

Week 7

Mon Sep. 26 “Other” language: native speakers, polyglots, and the deconstruction of “monolingualism”
Assignment: Chang-rae, Native Speaker; optional: Derrida, Monolingualism of the other

Week 8

Mon Oct. 3 Phenomenology and hermeneutical experience: non-Bakhtinian “dialogics”
Assignment: Truth and Method, esp. 268-484; optional: Taylor, 35-58
 Midterm student evaluations

- Week 9**
Mon Oct. 10 Fall Break: No class
- Week 10**
Mon Oct. 17 Taking stock: otherness as postmodern problem—the problem of our course
Assignment: Connor, ed., The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism, esp. 1-42 and 182-223
- Week 11**
Mon Oct. 24 The (other) woman: alterity and gender construction in the recent history of feminism
Assignment: Beauvoir, The Second Sex, esp. 3-138 and 629-732
- Week 12**
Mon Oct. 31 From gender to culture: otherness, identity studies, cultural studies, and the problem of ideology
Assignment: Brantlinger, Crusoe’s Footprints; Chang-rae, Native Speaker
Presenting final projects:
- Week 13**
Mon Nov. 7 Identity studies and race “after” cultural studies: the new cosmopolitans (I)
Assignment: Gilroy, Against Race, esp. 1-133 and 239-356
Presenting final projects:
- Week 14**
Mon Nov. 14 Identity studies and the emerging ethics of identity: the new cosmopolitans (II)
Assignment: Appiah, The Ethics of Identity
Presenting final projects:
- Week 15**
Mon Nov. 21 Kafka in Japan
Assignment: Murakami, Kafka on the Shore (I); optional: Connor, ed., The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism, 62-81
Presenting final projects:
- Week 16**
Mon Nov. 28 No class: I will be attending an overseas conference; read Murakami
- Week 17**
Mon Dec. 5 Final meeting
Assignment: Murakami, Kafka on the Shore (II)
Overview; final student evaluations
Presenting final projects:
Papers and exams due in class

