

**ENGLISH 650-01: MODERN LITERARY THEORY (3.0 CR.)**

Instructor: Christian Moraru  
Spring 2002

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McIver 230A, Wed., 3:30-6:20 PM  
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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 modern literary and cultural theory. The course pivots on influential "discourse models" emerging through formalism, structuralism and poststructuralism, as well as various types of cultural analysis revolving around issues of sex, gender, race, and ethnicity. We will discuss how linguistics, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and other disciplines have supplied tools and vocabularies for critical inquiry. We will read essays by Friedrich Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin, M. M. Bakhtin, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Michel Foucault, Luce Irigaray, Toni Morrison, and Homi Bhabha, among others (many on reserve in the Jackson Library).

**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 models of discourse that are, for the most part, influential, bearing upon how critics currently understand literature and related aesthetic and cultural phenomena. 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 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.

**CLASS FORMAT:** This class is a graduate seminar. Accordingly, it will combine lecture, extensive discussion, some group work, and individual presentations by students. Our meetings will usually 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, students will give 15-minute individual presentations on specific aspects of those readings and then we will discuss them collectively.

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES:** 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 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. Also, we will use certain components of the course (reading list, exam format, etc.) to prepare the Ph.D. examinations. More details in class.

Here are a few questions for us: 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. There will be a midterm and a final exam (both take-home), and possibly brief responses (in-class). Interested students may choose to submit a final, 25-p. paper (plus endnotes and works cited) in lieu of the exams. In that case they would be responsible for turning in (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.

2. Individual Presentations. Students sign up for oral presentations right away so that we can spread them out 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 Wed.

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 urge you to make at least one "formal" appointment early on in the semester.

COURSE POLICIES:

1. Late Work: No late work 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 (includes presentation): 20%

REQUIRED READINGS:

I. ENTIRE BOOKS:

1. Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text (pbk.). New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux: 1986. ISBN: 0374521603
2. Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics (pbk.). London and New York: Routledge UP, 1990. ISBN: 0415029740
3. Toni Morrison, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination. New York: Vintage Books, 1993 (pbk.). ISBN: 0679745424

II. BOOK SELECTIONS:

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. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Speech Genres and Other Late Essays (pbk.). Austin, TX.: U of Texas P, 1990. ISBN: 0292775601
3. Umberto Eco, The Open Work (pbk.). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1989. ISBN: 0674639766
4. Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982 (or latest pbk.). ISBN: 0394711068
5. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. The Signifying Monkey. A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism. Oxford UP, latest pbk. ISBN: 0-19-506075-X
6. Judith Butler. Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (pbk.). New York and London: Routledge, 1999. ISBN: 0415924995
7. Jürgen Habermas. The Postnational Constellation. Political Essays. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT P, 2001

III. ESSAYS, BOOK CHAPTERS (Some optional [O] and on reserve [R]):

1. Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" (Richter 1453-1566)
2. Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time" (R;O)
3. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth" (Richter 836-844)
4. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" (from Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language; R)
5. Roland Barthes, "What Is Criticism" (from Critical Essays; R)
6. Paul de Man, "The Resistance to Theory" (from Resistance to Theory; R)
7. Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" (Richter 889-900)
8. Stephen Greenblatt, "The Circulation of Social Energy" and "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion" (from Shakespearean Negotiations; R)
9. Edward Said, Orientalism, "Introduction" (Richter 1278-1292)
10. Homi Bhabha, "Locations of Culture" (Richter 1331-1344)
11. Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller" (from Illuminations; R)
12. Fredric Jameson, "Theories of the Postmodern" (R;)
13. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "The Master's Pieces: On Canon Formation and the African-American Tradition" (from Loose Canons) (R;O)
14. Christian Moraru, Rewriting. Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning. Albany: SUNY P, 2001. Part III. "Rewriting Race. Models of 'Cross-Fertilization' in African American Postmodernism." 83-125; "Epilogue. Rewriting Postmodernism." 167-173 (R;O)
15. Christian Moraru, "History, Politics, Theory." symploke 6. 1- 2 (1998): 188-191 (O; UNCG stacks)

Note: Assignments are due on the day specified in syllabus. To locate them, see the list above.

COURSE SYLLABUS:

**Week 1**

Wed Jan. 16 Modern Theory and Influential Models of Literary and Cultural Interpretation

Course introduction: goals, requirements (format of midterm vs. final), policies. Presentation of the topic and weekly syllabus. Discussion.

**Week 2**

Wed Jan. 23 Formalism and the "Cultural" Reaction": Bakhtin and Walter Benjamin

Assignments: Bakhtin, Speech Genres 60-131; Benjamin, "The Storyteller" (O)

**Week 3**

Wed Jan. 30 Bakhtin and Cultural Analysis: An African

American Response

Assignments: Gates, The Signifying Monkey  
xix-124; Moraru, Rewriting 83-125 (O)

**Week 4**

Wed Feb. 6 African American Criticism and Literary  
History: Canonicity and Representation

Assignments: Gates, "The Master's  
Pieces" (O); Morrison, Playing in the Dark

**Week 5**

Wed Feb. 13 From "Form" to "Structure" to Text: Structuralism  
and Its Crisis

Assignments: Lévi-Strauss, "The  
Structural Study of Myth"; Barthes, "What Is  
Criticism"; The Pleasure of the Text

**Week 6**

Wed Feb. 20 No class - I will be attending a conference. Read  
Eco

**Week 7**

Wed Feb. 27 Structure and Semiosis  
Assignment: Eco, The Open Work  
Homework: Think about midterm exam topics

**Week 8**

Wed Mar. 6 Preparing the midterm (group work)  
The exam essay, the academic essay, and the  
conference paper; the "thesis"; other  
professional development issues  
**Midterm evaluations**

**Week 9**

Wed Mar. 13 **Spring Break**

**Week 10**

Wed Mar. 20 From "Structure" to "Deconstruction"  
Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies"; de Man, "The  
Resistance to Theory"  
**Midterm exam due (in class)**

**Week 11**

Wed Mar. 27 Deconstruction and Poststructuralism:  
Foucault: The Archaeology of Knowledge  
1-39; 135-237; "What Is an Author?"

**Week 12**

Wed Apr. 3 Foucauldian Ramifications: The New  
Historicism and Gender Studies

Assignments: Greenblatt, the two essays  
from Shakespearean Negotiations; Butler, Gender  
Trouble 3-44; 163-190

**Week 13**

Wed Apr. 10 Gender Studies and Feminism  
Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa";  
Kristeva, "Women's Time" (O); Moi, Sexual/Textual  
Politics

**Week 14**

Wed Apr. 17 Postcolonial Studies: Two Models  
Assignments: Said, Orientalism  
("Introduction"); Bhabha, "Locations of Culture"  
Graduate writing and publication;  
writing for classes vs. writing for a wider  
audience; outlets for my work

**Week 15**

Wed Apr. 24 Postcolonialism, Nationalism, Postnationalism  
Assignments: Habermas, The Postnational  
Constellation 38-156  
Preparing the final exam

**Week 16**

Wed May 1 Modernist Rationalism vs. Postmodern  
Critique: Habermas vs. Jameson  
Assignments: Jameson, "Theories of the  
Postmodern"; Moraru, "History, Politics,  
Theory" (O); Moraru, Rewriting 167-173 (O)  
Last day of classes  
**Final exam/paper due (in class)**  
Course review and final evaluations