

**ENGLISH 704-01:  
STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY LITERARY AND CULTURAL THEORY (3.0 CR.)**

**Twentieth-Century Reading Models: Aesthetics, Ethics, Politics**

Instructor: Associate Professor Christian Moraru  
Spring 2007

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This is a critical theory seminar that focuses on reading models developed during the twentieth century. While most surveys of this sort limit themselves to reader-response criticism and reception theory, we will examine a range of paradigms, from phenomenology-inspired approaches to reading to the more recent ones informed by gender, translation, anthropology, and cultural studies and addressing, accordingly, complex, formal, cultural, and ethical-political concerns. We will discuss works by Martin Buber, Anthony K. Appiah, Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, Patrocinio Schweickart, and Elizabeth Flynn, among others. And we will use Don DeLillo's novel *Cosmopolis* as a target text.

More generally, the course aims at familiarizing the students with recent instruments in theories and practices of interpretation that have emphasized the role of readers and, more broadly, receivers. 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 paradigms of current critical and cultural analysis including structure, text, intertext, and context, author/audience and self/other, modernism and postmodernism, identity and community, local and global. 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. Students also present, toward the end of the course, their final projects.

**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 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).

#### COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Oral participation is expected; individual presentations on the materials for the day (20 min.). Guidelines for presentations: Students sign up for a) their final project and b) 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. 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; b) identify one major element or theoretical problem in these works, which should help us open up our conversation. Feel free to consult with me before you pick your presentation topic.

Papers and/or exams: a midterm (10 pp.) and a final paper (20 pp. min.), OR a midterm and final paper (10 pp. each) plus a final exam that follows the format of the PhD written examination.

Attendance and 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. We will also talk about your plans for the final project.

#### COURSE POLICIES:

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 will work together to find a solution.

Absences: You are allowed no more than 2 (two) justified 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 group work and presentation): 15%

#### REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. Appiah, Anthony K. *The Ethics of Identity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004. ISBN: 0691120366.
2. Anthony K. Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Reading." Dharwadker 197-227. Dharwadker, Vinay, ed. *Cosmopolitan Geographies: New Locations in Literature and Culture*. New York and London: Routledge, 2001. ISBN: 0-415-92507-X (pbk.) (on reserve).
3. Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. Transl. Walter Kaufman and S. G. Smith. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976. ISBN: 0684717255 (pbk.).
4. Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982. ISBN: 0816610371.
5. Jane P. Tompkins, ed. *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980. ISBN: 080182401X.
6. Wolfgang Iser. *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. ISBN: 0801845939.
7. Patrocinio P. Schweickart and Elizabeth A. Flynn, eds. *Reading Sites: Social Difference and Reader Response*. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2004. ISBN: 0873529855.
8. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser, eds. *The Translatability of Cultures; Figurations of the Spaces Between*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996. ISBN: 0804725616.
9. Don DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*. New York: Scribner, 2004. ISBN 0743244257.

## SYLLABUS:

- Week 1**  
R 01/11 Presentation of the syllabus, readings, requirements, etc.  
Introduction: Models and Contexts of Critical Response in the Twentieth Century  
Note: Start reading DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*. We will use it throughout the semester.
- Week 2**  
R 01/18 Readers and responses. Form and reception  
Tompkins, "An Introduction," "The Reader in History," Tompkins ix-xxvi and 201-232 (both optional)  
Culler, "Literary Competence," Tompkins 101-117  
Prince, "Introduction to the Study of Narratee," Tompkins 7-25  
Riffaterre, "Describing Poetic Structures," Tompkins 26-40
- Week 3**  
R 01/25 Phenomenology and interpretation (I)  
Poulet, "Criticism and the Experience of Interiority," Tompkins 41-49  
Iser, "The Reading Process," Tompkins 50-69  
Iser, *Prospecting* 1-69
- Week 4**  
R 02/01 Phenomenology and interpretation (II)  
Jauss, *Toward and Aesthetic of Reception* esp. vii-109
- Week 5**  
R 02/08 Reception and anthropology  
Iser, *Prospecting* 197-284
- Week 6**  
R 02/15 Reception, affective stylistics, textual "constructionism"  
Fish, "Literature in the Reader" and "Interpreting the *Variorum*," Tompkins 70-100, 164-184
- Week 7**  
R 02/22 Reader, self, "subjective criticism"  
Holland, "Unity Identity Text Self," Tompkins 118-133  
Bleich, "Epistemological Assumptions in the Study of Response," Tompkins 134-163
- Week 8**  
R 03/01 Reader, identity, context (I)  
Schweickart and Flynn, "Introduction," Schweickart and Flynn, *Social Difference and Reader Response* 1-38  
Gourdine, "Colored Readings," Schweickart and Flynn, *Social Difference and Reader Response* 60-82

Keating, "Reading Whiteness," Schweickart and Flynn, *Social Difference and Reader Response* 314-344  
 Berggren, "Reading like a Woman," Schweickart and Flynn, *Social Difference and Reader Response* 166-188

**Week 9**

R 03/08 Spring Break – No class

**Week 10**

R 03/15 Reader, identity, context (II)  
 Bleich, "What Literature Is 'Ours'?", Schweickart and Flynn, *Social Difference and Reader Response* 286-313  
 Yelin, "In Another Place," Schweickart and Flynn, *Social Difference and Reader Response* 83-107  
 Grobman, "Rhetorizing the Contact Zone," Schweickart and Flynn, *Social Difference and Reader Response* 256-287

**Week 11**

R 03/22 Reception, alterity, translation—the Old Babel  
 Budick, "Crises of Alterity," Budick and Iser, *The Translatability of Cultures* 1-22; and from the "Perspective sin History" section, essays by Assmann (Jan and Aleida), Barasch, Stierle, Besserman, and Bercovitch

**Week 12**

R 03/29 Reception, alterity, translation—the New Babel (I)  
 Miller, "Border Crossing," Budick and Iser, *The Translatability of Cultures* 207-223  
 Budick, "Cross-Culture," Budick and Iser, *The Translatability of Cultures* 224-244  
 Iser, "The Emergence of a Cross-Cultural Discourse," Budick and Iser, *The Translatability of Cultures* 245-264  
 Final project presentations (I)

**Week 13**

R 04/05 Reception, alterity, translation—the New Babel (II)  
 Motzkin, "Memory and Cultural Translation," Budick and Iser, *The Translatability of Cultures* 265-281  
 Lachmann, "Remarks," Budick and Iser, *The Translatability of Cultures* 282-293  
 Iser, "Coda," Budick and Iser, *The Translatability of Cultures* 294-302  
 Final project presentations (II)

**Week 14**

R 04/12 Reading and ethics, reading "others" (I)  
 Buber, *I and Thou*  
 Reichert, "'It Is Time,'" Budick and Iser, *The Translatability of Cultures* 169-185  
 Final project presentations (III)

Preparing the final exam

**Week 15**

R 04/19

Reading and ethics, reading “others” (II)

Appiah, “Cosmopolitan Reading,” Dharvadker, *Cosmopolitan Geographies* 197-227 (on reserve).

Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* esp. 213-275

Final project presentations (IV)

Assigning the final exam

**Week 16**

R 04/26

Course overview

Final evaluations

**Final papers and exams due in class**