Winter 2001

English 251b

Literary and Cultural Theory

TTh 11:30-1, PAS 2083

Instructor: Kevin McGuirk

Office hours: T Th 1-2, and by appointment, in HH 263. My phone extension is 2419.

This course will survey topics in (mostly) 20th-century literary and cultural theory through readings by a range of poets, critics, linguists, and philosophers. The required texts are Bonnycastle, In Search of Authority, which surveys recent developments in literary theory, a coursepack of readings (available at the bookstore), and the book version of the film Smoke. This book includes the screenplay, the short story the screenplay is based on ("Auggie Wren's Christmas Story"), and an interview with Paul Auster, the author of both screenplay and story. We will discuss the film in relation to many readings on the course. Readings will be supplemented by handouts, overheads, etc.

Schedule

* all readings are in courseware except Bonnycastle and the material from Smoke.

Jan 3 introduction

Jan 8, 10 literature, criticism, and "life"

Graff, Disliking Books at an Early Age

Bonnycastle opening chapters

Arnold selections

presentation: Martha Nussbaum, from Poetic Justice

Jan 15, 17 language, artifice, and ideology

Shklovsky, Art as Technique

De Saussure, Course in General Linguistics

Althusser, Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses

Brecht, Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting, The Popular and the Realistic

Bonnycastle chs 6&7

presentation: Kress, The Materiality of Meaning

Jan 22, 24 authors & "writing"

Bonnycastle ch 8

Foucault, What is an Author?

Barthes, The Death of the Author

Benjamin, The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

presentation: Ong, from Orality and Literacy

Jan 29, 31 Smoke

the screenplay, "Smoke"

“Auggie Wren's Christmas Story” (in Smoke)

interview with Paul Auster (in Smoke)

no presentation
Feb 7, 9 narrative
Benjamin, The Storyteller
Bonnycastle, ch 11

presentation (Tuesday): Hayden White, The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality
presentation (Thursday): Rachel Blau DuPlessis, from Writing Beyond the Ending

Feb 14, 16 gender and performativity
Bonnycastle ch 14
Mulvey, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema
Mitchell, from Westerns: The Making of the Man in Fiction and Film

presentation: bell hooks, The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators

** reading week **

Feb 27, Mar 1 more performativity
Culler, Performative Language

presentation: Carol Hollis, Speech Acts and Leaves of Grass

TEST March 1

Mar 6, 8 culture
Hebdige, From Culture to Hegemony
Klein, from Cigarettes are Sublime

presentation: Janice Radway, The Institutional Matrix of Romance

Mar 13, 15 more culture
de Certau, Walking in the City
Ross, The Death of Lady Day
Hyde from The Gift
Commodity

presentation: Simon Frith, Popular Music

Mar 20, 22 poetics
Easthope, from Iambic Pentameter
Damon, from The Dark End of the Street
Brathwaite, from History of the Voice
Bernstein, Thelonious Monk and the Performance of Poetry

presentation: Tricia Rose, Rhythmic Repetition, Industrial Forces, and Black Practice

Mar 27, 29 the cultural mix
Bonnycastle ch 16
When does the unreasonable act make sense?
hooks, the cultural mix: an interview with wayne wang
Bernstein, from Poetics of the Americas
ESSAY DUE MARCH 29
presentation: Cornel West, The New Cultural Politics of Difference

Apr 3 conclusions

Assignments & values
Test (March 1): 20%
Group presentation: 15%
Essay: 30%
Quizzes: 10%
Exam: 35%

Assignments explained

test: the test will consist of two essay questions on material covered in class up to February 29. A selection of 3 or 4 essay questions will be distributed in class on February 29. You will choose two questions and prepare essays to be written out in class on March 1.

group presentation (20 minutes; including discussion, 30 minutes): you will be involved in one group presentation with 2-3 other students. You will be required to present the essay indicated in the schedule under the week you sign up for. Presentations may take place on the Tuesday or the Thursday, depending on the needs of the course and the desires of the group. This will be worked out during a required meeting with me during the week before the presentation takes place. Your task is to present the essay in such a way that an attentive listener will be able to explain its argument to a friend after class. To achieve this goal, you can use overheads, video clips, and dramatizations, as well as a more straightforward discursive summary. A copy of each essay is available from me; borrow it and make your own copy well ahead of time. Presentations begin January 10.

quizzes: from time to time I will ask you to write in class. Sometimes this will take place at the end of class; you will answer questions about what we've just covered. Sometimes these will take place at the beginning and you will address material you've only read. Sometimes I will ask you to explain an essay just presented by a group of students (to make sure you're ready for a quiz, be sure to ask questions of the presenters). The purpose of these quizzes is two-fold: to help you keep up with the course; and to help me see what you're getting and what you're not.

essay (1500-2000 words): due on March 29 in class. Papers will be accepted until April 3, and no later unless you provide documentation showing positive proof of incapacitation. A separate handout will discuss this assignment in detail.

Exam (two hours): same format as midterm test. Questions will be distributed on April 3.