

# CULTURAL MATERIALISM IN NORTH-AMERICAN FICTION – 5 creds.

Mauricio D. Aguilera Linde (aguilera@ugr.es)  
Sumanyu Satpathy (University of Delhi, India).

## Introduction

What is ideology? Hegemony? How can we discover marginal values (some of them alternative, some others transgressive or subversive) in the loopholes (faultlines) of a text? Which strategies of resistance to hegemonic ideas can we find in a cultural artefact (a literary text, a newspaper article, a movie, or an image)? Why is a text made out of many other texts? What is a reverse discourse strategy? How many memory frames can we find in a literary discourse? What is official history? What is counter-history? These are just some of the fascinating questions that we will be discussing in this course. My main goal is to facilitate some useful tools and reading strategies that may help students to interpret a literary text.

## Contents

Literary texts can be analyzed as literary “sites of contest” (Raymond Williams 1973) whereby a number of different voices merge and collide. The aim of this course is not only to learn some strategies to read the ideologically dominant values (hegemony) which take up the central position of the texts, but also to unearth those marginal voices that have been muffled, silenced or simply erased. Special attention will be paid to parody as a strategy of genre-deviation (Hutcheon 2000) and to some other “reverse discourse” elements (Foucault 1978) in American fiction. Genre is never a fixed, immutable concept, and the principle of genre-bending plays a key role in the production of meaning of any literary text. Through epistemic frictions and counter-memory we resurrect violent exclusions, tensions, struggles and clashes that were erased and forgotten.

## Aims

- To analyze dominant/emergent/residual elements in any given artistic text. Read and apply Raymond Williams’ article (1973) in order to be able to distinguish establishment values and marginal ideas in a selection of texts.
- Read and discuss Medina’s article (2011) on counter-memory, epistemic friction and guerrilla pluralism in order to grasp the critic’s task of resurrecting and/or de-subjugating knowledges. Gramsci’s seminal idea of hegemony as a negotiable, perpetually threatened and recreated system, as opposed to Althusser’s economic determinism, will be amply discussed.
- Read and discuss Jan Assman’s binary model of memory and be able to identify how memory frames (communicative and cultural) operate in a literary discourse.
- To analyze modality (direct point of view) and vocabulary (indirect point of view) of a given text to elicit the ideological conflicts which permeate its linguistic structure. Read and apply Roger Fowler’s ideas to a selection of excerpts taken from American short fiction in informal response papers.
- To identify and locate the genre/subgenre and its linguistic components of any short

- story through a study of the commonest genres used by the author: melodrama, frontier story, Gothic tale, tall tale, detective/crime story, local color fiction, etc.
- To identify and locate the components of a genre which have been erased, disrupted, dislocated and parodied. Students must read and apply Hutcheon's postmodern notion of parody and Foucault's "reverse discourse" strategies to a number of short stories discussed in class.

Assignments will consist of short essays based on readings, informal writings in class, and oral presentations and class discussion on debatable topics. Papers must be discussed with the instructor during office hours. The grade distribution will be: 30% will be given to the short response papers; 10% will be given to in-class discussions; the remaining 60% will be given to the final exam. Class attendance is mandatory.

### **Set Reading**

Excerpts of O. Henry stories distributed in class.

Tennessee Williams. "Something about Him" and "Two on a Party". *Collected Stories*. New York: New Directions, 1985. 213-20 & 283-302.

William Saroyan. "Around the World with General Grant" *Little Children*. London: Faber and Faber, 1964.113-21.

### **Movie viewed in class**

*Speedy* (1928). Dir. Ted Wilde.

### **Bibliography**

Aguilera Linde, Mauricio D. "Truth is held in disrepute': O. Henry and the Dismantling of Paradigms". *Miscelánea. Journal of English and American Studies* 38 (2008): 11-27.

— "'The Wilderness is Interior': Williams's Strategies of Resistance in 'Two on a Party'", *The Tennessee Williams Annual Review* 11 (2010): 41-52.

<http://www.tennesseewilliamsstudies.org/journal/work.php?ID=99>

— "Spaceships and Vampires: Sexual Dissidence in Tennessee Williams's 'The Knightly Quest'. *Atlantis* 34.2 (2012): 67-83.

— "Saroyan's Travel Memories: Contesting National Identities for Armenia-Americans during the Great Depression". *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik. A Quarterly of Language, Literature and Culture* (2016). De Gruyter Mouton (Forthcoming).

Assman, Jan and John Czaplicka. "Memory and Cultural Identity". *New German Critique* 65 (1995):125-33.\*

Assman, Jan. "Communicative and Cultural Memory". *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning in collaboration with Sarah Young. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008. 109-118.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. I: An Introduction. Transl. Robert Hurley. New York: Random House, 1978.

Fowler, Roger. *Linguistic Criticism*. Oxford: O.U.P. 1986. Chs. 9-10,pp.127-167.\*

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms*. Champaign, Illinois: U of Illinois P, 2000.

Medina, José. "Toward a Foucaultian Epistemology of Resistance: Counter-Memory, Epistemic Friction and Guerrilla Pluralism". *Foucault Studies* 12 (2011): 9-35.

[http://www.vanderbilt.edu/AnS/philosophy/\\_people/faculty\\_files/\\_medinafoucaultstudies.pdf](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/AnS/philosophy/_people/faculty_files/_medinafoucaultstudies.pdf)\*

Williams, Raymond. "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory". *New Left Review* I/82. Nov-Dec 1973.3-14\*

