Modern and Contemporary French Literature:
Who is “je”?... Individual memory and shared nightmare

Course Description

Michel Houellebecq introduces his lastest novel by describing a very particular and singular characteristic of literature compared to art or music: this strong and deep presence of someone’s spirit who will accompany the reader for the time of the reading.

This course hopes to help the students hear different voices which are familiar to and immediately recognized by French readers: Proust, Céline, Duras, Perec, and Modiano. Through the reading of excerpts and complete novels, we will travel through 20th-century French literature guided by the voices of these writers, by their singular perspective on some of the historical and social events that created the collective memory of French society.

We will also go back and forth in time to discover some of today’s writers and realize the significant imprint the earlier authors have left on the new literary generation.

Goals

In this class, students will be given specific tools (vocabulary and analytic techniques) to be able to present a modern or contemporary novel in French (oral presentation and written paper). In order to reach this goal, several classes will be dedicated to the analysis of an excerpt and/or of a complete book.

Students will also be able to locate some of the main references of 20th and 21st century French literature such as movements, styles and principal genres (eg autofiction).

A chronological organisation will also allow students to review the important historical, political and social events as well as the main ideological issues of European history.

Finally, the fews “ateliers de presse” organized during the semester will make students discover the main literature magazines and the way today’s literature is commented on by reviews.
ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Examination I: 20%
Examination II 20%
Paper: 20%
Oral presentation: 20%
Attendance, Participation: 20%

Class attendance: Students are allowed ONE absence for any reason. Any subsequent absence, even for medical reasons, will result in the lowering of the participation grade by one letter grade (e.g. from B to B-). Exceptions will be made of course for students who are seriously ill upon presentation of a written medical excuse from a doctor or from the host family.

Policy concerning electronic equipment: The use of cell phones for any purpose (receiving or making telephone calls, receiving and sending text messages) is forbidden. Cell phones should be turned off and put away before class begins. If a cell phone rings, the student will be asked to leave, not to return, and will be counted as absent for the class. No computers are allowed either. Students should take notes by hand in a notebook.

Academic integrity. Modern and Contemporary French Literature is a course of the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. All students are expected to follow the academic Honor Code. Please read the UNCW Honor Code carefully. Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated in this class. Please be especially familiar with UNC-W's position on plagiarism as outlined in the UNCW Student Handbook. Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty in which you take someone else's ideas and represent them as your own. Here are some examples of plagiarism:

a. You write about someone else's work in your paper and do not give them credit for it by referencing them with footnotes and bibliography.

b. You give a presentation and use someone else's ideas and do not state that the ideas are the other persons.

Attention: Facts of “general knowledge” (e.g. birthdates, capital cities, works written by a well-known author) do not need to have a source. Facts not of general knowledge do (e.g. the current unemployment rate in France).
SYLLABUS

Monday, September 7 :
- Presentation of the syllabus and of a methodological model for the assignments and the oral presentations: “Quelles questions se poser sur un texte ?”. Specific vocabulary for text description and analysis
- Presentation of the authors to choose for the oral presentation.

Thursday, September 10 :

Monday, September 14 :
**Reading** : Two excerpts from *La Recherche* + Christine Lassale, “A la découverte d'une recherche”
Proust : introduction to “La Recherche”:
- “Du Côté de chez Swann”, first page,
- Short documentary about “Marcel Proust, excerpt from “Une découverte multimédia de l'oeuvre de Marcel Proust”, directed by JY Tadié, 1999.

Thursday, September 17 :
Proust, second excerpt ;la madeleine et le processus de mémoire involontaire.

Monday, September 21 :
Proust, third and final excerpt: last page of “Le Temps retrouvé”

Thursday, September 24
Revue de presse littéraire 1: presentation of the main literature magazines and of the French publishing calendar.
Reviews of the day: how to read between the lines.

Monday, September 28
**Reading** : “La mort et le tralala”, excerpt from “Une rencontre”, an essay from Milan Kundera, 2009 / 3 excerpts of “Voyage au bout de la nuit”, Louis-Ferdinand Céline / Voyage au bout de la nuit, Céline : repères et balises de Christine Combessie-Savy, editions Nathan
- Introducing Céline through Milan Kundera's text and the first part of the movie “Un diamant noir comme l'enfer”, from Emmanuel Descombes and Alain Moreau for the TV show *Un siècle d’écrivains*.

Thursday, October 1
- Céline: second part of the movie – discussion
- First excerpt from “Voyage...”: Sur le front de la première guerre”/In the trenches

Monday, October 5:
Second and third excerpt: Dans les usines Ford / At the Ford factory - Fin de fête à Clichy / End of the party in Clichy

Thursday, October 8:
**Researching and reading** : choose a literary review and prepare an oral presentation of it
Revue de presse 2: Literary reviews of the day

Monday, October 12 :
**Mid-term test**

Thursday, October 15
**Reading**: *La Douleur*, Marguerite Duras, (Part 1, 2 and 3)
Introducing Marguerite Duras through the movie: “Marguerite, telle qu'en elle-même” de Dominique Auvray, 2002

Monday, October 19

Thursday, October 22:
Duras, La Douleur, part 2 and 3, discussion.
Monday, October 26
The autobiographic approach of Georges Perec: general presentation of his place and work in French literature of the second half of the 20th century.

Thursday, October 29
Perec, “W ou le souvenir d'enfance” - private memory vs shared nightmare

Monday, November 2
Watching and commenting the movie “Un homme qui dort”, by Georges Perec and Bernard Queyssane, based on Perec's novel “Un homme qui dort”.

Thursday, November 5
Reading: Modiano, “Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue”, 2007
Introducing Modiano through the movie “Patrick Modiano” from Paule Zajdermann and Antoine de Gaudemar

Monday, November 9
Modiano, “Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue”

Thursday, November 12
Modiano, “Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue” suite et fin.

Monday, November 16
Reading: Excerpt of the essay “La règle du “je””, by Chloé Delaume, “autofiction” in French literature.
Researching and reading: choose a literary review and prepare an oral presentation of it
Revue de presse 2: Literary reviews of the day

Thursday, November 19
Students' oral presentations of the author chosen at the beginning of the semester

Monday, November 23
Students' oral presentations of the author chosen at the beginning of the semester

Thursday, November 26: Final test