Description and Objectives

In this twenty-week, two-quarter seminar on Derrida/Cixous, we will try to provide an introduction to the very different but nonetheless closely related projects of Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous. We will read both Derrida and Cixous with an eye to such shared themes as sexual difference, writing (and especially “feminine writing”), life, survival, literature, the archive, and so on. We will also attempt to understand how the respective projects of these two great thinker/writers intersected and informed one another for over thirty years. We will thus look at Derrida texts with no apparent relationship to Cixous, works of Cixous with little explicit relation to Derrida, but then at Derrida texts devoted to Cixous, Cixous texts on Derrida, and the one work signed by both Derrida and Cixous.

We will spend the first few weeks of the first quarter reading in great detail Part I of Derrida’s important 1967 work De la grammatologie. We will consider especially Derrida’s understanding of writing, the trace, life, and survival as these themes were developed in this early work. We will then shift gears rather dramatically in the middle of this first quarter by reading two or three relatively short and recent (post 2000) “novels” of Cixous (Reveries of the Wild Woman, The Day I Wasn’t There, So Close), followed by her important 1975 theoretical text “The Laugh of the Medusa.” Toward the end of the quarter, we will try to draw some parallels—and establish some substantial differences—between Derrida’s work and Cixous’s on questions of writing, sexual difference, the nature of literature (as opposed to photography), and so on.

During the winter break, we will all offer ourselves the pleasure of reading George Du Maurier’s (English) novel Peter Ibbetson and we will watch the movie Peter Ibbetson (with Gary Cooper). All this will prepare us for Cixous’s brilliant novel Philippines. We will then read Derrida’s two book-length works on Cixous, paying special attention to the themes of life, survival, sexual difference, power, and the archive that Derrida develops in those works. After that we will return to Cixous and read two more novels (Hemlock and Eve Escapes) that Derrida did not and could not comment on since they were written after his death—an event that resonates throughout both works. These novels will allow us to ask questions about Derrida’s and Cixous’s respective understanding of the trace, autobiography, haunting, death, and the power of literature.

In the final weeks of the seminar, we will turn to the one text written by both Derrida and Cixous, Veils, a text that combines a brief story by Cixous and an extended commentary on that story by Derrida. We will conclude with Cixous’s work Insister of Jacques Derrida, a very powerful work written in the wake of Derrida’s death in 2004 that might be considered the final
installment of *Veils* and, in some sense, the end of their decades-long engagement with one another’s work.

**Required Reading**


Suggested Readings


Freud, Sigmund, Gradiva.

Du Maurier, George. Peter Ibbetson

Requirements

1. For each quarter, a final 10-page research paper due at noon on the Friday following our final class. (For the first quarter, I will be looking for an explication de texte or analysis of some concept from De la grammatologie. For the second quarter, students will be free to pursue any theme from either Derrida or Cixous or both.) Absolutely no extensions will be given for this paper. (No title pages, cover sheets, or plastic binders are needed for these papers; just hand in 10 pieces of paper with your name on the top right, stapled or paper-clipped on the top left.)

2. Every student will be expected to give a brief (15-20 minute) presentation on a Derrida or Cixous text or part of a text that we will be treating during the seminar. We will discuss this further during our initial meeting.

3. Attendance: everyone is allowed one absence for the quarter. Any more than one absence will result in the lowering of the final grade one to two notches. Two late arrivals for class, or early departures from class (for example after the break), will count for one absence.

Class attendance, attention, and participation are, therefore, extremely important, so come tired, come with a hangover, come with a friend if you like, but come.

Grades

The final paper will count for 75% of the final grade. Class presentations, participation, and attendance will make up the balance of the grade. (More than one class absence will result in the lowering of the final grade one to two notches—e.g., from A- to B+ or even B.) There will be no incompletes for this class. If you have not completed your paper by noon on the Friday after our last class meeting, then you should come to the department anyway and I will give a final exam topic and allows you to write a final exam from 12-2 PM.
Schedule

Because it is difficult to predict exactly how much material we will cover in a given class, definitive reading assignments will be given out only the class before. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to contact a friend in the class to get the exact assignment.

(Very) Tentative Weekly Schedule

Autumn Quarter

1. Introduction: *Phaedrus* and the critique of writing; *Of Grammatology*, Preface, Exergue, 3-5.
6. *Reveries of the Wild Woman*
7. *The Day I Wasn’t There*
8. *The Day I Wasn’t There*

Winter Quarter

11. *Philippines*, George Du Maurier (1834-1896), *Peter Ibbetson* (can be read on line); movie with Gary Cooper, “Marble Halls”
13. Geneses, Genealogies, Genres, & Genius: The Secrets of the Archive
14. *Hemlock*
15. *Hemlock*
16. *Eve Escapes*
17. *Veils*
18. *Veils*
19. *Insister of Jacques Derrida;* must be read after *Veils*
20. Conclusion