Postcolonial Literature in English – Lesson #1 (12.11.2024)

Reflecting on the binary 'self/other'

1) "No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting-points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or Black, or Western, or Oriental. Yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities. No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about. Survival in fact is about the connections between things."

Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1993, p. 366

2) "This Eurocentric paradigm implies the dialectics of self and other, and the binary logic of identity and otherness as respectively the motor for and the cultural logic of universal Humanism. Central to this universalistic posture and its binary logic is the notion of 'difference' as pejoration. Subjectivity is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behaviour, whereas Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart. In so far as difference spells inferiority, it acquires both essentialist and lethal connotations for people who get branded as 'others'. These are the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies. We are all humans, but some of us are just more mortal than others. Because their history in Europe and elsewhere has been one of lethal exclusions and fatal disqualifications, these 'others' raise issues of power and exclusion. We need more ethical accountability in dealing with the legacy of Humanism."

Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 2013, p. 15

3) "To fully understand these terms, we need to take a further step back and note that the Greek term for "human" is "anthropos" (which is the etymon of many contemporary words, such as "anthropocentrism" and "anthropology," among others). Although the Latin term "humanus" and the Greek term "anthropos" cannot be assimilated (Nishitani 2006), the Greek understanding of anthropos has had a deep influence throughout history on the reformulation of the notion of the human. It is worth approaching it, specifically, through Aristotle, who in *Politics*, Book 1, famously defined the human (*anthropos*) as a political animal (zoon politikon, in Greek), that is, connected to the "polis," meaning the city, which represents civilization: "Man is by nature a political animal, and a man that is by nature and not merely by fortune citiless is either low in the scale of humanity or above it" (Pol. 1.1253a). It is important to note that this "political man" is placed in a hierarchical scale through not only its external, and explicit, "citiless" people, but also its internal, and implicit, others: in Athens, for

instance, women, slave, and resident aliens were excluded from the political life. Following, Aristotle defines the human through "logos" (that is, speech, language, but also, reason): "Man alone of the animals possesses speech [logos]" (*ibidem*). It is important to stress the relation to language by noting that people who did not speak Greek were considered barbarians, such as the Persians, the Egyptians, and the Phoenicians, despite their remarkable civilizations. In classical Greek culture, *logos* and civilization were connected, in that, as Aristotle remarks: "speech is designed to indicate … the right and the wrong; for it is the special property of man in distinction from the other animals that he alone has perception of good and bad and right and wrong and the other moral qualities, and it is partnership in these things that makes a household and a city-state" (*ibidem*).

Francesca Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanism*, 2019, p. 90

4) "The radical criticism of classical humanism had targeted two interrelated ideas: the self-other dialectics, on the one hand, and the notion of difference as pejoration, on the other. Otherness defined as the negative opposite of the dominant subject position and inscribed in a hierarchical scale that spells inferiority is challenged by a situated or an immanent method, inspired by Spinozist neo-materialism. The dialectics of difference in fact has dire consequences for real-life people who happen to coincide with categories of negative difference: women, indigenous, and earth "others," whose social and symbolic existence is precarious and exposed to all kinds of risk. Their own bodies raise crucial issues of power, domination, and exclusion that look to humanism as a possible solution."

Rosi Braidotti, Preface, in Francesca Ferrando, Philosophical Posthumanism, 2019, p. xiii

5) This term [Othering] was coined by Gayatri Spivak for the process by which imperial discourse creates its 'others'. Whereas the Other corresponds to the focus of desire or power (the M–Other or Father – or Empire) in relation to which the subject is produced, the other is the excluded or 'mastered' subject created by the discourse of power. Othering describes the various ways in which colonial discourse produces its subjects. In Spivak's explanation, othering is a dialectical process because the colonizing Other is established at the same time as its colonized others are produced as subjects.

Bill Ashcroft et al. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2013, p. 156