

## PSYCHOANALYSIS AND MODERN CULTURE

ENG 411-01; LCST 351-08  
Spring 2012

TR 12:30-1:50  
Tyler 301

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### Course description and goals

This course explores the relationship between psychoanalytic theory and the study of modern literature and culture. There will be extensive readings in Freud, introductory readings in Lacan, and strong emphasis on the dialogue between psychoanalysis and feminism. We shall pay particular attention to hysteria, dreams, cinema, sexuality, and civilization. The course is intended as a theoretical introduction to Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis, but also as an exercise in interdisciplinarity; the syllabus includes primary texts in both literature and film, and secondary readings relevant to literary studies, film studies, women's studies, and cultural studies. Assignments will include two 4-5 page papers (20% each), a take-home midterm (20%), five short in-class quizzes (20%), and a take-home final exam (20%).

The course has three fundamental goals: first, to provide an extensive introduction to psychoanalytic theory, tracing the evolution in Freud's thought from the classical theory of dreams, sexuality, and neurosis through his late writings on instincts and civilization, and also including significant revisions, interrogations, and critiques of the Freudian paradigm advanced by feminist theorists and the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan; second, to explore the relevance of psychoanalysis to the study of modern literature and culture; and finally, to encourage students to make their own contributions to psychoanalytic discourse through the various written assignments.

The first two goals rest on the assumption that the term psychoanalysis does not describe a unitary activity, but rather a diverse set of discourses, theories, and practices. We are probably most accustomed to thinking about psychoanalysis as an approach to the analytic situation and therapeutic technique: the couch, the analyst's silence, transference, counter-transference, the "talking cure," etc. But at the outset it may be helpful to distinguish several other strands of psychoanalytic theory. What follows are some preliminary observations about aspects of psychoanalysis that will concern us during the semester.

1. Psychoanalysis advances a theory of the self, of identity, or, to put it in more fashionable lingo, of the "subject." More particularly, psychoanalysis is also what we might call a "materialist" theory of the subject, i.e., one that holds that the self is not pre-given or essential but is, rather, produced through concrete social processes and relations. We become subjects in relation to other subjects, in a dynamic determined by social and cultural pressures. The primary cauldron in which this subject-formation takes place is the family, conceived here not as a rosy institution of unequivocal love but as a complex interpersonal structure marked by intense and conflicting desires, resentments, aggressions, and prohibitions. The family is a space in which the social and the individual, the public and the private intersect, and it is through the drama of family life (the "Oedipus complex") that we are produced as more-or-less well-adjusted individuals.
2. This understanding of identity entails a theory of sexual difference, i.e. a theory that we are first and foremost *gendered* subjects, that recognition of anatomical differences between women and men, between mother and father, and the anxiety occasioned by what we lack or what we might lose are primary aspects of our formation as subjects. The drama of subject-formation is a drama

of socialization, of the production of *social* beings, and society is structured by sexual difference (and sexual inequality), so that in order to become properly socialized subjects we must become “properly” gendered subjects. Socially, culturally, and existentially, then, boys and girls, men and women, are (psychoanalysis holds) situated very differently with respect to the processes of development and to their subsequent place within “civilized” society. Needless to say, this component of psychoanalytic theory has been very problematic and provocative for feminist theory.

3. Freudian psychoanalysis rests on a broad (and controversial) theory of sexuality, or, more accurately, a theory of primal instincts, drives, and desires that fuel human life. Here, Freud famously revised his views several times, and what began as a fairly rigid separation of sexual desire (“libido”) from other instincts grew into a much expanded conception of “Eros” (or the life instincts), which encompassed not only sexual desire but also the instinct for survival and self-preservation. For the late Freud, Eros was in constant battle with the “death instinct,” much as the “pleasure principle” continually locked horns with the “reality principle” (socially-induced repression). These dualities imply a subject driven by the impulse toward gratification, pleasure, sustenance, etc. Sadly, however, “civilization” demands the mutation of these desires and instincts—their transformation into socially useful shapes (“sublimation”), or their prohibition (“repression”). One happy consequence of Freud’s views of sexuality—despite his often stunted and condescending handling of female sexuality—has been to broaden considerably the category of pleasure, to accommodate and include radically different kinds of sexual practice, and to undermine facile or coercive distinctions between the “normal” and the deviant, the legitimate and the illegitimate, etc.
4. Synthesizing # 1-3, psychoanalysis sees the subject as radically de-centered or “split”—de-centered because lacking a fixed, stable core (the self considered as a structure rather than an essence), split because the main psychological fact of “civilized” human life, the central adjustment mechanism that brings instincts into alignment with the requirements of society, is *repression*. Thus the story of psychological life is a story of deferral, delay, and prohibition. Wish-fulfillment becomes a central fixation and motif—fulfillment is repetitively sought in dreams, in art, in fantasy, because of its unavailability in reality. Viewed historically, this psychoanalytic conception of the subject is consistent with emerging trends in art, philosophy, science, social theory, etc.—it is thus possible to consider psychoanalysis from the standpoint of modernism and modernity. The “split” self is variously described by Freud in terms of the conscious and the unconscious, or according to the tripartite scheme of the id, the ego, and the superego. In both cases, the Freudian self is an uneasy, delicate compromise arrangement, a balance of conflicting forces only arrived at through an arduous and sometimes (psychologically) violent journey. This self, like any delicate mechanism, is prone to breakdown, to illness, if the exact proportions of instinct and sublimation, desire and repression fall out of sync. When the “split” self interferes with our ability to be well-adjusted, relatively high functioning adults, our psychological life can become pathological. This is called *neurosis*, and it is only a slight exaggeration to say that psychoanalysis is first and foremost the theory of neurosis.

5. Changing gears, psychoanalysis is also a theory of meaning and signification, of the relationship between representation and truth, between image, sign, symbol and reality. This strand of psychoanalytic theory, which emerges centrally in Freud's writing on dreams, is consistent with tendencies in modern art. Psychoanalysis is in an important sense a *hermeneutic*, a theory of interpretation, and whether the "text" under consideration is a dream, a symptom, or a patient's utterance, the analyst quickly discovers that "reading" is difficult, motives unclear, texts obscure, narration unreliable. Things are seldom what they seem. As in dreams, works of modern art often seem constructed through *condensation* (or overdetermination—elements have more than one cause, mean more than one thing) or *displacement* (meaning, emphasis, or intensity is shifted from one thing to another). Moreover, as with what Freud calls "secondary revision" in dreams, we have to be most skeptical about texts that seem clearest and most obvious. All of this leads to a significant influence of psychoanalysis on modern culture, what Paul Ricoeur has called a pervasive "hermeneutic of suspicion"—distrusting the self-evident, seeking hidden meanings and ulterior motives.
6. Implicit in the conception of the subject described above is a rather dismal view of the irreconcilable conflict between civilization and individual happiness. This strand of psychoanalysis, developed in Freud's later writings, sees *sublimation* as a central fact of human society. Our buildings, roads, bridges, art, sports, technology, money, etc.—all can be regarded as the results of sublimation, of the conversion of instinctual (sexual, erotic, libidinous) energy into socially acceptable forms. Civilization is thus hopelessly at odds with the individual; repression of individual desire is the necessary price of social order. Desire is, after all, anarchic, aggressive, a-social, a-moral, potentially dangerous and destabilizing. This is something like the double-bind of "civilized" social life. Human "development," the drama of becoming a well-adjusted adult, is thus also a kind of fall, a movement away from happiness and fulfillment toward renunciation and deferral. To live in society is to accept unhappiness as a virtue. "Happiness," as Freud wrote, "is no cultural value."
7. Finally, psychoanalytic theory, as it is redirected by the French theorist Jacques Lacan, becomes also a theory of how language and vision contribute to the formation of gendered subjects, and how the desires of "split" subjects are managed and expressed through language and images. This strand has been particularly important to recent developments in both literary and film theory. For Lacan, building on Freud, adult human life continues to oscillate between two modalities, the Imaginary and the Symbolic, associated with earlier developmental stages (the "mirror stage" and the Oedipus complex, respectively). The Imaginary is pre- or non-verbal, associated with images and vision—it derives from the moment the child sees itself in a mirror, (mis-)recognizing itself as an image, an object, more complete and coherent than the child feels itself to be. The Imaginary is a register in which the self is not stable but instead fluid and changeable—identifications shift, perspectives alter, meanings reverse. The Symbolic, by contrast, is associated with language, rules, laws, and society, all initially linked to the empirical father (daddy) but later embodied in the abstract, symbolic role of the Father. Both the Imaginary and the Symbolic can offer only representations of what Lacan calls the Real, however. To "develop," for Lacan, is to be ushered into a world of lack, absence, and loss. When compared with the "plenitude" of the mother-infant dyad, in which the infant knows no difference between self and other, the developmental path that begins with separation from the mother is one in which we become aware of the enormous gulf between self and world, between self and other, and we must increasingly be content with images, representations, and substitutes instead of the real thing. This last kind of alienation is particularly associated with *language* itself (the Symbolic)—the medium in which we unhappy adults try desperately to make good the lack, the loss of plenitude, by trying to master, control, name, and possess the Real by manipulating words and symbols. But the Real is finally unreachable; we are

condemned to lack, to forever mistaking representations for reality, signifiers for signifieds. Thus language, like psychological life, is driven by *desire*—desire for fixity, completion, fulfillment.

These are not intended as final, definitive formulations, but as indications of significant problems we will encounter in various forms throughout the term. As the course progresses, you should expect to become reasonably fluent and confident in discussing, critiquing, and applying these and other strands of psychoanalytic theory.

### Required texts

Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper*

Gay, ed., *The Freud Reader*

James, *The Turn of the Screw*

Saguaro, ed., *Psychoanalysis and Woman: A Reader*

Additional readings on Blackboard (marked with \*)

### Schedule

Jan. 19: Course introduction

Breuer, *Anna O.*, 1895, *Freud Reader*

#### Foundations

Jan. 24: Freud, *On Dreams*, 1901, *Freud Reader*

Freud's dream of Irma's injection from *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1899, *Freud Reader*

(\*Note: it's best to do the readings in this order)

Jan. 26: Freud, *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria ("Dora")*, 1905, *Freud Reader*

Jan. 31: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, (1892)

Feb. 2: Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 1905, *Freud Reader*

Freud, "Fetishism," 1927, *Visual Culture: The Reader*, eds. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1999)\*

#### \*topics for first paper distributed

Feb. 7: Extract from Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986)\*

Michel Foucault, "We 'Other Victorians,'" *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1*, trans Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990)\*

Feb. 9: Freud, "The Tendencies of the Joke," 1905, *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. Joyce Crick (New York and London: Penguin Books, 2003)\*

**\*first paper due**

- Feb. 14: Freud, *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis ('Wolf-Man')*, 1918, *Freud Reader*
- Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, "The Maid and the Family Romance," *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (New York: Methuen, 1986)\*
- Feb. 16: Freud, "On Narcissism," 1914, *Freud Reader*
- Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 1917, *Freud Reader*
- Gender**
- Feb. 21: Freud, "Female Sexuality," 1931, *Psychoanalysis and Woman*
- Karen Horney, "The Flight from Womanhood," 1926, *Psychoanalysis and Woman*
- Juliet Mitchell, extract from *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (New York: Pantheon, 1974)\*
- Feb. 23: Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," 1929, *Psychoanalysis and Woman*
- Jean Walton, extract from *Fair Sex, Savage Dreams: Race, Psychoanalysis, Sexual Difference* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001)\*
- Feb. 28: Jacques Lacan, "The Meaning of the Phallus," 1958, *Psychoanalysis and Woman*
- Julia Kristeva, "About Chinese Women," 1974, *Psychoanalysis and Woman*
- \*take-home midterm distributed**
- Mar. 1: Luce Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One," 1977, *Psychoanalysis and Woman*
- Hélène Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?" 1981, *Psychoanalysis and Woman*
- Mar. 6-8: SPRING BREAK
- Reading and Interpretation**
- Mar. 13: E.T.A. Hoffmann, "The Sandman," 1816, trans. J.Y. Bealby (New York: Scribner's, 1885)\*
- Freud, "The Uncanny," 1918, *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford and Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2004)\*
- Mar. 15: Edgar Allan Poe, "The Purloined Letter," *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida, and Psychoanalytic Reading*, eds. John Muller and William Richardson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1988)\*
- Lacan, "Seminar on the Purloined Letter," *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida, and Psychoanalytic Reading*, eds. John Muller and William Richardson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1988)\*
- \*take-home midterm due**

- Mar. 20: Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 1898
- Mar. 22: Shoshana Felman, "Turning the Screw of Interpretation," in *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1982)\*
- Lacan, Film Theory, Feminism**
- Mar. 27: Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," 1949, *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, eds. Anthony Easthope and Kate McGowan (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1997)\*
- Fredric Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan," 1977, *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 1982)\*
- Mar. 29: Christian Metz, "Identification, Mirror," 1977, *The Imaginary Signifier* (Bloomington: IUP, 1982)\*
- Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 1975, *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, (New York and Oxford: OUP, 1999)\*
- \*Film screening: *Rear Window*, 5 pm, location TBD**
- Apr. 3: Tania Modleski, "Hitchcock, Feminism, and the Patriarchal Unconscious" and "The Master's Dollhouse: *Rear Window*," *The Women Who Knew Too Much* (New York: Routledge, 1989)\*
- Film: *Rear Window* (USA; Hitchcock 1954)
- Civilization**
- Apr. 5: Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 1913, *Freud Reader*
- \*second paper due**
- Apr. 10: Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920, *Freud Reader*
- Apr. 12: Peter Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot: A Model for Narrative," *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984)\*
- Apr. 17: Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1930, *Freud Reader*
- Apr. 19: Deleuze and Guattari, "Social Repression and Psychic Repression," *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1972; rep. 2000)\*
- Apr. 24: Marcuse, "Eros and Thanatos," *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966)\*
- \*take-home final distributed**
- Apr. 26: Conclusion

**\*Tuesday, May 1, final exam due in one of our mailboxes by noon**

### **Course policies**

1. Although this is a fairly large class, there will be a heavy emphasis on discussion and it will be impossible for you to “make up” classes that you have missed. We will, of course, excuse absences on grounds of illness, family emergency, and religious holidays, but repeated unexcused absences will affect your grade. If you can, let one of us know in advance if you have to miss class. E-mail is a good way to communicate information like this, or to set up appointments, but it is not usually very constructive to try to have intellectual discussion over e-mail (for example if you are confused about something, or if you have questions about your papers or the reading, or if you want to talk through something you are working on). For this reason, we encourage you to come to office hours or make an appointment if you would like to discuss a matter of substance.
2. Late papers: **We do not accept late papers**, unless you have discussed the matter with one of us first. In order to pass this course, you must complete and pass all the written assignments.
3. Plagiarism and the Honor Code: We take violations of the Honor Code very seriously, and you should make sure you are familiar with its conditions, especially Section 2, which states that plagiarism is an infraction of the Honor Code. Plagiarism is defined as follows: “Plagiarism occurs when a student, with intent to deceive or with reckless disregard for proper scholarly procedures, presents any information, ideas or phrasing of another as if they were his or her own and does not give appropriate credit to the original source.” In all your assignments, secondary material must be fully acknowledged. Whenever you quote from another source (article, book, web page etc) make sure you include full details of the text you are quoting from (author, title, publisher, date of publication of your edition, if applicable, and page number, or, in the case of a web page, the full URL and page number, if there is one).
4. Multiple submission and the Honor Code: You should also note that you may not turn in the same assignment for more than one course (see Honor Code, Section 2, Number 4, which notes that the following is an infraction of the Honor Code: “the acts of using any material portion of a paper or project to fulfill the requirements of more than one course unless the student has received prior permission to do so”).