COURSE OVERVIEW

This course introduces some classical psychoanalytic methods of reading and interpretation, with accent on the four concepts Jacques Lacan identified as foundational: the unconscious, repetition, the transference, and the drive. These categories can only be understood in relation to one another, and we will encounter others along the way, but the four terms will give us orientation points as we explore psychoanalytic theory.

We will approach psychoanalysis as a style of close reading whose influence on forms of interpretation—especially literary interpretation—has been immeasurable. One central concern will be the capacity of psychoanalysis to force us to read ourselves reading, to make the interpretive situation itself the object of our analysis. Throughout the course, we will emphasize psychoanalysis as a way of understanding how meanings are made or missed. That is, we will be less interested in seeking out meanings or interpretations than in grasping the conditions and procedures that make meaning-making possible in the first place.

Most of our attention will be given to psychoanalytic writings themselves; we will read them both as theory and as texts that demand analysis and interpretation. During the semester, we may turn occasionally to literary texts, films, and other material as opportunities arise, and you will have the chance to write about literature in your essays. But our major task will be to understand and perhaps play with the psychoanalytic texts before us, to work out their fundamental logic, and to consider how they and their concepts may be mobilized within literary analysis. Your work in this course will probably energize your reading of texts elsewhere, even when you aren’t applying psychoanalytic methods.

Students who read German or French (or Italian) are encouraged to look at the relevant texts in their original languages; issues of translation will arise from time to time.

REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

Reading. Read and reread. Then read again. Makes notes in the margins, underline and circle words and phrases, bescribble the page: in short, be an active reader. Our texts are challenging, and each week’s reading assignments are substantial. Plan your time. Complete the reading before each session, give yourself time to think about the texts before class, and arrive with at least a handful of points and questions for discussion. Bring your reading notes to class.

Writing.

A) Research option. This course offers a research option for students who would like to write a longer essay in fulfillment of the prerequisite for an English honors thesis. If you choose the research option, you will write a 20-25pp. essay on a topic you have discussed with me, and you will turn in components of the project--outline, annotated bibliography, and final draft--during the term.

B) Two essays. If you do not choose the research option, you will write two shorter essays, 5-7pp. and 12-15pp. In the first essay, you will explicate a psychoanalytic text from the course, treating it as a you would a literary text. Your second essay will give you the occasion to look outside
the course: to apply the theory to a text (a poem, novel, film, whatever) of your choice: perhaps an exemplary text for the application of psychoanalytic concepts, perhaps a test of the theory against a particularly challenging case.

C) Weekly short summaries (1-2pp.) that convey the central argument(s) or point(s) in the week's reading. These summaries serve two purposes: first, they require you to establish what our theorists are saying before you elaborate on (or argue against) their propositions. Second, they will ensure that you have the basic premises of the texts before you in class during our discussions. I will collect these at the end of every class session. You may write your short summaries in the form of notes—they need not be essays or properly polished response papers, but they must be more than crude jottings. (Note: students with ample summaries often master the material more quickly than others.)

D) Four short reading exercises (3pp.) focused on close reading—usually of a theoretical text, but sometimes of another short text I provide. These will sharpen your critical reading skills as the semester progresses, and they will give you the opportunity to put the theory to work (and to work out the theory). Most importantly, they will allow you to dive into the psychoanalytic material, to explore how an author makes an argument, assembles evidence (yes, evidence), constructs concepts, and so on.

Participation. This course is a seminar: we succeed or fail collectively. Arrive at each of our sessions ready to talk and ready to listen with engagement and generosity to your fellow students. If a text excites you, talk about why. If something confuses you (and many things will!), ask questions. If you agree with comments someone makes, elaborate on your agreement with the class. If you disagree with someone, explain why. In short, contribute with gusto to our common enterprise in the seminar—which is to engage deeply with a rich and exciting collection of texts and to understand together how they work.

Attendance, deadlines. Attendance at every session is required; more than two absences will be grounds for failing the course. Assignment due dates are provided on the syllabus so that you can plan your work for the semester. All due dates are firm: extensions will be granted only in cases of serious illness or personal crisis.

Disabilities resources. Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible. If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey (lpatey@wesleyan.edu) in Disability Resources located in North College, room 021, or call 860-685-5581 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

Honor Code. Please write an abbreviated form of the Honor Code pledge (“No aid, no violation.”) at the top of the first page of all assignments. All work must be done in compliance with the Honor Code. If you need help with proper citations or you have any questions at all on how to avoid plagiarism, please talk with me.
Grading
Your final grade breaks down like this:
10%: Participation (including weekly short summaries)
30%: Reading exercises
60%: Research essay, or two essays (5-7pp., 20%; 12-15pp., 40%)

Texts (available at Broad Street Books):
*Note: You must obtain these editions of the texts, since we are using the Standard Edition translation of works by Freud. If you are unable to buy these texts, I will buy them for you—please see me.


Additional required readings, marked with an asterisk (*) below, are included in the course reader, which you must order through your electronic portfolio.

Schedule

1. January 25: Introduction
   Bruce Fink, “Language and Otherness” (from *The Lacanian Subject*)

The Unconscious

2. February 1
   Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, pp. 121-363

3. February 8
   Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, pp. 363-615
   Printed copy of first reading exercise due in class.

   Recommended:
   Adam Phillips, “Dreams” (from *Terrors and Experts*)

4. February 15
   Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*
   Freud, “Screen Memories” (FR 117-126)
   Francesco Orlando, from *Toward a Freudian Theory of Literature*
   Sebastiano Timpanaro, from *The Freudian Slip*

   Recommended:
   Freud, from *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*
   Freud, “Negation” (FR 666-669)
   Jerry Aline Flieger, “The Purloined Punchline: Joke as Textual Paradigm”
5. February 22
Lacan, “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious” (from *Écrits)*
Juliet Mitchell, “Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious”*
Frantz Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology” (from *Black Skin, White Masks)*

**Recommended:**
Leo Bersani, “The It in the I” (from *Intimacies)*
Slavoj Žižek, from *The Sublime Object of Ideology*

6. February 29
Freud, “Wolf Man” (*FR* 400-426)
Freud, “The Unconscious” (*FR* 572-584)

**Recommended:**
Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, from *The Freudian Subject*

March 4: Printed copy of first (5-7pp.) essay due in box outside my office door.

March 7 and March 14 – Midsemester recess: no class.

**TRANSFERENCE**
7. March 21
Josef Breuer, “Anna O.” (*FR* 60-78)
Freud, “Transference”*

**Printed copy of second reading exercise due in class.**

**Recommended:**
Freud, “The Aetiology of Hysteria” (*FR* 96-111)
Fink, “Desire in Analysis” (from *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis)*

8. March 28
Freud, “Dora” (*FR* 172-239)
Freud, “Rat Man” (*FR* 309-350)
Fink, “Interpretation: Opening Up the Space of Desire” (from *A Clinical Introduction*)

9. April 4
Lacan, “From Interpretation to the Transference” (*FFC* 244-260)
Lacan, “Presence of the Analyst” (*FFC* 123-135)
Lacan, “Analysis and Truth or the Closure of the Unconscious” (*FFC* 136-148)
Juliet Mitchell, “The Oedipus Complex”*

**Recommended:**
Melanie Klein, “The Origins of the Transference”*
**REPETITION**

10. April 11
Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” (FR 584-589)
Freud, “Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through”*
Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable”*

11. April 18
Freud, “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning” (FR 301-306)
Freud, from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (FR 594-626)
Lacan, “Of the Network of Signifiers” (FFC 42-52)
Lacan, “Tuché and Automaton” (FFC 53-64)
Bruce Fink, “The Real Cause of Repetition”*

**Printed copy of third reading exercise due in class.**

**DRIVE**

12. April 25
Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (FR 722-772)
Freud, from *The Ego and the Id* (FR 628-658)
Freud, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” (FR 436-443)

13. May 2
Lacan, “From Love to the Libido” (FFC 187-200)
Lacan, “In You More Than You” (FFC 263-276)

**Printed copy of fourth reading exercise due in class.**

**Recommended:**
Bruce Fink, “Object (a): Cause of Desire” (from *The Lacanian Subject*)*

Friday, May 13: Printed copies of final essays due in box outside my office door by 5pm.