

Literature and Psychoanalysis

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René Magritte, La Clef de Songes (1930)

Literature and Psychoanalysis (Spring/Summer 2011)

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Introduction

Freud never stopped puzzling over the topic of *Dichtung* – poetry, fiction: the German word covers both – and its various ties to psychoanalysis. This course starts from that privileged tie between psychoanalysis and literature, exploring Freud's writings as a means to understand his uses of literature and the idea of the literary in the discovery of the life of the unconscious mind. Taking for granted that poetry is there to give vent to forms of intense, personal feeling, that the poet, or creative writer, is a man who projects self through words, Freud casts psychoanalysis as something like a form of practical poetry – a therapy that carves out a space on the cusp between literature and medicine.

To grasp what is at stake in the space that opens up between psychoanalysis and literature, it is important to begin at the beginning: with Freud's research into hysteria – 'the most enigmatic of all nervous diseases', as he once described it – at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris in the mid-1880s. Apart from its intrinsic interest – as both disease and enigma, hysteria has a long and complex history – Freud's work with hysterics is essential to his understanding of both mind and literature. 'The mechanism of fiction is the same as that of hysterical fantasies,' he writes in 1897 (to his then friend and collaborator, Wilhelm Fliess): the first sections of this course unpack that dense statement, its significance to Freud's theory of symptoms and creativity, wish and fiction.

A decade of listening to, and thinking about, the (sometimes obliterated) lives that arrived in his consulting-room had prepared Freud to make this statement. Hearing about the 'sexual business' (*die sexuelle Geschichte*: history, story, business) from all sides, he was learning what to ask and what not to ask, or not to ask too soon. He was also struggling to write – to know how to write – about what he was hearing. *Studies on Hysteria*, *The Interpretation of Dreams* and the case history of 'Dora' – often described as a modernist novel – are some of the results of that struggle. In Part 1 of this course ('Fictions of Hysteria'), we will read selections from these early writings, juxtaposing them with two literary works that have been central to the study of psychoanalysis in the Humanities: Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Beginning with Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Part 2 introduces the wide-ranging, and influential, discussions of psychoanalysis as a theory of representation. Dreams, sexuality, creativity: these three terms have been central to those discussions and orient the readings required by the course.

Throughout this course, our emphasis will be on psychoanalysis as a mode of thinking about writing and representation; psychoanalysis is not a 'method' of reading, nor does it supply a series of concepts to be 'applied' to literature (as some sort of 'answer' to a wayward or enigmatic form of creativity). On the contrary: the questions raised by psychoanalysis – the relation between self and sexuality, say, or between sexuality and creativity – are questions engaged by the literary texts in their own right. In other words, it is the questions *shared between* literature and psychoanalysis with which this course is primarily engaged.

Vacation reading

Freud can take some reading. Please use the vacation to read as much as you can of the course material set out below. Both the psychoanalytic and literary material will benefit from a second reading at the time of the seminar (i.e. don't do it over Xmas and then not do it during the term!). Freud's *Introductory Lectures* are a wonderful overview of psychoanalysis but the priority is the material set for the course. It is important to manage your time so that you are able to prepare

seminar presentations as well as read material set for each week (note the longer novels in Weeks 9 and 10, for example).

A full course package will be posted on Sussex Direct.

Books to buy

Although there are two sets of the Standard Edition of Freud's works in the library (one NTBB), you should consider purchasing the case history of 'Dora', 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of History', *Standard Edition VII* (or *Pelican Freud*) and *The Interpretation of Dreams* (please ensure you read Strachey's translation available as paperback Standard Edition or as Pelican Freud (second hand)). Other readings from Freud are much shorter but please allow time to photocopy material if you are relying on the library and keep in touch with one another via Sussex Direct discussion forum to pass books around.

You should also purchase the novels set for the course as the Library does not undertake to provide sufficient copies of these.

Seminar preparation/course aims and outcomes

The seminar is very much your time to use, together with the course tutor and fellow students, to explore further the reading you have been doing during the week; it is often the space, in fact, in which your ideas and interests start to clarify because you need to explain them to someone else. Your investment in the course – both in seminars and in written work – will make an enormous difference to the seminar experience as well as to how prepared you are for writing the assessed dissertation.

We will discuss your individual contributions (eg presentations) to seminars in the very first week of term. However, whether you are leading the seminar presentation or not, you must come prepared to discuss the reading set for each week. You need to bring the text to the seminar. Take some time, for example, to note passages that have raised questions, or interpretative difficulties, for you (and please note page numbers: if we are engaged in a close reading of Freud or of a literary text, a vague memory of what you found interesting or difficult will not help to further discussion). Some further notes on presentations are reproduced at the end of this course description.

On a more general note: I prefer to run seminars in which every member feels at ease in speaking to their interests, and raising questions that have occurred to them (even if not to anyone else). What can appear to be a 'naïve' question is often the one that opens up the text for discussion, and I would encourage you not to be anxious about the apparent conceptual difficulty of some of the critical readings on the course. Some of us will have more years of reading Freud behind us than others, but no-one (including Freud) has a final authority over the questions that can be raised by his writing, or the modes of interpretation that can be brought to bear upon it. This is not to say that there are not more or less informed readings: part of the work of the seminar is to help you towards such a reading. But the time spent in discussion will be much more productive if we can establish an ethos of respect for both Freud's writing – doing justice to his writings as far as we possibly can – and the different critical responses that each of us will bring to them.

Above all, the emphasis in seminars is on student participation in order to develop your confidence, and skills, in verbal and written communication. As the course is examined by dissertation, we will also be working to develop research and writing skills. Your attendance at and participation in every seminar is expected; the tutorial report at the end of the course will reflect on both (these are often used in writing academic and employment references).

This course aims to develop students' skills in reading between disciplines – psychoanalysis, literature, for example – and to gain confidence in identifying the questions and concepts that push against the boundaries of disciplinary thought. Critical thought, verbal reasoning and negotiation between conceptual fields are among the key skills supported by the reading, and research, undertaken for this course. Students will also become familiar with a range of established and emergent critical positions on reading and interpretation in the Humanities and with key issues in theories of identity, sexuality, creativity and representation.

Preparation for seminar presentations as well as for writing the dissertation will require students to conduct independent and self-reflective research under supervision and to manage time in order to meet deadlines for each task. The course also requires the use of a variety of academic resources and tools.

Modes of evaluation and assessment

Spring term

At least one oral presentation in seminar.

Contributions to seminar discussion.

Week 8 of Spring term: 1500 word practice essay which you will then be able to revise and use towards your dissertation. Feedback on this essay will be available in Week 10.

End-of-course tutorial report.

Summer term

1-2 dissertation supervision meetings.

Dissertation (6000 words): this is the formal assessment for the course.

The dissertation is on a topic of your choice, and should enable you to develop expertise, and research skills, in an area of particular interest to you. You will be expected to show wide reading and reflection, the ability to organise and develop a lucid and persuasive argument, and the capacity to make and substantiate generalisations through mastery of the details of texts and through close attention to their form and style. The dissertation will test your skills in using sources and organising and presenting an effective and scholarly piece of discursive writing. Further advice on writing the dissertation follows the seminar schedule.

Literature and Psychoanalysis

Seminar schedule

Part 1 The Fictions of Hysteria

Week 1 Introduction: literature and psychoanalysis (i)

Essential reading

Freud, 'Draft N' (31st May 1897), especially 'Fiction and Fine Frenzy' (photocopy to be made available or text placed on Sussex Direct site); letters to Wilhelm Fliess dated 15.10.97, 5.11.97, 15.3.98. These letters are also collected in ed. Jeffrey Masson, *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 1888-1904* [trans. Jeffrey Masson], Harvard UP, 1985.

Shoshana Felman, 'To Open the Question', available in *Literature and Psychoanalysis: the Question of Reading: Otherwise*, Johns Hopkins UP, 1977. Also available online in *Yale French Studies* 55/56.

Week 2 The origins of psychoanalysis: Freud at the Salpêtrière

Essential reading

Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), *SE II*, Pelican Freud 3: see, Breuer's study of 'Fraülein Anna O.'

J-B. Pontalis, 'Between Freud and Charcot: From One Scene to the Other', in *Frontiers in Psychoanalysis Between the Dream and Psychic Pain* [trans. Catherine Cullen and Philip Cullen], London: The Hogarth Press, 1981.

Stephen Heath, 'Difference', Section I, pp. 50-53 in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, London and New York: Routledge: 1992. The relevant section begins 'The woman who is there in psychoanalysis ...' to the end of section I: the essay is also available in *Screen* Autumn 1978, vol. 19, no. 3.

Images from *The Iconography of the Salpêtrière* are available on Sussex Direct.

Week 3 The fictions of hysteria (i): Freud and Dora

Essential reading

Freud, 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' (Dora) (1905), in *SE VII*, Pelican Freud 8.

Steven Marcus, 'Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History' in eds. Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane, *In Dora's Case: Freud, Hysteria, Feminism, Virago*, 1985. (There are a number of invaluable essays in this collection: see Jacqueline Rose, 'Dora: Fragment of an Analysis' (also available in Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, Verso, 1986) and Jacques Lacan, 'Intervention on Transference').

Week 4 The fictions of hysteria (ii): Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898)

Essential reading

Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* and the 'New York Preface' – use the Norton Critical Edition if you can (this edition includes the Preface)

Shoshana Felman, 'Turning the Screw of Interpretation' in *Literature and Psychoanalysis: the Question of Reading: Otherwise*, Johns Hopkins UP, 1977. Also available online in *Yale French Studies* 55/56. **Please note:** this essay is very long ... give yourselves time to read it fully.

Week 5 The fictions of hysteria (iii): Robert Louis Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886)

Essential reading

Robert Louis Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* – use the Norton edition if you can.

Stephen Heath, 'Psychopathia Sexualis: Stevenson's *Strange Case*', in *Critical Quarterly* Vol. 28, nos. 1-2

Week 6 Reading week

You should use this week to read ahead for the second half of the course and to plan your essay for the beginning of Week 8.

Part 2 Psychoanalysis and representation

Week 7 Freud: dreaming literature (i)

Essential reading

Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), SE IV and V, or Pelican Freud 4. See, in particular: Chapter II, 'The method of interpreting dreams', Chapter III, 'A Dream is a distortion of a wish', passages on *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet* and section on 'Typical Dreams'

There is a vast literature on *The Interpretation of Dreams*. This is a small selection of recent critical material, from diverse perspectives:

-- John Forrester, 'Dream Readers', in *Dispatches from the Freud Wars: Psychoanalysis and its Passions* (Harvard UP 1997).

-- Ferguson, H. (1996) *The Lure of Dreams. Sigmund Freud and the Construction of Modernity*. London and New York: Routledge.

-- Jacqueline Rose, 'On Not Being Able to Sleep: Rereading *The Interpretation of Dreams*',

in *On Not Being Able to Sleep: Psychoanalysis and the Modern World* (Chatto & Windus 2003).

-- Daniel Pick and Lyndal Roper (eds.), *Dreams and History* (Routledge 2004), Introduction. There are a number of very interesting essays in this collection; Chapters 2, 11, 12 and 14 are most immediately concerned with Freud.

-- Laura Marcus (ed.) *Sigmund Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams. New Interdisciplinary Essays* (Manchester UP 1999)

-- Shoshana Felman, 'Beyond Oedipus: the Specimen Story of Psychoanalysis', pp.99-102 only, in *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight: Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture*, Harvard UP: 1987.

-- Jean-Joseph Goux, Chapters 1 and 2 of *Oedipus, Philosopher*, Stanford, Stanford UP: 1993.-- Robert A. Paul, 'Purloining Freud: Dora's Letter to Posterity', *American Imago* 63:2, 2006 (available on-line via Project Muse).

Week 8 Dreaming literature (ii): sexuality and representation, Arthur Schnitzler, *Dream Story* (1926)

Essential reading

Arthur Schnitzler, *Dream Story* (Penguin edition is widely available)

Freud, *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905), in SE Vol. VII, or Pelican Freud 7.
Civilisation and its Discontents (1930)

Leo Bersani, 'Sexuality and esthetics', pp. 29-40, in *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art*, Columbia UP, 1986. Also in *October* 28, Spring 1984: available via JSTOR.

Week 9 Writing the feminine (i): Marie Cardinal, *The Words to Say It* (1975)

Essential reading

Marie Cardinal, *The Words to Say It*, The Women's Press, 1993

Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', in ed. Toril Moi, *The Kristeva Reader*, Basil Blackwell, 1986

Week 10 Writing the feminine (ii): Elfriede Jelinek, *The Piano Teacher* (1983)

Essential reading

Elfriede Jelinek, *The Piano Teacher* [trans. Joachim Neugroschel] (Serpent's Tail 1983)

Freud, 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' (1924) *SE XIX* or *PF 7*

Guidelines for writing your plan and dissertation (6000 words)

You should write the plan according to these guidelines and bring it along to your supervision sessions. It is essential that you are ready to discuss your topic by the beginning of the Summer term.

Your plan should include:

- An outline of the topic you intend to explore.
- A list of the text(s) you will concentrate on.
- A bibliography of critical sources you have consulted and/or intend to consult in preparation for your dissertation.

The following points may help you in preparing your plan:

1. What is the central question you want to ask? This may be a *question*: e.g. 'What does Freud do, or not do, to the understanding of hysteria at the end of the nineteenth century?' Or, it may be formulated as a hypothesis: 'Freud makes a unique contribution to the understanding of hysteria towards the end of the nineteenth century.' You may want to write about the idea of the literary in Freud's writings – his uses of literature, for example – or about a literary text that engages psychoanalysis, or about the critical encounter between psychoanalysis and literature.

In any case, the topic should emerge out your reading for the course. It may be, for example, that you want to do a detailed critical reading of one or more texts by Freud – explore the history of the writing and reception of that text, as it were – as a way into the question of what literature is for Freud. But you will need to have a sense of why *that* text, or texts: what is its interest and importance? You should be as specific as possible: much of the work of writing a dissertation is in finding out what it is, precisely, that you want to write about and why. One way to do this is to start to define why you think the topic is important (i.e. worth writing about).

2. How are you going to address your question or topic? For example, if you were taking up the question of hysteria, you would need to be able to present Freud's writings in the context of preceding and current explanations of hysteria: in other words, you would need to research the critical material on hysteria in the period, and decide which of Freud's texts would be of most use in setting out your argument about his contributions to the field.

3. How are you going to organise your dissertation? Do you intend to write a continuous piece, or is the question best addressed through chapters or sections (beware: sections should not be used to avoid the necessity of sustained argument!).

4. What is your proposed schedule of research? E.g. Easter break: reading of primary texts relevant to your interests, literature review of critical texts and first draft; Summer term: detailed rereading of relevant texts, further critical reading and second/final draft.

5. While there is no minimum or maximum number of texts on which you should focus your essay, you need to select material that will support 6000 words. It is not necessarily the case that you need to select 'long' texts: some of Freud's short essays, for example, are remarkably dense in conceptual terms, as well as enormously influential. Selection of texts will obviously depend on your question, but you will need to demonstrate a close reading of Freud's texts, of your chosen literary texts as well as your awareness of relevant critical material. This is likely to produce a reading list of not less than 20 texts, but this is, I stress, only a very rough guideline. Your provisional bibliography should list a minimum of 12 texts.

6. Part of the work of the essay plan is to identify the critical sources you will be using. It can be useful to start with a critical essay that you liked, or found helpful, and then use its notes and bibliography to identify other relevant texts. MLA Bibliography is a good on-line data base for articles and books published worldwide (it is accessible through the Pier, OCLC First Search) as is Project Muse and JSTOR (accessible via the Electronic Library).

7. Make sure you know how to reference properly; marks are often lost through poor or inadequate referencing.

Seminar presentations

In the promotion of active learning, a common teaching/learning method, and one which will be used on this course, is the student-led seminar, in which one or more of you give an oral presentation on an aspect of the week's topic. Everyone on this course will be expected to give a presentation.

An oral presentation is a formal presentation and requires planning and serious preparation. A traditional presentation should consist of an introduction, (in which you tell your seminar group what your presentation will be about), a development of your argument, with references to the texts discussed, and a conclusion. Organise the main points of your argument one after another and signpost the main points clearly. Illustrate your points by quotation from the texts. Do not speak too fast or too slowly and do not use over-long sentences. In your conclusion you should emphasise the main points of your presentation to make sure your audience has understood them.

You are encouraged to produce handouts for the other members of the class which could comprise (eg): key ideas in bullet point form; pictures; written instructions (eg for class activity). Please also provide references for material which you have used in preparing your presentation. You are welcome to use PowerPoint, the Sussex Direct forum etc.

Suggested essay titles

1. What is the significance of Freud's theory of hysteria to the study of literary writing and/or creativity?
2. 'All our stories are about what happens to our wishes' (Adam Phillips). Discuss.
3. The ideology of childhood has been described as crucial to the discourse of psychoanalysis. How does Freud use the idea of the child in *The Interpretation of Dreams* or *Three Essays on Sexuality*?
4. What is a dream for Freud? What does his theory of dreaming contribute to modern understanding of the meaning, and significance, of the dream?
5. *Three Essays on Sexuality* has been described as one of the most innovative, and provocative, works of the 20th century. What is Freud's concept of the sexual in this text?
6. Discuss the relationship between symptom and narrative.
7. What is a case history?
8. What is a psychoanalytic reading?
9. What does the concept of the drive enable Freud to think about?
10. What does sexuality have to do with literature?
11. What is narrative *desire*?

12. Discuss the conflict between pleasure and unpleasure **or** life and death in one psychoanalytic and one literary text.
13. Jean Laplanche has described *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as 'the most fascinating and baffling text of the entire Freudian *corpus*.' What is the source of that fascination, and bewilderment, for Laplanche?
14. What does Freud contribute to studies in the Humanities?