FIELD OF STUDY COURSE PROPOSAL

Field of study: Literary analysis

A. Relevant information:

1. Course number: Modern Languages and Literatures 256 (MDLG 256)
2. Full course title: Psychoanalysis, Literature, and Culture.
3. Catalogue description: General introduction to the use of psychoanalytic techniques in the analysis of literature and culture. Readings from Freud and post Freudian theorists are used to interpret a variety of literary texts, as well as films, ads, and other examples from popular culture. Offered in English with optional LAC component.
4. Prerequisites: none
5. Hours of credit: 3
6. Estimated student enrollment: 20 students
7. By whom and when the course will be offered: Tom Bonfiglio, once every four semesters
8. Staffing implications: none
9. Adequacy of library, technology, and other resources: adequate
10. Interdepartmental implications: By familiarizing the student with psychoanalytic interpretive techniques, this course augments not only the offerings of all literature departments (Classics, English, MLL), but also aids the student in interpretive sociocultural and sociohistorical analysis in general. Thus the analytic skills it develops have value for a wide range of subsequent humanities and social science courses. This course replaces MDLG 356: Freud.
11. Contact person: Tom Bonfiglio

B. Explanation:

Since the late 1980s, I have been regularly offering MDLG: Freud as an upper-division elective for the majors in modern literature: English, French, German, and Spanish. In teaching the course, I have become more and more aware of the immense utility of psychoanalysis for literary interpretation and its pervasiveness, if not ubiquity, in the hermeneutic sciences. I have decided to raise the visibility and accessibility of psychoanalytic inquiry for the general Richmond student by retooling the Freud seminar into a field of literary study course on psychoanalytic interpretation.

Perspectives from psychoanalysis have played an important role in humanistic inquiry since the 1980s and have become a commonly understood part of the vocabulary of literary criticism and its recent applications in the analysis of culture. Concepts such as overdetermination, displacement, condensation, secondary revision, doubling, and repetition hardly evoke any associations with psychoanalysis at all any more and are now taken for granted as viable interpretive tools in themselves. (Others, such as oedipal relations, projection, inversion, repression, and denial are more visibly psychoanalytic.) The problem is that our students are exposed to these tools only tangentially, when they arise as auxiliary notions in the act of interpretation. We have no general forum for teaching them to students. This course does just that and will provide the students with a valuable apparatus for structural and poststructural textual analysis. The analytic skills it develops have value for a wide range of subsequent humanities and social science courses, as they will sophisticate the students’ interpretive discourse. Most importantly, it teaches them to be suspicious listeners,
never to take any text at face value—be it literary or non-literary— and to look beyond the surface for meanings.

The main purpose of this course is to present texts as autonomous objects to be analyzed structurally that generate no single meaning, but instead a multiplicity of meanings. The key concepts here are displacement and condensation, which are explained in the Lacanian fashion as metonymy and metaphor, thus foregrounding the immediate bridge to the literary (It was Lacan who first told us that the rhetorical structure of defense mechanisms is that of literary tropes.); Then come overdetermination, doubling, and repetition, which aid immensely in the analysis of literary characters and textual polyphony. A good example can be taken from fairy tales, which generally deal with children’s oedipal ambivalence toward parental figures. The ambivalence produces the doubling of the parent into benevolent mother and malevolent stepmother; thus the latent hostility toward the parent is denied and projected onto the evil mother figure. I think the real attractiveness of this course is that it will be able to teach the students literary theory in a very attractive and digestible way. In other words, it will overcome their latent oedipal resistance to surrogate parental authority!

The major themes of the course are organized into six parts. For each part, there is a theoretical component and an application to the aesthetic and/or cultural text. Please note that the theoretical components will be read in carefully excerpted form, e.g. only chapter six of the *Interpretation of Dreams*, “The Dream Work,” a treasure trove of tropes. Reading the theoretical works in their entirety is unnecessary and would mean reading fewer primary texts, which would be unadvisable.

Part I: Historical introduction

The cultural point of departure—the cradle of psychoanalysis—is Vienna at the fin-de-siècle, where one finds the beginnings of postmodernity and the discovery of hysteria and conversion. It was here that a cultural model emerged that equated psyche, body, and language and that foregrounded the kinetic visibility of the psyche, thus giving rise to expressionist art in Vienna. Thus the literary/cultural application here is: Viennese expressionism, especially the paintings of Oskar Kokoschka.

Part II: Dream work and its application to literary and cultural criticism

It is important to begin with Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which offers a model for analyzing the interplay of textual images as rebuses, as a playing among correspondences, and not as sources of abstract meaning. This understanding of Freud is aided by reading Lacan, “The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis.” The literary/cultural applications here are Kafka, “A Country Doctor” and “The Judgment,” along with the film *Titanic*.

Part III. Parapraxes: dreaming while awake

The next step is the notion of conversion of psyche into body, which facilitates the suspicious hearing and viewing of secondary characteristics, such as body language, non-sequiturs, slips, forgetting, misreading, etc. This requires reading excerpts from Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* and *Jokes and their Relationship to the Unconscious*. The literary/cultural applications are: the paintings of Salvador Dali and René Magritte, the selected poems of Arthur Rimbaud, Schnitzler’s *The Dream Novella*, and the film *Eyes Wide Shut*.

Part IV. Consciousness, that which is unconscious, and repetition

This portion is imperative for the fundamental Lacanian understanding that the unconscious is not a place, but a product of repression. This prevents mystical readings of Freud and of the text under analysis. Instead, the moves of the text are seen as strategies of avoidance, postponement, denial, etc. This recommends reading Freud, *The Ego and the Id, Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and “The Relation of the Poet to Daydreaming,” and Lacan, “The Freudian Unconscious and Ours.” The literary/cultural applications here are the folk tales of Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm.
Part V. Tragedy, Oedipus, and the crisis of patriarchy

This is one of the most important contributions of psychoanalysis for the understanding of literature and culture: the struggle against the authority of the father, the wished-for elimination of the father and the formation of the band of brothers, the resultant rise of democracy, the institutions of guilt and regret, and the subsequent rite of totemism. Readings: Freud, *Totem and Taboo*. Literary/cultural application: Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*; Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. Film: *Damaged* (a first-rate bourgeois tragedy).

Part VI. Psychoanalysis and Feminism


The semester ends with a capstone reading of Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, which will engage in a summary application of the interpretive techniques developed in the course.

Evaluation

Written assignments: this is a writing-intensive course with four take-home essay exams requiring psychoanalysis-based literary/cultural interpretation. There are no in-class exams, because I am not interested in developing skills in how to take exams in classrooms. Instead, I want the students to take a week to structure out well-deliberated essays in several drafts.

Not to worry

This course description may give the impression of being too ambitious and too theoretical for a 200-level general education course. I am fully confident that this is not so. I have been teaching the Freud seminar regularly since the late 80s and have attracted a wide range of students, especially when it was cross-listed as a women’s studies course. I had students from diverse majors, many of them with little or no preparation in or talent for literary interpretation. But the course has succeeded well and has never been accused of being too theoretical or abstract. I am fully capable of presenting the course material—even Lacan—to students in a digestible manner. I know the students are capable of this type of inquiry and can benefit from it considerably. It is for these reasons that I have decided to restructure the old Freud seminar in a format that will cast a wider net and contribute to the general education of the student body.
Modern Languages and Literatures 256: Psychoanalysis, Literature, and Culture Syllabus

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Critical texts by Freud:

The Interpretation of Dreams (excerpts)
The Psychopathology of Everyday Life (excerpts)
Jokes and their Relationship to the Unconscious (excerpts)
Dora--An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria (in toto)
Totem and Taboo (excerpts)
“The Relation of the Poet to Daydreaming”
Beyond the Pleasure Principle (excerpts)
The Ego and the Id (excerpts)

Critical postfreudian texts:

Peter Brooks, “The idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism”
Juliet Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism (excerpts)

Primary texts:

Literature:

Shakespeare, Hamlet
Sophocles, Oedipus Rex
Schnitzler, Dream Story
Shelly, Frankenstein
Folk tales of Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm
Selected poems of Arthur Rimbaud
Selected poems of Adrienne Rich

Art:

Viennese expressionism, especially the paintings of Oskar Kokoschka
Selections from Salvador Dalí and René Magritte

Films:

Titanic
Eyes Wide Shut
Damaged
Cold Mountain

Other artifacts of popular culture:

Psychosexual subtexts in advertising

Course structure:

This course is divided into four parts:
1. Historical introduction: Vienna at the fin-de-siècle, the beginnings of postmodernity, and the discovery of hysteria and conversion.

Literary/cultural application:
Viennese expressionism, especially the paintings of Oskar Kokoschka.

2. Dream work and its application to literary and cultural criticism

Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*
Literary/cultural application:
Film: *Titanic*

3. Parapraxes: dreaming while awake

Freud: *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*
Freud: *Jokes and their Relationship to the Unconscious*
Literary/cultural application:
The paintings of Salvador Dali, and René Magritte
Selected poems of Arthur Rimbaud
Schnitzler, *Dream Story*
Film: *Eyes Wide Shut*

3. Consciousness, that which is unconscious, and repetition

Freud, *The Ego and the Id, Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* “The relation of the poet to daydreaming”
Lacan, “The Freudian unconscious and ours,”
Literary/cultural application:
The folk tales of Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm

4. Tragedy, Oedipus, and the crisis of patriarchy

Freud, *Totem and Taboo*
Literary/cultural application:
Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*
Shakespeare, *Hamlet*
Film: *Damaged*

5. Psychoanalysis and Feminism

Mitchell, Juliet, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (excerpts)
Literary/cultural application:
Selected poems of Adrienne Rich
Film: *Cold Mountain*

6. Transference, countertransference, and the pitfalls of reading

*Dora—An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*
Brooks, Peter, “The idea of a psychoanalytic literary criticism”
Lacan, “Intervention on transference”
Literary/cultural application:
Psychosexual subtexts in advertising

Capstone reading: Shelly, *Frankenstein*
**Evaluation**

Written assignments: this is a writing-intensive course with four take-home essay exams requiring psycho-analysis-based literary/cultural interpretation, weighted as follows:

First Exam 20%,
Second Exam 20%,
Third Exam 25%
Fourth Exam 25%

Attendance and Participation: 10%.

The grade of an exam that is submitted after the due date will be reduced as in the following example of an exam of B quality:

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**LAC Credit:**

This course also offers language across the curriculum (LAC) credit. Students have the option of gaining a fourth credit hour if they submit an extra paper based on research in a language other than English. The paper is due at the end of the semester, and the project will be supervised by me and, if need be, a professor of the target language. Students interested in this option should also register for Interdisciplinary Studies IDST 250 to 257, depending on the language of choice. We will discuss this option in detail on the first day of class.