

## **Psychoanalytic Narratology – Theory Core Course**

**Prof. Shirley Sharon-Zisser**

2018/19, Spring Term, 4hr credit for BA, Webb 103

**Reception hours:** Monday, 14:00-15:00 or by appointment, Webb 509

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**Course prerequisites:** interest in poetics, literary theory, psychoanalysis; love of language. It would be beneficial for students to have taken courses in theory, in particular narrative analysis and introduction to theory.

### **Course Description**

**Please note that this course proceeds from a psychoanalytical Freudian-Lacanian position.**

. The process of a psychoanalysis is not a narrative. As an analysis, it indeed splices and deconstructs, and also sutures differently, various components of the subject's psyche. And yet so many of the categories used in the psychoanalytic cure and in psychoanalytic theory are narrative in structure or pertain to one of the fundamental concepts of narratology. Best known among these is the Oedipus complex in its Freudian articulation, which relies on a narrative substructure derived from literature (Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*), but no less significant is the category of the phantasm, first formulated by Freud in the article on "A Child is Being Beaten" and augmented by Lacan to become the unconscious narrative, subtended by an axiomatics, which produces the neurotic subject's usually masochistic sense-making – of his dreams and symptoms, of his encounters with others, of works of literature and art. The delusions of paranoid psychotics too take a narrative form, albeit one that has a function radically different from the narrative that is the neurotic's phantasm. In Freudian theory, various of the processes discovered as serving a defensive function against a knowledge that if confronted, would be too unpleasurable or unbearable for the subject. Such are "The Sexual Theories of Children," the "Lies Told by Children," and "The family Romance." Finally, of the formations of the unconscious, those encrypted phenomena by means of which the unconscious emerges, the one Freud denominated "the royal road to the unconscious," the dream, is of course a narrative. A crucial component of narrative – character -- which has been the subject of narrative theory ever since Aristotle's *Poetics*, is also a psychoanalytic concept, first theorized by Freud in 1908, and retheorized in his work and in that of later analysts up to Jacques-Alain Miller, who rereads it in the light of Lacanian psychoanalysis. What is the structure and function of narrative within psychoanalysis and of the psychoanalytic categories and phenomena that take narrative form? What can they teach us about narrative and its components as theorized in classic narratology, especially modern (mainly formalist and structuralist) narratology? What is the psychoanalytic category of character and how does it relate to the narratological concept of character? These are some of the questions the course will ask and try to answer by means of a close reading of the relevant texts of Freud, Lacan, and Miller alongside those of narratologists from Aristotle through Propp, Todorov, Genette and Chatman.

Requirements: regular attendance, active participation, final take-home exam.

### **Course Reading**

The course will focus on a close reading and discussion of the works listed in the bibliography. Most texts are available online, and those that are not will be uploaded to *moodle*. Students are expected to have read the texts thoroughly before they are discussed in class and always to have a text in class for reference.

### **Detailed Course Plan**

Please note that this schedule is tentative and may be subject to change, depending on course dynamics and the students' interests and questions.

#### **Part I - Introduction – The Categories of Classical Narratology Revisited Psychoanalytically**

From Aristotle, *Poetics*; from Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse*; Boris Tomashevsky, *Thematics*; from Vladimir Propp, *The Morphology of the Folk-Tale*; from Frederic Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*; Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Daydreaming"

#### **Part II – Precursors – Giambattista Vico and Claude Levi Strauss**

From Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*; Claude Levi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth"

#### **Part III – Freudian Theories of the Function of Narrative**

Sigmund Freud, "On Lies Told by Children", "Family Romance," "The Sexual Theories of Children," Bruno Bettelheim, from *The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*

#### **Part IV – The Narrative Structure of Dreams**

Sigmund Freud, "On Dreams," from *The Interpretation of Dreams*

#### **Part V – The Phantasm as Narrative**

Sigmund Freud, "A Child is Being Beaten," from Jacques Lacan, Seminar 6, *Desire and its Interpretation*; Seminar 10, *Anxiety*

#### **Part VI – The Freudian Theory of Character**

Sigmund Freud, "Psychopathic Characters on the Stage," "Character and Anal Erotism," "On Character Types Met with in Psychoanalytic Work."

