The Perversity of the Poetic
הפרוורסיה של הפואטי

MA Seminar

Prof. Shirley Sharon-Zisser
Course no.: 626422301 2017/18, Fall term, 4hr credit for MA
Monday and Thursday, 10-12, Webb 105
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

Course Description

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

The question of the specificity of the poetic has preoccupied thinkers on language from at least as early as Aristotle’s Poetics and as late as Heidegger’s essay on “Language,” its discussions reaching an apex in formalist and structuralist literary theory, for instance in the work of Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson, and Jan Mukarovky. Characteristic of these discussion is an opposition between poetic language and what Mukarovsky calls “standard language” and Aristotle – the kurion or “common.” This characteristic of theorizations of the poetic as a deviation from a common or universal standard finds its isomorph in one of Freud’s most foundational discoveries, first formulated in the Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality of 1905: the finding that sexuality, operative from infancy onwards, is the isolation of a portion of the organism and its sublation from a universal ego-preserving function to the function of satisfaction alone, that is to say, that sexuality is, to follow the title of the inaugural among Freud’s Three Essays, constitutively aberrant, polymorphously perverse with respect to the universal of anatomy as well as, of course to any norm. What makes speech poetic, Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky famously writes in his programmatic “Art as Technique,” is its impeding of, ob-jecting to sense; that is, its abrogation of the lexical to the profit of the formal. It is thus, Shklovsky writes, that the poetic "gives satisfaction," that is -- coincides with the aim of the drive. The seminar will interrogate the consequences of the isomorphism between the structure of the poetic as deviation and the structure of sexuality as perverse, as well as the relations between perversion as a particular subjective structure (distinct from neurosis and psychosis) and theorizations of the poetic, most notably those of Roman Jakobson and Michael Riffaterre that explicitly gesture towards the poetic object and the object of perversion par excellence: the fetish. It will also consider the relation between the poetic and the two variable components of the drive: the object by means of which it achieves its aim of satisfaction, and the erogenous zone around which it turns, so as to consider the question of what I call rhetorical erotogenicity.

**Course Requirements**
Requirements: regular attendance, active participation (10 %), in-class presentation (30%), referat or seminar paper whose topic is to be discussed with the instructor by mid-December (60 %).

**Course Reading**
The course will focus on a close reading and discussion of the works listed in the bibliography and selected literary works to be assigned by the instructor. 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 – On the structure of perversity**

**Part II – On the specificity of poetic language**

**Part III – the perversity of the poetic**
Student presentations and discussion

**Bibliography:**
poesia?"; Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*; “Drives and their Vicissitudes”; “Fetishism” “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”; Lacan, extracts from “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” “The Youth of Gide or the letter and Desire,” *Seminar 4: The Relation to the Object, Seminar 10, Anxiety; Seminar 24, L’insu que sait de l’une bevue s’aille a mur*; Michele Montrelay, “L’enonce en tant que chose,” extracts from *La disposition pervers*. Please note that texts may be added or subtracted as an effect of class dynamics and the questions and interests of the students. Please make sure to follow the announcements in class and on moodle.