

The Wound of Language – Syllabus

Tamar Gerstenhaber

Email: gerstenh@post.tau.ac.il

Office hour: Tuesday 12:00-13:00 or by appointment, Webb 504

Course number: 2017/18 Fall term, 2 credit hours for BA

Tuesday 10:00-12:00, Webb

The Department of English and American Studies

Course Description

Philomela, poetry's famous song bird, sings from a wound. She is transformed into a song bird after suffering rape and mutilation. Orpheus, mythology's beloved musician, continues to play as his limbs are torn apart, while his limbs go on singing even after the musician's demise. Echo, the musician, suffers a similar fate. Though she is canonized for her love of Narcissus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Longus assigns her a fate similar to that of Orpheus. In this more archaic Greek tale, she is a musician envied by Pan and torn to pieces by his followers, while her limbs "preserve the gift of song, and by the will of the muses, speak and imitate all sounds". A crimson thread then runs through all these myths. They all feature a wounded singer, thus pointing towards an intimate relationship between the auditory dimension of language and a wound. For Freud, the symptom, which appears on the body of the hysterics who seek his help, is a text that asks to be read. That is, language for Freud is written on the body as an ailment. Language, it seems, has the shape of a wound. How may we conceptualize this wound? And what is the specific relationship between language and the wound? To answer these questions, we will take a twofold path, poetic and theoretical. We will turn to the myths as keepers of unbearable knowledge made more bearable by taking mythic form, and we will also trace the manner in which Freud and Lacan institute language as body.

Reading:

Our reading will follow a three-part trajectory. First we will explore into the fundamental question of language. We will then investigate Freud's conceptualization of a symptom as a message, and conclude by approaching the question of the relation between body and language through the psychoanalytic concept of the wound.

Please note: As the progress of the reading depends on class discussions and questions that you will raise, I may add or remove texts throughout the semester. All text will be made available on moodle, and I will send emails throughout the semester with updates on readings for the following classes.

Texts:

Part I – The Question of Language

- Ferdinand de Saussure - –*Course in General Linguistics* : Part I chapter I “Nature of the Linguistic Sign” and Part II chapter IV “ Nature of the Linguistic Sign”
- Charles Sanders Pierce – *The Essential Pierce* : “On Reasoning in General”, article 4-11; “The Nature Signs”; “Sign”
- Thomas A. Sebeok - *Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics* Chapter I and II

Part II -- The Symptom

- Sigmund Freud:
Studies in Hysteria, the case of Fraulein Elisabeth R.;
-- *Psychotherapy of Hysteria*, Chapter IV
- Oscar Wilde – “The Nightingale and the Rose”
- Richard Crashaw – “The Flaming Heart”
- The Myth of Philomela from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*

Part III -- The Wound

- The Myth of Orpheus from Virgil’s *Georgics* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*
- The Myth of Echo from Longus’s *Daphnis and Chloe*
- Freud
Project for a Scientific Psychology (excerpts)
----*The Ego and the Id* (excerpts)
- Jacques Lacan “The Mirror Stage”

Course Requirements

Attendance is compulsory. Students who accumulate more than 2 unjustified absences will lose 5% of the final grade per absence. Students who miss more than 30% of the classes, regardless of circumstances, will not be able to complete the course.

Midterm paper (30% of the grade): specific instructions for the midterm paper will be posted online approximately two weeks before its due date

Final paper (70%): specific instructions for the final paper will be posted online approximately a month before its due date, that is towards the end of the semester.

Students, however, are more than welcome to schedule personal meetings and discuss ideas they would wish to explore further on their papers, throughout the semester