

## **Fiction and Therapy: From Psychoanalysis to CBT**

Instructor: Tess McNulty

[TessMcNulty@g.harvard.edu](mailto:TessMcNulty@g.harvard.edu)

Office Hours: TBD and by appointment, Lamont Café

**Course Description:** The twentieth century was the century of therapy; first came psychoanalysis, then the broad institutionalization of talk therapy in the mid-century, and finally the introduction of a therapeutic ethos into varied areas of contemporary life, from the home, to the corporation, to popular culture. In this tutorial, we will view those historical and intellectual developments through the lens of post-1900 fiction, with a particular focus on relations between the emergence and institutionalization of psychoanalysis and literary writing. Questions we will ask will include: how do psychoanalytic and therapeutic ideas, practices, and cultures, find reflection in the work of post-1900 authors? How, in turn, do literary works speak back to those ideas, practices, and cultures? How is reading literature, or doing literary criticism, like or different from the processes of receiving or administering psychotherapy? Thinkers we'll read will include Freud, Lacan, Melanie Klein, Winnicott, Foucault, and Eve Illouz. Authors we'll read will include Philip Roth, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Italo Svevo, and Lydia Davis. Students will also be asked to write a 20-25 page paper pertinent to the course themes.

### **Course Goals:**

- To understand 20<sup>th</sup> century fiction, therapy, and their interrelations (see blurb, above)
- To learn how to write an upper level, long form (20-25 pg) work of literary criticism.
- To learn how to identify and engage with criticism related to a literary work
- To learn how to identify and engage with other relevant secondary sources
- To learn how to write in a clear, well-structured fashion, at length.

### **Major Assignments:**

1. Due week 5: One 5-7 page paper, due at the end of the fourth week of the course. In this paper, you should close read one aspect or passage of one of the literary texts read in the course thus far, making reference to one work of criticism –further instructions forthcoming.
2. Due week 8: One 2 page prospectus and annotated bibliography with 8-10 sources for the 20-25 page final paper, due in the 8<sup>th</sup> week. For lengthier descriptions of this assignment see week 8 and forthcoming handout.
3. Due week 12: One full draft of the final paper, due during week 12; This full draft of the final paper, of 20-25 pages in length, will be returned with comments for revision promptly (within a week).
4. Due Date TBD: The 20-25 page final paper, due during reading week
5. Due Date TBD (to be presented at conference 10am-2pm): One 5 minute conference presentation (ungraded) on your paper, to be delivered to your peers.
6. Due throughout the semester (see week by week calendar for more info): A number of mini-assignments, all designed to help you reach milestones in your researching/writing process – i.e., things you would have to do anyway. These will include, for example, finding one piece of criticism on a novel early in the course, choosing and reading a

novel on the syllabus you may like to write on, reporting on research, outlining your paper, revising your outline, etc. These exercises will be informal, and worth only 10 percent of your grade, but essential to complete.

7. Preparation and Participation – showing up having read, and ready to speak and participate, at every course section.
8. Mandatory program wide meetings – there will be a few junior tutorial program wide meetings, beyond the final paper conference. They will include a welcome meeting, a library session during week 6, and a presentation by former writers of junior papers.

### **Grade Breakdown:**

Final paper – 40%

Final paper draft – 10%

Prospectus and annotated bibliography – 10%

Short, 5-7 page Paper – 15%

Mini Assignments – 10%

Participation and Preparation – 15%

Conference presentation and mandatory program wide meetings- ungraded

### **Course Texts (other works, and critical works, will be excerpted or posted on canvas):**

The Yellow Wallpaper, Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Portnoy's Complaint, Philip Roth

Zeno's Conscience, Italo Svevo

The End of the Story, Lydia Davis

The Year of Magical Thinking, Joan Didion

Are You My Mother?, Alison Bechdel

Open City, Teju Cole

Nervous Conditions, Tsitsi Dangarembga

The Depressed Person, David Foster Wallace

CBD, Tao Lin

### **Unit One:**

#### **Foundations: Psychoanalysis and Literary Writing**

#### **(And introduction to literary critical research, and choosing a topic)**

In this unit, we will cover some foundational themes, relevant throughout the whole course. First, we will review early, influential psychoanalytic ideas (Freud, Lacan). Next, we will review major approaches to thinking about those ideas in relation to literature (Brooks, Bloom), finally, we will review the process of psychoanalysis and therapy's 20<sup>th</sup> c. institutionalization.

### **Week 1: Introduction:**

Excerpts: Foucault, Madness and Civilization

Eve Illouz, Saving the Modern Soul

Brooks and Woloch, Whose Freud? The Place of Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture

Optional Additional Reading, to be referenced throughout the course: Cambridge Introduction to Literature and Psychoanalysis

**Week 2: Freud pt. 1, The Unconscious**

Charlotte Perkins Gillman, The Yellow Wallpaper  
Freud, On the Interpretation of Dreams  
Freud, "The Unconscious"

**Week 3: Freud pt. 2, Sexual Drives/Development**

Phillip Roth, Portnoy's Complaint  
Freud, On the Psychopathology of Everyday Life (excerpts)  
Freud, "Infantile Sexuality"  
Freud, Jokes and Their Relation to the Subconscious

\*Assignment: Using the skills acquired in last week's research tutorial, find one work of literary criticism (article or book chapter) on one of the texts that we've read so far, or will read in the next two weeks (You may want to choose the author you feel most likely to write your first, close reading essay about). Be prepared to summarize the essay's argument, and provide a brief outline of how it presents that argument, in class.

**Week 4: Psychoanalysis and Literature, part 1: Language and Writing**

Zeno's Conscience, Italo Svevo  
Lacan, "Mirror Stage," "The Instance of the Letter in the Subconscious"  
Reading Lacan, Jane Gallop  
Looking Awry, Zizek

**\*\*Friday, Sept. 28 (midnight): Short (5-7 page) Paper Due\*\***

**Week 5: Psychoanalysis and Literature, part 2: Criticism and Reading**

The End of the Story, Lydia Davis  
Peter Brooks, Reading for the Plot  
Eve Sedgwick, Paranoid and Reparative Reading

\*Assignment: Choose one sample junior paper, make a reverse outline of it (i.e., make a map, or outline, of its parts or sections based on reading it), and be prepared to discuss in class

**Week 6: Free Week and Library Session (Plus: Psychoanalysis as Institution, The Later 20<sup>th</sup> c)**

Eve Ilouz, ch. 1 on the Freudian legacy  
Psychotherapy, a Very Short Introduction (for a review of post-Freudian Approaches)  
Erving Goffman on Asylums

\*Assignment: This is a largely free week for you to select a course text – potentially one from a later week in the course - that you may want to write your final essay on. Select and read a text (if you haven't already read it already) and come to class/this week's library session with an

idea about 1-2 topics, related to that text, that you may want to write about. You can also, if you like, choose a text not on the syllabus, with my approval, if there's a topic you'd like to write on that we don't cover. The text/topic you choose is by no means a binding contract! Just to get you start thinking. You will meet with me, sometime this week, about your topic selection, and begin sample research on the topic during our library session.

\*Mandatory Event: Library Session: date, time, TBD. This session, along with the conferences I have with you about potential topics, will either replace our usual seminar meeting or cut it down to 30 min-one hour.

**Unit Two:**  
**After Freud: Psychoanalytic and Therapeutic Themes**  
**(Plus: Beginning Research and Planning)**

In this unit, we'll examine some major, new conceptual takes on the psychoanalytic tradition with which literature engaged. We'll look at psychoanalytic thinkers on gender and Motherhood, on Race and Colonialism, and on Personal and Historical Trauma

**Week 7: From Mourning and Melancholia to Depression**

Joan Didion, The Year of Magical Thinking

Freud, Mourning and Melancholia

Melanie Klein, Mourning and its Relation to Manic Depressive States

Darian Leader, The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia, and Depression, excerpts

Assignment: Research report number 1 -Begin research on the (tentative) topic that you are working with, and come to class ready to report on the type of things/criticism you are finding. After a shallow dive, what does the criticism on this topic look like?

**Week 8: Trauma, Personal and Historical**

Teju Cole, Open City

The Wasteland T.S. Eliot

Cathy Caruth, Unclaimed Experience

Felman and Laud, Testimony

\*\*Date TBD (midnight), Prospectus with Annotated Bibliography Due\*\*

**Week 9: Gender and Motherhood**

Alison Bechdel, Are You My Mother?

Simone de Beauvoir, excerpt, The Second Sex (explaining/opposing Freud's oedipus complex, penis envy, etc.)

Luce Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman (excerpts, critique of Freud in The Blind Spot)

Winnicott, The Child, the Family, and the Outside World

\*Assignment: Research Report #2: Come in ready to report on some secondary research that you have conducted for your essay, most likely in one or both of two areas a) literary critical or theoretical arguments b) relevant contextual information (e.g., information about the author's biography or other works, information about the history/recent trajectory of the genre of novel in question, information about some relevant piece of historical context, etc.). Overall, try to be ready to explain how your choice of topic, and potential argument, relates to prior scholarship. Does it a) extend it, b) agree with it c) disagree with it? d) revise it? e) talk about something entirely different? Etc.

### **Week 10: Race (and Gender) and Colonialism**

Tsitsi Dagarembga, Nervous Conditions  
Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks  
Homi Bhabha The Location of Culture, excerpts

Workshop/Discussion: Discussion of argument and basic outline, Essay structure

\*Assignment: Come in with idea of a basic argument and outline for your essay, to be shared

### **Unit 3:**

#### **The Contemporary: New Modes of Therapy and Therapeutic Culture (Plus: Writing and Revising)**

We'll look more broadly at therapy today and Therapeutic Culture, in the wake of the psychoanalytic revolution.

### **Week 11 (Nov. 12-16): Narcissism and the Culture of Me**

David Foster Wallace, the Depressed Person  
Christopher Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism  
Freud On Narcissism

Take this week of light reading to a) meet with me about (revised) versions of your outlines and b) write drafts of your essays, due before thanksgiving break)

### **Week 12 (Nov. 19-23): Thanksgiving Break, Drafts due**

\*Monday, November 19: full essay drafts due\*

### **Week 13: Capitalism, Individualism, and Productivity**

Film, Yella, Christian Petzold  
Illouz, Cold Intimacies  
Rachel Greenwald Smith, Affects and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism (excerpts)

\*This week: full essay drafts due\*

### **Week 14: Therapy Today: Neurochemical and Behavioral Approaches**

Tao Lin, CBD

“The Rise of The Neuronovel,” n+1

Cognitive Literary Study: Second Generation Perspectives, special issue of *Style*

Johnathan Knapp, Family Systems Psychotherapy and Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism: A Comparative Critique

\*Assignment: Complete a draft revision. Come in ready to give a very casual (messy as need be) flash 5 minute presentation on it, to prepare for the conference

**\*\*Date TBD: Final Papers Due!\*\***

**\*\*Date TBD Junior Tutorial Conference\*\***

### **Course Policies**

Attendance: I will allow each student a “free” tutorial absence to be used in case of sickness, travel, etc: no explanation necessary. Missing more than one class will decrease your participation grade, and excessive absence could result in failing the course. Also, 2 lates = 1 absence. If you have attenuating circumstances, communicate with me in a timely manner so that we can discuss how to deal with it.

Participation: Good participation in section comes in many forms: it’s great to make a brilliant comment, but it’s also helpful to ask a question, propose a new topic, flag a passage, or synthesize points that have already been made. The important thing is that you make your voice heard multiple times in every (or nearly every) class. If you think that you might be reluctant to speak up, for any reason, let me know when we meet next week. This is something that we can work on together.

My Availability/Email: I will be holding office hours at some time TBD, but you should email me to set up appointments whenever. Email is good for logistical questions (when is the essay due?) but I prefer to deal with all substantive issues (Would you say Butler’s argument is wrong because...?) in person. I will also comment on drafts of arguments, outlines, essays etc. in person but not over email, so if you’d like me to look at them, email me to set up an appointment. I hope you will come meet with me, throughout the semester, many times!

Laptops/Phones: No laptops or phones in section, except on 1-2 exception days when we will be doing research tutorials. So please do print out all readings in hard copy to bring to class.

Due Dates & Late Grades: Assignments are due at the precise times listed on the schedule. Late assignments will be docked 1/3 letter grade per day late, except for the final paper, which must be turned in before the due date. Students failing to turn in a final paper, or turning it in late without an official excuse, will fail the tutorial. Extensions are strongly discouraged by the Junior tutorial board. If, very well in advance of an assignment, you expect you will need an extension for serious reasons, please talk with me.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism is the use of another person's ideas or writing without giving them proper credit. Consequences of plagiarism can range from failure on the paper to dismissal from the course to even more serious actions. You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with Harvard FAS's Honor Code: *"Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one's own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs."*

Collaboration: You are absolutely encouraged to talk with other students about the course and its readings, and to read each others' work. In individual assignments (which may include midterm or term papers, short writing assignments, homework or reading questions and responses, or take-home exams), collaboration and external sources should be always cited.

Accommodations for students with disabilities: *"Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the [Accessible Education Office](#) (AEO) and speak with the professor by the end of the second week of the term, (DATE). Failure to do so may result in the Course Head's inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation."*