

English 106: Critical Theory – Psychoanalysis

Instructor: Todd McGowan
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Course Description and Objectives: This course will investigate psychoanalytic theory, especially as it aids in the interpretation of cultural phenomena. To this end, we will focus on the thought of Sigmund Freud and, especially, Jacques Lacan. In the last 10 years, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory has informed an explosion in thinking about culture in psychoanalytic terms. The leader of this intellectual movement is Slavoj Zizek, who we will also study and who will be a guest in this class during the semester. We will engage psychoanalytic theory on its own terms, in dialogue with other theories, and as a vehicle for cultural study. The primary objective for the course is for students to come away with a detailed understanding of what is at stake in psychoanalytic exploration.

Texts: *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* – Sigmund Freud (Liveright)
Outline of Psychoanalysis – Sigmund Freud (Norton)
Totem and Taboo – Sigmund Freud (Norton)
Fragile Absolute – Slavoj Zizek (Verso)
Zizek Reader – Slavoj Zizek (Blackwell)
Lacanian Subject – Bruce Fink (Princeton)
Desiring Whiteness – Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (Routledge)
Int. Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis – Dylan Evans (Routledge)

Grading:	Participation	20%
	2 Exams	20% (each)
	1st Paper	10%
	2nd Paper	20%
	Response Papers	10%

Participation: Since the format of this class is primarily discussion, you should come to class prepared to engage actively the theoretical works that we are discussing. To do well in the class, you must be an active member in class discussion. Some of the works are difficult and will require careful study and reflection. Don't worry if you don't understand fully before class, but make sure that you are thoroughly familiar with the reading.

Paper: Two papers are required, roughly 5 pages each. For the papers, you must engage psychoanalytic theory as it is disseminated in the thinkers that we are reading. Your papers can elaborate on an argument by a thinker or develop a criticism. You may also employ psychoanalytic theory for the interpretation of culture in your papers. Whatever tack you choose, your essays must have an argument and avoid summary or description.

Responses: You must write a one-page, single-spaced response paper for four different class meetings during the semester. Response papers should respond thoughtfully and critically to the works that we are reading in the course. Responses must have an argument; summary of a work that we are reading is not acceptable. Each response paper must be written on a different text—four responses, four different texts—and must be written while we are working on the text that you discuss. For instance, you *cannot* write a response on the *Introductory Lecture on Psychoanalysis* (which we are reading in the first week) in the final week of the semester. The response papers have due dates (as noted on the course schedule) but may be turned in any time before or on the due date.

Exams: There will be two exams for the course, a midterm and a final. Each will require students to demonstrate a grasp of the theoretical issues at issue in the course and familiarity with the texts that we are reading.

Late Work: Papers turned in late will be lowered one grading step for each day that they are late.

Class Schedule:

* Reading and writing assignments are *due* the day they are listed.

* Abbreviations: *=response paper due; **=paper due; ***=exam day

Jan	16	W	Introduction to course
	18	F	
	21	M	Martin Luther King Jr. Day – No class
	23	W	
	25	F	
	28	M	No class
	30	W	
Feb	1	F	
*	4	M	
	6	W	
	8	F	
	11	M	
	13	W	
	15	F	
	18	M	President's Day – No class
	20	W	
	22	F	
	25	M	
	27	W	
*March	1	F	
	4	M	
	6	W	
	8	F	
***	11	M	
	13	W	
**	15	F	
March 16 - 24: Spring break			
	25	M	English Department advising day – No class
	27	W	

	29	F	
* April	1	M	
	3	W	
	5	F	
	8	M	
	10	W	
	12	F	
	15	M	
	17	W	
	19	F	
	22	M	
	24	W	
	26	F	
* May	29	M	
	1	W	Course review

*** Final Exam:

** 2nd paper due at final exam time