

Hysteria as Discourse
Spring 2023
M/W 10-11:40
63 Fifth Ave room L105

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office hours: by appointment

As a descriptive and diagnostic term, “hysteria” has had a variegated history. From ancient Greek and Egyptian descriptions of hysteria (itself a Greek word that means “wandering womb”), which often treated it as a condition related to failures in reproduction and marriage; to 16th and 17th-century treatments of hysteria as a medical condition; to Sigmund Freud’s work on the etiology of hysteria as a psychosomatic affliction, hysteria has historically been linked to questions of femininity, sexuality, desire, the body, and repression. And yet more contemporary thinkers also theorize hysteria as a cultural discourse and political stance—that is, as a subjective position intimately related to the workings of power and knowledge—even as the term has dropped out of medical and therapeutic fields. In this course, we will understand hysteria as a speaking position taken up by both bodies and communities, and also as a kind of writing: a writing on the body and on the page. By reading theoretical and literary works that both thematize and exemplify the writing of hysteria, we will examine both the depiction and the performance of hysteria in literary, theoretical, and political texts, and we will ask such questions as: is hysteria a feminist or a misogynist cultural idea, or both? If hysteria is linked to femininity and sexuality, what does it also have to do with patriarchy and race? What does it have to do with community? What are the forms of writing that transmit the hysterical position, and what are its potentials and pitfalls?

Mon Jan 23 Mark S. Micale, “A Short ‘History’ of Hysteria” and “On the ‘Disappearance’ of Hysteria: A Study in the Clinical Deconstruction of a Diagnosis”*

History, Science, Feminism, Medicine

Wed Jan 25 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper”
<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/theliteratureofprescription/exhibitionAssets/digitalDocs/The-Yellow-Wall-Paper.pdf>
Elaine Showalter, “Hysteria, Feminism, and Gender”
<https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft0p3003d3&chunk.id=d0e14039&toc.id=d0e11152&toc.depth=1&brand=eschol&anchor.id=bkd0e14048#X>

Optional: Roy Porter, “The Body and the Mind, the Doctor and the Patient: Negotiating Hysteria”
<https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft0p3003d3&chunk.id=d0e11158&toc.depth=1&toc.id=d0e11158&brand=eschol>

Psychoanalysis: Freud

- Mon Jan 30 Sigmund Freud, "Observation of a Severe Case of Hemi-Anaesthesia in a Hysterical Male"* (1886)
Freud, "Hysteria"* (1888)
Josef Breuer and Freud, *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), the case of Elisabeth von R*
- Wed Feb 1 Freud, "On the Psychological Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena"* (1893)
Freud, "The Aetiology of Hysteria"* (1896)
Freud, "Hysterical Phantasies and their Relation to Bisexuality"* (1898)
"Dora" (1905)
- Mon Feb 6 Freud, "Dora" (1905)
- Wed Feb 8 Lacan, "Intervention on Transference"*
Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clement, "The Guilty One," "Sorceress and Hysteric," "Culture and Repressive Structures," "Signs and Marks: The Theater of the Body," and "The Untenable"* (in *The Newly Born Woman*)
Recommended:
Steven Marcus, "Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History"*
Jacqueline Rose, "Dora: Fragment of an Analysis"*
Neil Hertz, "Dora's Secrets, Freud's Techniques"*
Jane Gallop, "Keys to Dora"*
(all in *In Dora's Case*, ed. Bernheimer and Kahane)
- Mon Feb 13 Freud, "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" (1925) *
Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" (1924)*
Freud, "Female Sexuality" (1931)*
- Wed Feb 15 Henry James, "The Turn of the Screw"
- Wed Feb 22 James, "The Turn of the Screw"
Shoshana Felman, "To Open the Question," "Turning the Screw of Interpretation" (p. 94-119)* (in *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Felman; final pages in separate pdf under Felman)

Psychoanalysis/Discourse Theory: Lacan

- Mon Feb 27 Stijn Vanheule, "Capitalist Discourse, Subjectivity and Lacanian Psychoanalysis"*
Russell Grigg, "Beyond the Oedipus Complex" in *SIC 6**
Mark Bracher, "On the Psychological and Social Functions of Language: Lacan's Theory of the Four Discourses"*

- Wed Mar 1 Lacan, *Seminar XVII*, “Production of the Four Discourses” and “The Master and the Hysteric”*
- Mon Mar 6 Gabriella Ripa di Meana, *Figures of Lightness: Anorexia, Bulimia and Psychoanalysis* p. 1-45*
Paul Verhaeghe, *Does the Woman Exist? From Freud’s Hysteric to Lacan’s Feminine* (excerpts)*
- Wed Mar 8 Carmen Maria Machado, “The Husband Stitch,” “Inventory,” “Mothers,” “Real Women Have Bodies”
- Mon Mar 20 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, “From the Author” and Books 1-2
- Wed Mar 22 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* Book 3-Book 4 Ch.4
- Fri Mar 24 Papers due**
- Mon Mar 27 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* Book 4 Ch. 5-Book 5
- Wed Mar 29 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* Book 6-Book 8 Ch. 2
- Mon Apr 3 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* Book 8 Ch. 3-Book 9 Ch. 4
- Wed Apr 5 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* Book 9 Ch. 5-Book 10
- Mon Apr 10 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* Book 11
- Wed Apr 12 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* Book 12
- Mon Apr 17 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* Epilogue
Freud, “Dostoevsky and Parricide”*

Hysterical Narrative/“Écriture Feminine”

- Wed Apr 19 Ann Rosalind Jones, “Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of ‘Écriture Feminine’”*
Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa”*
Luce Irigaray, “This Sex Which Is Not One” and “Another ‘Cause’—Castration”*
Julia Kristeva, “Women’s Time”* (20 pp)
Elaine Showalter, “On Hysterical Narrative”*
- Mon Apr 24 Clarice Lispector, *The Hour of the Star*

Hysteria and Race

Wed Apr 26 Laura Briggs, “‘The Race of Hysteria: ‘Overcivilization’ and the ‘Savage’ Woman in Late Nineteenth-Century Obstetrics and Gynecology’”*
Frank Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* Ch. 1-2*

Mon May 1 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* p. 4-75

Wed May 3 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* p. 76-158

Mon May 8 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* p. 159-235

Wed May 10 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* p. 236-end

Hysteria and the Group

Mon May 15 Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture*
(excerpts)*
Steven Millhauser, “Dangerous Laughter”*

Wed May 17 TBD

Fri May 19 Final papers due

Texts:

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (Picador)

Sigmund Freud, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, Touchstone (Simon & Schuster)

Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw & In the Cage*, The Modern Library, 2001

Clarice Lispector, *The Hour of the Star* (New Directions Books)

Carmen Maria Machado, *Her Body and Other Parties* (Graywolf)

Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (Vintage)

*Texts marked with an asterisk are available under “Files” on Canvas

Course Requirements

Class Participation

It is your responsibility to read the works carefully and come to class alert, on time, and prepared to discuss the texts. Please print out any materials in advance (and read with a pen, and underline passages) rather than bringing your computer or other device into class. If you must consult your device, it should be only to read passages; emailing or surfing the internet is not permitted (and is extremely easy to catch).

Papers

There will be one (5-7 pp.) paper, due March 24, and one (8-10 pp.) paper, due on May 19, both at 9am to my email.

“Self-History”

Throughout the semester, I would like you to keep a journal, in which you write about yourself and your understanding of your own life in response to the material that we will be reading. Write your personal associations to the material according to your own experience of the questions that the course is raising around the body, mastery, patriarchy, gender, race, group life, the subject and/versus the institution, and note down if/how the reading has influenced your thinking about this experience. Once per week, before the Wednesday meeting of the class, you should either send me an excerpt from this journal, or post it on the discussion board.

Student teaching

Once throughout the course of the semester, each student will have the opportunity to teach the class for 15 minutes. Specifics for this assignment will be discussed during the first class.

Grading Breakdown:

Attendance, Class Participation, Self-History: 35%

Student teaching: 15%

Paper 1: 20%

Paper 2: 30%

Class Policies**Lateness**

Paper grades will be lowered by 1/3 of a grade (ie, B to B-) for every day they are late.