

Mental Health and Emotional Regimes

Com 10L – Master Authors

People tell me it's a sin
to know and feel too much within
- Bob Dylan

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Office Hours:

Mondays: 4:30- 5:30pm

Tuesdays: 4:30- 5:30pm

Course Description:

The pairing of strong feelings and mental illness occupies the center of much modern literature. In the early 20th century, High Modernist novels from Woolf to Kafka charted explorations of 'the interior', often expressing thoughts and feelings that were new, abnormal, and shocking. At the beginning of the 21st century, scholars in many disciplines spoke of an 'affective or emotional turn', sparking renewed debate over the relationship between thinking and feeling. Today, sensitivity has progressed towards 'mental health' as a site of variation and in need of tolerance. However, an increasing tendency to oppose emotion to cognition, as the effect of either social or physiological causes, aligns with a contemporaneous rise in what the philosopher Martin Heidegger called anxiety ('*Angst*') at the knowledge that my feelings are not mine to control (experienced as either horror or freedom). Does emotion in fact lead us away from thought, or merely away from an 'instrumental reason' that has come to rule the day? Literature would appear to be an ideal object through which to test the latter claim, due to its affinity for layered structures of feeling, the importance of intimacy and social bonds to the narrative arc, and its propensity for realizing depth through representations of the full range of emotions.

In this course, we will read critical essays from Marxist and feminist traditions that articulate how emotion is socially and historically structured. At stake in such writing is the notion of an 'emotional regime' proper to each society's mores, exclusions, and demands for social reproduction. Alongside these essays, we will read four recent novels of short length which narrate various situations (exile, marriage, institutionalization, depression) inducing of emotional distress. An organizing question for the course might be: Can we develop a vocabulary and discourse that posits emotions as both the result of social determination as well as the passage through which subjects pursue collective fulfillment, transformation, and liberation? Class time will be divided between writing responses, instructor lectures, and group discussion. Reading load will be moderate, approximately 100 pages per week. Students should read for comprehension and pleasure, as well as highlight key sections, take notes, and be prepared to participate in class discussions.

Class Schedule:

- (Week 1) Tues, 1/10 Introductions
Assignment: David Foster Wallace, “The Depressed Person”
JD Taylor, “Anxiety Machines: Neoliberal Capitalism, Depression, and Continuous Connectivity” (link in Chat Room)
- (2) Tues, 1/17 Tuesday Film Screening: *United Red Army (2007)*
Assignment: *Norwegian Wood* pp. 3-166
Emma Dowling, “Love’s Labor’s Lost: The Political Economy of Intimacy” (link in Chat Room)
- (3) Tues, 1/24 Excerpt on Mark Fisher and Capitalist Realism
Reading assignment: *Norwegian Wood* pp. 167-296
Will Davies: “Social Media, Sharing, and the Happiness Industry”
- (4) Tues, 1/31 Reading assignment: *Wide Sargasso Sea* all
- (5) Tues, 2/7 Reading assignment: “Diary of a Madman” Lu Xun
Jameson, ‘3rd World and National Allegory’
Shulamith Firestone, *Airless Spaces*, ‘Hospital’, ‘Post-Hospital’
Sianne Ngai on Firestone
- (6) Tues, 2/14 Reading assignment: *Airless Spaces*, finish
Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (selections from pt. 1)
- (7) Tues, 2/21 Film Screening: *Side Effects (2013)*
Reading Assignment: Benjamin Noys, “Legacies of Anti-Psychiatry”
Noys, “Intoxication and Acceleration”
John Foot, “Taking over the Asylum: on Franco Basaglia”
- (8) Tues, 2/28 Reading assignment: Clarice Lispector, *Água Viva*
Beverly Best, “The Structure of Feeling of Reality TV”
- (9) Tues, 3/7 Reading assignment: Clarice Lispector, finish
Selections from *Minima Moralia* (pts 2 & 3)
Film: *A Question of Silence (1982)*, Marleen Gorris

(10) Tues, 3/14 Conclusion

Required Texts:

Texts are available in the campus bookstore. Note that there may be other texts listed for this course, but we are only using the 4 listed here.

Other books and essays will be posted to the Canvas course site Files tab.

<u>Author</u>	<u>Title</u>
Jean Rhys	<i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i> (1966)

Haruki Murakami	<i>Norwegian Wood</i> (1987)
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Shulamith Firestone	<i>Airless Spaces</i> (1998)
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****Clarice Lispector	**** <i>Água Viva</i> (1973)
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(Due to my mistake, this title will not be available until February. You may also purchase it on Amazon.)

Grades and expectations:

Com 10 is a 2-unit, pass/no pass course. Your primary responsibility is to complete the weekly readings. Short quiz responses will allow me to verify that the reading has been done, and if it is not, you will not pass the class. However, they will not be challenging if you have read, and are intended to give you a chance to write thoughtfully about problems related to the texts.

The classroom is an open space for a free exchange of ideas. Other than the requirement that you are prepared, there will be no evaluation of any opinions and thoughts shared.

Disclaimer/tolerance:

The material for this class in a basic way will challenge us all to think in new ways and to confront difficult and uncomfortable ideas. This will require both a practice of intellectual flexibility, as well as the ability to empathize across difference. We will seek to understand the logic and reason behind taboo actions, behavior socially inscribed as unhealthy or ultimately abject. For this, it will be of great benefit to extend your sensitivity generously to the characters in the literature, as well as to each other.