

From Emotions to Affect: Modern and Contemporary Women's Writing in English

Instructor: Sezen Ünlüönen
unluonen@g.harvard.edu

For centuries, reason was equated with men, while emotion was equated with women and consequently denigrated. The contemporary recognition of our emotional states as increasingly important ~~[or central to x,y,z]~~ has also intensified interest in the burgeoning field of affect studies: instead of seeing emotion (and affect) as unruly, irrational and in need of discipline, feminist and queer theorists argued that emotions and affects provide crucial information about our world and how to situate ourselves in it.

Taking emotions and affects seriously, this course aims to answer three interrelated questions:

1. What are emotions and affects?
2. How do contemporary women writers, who have historically been associated with emotion, actually represent emotion and affect in their writing?
3. Do emotions and affects offer a meaningful paradigm to make sense our contemporary experience (across issues of economics, politics or environment, for instance)?

The three units of this course correspond roughly to these three questions, and although the literary texts are ordered chronologically within the units, this is a course organized around conceptual questions rather than chronology.

Our most important theoretical orientation is “affect theory.” Throughout the semester, we will be studying recent work in affect theory, so that you can be fluent in this relatively new school of thought, which increasingly becomes a crucial interpretive framework, not just for contemporary texts, but also earlier authors like Shakespeare and Austen.

Chronologically, we begin with two authors, Mansfield and Woolf, who were born in the nineteenth century, and who came of age at a time of intense social and political change when women's suffrage, their access to higher education and professions were matters of intense debate. Women's emotional and nervous states were often a crucial part of these debates. We then move to mid-century, and a new set of issues made visible by second-wave feminism: questions of sexuality, same-sex desire, and embodiedness for which emotions and affects become valuable indexes. In the final third of the course, we revisit similar questions with the help of more recent theories of race, postcolonialism, gender and sexuality. On the one hand, we look at how the intersection of class, gender, race, and national origin inflects experiences of emotions and affects, as well as what kinds of political agency can be generated around emotions and affects. At the same time, we reach a moment when ideas of gender and sexuality organized around strict binaries themselves come into question as organizing principles of social life. Affect theory will help us grapple with this transition as well.

Course Goals

At the end of this course, you will be able to develop your own answers to the questions listed above, informed by some of the most important feminist, and queer theorists of our times.

You will also be able to formulate a research question, identify relevant secondary sources, and to put them in dialogue with your own ideas, as well as writing with greater clarity and authority.

Assignments

Short paper (15%): Due at the end of Week 3

Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography (10%): Due at the end of Week 8

First Draft (at least 15 pp.) (15%): Due at the end of Week 10

Final Paper (40 %): Due during the reading week

Participation and Mini Assignments (20 %): Doing the reading, participating in class discussions, attending meetings.

Required Texts

You are welcome to use any edition you choose for the following books. PDFs for the remaining readings will be uploaded to the course website.

The Garden Party and Other Stories, Katherine Mansfield

To the Lighthouse, Virginia Woolf

Nervous Conditions, Tsitsi Dangarembga

The Edible Woman, Margaret Atwood

Talented Mr. Ripley, Patricia Highsmith

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, Muriel Spark

I Love Dick, Chris Krauss

The Argonauts, Maggie Nelson

The Left Hand of Darkness, Ursula K. Le Guin

Lucy, Jamaica Kincaid

The Disaster Tourist, Yun Ko-Eun

Schedule

Unit I: Theoretical Groundwork

Week 1: Affect and Interpretation

The Garden Party and Other Stories, Katherine Mansfield

“Introduction” and “Feminist Attachments,” in *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed

“Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You,” Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

Week 2: Histories of Affect

To the Lighthouse, Virginia Woolf

“An Inventory of Shimmers,” Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg

“Understanding the Material Practices of Glamour,” Nigel Thrift

Week 3: Affect and the World

Nervous Conditions, Tsitsi Dangarembga

“The Autonomy of Affect,” Brian Massumi

“Anger and Space in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*,” Sue J. Kim

ASSIGNMENT 1: Discuss one of our primary texts in light of one of our secondary sources. How do both works throw light upon each other? (4-5 pp.)

Week 4: Affect and Body

The Edible Woman, Margaret Atwood

“Introduction” and “Two Girls, Fat and Thin,” in *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant

“*The Edible Woman*: the Psychology of Early Second-Wave Feminism,” Fiona Tolan

ASSIGNMENT 2: Meet with me individually to determine the work you will write your research paper on. You can write about a work from our syllabus, or a different work that fits our course's central themes and ideas, but you are required to have a conversation with me about your final project.

Unit II: Ugly Feelings

Week 5: Library Visit & Research Training Session

ASSIGNMENT 3: I encourage you to use this week to read the primary work you'll be researching, so that you can have a more informed conversation with the library liaison about what Harvard libraries have to offer for *your* research project.

*****Next week, you'll also be pitching for what we should read for the final week of the class. You are welcome to pitch the work you plan to write on.

Week 6: Envy

Talented Mr. Ripley, Patricia Highsmith

“Envy and Gratitude,” Melanie Klein

“Envy,” Sianne Ngai

“Tom Ripley, Queer Exceptionalism, and the Anxiety of Being Close to Normal,” Victoria Hesford

*****During class: Short pitches for what we should read for the final week of the class (nothing formal or onerous, 1-2 minutes max.) and voting

Week 7: Desire and Attachment

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, Muriel Spark

“Uses of the Erotic,” Audre Lorde

“No One is Sovereign in Love,” Lauren Berlant and Michael Hardt:

<http://nomorepotlucks.org/site/no-one-is-sovereign-in-love-a-conversation-between-lauren-berlant-and-michael-hardt>

“Eccentricity as Feminism,” Olga Tokarczuk

Week 8: Anger

I Love Dick, Chris Krauss

“Anger,” in *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, edited by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank

ASSIGNMENT 5: Prospectus & Annotated Bibliography

Week 9: Shame

The Argonauts, Maggie Nelson

“The Bear Came Over the Mountain,” Alice Munro

“Shame on You,” Leo Bersani

“Embodied Shame and the Resilient Ethics of Representation in Alice Munro’s ‘The Bear Came Over the Mountain,’” Ana María Fraile-Marcos

Unit III: Politics of Affect

Week 10: Politics of Dissatisfaction

The Left Hand of Darkness, Ursula K. Le Guin

“The Twin Sources of Realism: Affect, or, the Body's Present,” Fredric Jameson

“Introduction,” in *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai

ASSIGNMENT 6: FIRST DRAFT DUE

Week 11: Workplace and Emotional Labor

Lucy, Jamaica Kincaid

“Preface” and “Gender, Status, Feeling,” in *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Arlie Russell Hochschild

“Invisible Memories: Black Feminist Literature and Its Affective Flights,” Jamie Ann Rogers

Week 12: Environmental Panic

The Disaster Tourist, Yun Ko-Eun

#Misanthropocene: 24 Theses, Joshua Clover and Juliana Spahr:

<https://communeeditions.com/misanthropocene/>

American Psychological Association’s Report on “Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications, And Guidance” (March 2017), esp. “Eco-Anxiety” pp. 28-30.

“What Affects are Good For,” Michael Hardt

Optional: *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, Amitav Ghosh (selections)

Week 13: Student Selection

ASSIGNMENT 7: FINAL DRAFT DUE

(Nota Bene: Dr Alexandra Kingston-Reese’s “Bad Feelings” course helped me organize weeks on “Shame” and “Environmental Panic.”)

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), academic collaboration and external sources should be always cited.

Attendance: Your attendance in tutorial is vital to your own success as well as to the success of the class as a whole; so is your attendance in Junior Tutorial General Meetings and at other required events. 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, being late really disrupts the work we’re doing together: 2 lates = 1 absence. If you have extenuating circumstances, you must communicate with me in a timely manner so that we can discuss how to deal with it.

Due Dates & Late Grades: Unless otherwise specified, assignments are due by 11:59pm on the date listed in 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. If you expect you will need an extension, please talk with me.

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. 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.”*