

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

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Course Design: Sezen Ünlüönen

The contemporary recognition of our emotional states as increasingly important has 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 of 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 *embodiment* 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

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| • Short paper | (15%) | Due end of Week 3 |
| • Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography | (10%) | Due end of Week 8 |
| • First Draft (Min. 15 pp.) | (15%) | Due end of Week 10 |
| • Final Paper | (40 %) | Due Reading Week |
| • Participation and Mini Assignments | (20 %) | |

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
To the Lighthouse
Nervous Conditions
The Edible Woman
Talented Mr. Ripley
Matrix
I Love Dick
The Argonauts
The Left Hand of Darkness
Lucy
The Disaster Tourist

Katherine Mansfield
Virginia Woolf
Tsitsi Dangarembga
Margaret Atwood
Patricia Highsmith
Lauren Groff
Chris Krauss
Maggie Nelson
Ursula K. Le Guin
Jamaica Kincaid
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

ASSINGMENT 1: Choose **one primary text** and **one secondary text** from Weeks 1-3. In placing these two texts into conversation with one another, this paper should consider a specific element of how each text illuminates the other, allowing you to discover and communicate something new about both. (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. Your paper can engage with 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: You are encouraged 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. **NB:** Next week, you'll also be pitching for what you think we should read for the final week of the class. You are welcome to pitch the work you plan to write on for your final paper.

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

- *Matrix*, Lauren Groff
- *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, dir. Ronald Neame (1969)
- “Uses of the Erotic,” Audre Lorde
- “No One is Sovereign in Love,” 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 Sivan Tomkins Reader*, edited by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank

ASSIGNMENT 4: 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 5: FIRST DRAFT DUE – Min. 15pp.

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 Gosh (selections)

Week 13: Student Selection

ASSIGNMENT 6: FINAL DRAFT DUE

Note: Dr Alexandra Kingston-Reese’s course, “Bad Feelings,” informed the layouts for the weeks on “Shame” and “Environmental Panic.”

Policies

Accessibility - If you have any accessibility-related requests or concerns, please contact me as soon as possible to arrange any accommodations necessary. As per the Harvard AEO: "*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.*"

Collaboration - You are absolutely encouraged to talk with other students about the course and its readings, and to read each other's 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 - Absences for religious holidays or illness are excused but, where possible, please let me know as far in advance as you can. Persistent absence without documented reason will be reflected in your participation grade.

Participation - Productive and enjoyable classes are driven by the quality of everyone's participation. Please ensure that you have done the reading each week, are ready to share your thoughts and ideas, to hear those of your classmates, and that you have any assigned texts in hand.

Academic Integrity - Please ensure that you are familiar with the college's academic integrity policies (Harvard Honor Code etc.) and standards. If you have any questions or uncertainties about academic integrity issues, do not hesitate to contact me.

Emails - You can email me at any time, and I will always do my best to get back to you within 48 hours or the next business day for weekend emails.

Extensions - Extensions on assigned writing can be organized if deemed necessary, but please ensure that you contact me as soon as possible about arranging one.