

ENGL 7471: Forms of Fiction Strategies of Sentiment

Spring 2022

Tuesday 5:30-8:30pm

Mark Mayer - mmayer@memphis.edu

A creative investigation of how fiction manages and provokes emotion, both its characters' and our own. We'll survey and study the widely various formal strategies by which short stories and novels make us feel. We'll stop and examine the place and purpose of emotion within narrative, reflecting on our judgments of the line between sentiment and sentimentality, drama and melodrama. We'll think about the pleasures, perils, and politics of empathy. We'll tour genre-specific literary affects like *horror* and *thrill* and *comic rage*. Along the way, students will build a collaborative catalog of strategies of sentiment and write and present original fiction. This course will focus on the novel and short story but should benefit poets and essayists as well.

Guiding Questions:

- When and how does spare, even detached language provoke strong feeling?
When and how does "evocative" language evoke? Why do sentence rhythms seem to matter so much?
- How might we develop Danielle Evans's distinction between the "active plot" and "emotional plot"? How should sentiments move, shift, and alternate within a narrative? Do stories require a climax? What is a climax?
- Why and how do settings emote? Is the "pathetic fallacy" as bad as it sounds?
- What is the role and importance humor?
- What makes horror pleasurable and what ethics should guide fiction writers when we write about terrible things?

Course packet and reading list to include: Svetlanna Alexievich, Paul Beatty, Raymond Carver, J.M. Coetzee, Danielle Evans, Mavis Gallant, Rachel Greenwald Smith, Garth Greenwell, Kazuo Ishiguro, Taeko Kono, Victor LaValle, William

Maxwell, Scholastique Mukasonga, Claudia Rankine, Nathalie Sarraute, Elaine Scarry, W.G. Sebald, Terrence Tucker, Joy Williams, Richard Wright, and others.