

EGMT 1510: Engaging Aesthetics

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Love, Unrequited

Plato's Symposium asks us to imagine Hephaestus, god of metalwork, puzzled as he looks upon a pair of lovers locked in an embrace. "What is it you two really want from each other?" he asks, "To be two parts of the same whole and never separate?" He generously offers to weld the lovers together, so that the two may be forever one. No one, the text argues, would say yes to Hephaestus' proposal. The true aim of our desires, after all, isn't necessarily to fulfill them. What are the stakes of love, particularly of love that is never returned or fulfilled? Why is unrequited love often best conveyed through contradiction: burning ice, blissful torture, sublime pain? What aesthetic forms, expressions, and techniques are used to describe this internal psychic state to an external audience? With reference to a global set of works-- including poetry, novels, drama, and cinema-- this Engaging Aesthetics course will explore the long purchase of romantic longing as an aesthetic subject, and an ethical, epistemological, and social discourse across varied cultural and historical contexts.

Required Readings/ Viewings

All readings are due before their listed class date.

1 / W Mar 16. Introduction.

2 / M Mar 21. Love as Dialogue.

- *Symposium*, Plato, 1-47.

3 / W Mar 24. Love as Education.

- *Symposium*, Plato, 47-77.
- "Guigemar," Marie de France, *Lais*. (ca. late 12th century)

4 / M Mar 28. Courtly Love.

- "The Franklin's Tale," Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*. (ca. 1387)

5 / W Mar 30 Form and Feeling.

Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, Rime 140. (ca. 1370)

- Thomas Wyatt, "The long love that in my thought doth harbor" (1557)
- Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, "Love, that doth reign and live within my thought" (ca. 1543)
- William Shakespeare, Sonnet 130 (1609)
- Arabic ghazal by Hafez and others (14th century)

6 / M Apr 4. Love as Illusion.

- Selected Acts from *Peony Pavilion*, Tang Tianzu, (1598)

7 / W Apr 6. Scorned Love.

- Jean Racine, *Phedre* (1677), pg 18 - 79

8 / M Apr 11. Love as Torment.

- *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1744) Part One, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

9 / W Apr 13. Unrequited Modernity.

- *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1744) Part Two.

10 / M Apr 18. Race, Love, and (Im)possibility.

- *Cane*, Jean Toomer, (1923) Section One (from beginning to “Blood Burning Moon”)

A note: Cane invokes the frequent use of racial slurs. Toomer, a mixed-race African-American writer with a complex relationship towards his own racial identity and the country’s legacy of black enslavement, wrote in full awareness of the grotesque and abject force of slurs, and thus all of his language is reproduced as intended in the text.

11 / W Apr 20. The Unrequited Postcolonial.

- *Song of Lanino*, Otok p’Bitek. (1966)

12 / M Apr 25. The Impossible Cosmopolitan.

- *In the Mood for Love*, Wong Kar-wai (2000)

13 / W Apr 27. The Confessional Feminine.

- Sylvia Plath, “Daddy” (1962)
- Gwendolyn Brooks, “the mother” (1963)
- Wanda Coleman, “The Saturday Afternoon Blues) (1983)
- *I Love Dick*, Chris Kraus. 19 - 53 (1997)

14 / M May 2 The Digital-Lyrical.

- Spotify playlist. (various artists)
- “Cat Person,” Kristen Roupenian (2017)
- “Cat Person’ and Me,” Alexis Nowicki (2021)