

LS801 Passion and Reason, Spring 2022  
Harbour Centre, Simon Fraser University  
Wednesdays 6:30 to 9:20 pm  
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Humans have struggled through the centuries with understanding their lives, the limitations and glories of them, and the interplay between their desires and emotions with discipline, order, and certainties. While David Hume says in his well-known quote that “reason is and ought only to be the slave of passions” (*Treatise on Human Nature*), both reason and passion motivate human actions. The texts in this course provide students with ample opportunities to ponder these two inclinations.

#### Course requirements

Each student will lead one seminar presentation (about 15 minutes) on a specific text. The presentation should not simply rehash the reading. Rather, major themes of the work, as it relates to passion and reason, are to be highlighted. (Utilize short direct quotations and page numbers.) Finally, three to four succinct questions are to be provided for discussion.

When a text does not have a student presenter, all students are to prepare at least one question for group discussion.

All students are to be prepared for the sessions and participate in the seminars.

Toward the end of the term, students will discuss with the cohort the topic and direction of their term essay. The essay (12 to 15 pages) is due a week after our final seminar gathering.

- January 12<sup>th</sup>      *Song of Songs* (6<sup>th</sup> c. BCE) – here’s one translation  
<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/shir-hashirim-song-of-songs-full-text>  
Probably the only reason this sensual text was included in the Hebrew scriptures was because its authorship was attributed to King Solomon.
- Sun-Tzu, *The Art of War* (5<sup>th</sup> c. BCE)  
War is all about strategy and outmaneuvering one’s opponents.  
This classic Chinese text has been read through the centuries and has, in recent years, been studied by corporate “wannabes.”
- January 19<sup>th</sup>      Euripides, *Medea* (5<sup>th</sup> c. BCE)  
Medea and Jason have two sons. Medea finally ends up murdering their two sons. Is she a horrible woman and mother?
- Bhagavad Gita (late 3<sup>rd</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE)  
Life is about decisions and sacred obligation. Robert Oppenheim quoted from the *Gita* after watching the first atomic explosion in July 1945: “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.”

- January 26<sup>th</sup> Seneca [the Younger], *On the Shortness of Life* (1<sup>st</sup> c. CE)  
Life is short, so why do we waste so much of it?  
Augustine, *Confessions* (late 4<sup>th</sup> c. CE), Books 1 thru 9  
Augustine's early life was not exceptional, nor were his philosophical questions, yet his *Confessions* has become a cornerstone within Western literature.
- February 2<sup>nd</sup> Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisvatta* (8<sup>th</sup> c. CE)  
Mahayana Buddhist philosophy seeks enlightenment through an "awakening mind" which not only benefits the enlightened one but all living beings.  
*The Song of Roland* (11<sup>th</sup> c. CE)  
An extremely popular epic poem in the Middle Ages depicting a battle between Christians and Muslims in Spain. It is a tale that portrays good, evil, honour, treachery, pride, and stupidity.
- February 9<sup>th</sup> Rumi, *Love is a Stranger* (13<sup>th</sup> c. CE)  
A Sufi mystic and poet, Rumi was also a philosopher of "cosmic love."  
Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (early 15<sup>th</sup> c. CE), Part I  
Pizan is visited by Lady Reason who helps her understand that all the horrible things written about women by "wise" men are simply not true. Great women have existed.
- February 16<sup>th</sup> Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (16<sup>th</sup> c. CE)  
A report written to Prince Philip II about the mistreatment and slaughter of indigenous peoples by the Spanish conquistadors. All for "gold, glory, and god."  
Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal* (18<sup>th</sup> c. CE)  
An essay proposing a well-reasoned economic and social solution to the poverty of the Irish, and for the good of the entire country, of course. (Satire.)
- February 23<sup>rd</sup> Reading break – no seminar
- March 2<sup>nd</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* OR *On the Subjection of Women* (19<sup>th</sup> c. CE)  
The first reading is considered a foundational text weighing the rights of minorities versus majorities, authority and liberty. The second reading argues for equality between women and men.  
Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (19<sup>th</sup> c. CE)  
Not the first so-called "slave narrative" written by an African American, but one of the most moving testaments to the experiences of a woman slave.
- March 9<sup>th</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych* (19<sup>th</sup> c. CE)

- Ilych has led a conformist life seeking middle-class comforts, status, and security, but he is now dying. And (almost) everyone around him carries on as if nothing is happening.
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (19<sup>th</sup> c. CE)  
 Shortly after giving birth to a baby, the mother experiences a mental breakdown, and her doctor husband—a controlling know it all—insists on her taking a “rest-cure.” (Not good.)
- March 16<sup>th</sup> Sigmund Freud, *On Civilization and its Discontents* (20<sup>th</sup> c. CE)  
 Written in the aftermath of World War I and during the rise of overt anti-Semitism in Austria/Germany, Freud addresses the tensions between individuals and societies.
- Isak Dinesen, *Babette’s Feast* (20<sup>th</sup> c. CE)  
 It’s a French feast, one unlike the two austere sisters and their friends in their small, isolated Norwegian hamlet have ever experienced. (Nor could they have ever imagined.)
- March 23<sup>rd</sup> Mao Tse-Tung/Zedung, *The Little Red Book* (second ed., 1966)  
 One of the most published books of all time and central to China’s Cultural Revolution. Mao was no Confucius, but this collection of sayings imitated the style of Chinese philosophical teachings.
- Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (1970)  
 Arendt disagrees with Mao who had said that “power grows out of the barrel of a gun.” And she says much more that is still relevant today.
- March 30<sup>st</sup> Tomson Highway, *The Rez Sisters* (1986)  
 Seven women who live on a reserve in Ontario all dream of winning the “biggest bingo in the world” and do a road-trip to Toronto. The first Canadian theatre play with an indigenous cast.
- Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (2003)  
 An autobiographical graphic novel about growing up in Iran before, during, and after the Islamic Revolution, as well as the effects of the war with Iraq.
- April 6<sup>th</sup> Sayaka Murata, *Convenience Store Woman* (2016)  
 Keiko Furukura is a misfit, but she loves her part-time job at the Smile Mart where she knows what rules and procedures to follow. She’s happy without sex, marriage, or children.
- Jessica Bruder, *Nomadland* (2017)  
 Financial peril drives diverse individuals to take to the road. They do not consider themselves homeless, but rather, houseless, and they are the “workampers” of America’s 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.
- April 13<sup>th</sup> Final essays due