

Bibliotherapy Project

In 2019 third year Philosophy & Theology student Jack Sagar suggested College members form a reading list organised by topic, modelled on *The Novel Cure*, an A-Z bibliography of 'literary remedies for life's ailments', by Ella Berthoud and Susan Elderkin.

What follows are the submissions sent in by staff and students. The location of each book in the Library is given at the end of each entry.

Anxiety/Feeling different

Normal People Sally Rooney

Sally Rooney's *Normal People* is a romance, but more palpably an almost forensic examination of two people's minds, which sounds scary but is actually incredibly vulnerable and a liberating read. Rooney has a skill for capturing the kinds of strange and embarrassing thoughts we feel the need to hide and put them on display, making them more knowable and more manageable.

Maya Little

910 ROO 2 Contemporary Fiction

Boredom

One Hundred Years of Solitude Gabriel García Márquez

One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel García Márquez is a novel set in the town of Macondo and follows the family who founds it, the Buendías. For years, the town is isolated, having no contact from the outside world. The novel is considered the founding text of magical realism, a style of writing where the division between the supernatural and the mundane is unclear. German art critic Franz Roh used the term 'magic realism' to emphasize how fantastical and strange normal objects can appear in the real world when you stop to observe them. If you feel worn down by the quotidian, repetitive humdrum of your life, this text allows you to see the little pockets of magic present in the everyday.

Nazan Osman

9001 MAR 1 Contemporary Fiction

Boredom, Flatness

Still Life with Feeding Snake John Burnside

I found the poetry collection *Still Life with Feeding Snake* by John Burnside, especially

the first poem, *The Beauties of Nature and the Wonders of the World We Live in*, to be a fantastic expression of how the world can appear to us when we pay close attention. Very often I feel as though routine habits can strip my life of excitement and vividness, joys and anxieties repeat themselves, as though I'm watching the same TV show again and again. Poems like Burnside's can open a window into an everyday world, a world of colour, the play of light, people's faces, but a world seen for the first time, full of its primordial strangeness and wonder. It allows me to appreciate the joys of the most basic experiences, and make me grateful for my routines.

Aamir Kaderbhai

910 BURNSI 1 Contemporary Fiction

Career anxiety

Even Artichokes Have Doubts Marina Keegan

Keegan is a beautiful essay writer, and her *Artichokes* essay covers her musings on the corporate world that is heavily advertised to students, especially at top universities. I worry a lot about trying to pursue a career in the arts and how it's probably not viable. With warmth and a genuine care, Keegan makes a case for following your passions without ever sounding trite and whilst still acknowledging the great difficulties this brings with it.

910 KEE 1 Contemporary Fiction

Confusion of metaphysical ontology

Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Joe Mckinsey

1680 (4)

Different, Being

Convenience Store Woman by Sayaka Murata

I found the novel *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata particularly useful in reflecting on the way in which clinging to norms and trends can ward off feelings of anxiety. I sometimes feel as if my emotional judgments might be eschew ('What if I don't feel like other people do?' 'Should I feel this way?') and recognising the pressure that makes to conform, the way that central character does, has been liberating. Because whereas the central character has made it a conscious defence, bordering on an ironic form of authenticity, most of us do unconsciously and in a way that promotes a strange sort of ossification of the norms we all participate in.

Jack Sagar

9001 MURA 1 Contemporary Fiction

Dumped, being

The heart is a lonely hunter Carson McCullers

The story of a deaf mute and other isolated misfits in a 1930s American town. Strangely comforting to read about different kinds of loneliness. None good, but all normal.

910 MCCU 1 Contemporary Fiction

Gratitude

The Beauty of Everyday Objects Soetsu Yanagi

Allows people to view the world around them in a more nuanced and mindful way.

Leon Hughes

9000/F YAN

Homesickness

Brooklyn Colm Toibin

I guess it's a slightly obvious choice in this context, but I love *Brooklyn* by Colm Toibin for what it has to say about homesickness. Moving away from friends and family can be really difficult, and the main character Eilis (who emigrates from Ireland to America in the 1950s) definitely finds this, feeling like "a ghost" in a city where she doesn't know anyone, and no-one knows her. Despite this, she learns to cope and adjust to her new life, and eventually comes to love it as much as her old one. The film adaptation is also amazing, especially the last few lines, when Eilis is giving advice to another young immigrant and tells her: "you'll feel so homesick that you'll want to die, and there's nothing you can do about it apart from endure it. But you will, and it won't kill you." It's a tough lesson, but one that I feel Brooklyn teaches with lots of grace and hope- definitely a book that gives you its hand and helps you endure it too.

Brennig Davies

910 TOI 2 Contemporary Fiction

Intelligence

Flowers for Algernon Daniel Keyes

Nothing will make you understand that being smart is not the most important thing in the world than this elegiac masterpiece.

910 KEY 1 Contemporary Fiction

Interest in life, lack of

Blue Planet

Reading *The Blue Planet* or *The Blue Planet II* - the colourful pictures and vivid descriptions of plants/animals and the obstacles they overcome for survival remind me that there is a world beyond the one I normally see, and puts the challenges I face into perspective.

Available on BBC iplayer

Loneliness, Existential Crisis, Broken Heart, Lost Faith

The End of the Affair Graham Greene

I have never read a book with such vivid characters as this one. Reading it feels like climbing inside their minds and Greene is just so excellent at portraying broken and flawed people. The story follows Maurice whose affair with a married woman called Sarah has just ended. Sarah has left him with no explanation and he is consumed by pain, jealousy, obsession, heartbreak. Greene writes the character so beautifully I think it would be a comfort to anyone who has known love and loss and all the ugly emotions which come with it. Maurice is pretty lost in terms of his own identity whilst experiencing all these negative feelings in the wake of his heartbreak. We are all changed by the tragedies we experience and this exploration of what it means to still be you when your heart and emotions are in turmoil and unrecognisable to you is both confronting but also reassuring in that it is relatable. The second half of the novel is from Sarah's perspective. Without wanting to spoil the plot, this half is more about faith and God and it completely blows out the narrative into a much larger sphere than the internal emotional drama of Maurice's life. I think Greene gives a really interesting take on religious faith which is helpful to anyone who feels theirs is lacking or has lost its authenticity. I read this book about 5 years ago now and I have never read another book like it.

Anna Jeffrey
910 GREE 4

Loneliness, Modern Dating, Pining for a relationship

Everything I Know About Love Dolly Alderton

This book is about love in so many different ways. It is autobiographical but because it is so open and honest I truly think everyone can learn something from it. Dolly talks about her experiences of love and dating from the start of her teenage years and all the way through her twenties. But there is also a heavy focus on relationships in terms of friendship and this was very powerful to me. She is very, very honest about all of her mistakes and flaws whilst trying to navigate through a modern love life and all the pressure that women face to settle down and find 'the one' or else they won't be complete. I was sceptical about reading it because the title made me

think it was going to be a soppy and sentimental book with nothing new to tell me that I hadn't already picked up from girl-power chick flicks and *Cosmo* articles. I will definitely read it again many, many times and I have recommended it to friends probably more than any other book. It made me laugh and made me cry a lot. I promise it will make you feel less lonely and teach you something new and give you a different perspective and lots to think about.

Anna Jeffrey

910 ALD 1 Contemporary Fiction

Lost, Feeling / alienated / homesick

In Search of Lost Time Marcel Proust

Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* is a book which seems to take forever to read and is likely to remain relevant for an entire lifetime of anyone who has read it once. The portrait of the seemingly conventional and unsurprising life of the main character makes one rethink what matters the most in our everyday life filled with all kinds of positive and negative emotions. In the busy study and social life we experience at university, time seems to pass too quickly for us even to reflect or notice any particular thing, and it is fairly common to feel lost at some point during the term. Proust brought forth in his work a reminder that it is through memories that we regain the tenderness of our lost time, through reflections we realise our growth and through life itself, together with all its bitterness and frustrations that we understand its significance. When we feel lost, or alienated, or homesick, just try to remember that all such emotions are worthwhile, once we look back at them years later. We should have the confidence to carry on.

Jack (Jiahe Zhu)

9001 PRO 1

Lost/ No Direction/ Uninspired by Life

The Alchemist Paolo Coelho

Brilliant story of the search for individual destiny in an uncertain world. Easy read too.

Josh King

9001 COE 1 Contemporary Fiction

Misogyny

Vagina Naomi Wolf

Extremely enlightening book that any person with a vagina should have the pleasure of reading.

Jess Hemsley

9082 WOL

Overwhelmed, feeling

The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency Alexander McCall Smith

I read this series. Each novel contains a mystery that seems difficult to tackle but is solved at the end, which gives me hope that the problems I face can also be resolved. The novels also depict the simplicity of life in Botswana and describe the struggles of the characters in a relatable and humorous way.

910 MCCA 1 Contemporary Fiction

Romantic rejection

Heartburn Nora Ephron

I cannot remember the amount of times I have given this book to my heartbroken friends. Autobiographical, it tells the story of famous film director Ephron leaving her husband journalist Carl Bernstein (after finding out he had been having an affair with their mutual friend) when she was 7 months pregnant with their second child. Ephron is the ultimate heroine and this book is hilarious, insightful and incredibly moving. It will fix your heart, or at least pass the time while it is broken. Ephron went on to become the 'founder' of the romcom, but her razor-sharp wit is at its best in this book. You will inhale it in a few hours, and go back to it again and again.

Lottie Moore

910 EPH 1 Contemporary Fiction

Sincerity

The Fall Albert Camus

A beautiful confession about how, as Camus puts it in an earlier work, there is something quite shameful about the only one being happy. It is about how being successful and virtuous in the eyes of an imperfect society is to be corrupt - the story of a successful and hedonistic lawyer whose own narcissism and thoughtlessness resulted in a woman's life being lost. *The Fall* is his confession, and his invitation for us all to be better.

9001 CAM 3

Winter blues

My Family and Other Animals Gerald Durrell

Escaping to the sunny island of Corfu with the Durrells helps ease the gloom of the dark winter months in the north.

Suzy Cripps

910 DURR 1 Contemporary Fiction

Writing

Letters to a Young Writer Colum McCann

This beautiful book, that contains short passages on different problems and pieces of wisdom, is an essential guide to anyone at Mansfield considering writing professionally or academically but is nervous and lacking guidance and hope.

910 MCCAN 1 Contemporary Fiction

If you have a recommendation that you would like us to include in this list,
please email: library@mansfield.ox.ac.uk