

Wednesday 29 November 2017  
4.00pm – 5.30 pm Highfield 85/2213

## Narratives and Depression: Representations of male mental health

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Dr Christina Wilkins - University of Southampton



Narratives of depression are most commonly the remit of the female perspective; the most famous examples of the genre such as *The Bell Jar*, *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *Girl, Interrupted*, are all focused on women's experience. Yet, men are over three times more likely to commit suicide in the UK, and the male suicide rate has risen in the last decade. There have been a number of literary representations of male mental health published in the last few years that attempt to capture the male experience. One of these is Hanya Yanigahara's *A Little Life* (2015) which positions a male struggling with depression, self-harm and suicidal ideation as protagonist. But how far can narratives go in exploring the nature of depression? Stories of depression, according to Hilary Clark, "reproduce a dominant order that emphasizes certain identities (healthy or physically ill) and marginalizes others (mentally ill)". This paper examines whether the novel reinforces stereotypes of depression through the narrative structure, and compares the literary exploration of depression to Freudian case studies. Does literature provide a psychoanalytic understanding of mental illness or does it hinder understandings of mental illness through the quest to 'uncover' the origins of illness? This paper seeks to answer whether the uncommon male story progresses or merely 'reproduces' understandings of male mental illness through an exploration of the text alongside a wider discussion of male mental illness and literature.

**Biography:** Christina Wilkins is an Early Career Researcher in the field of medical humanities. She has a PhD from the University of Southampton. She currently teaches at the University of Winchester and is a Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Southampton. Her research interests are male depression and suicide, contemporary psychoanalysis, trauma and popular culture.

Please join us for the seminar and discussion

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