

SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS

Voyage: *Spring 2013*

Discipline: *English*

ENGL 3559: *Illness Narratives*

Division: *Upper Division*

Faculty Name: *David B. Morris*

Pre-requisites:

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Medicine, as a cultural force that shapes individual lives, today holds a centrality comparable only to theology in the Middle Ages. In 2001 healthcare costs accounted for 14.1% of the U.S. total output of goods and services (GDP). Expenditure so vast suggests that healthcare systems have a massive, often unseen impact upon cultures and lives. What happens in different cultures when a person passes into the kingdom of the ill? What specific historical significance accrues to certain diseases such as TB, cancer, or HIV/AIDS? How is the individual experience of illness constituted in part through an impersonal field of caregivers, insurance companies, lawyers, advertisers, and policy makers? When do everyday medical events such as pain or end-of-life care raise ethical issues as significant as the outcry surrounding abortion, cloning and stem cell research? Where does medicine stand in relation to the postmodern culture of gym-fit, surgically enhanced bodies? The ultimate aim of the course is, through narrative, to explore illness as constructed at the intersection of biology and culture.

Illness Narratives is an exploration of how humans have represented their relationship to illness (and, indirectly, to health). Patients, in the developed world, have increasingly claimed a voice in describing the experience of illness and in wresting illness away from the exclusive province of medicine. Doctors too have recently and self-consciously reclaimed the ancient tradition of physician-writers, adding their own narrative voices. But, beyond the individual voices of doctors and patients, medicine as system—articulated through treatises, textbooks, and clinical practices—also authors its own changing “narratives” of illness. These narratives of course usually focus on causes and on treatments, but medicine’s stories of illness are finally no less narrative despite the technical language and science-based methods. And medicine in non-Western and less developed regions often tells a very different story than the standard biomedical narrative. We will examine how various writers and systems describe the human encounter with illness, across cultures and across times, in forms ranging from memoir to film to treatises.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The overall aim is to develop knowledge, skills, and experience that help you understand the multiple ways in which narrative intersects with human illness and health. We will also apply such knowledge, skills, and experience to our encounter with various non-Western (but often globalized) attitudes toward illness and health. The course also aims to improve your skills as a writer through short writing assignments and to develop your abilities as a participator in small group discussions and/or projects. There will be a term project, as well as regular 2-page writing assignments and small group projects designed to focus explorations at our various ports.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

AUTHOR: Roose, Diana Wickes
 TITLE: Teach Us To Live: Stories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki
 PUBLISHER: Intentional Productions
 ISBN #: 096 480 428X
 DATE/EDITION: 2007
 COST: \$15.95

AUTHOR: Yolen,
 TITLE: The Radiation Sonnets
 PUBLISHER: Algonquin Books
 ISBN #: 156 512 4022
 DATE/EDITION: 2003
 COST: \$14.95

AUTHOR: Fadiman, Anne
 TITLE: The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down
 PUBLISHER: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux
 ISBN #: 037 4525 641
 DATE/EDITION: 1998
 COST: \$9.58

AUTHOR: Styron, William
 TITLE: Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness
 PUBLISHER: Ballantine Books
 ISBN #: 06796 43 524
 DATE/EDITION: 2007
 COST: \$10.85

AUTHOR: Lahiri, Jhumpa
 TITLE: Interpreter of Maladies
 PUBLISHER: Mariner Books
 ISBN #: 0395 927 20X
 DATE/EDITION: 1999
 COST: \$10.17

AUTHOR: Woolf, Virginia
 TITLE: On Being Ill
 PUBLISHER: Paris Press
 ISBN #: 978-1-930464-13-1
 DATE/EDITION: 2012 - Paperback

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE

I. Introduction: Narrative Medicine meets Global Health (A1 – A4)

- A-1 Introduction: Narrative vs. Fiction
- A-2 Charon, "Narrative Medicine" (pdf)
- A-3 Woolf, On Being Ill
- A-4 Sontag, Illness as Metaphor (pdf)

II. Approaching Japan: West Meets East (A5 – A12)

- A-5 Roose, Teach Us To Live: Stories from Hiroshima and Nagasaki
- A-6 Yolen, The Radiation Sonnets

III. Illness and Culture: A Model

- A-7 Film, *Departures*, director Takita
- A-8 Fadiman, The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down
- A-9 Fadiman, The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down
- A-10 Film: *Sympathy*, director Chan-wook Park

IV. Approaching India: *Interpreting (& Addressing) Maladies*

- A-11 Farmer, Infections and Inequalities (pdf)
- A-12 Lahiri, Interpreter of Maladies

IV. Postcolonial Illness (A13 – A17)

- A-13 McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term *Post-colonialism*" (pdf)
- Vaughan, "Colonial Power and African Illness" (pdf)
- A-14 Davis, Planet of Slums (pdf)
- A-15 Adichie, "The danger of a single story" (pdf)
- A-16 Nolen, 28: Stories of AIDS in Africa (pdf)
- de Gelder. "Ways of Dying" (pdf)
- A-17 Makuchi. "Slow Poison" (pdf).

V. Heading Home: Global Perspectives on Western Illness (A18 – A20)

- A-18 Film: *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, director Schnabel
- A-19 Styron, *Darkness Visible*
- A-20 Rose Styron, "Strands"
- A-21 Film: *Contagion*, director Soderbergh
- A-22 Williams, "The Use of Force" (pdf) / Selzer, "Brute" (pdf)
- A-23 Selzer, "The Exact Location of the Soul" (pdf)
- Morris. "Unforgetting Asclepius" (pdf)

VII. Final Examination (A 24)

Questions and Assignments

The questions for each day grow directly from the assigned texts—and begin with making certain that students have read with full understanding and grasped the main points. Mini-lectures (meaning, instructor discourse punctuated with specific questions for discussion) will provide opportunities for emphasis and elaboration, and the mini-lectures will most often be accompanied by powerpoint slides, which will be posted online after class. Classes devoted entirely to writing will proceed in workshop fashion, with improvisational in-class exercises supplemented by small-group reading and discussion of student work-in-progress.

Major recurrent questions will focus on issues raised in the daily reading, which all concern various ways of constructing or understanding the human relation to illness. This relation, of course, must be understood with attention to the ways in which illness has been gendered, with attention to cultural and socioeconomic difference. Illness is understood and experienced very differently in different times and places. Many of the readings reflect a Eurocentric perspective, despite the many different points of view implicit in Euro-American thought, but the aim is not to focus on Western attitudes so much as to prepare students for their own encounters with Asian, Indian, and African traditions. Students will write extensively about what they encounter in non-Western cultures. In effect, they will be performing primary research or field work for this course every time they walk off the ship. Moreover, each student will commit—after in-person meetings with the professor—to a personal course project. Classroom questions and assignments will call attention to the specific features of the texts under analysis. The payoff will come as students complete their own course projects—which will ask them, in whatever specific topic they choose to pursue, to include an explicit awareness of their own socioeconomic and cultural and gendered relation to health and to illness.

I need to maintain leeway for ad hoc assignments that emerge directly from my own re-reading and preparations immediately preceding each class. I have never taught with a prefabricated list of questions because in my experience questions are most meaningful if students feel that the question links clearly and directly to issues arising within the classroom. These issues are therefore not entirely predictable, but I have prepared many pdf files of readings that I anticipate may prove relevant. My own method of teaching—although *method* is too grandiose and technical a term for what I practice—finds a rationale in Stephen Nachmanovitch's Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art (1991). There is a big difference between an unprepared teacher who is irresponsibly “winging it”—where discussion wanders and wobbles—and a well-prepared and experienced teacher who targets questions to emerging themes and who deliberately leaves room open for creative, ad hoc assignments that bring a subject to life by making it relevant to current work in progress. The final projects—for which students select the form and subject, with the help and approval of the instructor—will be worthwhile to the extent that students proceed in an improvisational spirit of openness and identify topics and forms that truly engage them. Term papers are of course welcome, but so are other alternatives that require equivalent work, learning, and serious engagement with concepts important both to the individual student and to the course.

FIELD WORK

FIELD LAB (*At least 20 percent of the contact hours for each course, to be led by the instructor.*)

A daylong tour and meeting with the founders and heads of Hands-On Saigon (a community-based outreach group actively engaged with programs pertaining to health and illness).

HANDS-ON SAIGON! (Sunday 17 February)

Hands-On Saigon! is a non-profit community organization that engages in a series of projects that take as their mission improving the health and well-being of children, of the elderly, and of minority populations, such as the Hmong people. We will meet with Project Director (and former SAS student) Deann Henry, starting at the Institute of Traditional Medicine. Ms. Henry is arranging encounters with local people, the details of which are still under negotiation. Expect some surprises! The encounters will provide maximum opportunity for you to ask questions that pertain directly and indirectly to our exploration of the narratives constructed around health and illness.

Vietnam, rebounding after a long history of war and suffering, is a country where as much as half the current population of 90.5 million live on less than \$2 a day, and many on less than \$1. There is still a great need for assistance for the poor, disadvantaged and disabled, in which Hands-On Saigon (HOS) has been active since 1996. Their programs, in numerous provinces of Vietnam, both north and south, have focused on the needs of some of the more overlooked and disregarded people; those in remote rural areas as well as some in the centers of the busiest cities. HOS current projects include, among others, helping Agent Orange victims, donating livestock to struggling families, harvesting rainwater, promoting computer literacy, supporting the children's cancer hospital, and providing free medical check-ups and medicine to ethnic minorities living in rural, difficult-to-access mountainous areas.

Our academic objective—based on the educational trio of related and at times compatible options, “knowledge-skill-experience”—is to share the experiences that Ms. Henry arranges and to learn from these encounters what specific or generic narratives emerge in a country where the basic needs for human health and well-being differ so markedly—or do they?—from the needs and narratives we learn to recognize in the West.

ATTENDANCE MANDATORY.

FIELD ASSIGNMENTS

Students will, on their return, document their daylong encounter with specific aspects of the international experience of illness and practice of health care.

Students will have the choice of submitting a detailed journal or a three-page paper. The evaluation of the journal and/or paper will include the following standards: appropriate length, substantial detail, significant insight, effective writing, and overall understanding of the specific components (indicated in writing in advance) that the field assignment is designed to address.

METHODS OF EVALUATION / GRADING RUBRIC

30%	Final project: Chosen with Consent of the Instructor
25%	Ad hoc writing & editing assignments
25%	Class participation*
20%	Final Examination

Class attendance and participation: Students must be present in class & on time, demonstrate adequate preparation (including *fully* completed reading and/or viewing assignments), perform well on in-class diagnostic quizzes, and participate *fully* in discussions and small-group projects.

RESERVE LIBRARY LIST

Frank, Arthur. The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Hunter, Kathryn Montgomery. Doctors' Stories: The Narrative Structure of Medical Knowledge. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

Morris, David B. The Culture of Pain. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

Radley, Alan. Works of Illness: Narrative, Picturing and the Social Response to Serious Disease. Ashby-de-la-Zouch, U.K.: InkerMen Press, 2009.

Stories of Illness and Healing: Women Write Their Bodies. Ed. Sayantani DasGupta & Marsha Hurst. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2007.

ELECTRONIC COURSE MATERIALS

A. Films

Contagion. Steven Soderbergh, director. 2011. Warner Brothers. 106 minutes.

Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance. Chan-wook Park, director. 2002. Language: Korean, subtitled. 129 minutes.

Departures. Yojira Takita, director. 2008. Language: Japanese, subtitled. 130 minutes.

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly. Julian Schnabel, director. 2007. Miramax. 112 minutes.

B. Texts

- Charon, Rita. "Narrative Medicine: A Model for Empathy, Reflection, Profession, and Trust." *JAMA*, 286, no. 15 (2001): 1897-1902.
- Davis, Mike. "Slum Ecology." *A Planet of Slums*. New York: Verso, 2006. Pp. 121-150.
- DasGupta, Sayantani and Marsha Hurst. "The Gendered Nature of Illness." *Stories of Illness and Healing: Women Write Their Bodies*. Ed. Sayantani DasGupta & Marsha Hurst. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2007. Pp. 1-7.
- de Gelder, Mieke. "Ways of dying: AIDS care and agency in contemporary urban South Africa." *Ethnography* 13 (2011): 189-212.
- Engel, George W. "The Need for a New Medical Model: A Challenge for Biomedicine," *Science* 196 (1977): 129-36.
- Farmer, Paul. "'The Vitality of Practice: On Personal Trajectories.'" *Infections and Inequalities: The Modern Plagues*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. "The Face." *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (1982). Trans. Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985.
- Linde, Paul R. *Of Spirits and Madness: An American Psychiatrist in Africa*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002.
- Makuchi. *Your Madness Not Mine: Stories of Cameroon*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999. Makuchi is the pen name for Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi.
- Morris, David B. "Un-Forgetting Asclepius: An Erotics of Illness." *New Literary History* 38, no. 3 (2007): 419-441.
- . "Narrative and Pain: Toward an Integrative Model." *Handbook of Pain and Palliative Care: Biobehavioral Approaches for the Life Course*. Ed. Rhonda J. Moore. New York: Springer, 2011. Pp. 733-751.
- Selzer, Richard. "Brute." *Letters to a Young Doctor*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).
- Williams, William Carlos. *Selected Poems*. New York: New Directions, 1985.
- . "The Use of Force" (1938). *The Doctor Stories*. Ed. Robert Coles. New York: New Directions, 1984.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**HONOR CODE**

Semester at Sea students enroll in an academic program administered by the University of Virginia, and thus bind themselves to the University's honor code. The code prohibits all acts of lying, cheating, and stealing. Please consult the Voyager's Handbook for further explanation of what constitutes an honor offense.

Each written assignment for this course must be pledged by the student as follows: "On my honor as a student, I pledge that I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment." The pledge must be signed, or, in the case of an electronic file, signed "[signed]."