Literature and Medicine: Corpus, Theory, Praxis (ENG6521HF)

Prof. Andrea Charise | Mondays 1pm-3pm in JHB 616, Fall 2019
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Course Description. This seminar is a critical introduction to the interdisciplinary field of literature and medicine: its key texts and issues, current conceptual frameworks, and contemporary scenes of practice. We will consider the basics of illness narratives (including thematics like pain, ethics, and the medical encounter), alongside distinctive formal conventions and genres (like memoir and creative nonfiction, physician writing, lyric, speculative fiction). We will also consider the implications of the past two decades' enthusiastic uptake of literary concepts by the health professions—"narrative" and "close reading" especially—for the purposes of enhancing clinical competencies like compassion, empathy, and the "humanizing" of medicine. How might we, as scholars of literary studies, better theorize the emergence of literary sensibilities in the twenty-first century clinic? Why would the deployment of literary concepts, tools, and methods constitute such a fraught moment in the historical debate regarding the value of the humanities?

This seminar's deliberate interweaving of literary writings with theoretical texts is intended to complement our ongoing consideration of praxis as it regards literature and medicine. To this end, students will also be provided the opportunity to develop transferable skills in "narrative medicine," a workshop-based, practical methodology that expands the purview—or pushes the limits—of contemporary literary studies. Although our readings will focus on contemporary Anglophone/North American writing, this course is also intended to serve as a more general introduction to literary "medical" or "health" humanities. Seminar participants are encouraged to make use of readings to further their own projects and field interests.

Learning Outcomes. In this course, you will:

- Acquire a critical grounding in the field known as health humanities, with a focus on representations of health and illness in contemporary Anglophone writing;
- Develop introductory skills in the practice of "narrative medicine";
- Professionalize through assignments that reflect real-world genres of evaluation;
- Formulate effective questions to help you produce thoughtful, relevant research at the graduate level;
- Gain an understanding of the pedagogical issues associated with teaching health humanities to undergraduates;
- Improve your ability to engage in meaningful intellectual collaboration and deliberation with your peers.

Required Texts:

- Jay Baruch, *Fourteen Stories: Doctors, Patients, and Other Strangers* (Kent State)
- Arthur Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, 2nd Ed. (Chicago)
- Rita Charon, *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness* (Oxford)
- Porochista Khakpour, *Sick: A Memoir* (Harper)
- Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Duke)
- Rawi Hage, *Cockroach* (Anansi)

Recommended:
Leslie Jamison, *The Empathy Exams: Essays* (Graywolf)
Rita Charon et al. *The Principles and Practice of Narrative Medicine* (Oxford)

Texts are available via the University of Toronto Bookstore. Additional materials listed below are available via Quercus under "Course Materials" (Q) or online (via links).

Quercus. Check Quercus and your university email account regularly for course documents, announcements, correspondence, links, etc.

Evaluation

Fixed Evaluation	50% (Participation, seminar presentation, short essay)
Variable Evaluation	50% (Teaching portfolio OR narrative medicine pilot program OR research essay: due December 11, 2019)

Detailed evaluation item descriptions and due dates follow below ("Methods of Evaluation"). Assignments submitted after the stated deadline will not receive comments. Assignments will not be accepted beyond one week after the due date without documented evidence of a major disruption to your work.

a) Fixed Evaluation:
The components in this section apply to all seminar participants. Taken together, they constitute 50% of your total course grade.

Participation (10%) Perfect attendance and intelligent, consistent participation are the lifeblood of any good graduate course. You have an important role to play in shaping our collective experience in the classroom. Please take that role seriously.

Seminar Presentation (20%; first-come-first-served signup by email Week 2). Give a 15-minute presentation on a primary text we are studying that day on any topic relevant to the themes of this course. You must indicate your top three (3) choices to me via email by 5:00 pm on September 16 (Session 2); presentation days will be assigned on a first-come-first-served basis. If I have not heard from you by the above date, I will randomly assign you a presentation day. Treat this presentation as if you are giving a short paper at an academic conference, but with one important difference: you can be sure that your audience will have read the work on which you are presenting.

Your presentation will include the following: evidence of close reading, germane references to secondary texts in health humanities, an engaging visual accompaniment (PowerPoint/Keynote recommended; bring your presentation on a USB), and discussion questions (posted to Quercus's "Discussion Board" no later than 12pm on the day *prior* to your presentation). You will be expected to lead the discussion following your presentation; if you are presenting on the same day as another seminar colleague, I recommend some light co-ordination of topic selection to avoid overlap in presentation material and discussion questions. For evaluation purposes, on the day of your presentation I will require you to submit to me a hard copy of your notes and an emailed copy of your digital presentation. Feel free to test-drive final project ideas.

Short Essay (20%; due October 21, session 6). Write a 1500-2000 word essay on any topic that engages the interests of this course. This could take the form of 1) a scholarly review of a book-length work relevant to health humanities (either on- or off-syllabus), 2) a more polemical—yet rigorously informed—"roundtable"-style position paper (see Session 2 readings for examples), 3) a review of or critical response to a relevant conference/symposium/exhibition, digital humanities project, or research tool that is germane to health humanities and the broader themes of this course in some way. I encourage you to be bold, creative, and/or challenging for this assignment; although you are not limited to working exclusively with a contemporary focus, I do expect your work to reflect the broader aims and objectives of this seminar. Again, feel free to test-drive final project ideas. A good guide for writing academic book reviews is available here: http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/book-review. Thinking ahead, you may wish to submit a revised version of your work for potential publication in a journal like *Literature and Medicine, Journal of Medical Humanities*, or *Synapsis* (which is especially welcoming of short-form submissions by graduate student writers).

***b) Variable Evaluation: Final Project* (due December 9)**

The items in this section are divided into three options: A, B, and C. Whichever option you choose (A, B, or C) constitutes 50% of your total course grade. You must indicate your chosen option to me via email by 5:00 pm on October 21 (Session 6). Barring

legitimate extenuating circumstances (such as illness or bereavement), the deadline for choosing your variable evaluation option is not open to negotiation. If I have not heard from you by the above date, I will randomly assign you an option.

OPTION A: TEACHING PORTFOLIO (50%)

Assemble a teaching portfolio on literature and medicine (i.e., a literary approach to health humanities) that contains the following:

- One (1) statement of teaching philosophy (800-1000 words) that outlines your vision for teaching health humanities at the undergraduate level;
- One (1) syllabus for a third-year course entitled "Introduction to Literature and Medicine"
- One (1) syllabus for a third-year, field-specific literature course (e.g., "Feeling Sick in Contemporary American Poetry") or one fourth-year literature seminar organized around a theme (e.g., "Queering Health")
- One (1) course rationale (1200-1500 words) that justifies, in specific detail, the choices you made in designing your two syllabi.

Each syllabus must include: a course description, learning outcomes, list of required texts, methods of evaluation, and reading schedule outlined by week (1-12). You are encouraged to incorporate any aspect of your coursework into any of your portfolio documents. Additional materials can include choice of literary or theoretical texts, critical frameworks for reading health and illness in literature, pedagogical strategies, and any other element that you feel would be useful in the creation of your portfolio.

OPTION B: NARRATIVE MEDICINE PILOT PROGRAM (50%)

Compose a six-week narrative training program on 1) a particular health-related topic (e.g., mental health, disability, empathy training, etc. etc.) for 2) a specific "user" group of interest to you (e.g., postsecondary students, older people, a particular kind of health/medical professional, etc. etc.) which contains the following:

- One (1) literature review (1500-2000 words) that assesses the published literature pertaining to narrative medicine/narrative training initiatives that concern your chosen user group. How has narrative medicine/narrative training more generally has been utilized by this group as reflected in the health literature? Depending on your chosen user group, you might have to broaden this to other cognate groups in order to situate your work. The purpose of this literature is to provide a strong sense of context for 1) the need for your initiative, and 2) a rationale for your approach to constructing the narrative training program.
- One (1) reading list (2-3 pages) of creative reading sources appropriate for the user group you have chosen. Each book/anthology included on the reading list should

be briefly annotated and, if it only contains a few poems/stories/items that would be appropriately matched to this user population, then a list of those specific works. Individual works can be listed separately with full citation materials for easy reference (including online links, if available).

- One (1) 6-session narrative training program "syllabus," organized by week, that includes specific creative readings and writing prompts for each session.
- A pilot program rationale (1000-1500 words) that that justifies, in specific detail, the choices you made in designing your program: pay special attention to issues regarding research ethics, preserving confidentiality, choice of topic/works/users and intervention setting.

See "Additional Narrative Training Materials" on Quercus under "Week 5" for a pilot program example; feel free to use these materials as a template.

OPTION C: RESEARCH ESSAY (50%)
Write an original research essay of roughly 5000-6000 words (17-20 double-spaced pages) inspired by our seminar's topic. You must focus on at least one primary text, ideally from our required reading list; however, I am also open to discussing (well in advance of the deadline) other texts or approaches that may be better suited to your research and/or professional interests. You are encouraged to use any aspect of your coursework as the starting point for your research essay.

Reading Schedule. I have chosen to front-load the course with an overview of canonical texts and thematic issues in literature and medicine, which will serve as the conceptual foundation for this course. Sessions 1 and 2 will be dedicated to developing this framework, but in Week 3 (i.e., Session 3) we will transition to more sustained case studies of creative and theoretical writing as our primary texts.

Session 1: September 9 [Seminar participants are asked to complete these readings in advance of the first seminar meeting.]
Topic: What Is Literature and Medicine?
Focal Question(s): How can we read for health and illness in literary content, genre, and textual form? Do health and illness (as content, themes, or more formally delineated textual features) manifest as an analytical category with features specific to contemporary Anglophone writing?

Required (Q):

- Virginia Woolf, "On Being Ill"

- Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller"
- Susan Sontag, "Illness as Metaphor", "AIDS and its Metaphors" (selections)
- Anatole Broyard, *Intoxicated by my Illness* (selection)
- Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals* (selection)
- Ann Jurecic, "Illness Narratives and the Challenge to Criticism"

Recommended (Q)*:*
Sontag, "Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors"; James, "A Lexicon for the Sick Room: Virginia Woolf's Narrative Medicine"; Pett, "Rash Reading: Rethinking Virginia Woolf's *On Being Ill*"; Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern"

Session 2: Sept 16 (last day to indicate Seminar Presentation choices)
Topic: Who is Literature and Medicine for?
Focal Question(s): How do the interdisciplinary stakeholders in this field define its value and purpose? What does writing on literature and medicine reveal about the (perceived) role of literature, the humanities, and the critic?

Required (Q):
- Abraham Verghese, "My Own Country: A Doctor's Story" (selection)
- Jay Baruch, "Creative Writing as a Medical Instrument"
- Sayantani Dasgupta, "Narrative Humility"
- Selections from *Ars Medica* (www.arsmedica.ca), *The Intima* (www.theintima.org), and *Synapsis: A Health Humanities Journal* (https://medicalhealthhumanities.com); explore these resources and pick out some relevant works to discuss based on your interests and our seminar discussions.
- Ann Jurecic, "Empathy and the Critic"
- Johanna Hedva, "Sick Woman Theory"
- Claudia Rankine, "The Health of Us"
- Michael Bérubé, "The Utility of the Arts and Humanities"

Recommended (Q)*:*
Hudson-Jones, "Why Teach Literature and Medicine? Answers From Three Decades"; Trautmann, "The Wonders of Literature in Medical Education"; Ousager and Johannessen, "Humanities in Undergraduate Medical Education: A Literature Review"; Belling, "Sharper Instruments: On Defending the Humanities in Undergraduate Medical Education"

Session 3: Sept 23
- Arthur Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, 2nd Ed. (Chicago)
- Jay Baruch, *Fourteen Stories: Doctors, Patients, and Other Strangers* (Kent State)

Session 4: Sept 30
- Arthur Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, 2nd Ed. (Chicago)
- Jay Baruch, *Fourteen Stories: Doctors, Patients, and Other Strangers* (Kent State)

Session 5: Oct 7
- Rita Charon, *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness* (Oxford)
- Adamson K, S Sengsavang, A Charise, S Wall, L Kinross, M Balkaran. "The Impact of Narrative Training as a Method to Promote Nursing Empathy within a Pediatric Rehabilitation Setting" (Q)

Recommended (Q):
Additional narrative training materials from Adamson et al.'s study (Q); Charise, "On Applying the Arts and Humanities in Austere Times" (chapter in progress for *The Routledge Companion to Health Humanities* – not for further circulation)

October 14: NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Monday

Session 6: Oct 21 (SHORT ESSAY DUE; last day to indicate Final Project option)
- Rita Charon, *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness* (Oxford)
- **Guest lecture** by award-winning author Damian Tarnopolsky (former Barbara Moon-*Ars Medica* Editorial Fellow, Massey College)

Recommended (Q):
Behrendt, "Narrative Aversion: Challenges for the Illness Narrative Advocate"; other readings possibly TBA.

Session 7: Oct 28
- Porochista Khakpour, *Sick: A Memoir* (Harper)

Recommended (Q):
Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (selections: Introduction, "Feel Your Way"; Chapter 7 "Queer Feelings"); Ahmed, "Multiculturalism and the Promise of Happiness"

November 4: NO CLASS – Fall Reading Week (St George)

Session 8: November 11

- Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Duke)

Recommended (Q):
Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)"

Session 9: Nov 18

- Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Duke)

Session 10: Nov 25

- Rawi Hage, *Cockroach* (Anansi)

Recommended (Q)*:*
Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (selection); Latour (see Week 1)

Session 11: December 2

- Rawi Hage, *Cockroach* (Anansi)

Session 12: December 9

- Biss, "The Pain Scale" (Q)
- Conclusion and collaborative work session.

Final Projects due by 5pm on Dec. 11, 2019, emailed to acharise@utsc.utoronto.ca.
I will acknowledge receipt. See notes under "Evaluation" for late policies.