

# Honoring the Stories of Illness

Interdisciplinary Approaches to Literature

ENGL 3325.W01, Fall 2019, Online

**Dr. Kelly L. Bezio**

Office: Classroom East 213C

Office Telephone: 361.825.3623

Skype: kellylbezio

Email: [kelly.bezio@tamucc.edu](mailto:kelly.bezio@tamucc.edu)

**Office Hours: By Appointment**

## Course Description

From Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to Fox TV's *House*, stories about mysterious patients and the doctors who tend to them have captivated audiences. What do the stories we create—about disability and disease, about who (and what) has the power to heal, about the fear of death and desire for transcendence—tell us about our culture, our history, and the experience of being human? This course invites students to explore these questions (and many more) through a series of themed units. Our overarching goal will be to become well-versed in the ways in which humanistic traditions—cultural, literary, and artistic—have been invested in representing illness and health and why. We will consider, on the one hand, how the terms “humanities,” “medicine,” and “culture” help to ground our critical perspectives in various fields of study, and, on the other hand, how each invites their own interrogation.

## Course Objectives

- Learn about health humanities methods
- Learn how to write and talk about illness and healthcare critically
- Learn how to use the humanities to improve healthcare outcomes

## Student Learning Outcomes

- Use writing and reading to articulate the meaning of health and illness in human cultures
- Define key health humanities methods and concepts
- Read texts more closely and analytically than at the start of the semester.

## How You Will Earn Your Grade & Assignment Descriptions

- Instructional Activities and Readings, completed weekly to learn class material, assessed pass/fail (50%)

- Illness Narrative, written to capture a social experience of the common cold, assessed A-F + rubric (10%)
- Midterm examination, test to demonstrate mastery of class concepts, understanding of texts, and relevance to healthcare outcomes’ improvement, assessed 100 pt. scale (15%)
- Illness Interview, conducted to capture another person’s social experience of an illness, assessed A-F + rubric (10%)
- Final Exam, Comprehensive, test to demonstrate mastery of class concepts, understanding of texts, and relevance to healthcare outcomes’ improvement, assessed 100 pt. scale (15%)

**Required Readings**

- Josephine Ensign, *Catching Homelessness*
- Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light*
- Additional texts, videos, & podcasts available through BB

**Course Schedule**

	<b>Lessons and Reading Assignments</b> (To Be Completed by the Date Listed on BB Calendar)	<b>Instructional Activities, Tasks, and Writing Assignments</b> (Due Dates Vary)
<b>Unit 1: Honoring the Stories of Illness</b>		
Week 1	<p><b>Day 1: Course Introduction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Course Overview (Syllabus, Units, Books, intros &amp; other housekeeping)</li> <li>➔ What makes people sick?</li> <li>➔ How do we define illness, health, medicine, debility, nursing, care, etc.?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Course Overview</li> <li>2) Syllabus, assignments, etc. questions</li> <li>3) Introductions</li> <li>4) Personal Info</li> <li>5) Defining illness, etc. discussion board</li> </ol>
	<p><b>Day 2: Understanding Illness as a Site of Critical Engagement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Why is illness something we can and should study in a humanities course?</li> <li>➔ Analyzing depictions of illness in popular culture</li> <li>➔ What is interpellation?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Three internet examples (tv/movies/ads/memes/websites, etc.) that define illness for us</li> <li>2) Model Analysis (Dr. B example)</li> <li>3) Analysis of other students’ examples</li> <li>4) The sick identity</li> </ol>

Week 2	<p><b>Day 1: What Does it Mean to “Honor the Stories of Illness”?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Who is Rita Charon &amp; what can she tell us about the study of illness?</li> <li>➔ <b>Rita Charon</b>, <i>Honoring the Stories of Illness</i> (TED Talk)</li> <li>➔ Principles for honoring the stories of illness</li> <li>➔ <b>Oliver Sacks</b>, <i>The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat</i> (Selections)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Response to Charon: what rung true &amp; what seemed odd or questionable.</li> <li>2) How would you define the principles for honoring the stories of illness?</li> <li>3) How are stories of illness being “honored” by Oliver Sacks?</li> </ol>
	<p><b>Day 2: What are Humanities Competencies?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Humanities, Narrative, and Structural competencies – <b>Sari Altschuler</b>, <b>Rita Charon</b>, and <b>Jonathan Metzl</b> and <b>Helena Hansen</b></li> <li>➔ <b>Daniel Shapiro</b>, “Perspective Shift”</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Discussion of “competencies”: which ones made the most sense to you &amp; why?</li> <li>2) Initial reactions to Shapiro: what shift in perspective does he demand of us? How did you experience that shift (describe in detail)?</li> <li>3) Looking for competencies in Shapiro: read the story again and track evidence of one competency within it.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Unit 2: Illness Narrative CHALLENGE: The Common Cold</b></p>		
Week 3	<p><b>Day 1: An Introduction to Illness Narratives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Attributes of illness narratives - <b>Ann Jurecic</b>, <i>Illness as Narrative</i>, <b>Arthur Frank</b>, <i>The Wounded Storyteller</i>, and <b>Arthur Kleinman</b>, <i>The Illness Narratives</i></li> <li>➔ Illness Narrative Assignment Sheet</li> <li>➔ Making the Common Cold Unique</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Discussion of illness narrative attributes</li> <li>2) How do Sacks and Shapiro examples show these attributes?</li> <li>3) Brainstorming about the Common Cold &amp; Questions about Illness Narrative Challenge</li> </ol>
	<p><b>Day 2: Drafting an Illness Narrative about The Common Cold</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ How to write an illness narrative: tips and tricks</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Various writing activities to get started on your illness narrative.</li> </ol> <p><b>DRAFT OF ILLNESS NARRATIVE DUE – SUNDAY</b></p>

Week 4	<p><b>Day 1: What are the Health Humanities?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Why we need an academic inter-discipline called the “health humanities”: the case of Lyme disease</li> <li>➔ What is “expressive writing” – <b>James Pennebaker</b></li> <li>➔ What is “therapeutic emplotment” – <b>Cheryl Mattingly</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Comparing health humanities to your discipline (major/minor)</li> <li>2) What elements of expressive writing did you use in your illness narrative draft?</li> <li>3) How did therapeutic emplotment show up in your illness narrative draft?</li> </ol>
	<p><b>Day 2: Other Examples of Textual &amp; Discursive Practices re: Illness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ What is “biosociality” – <b>Paul Rabinow</b></li> <li>➔ What is “biological citizenship” – <b>Adriana Petryna</b></li> <li>➔ What is a “condition of doubt” – <b>Catherine Belling</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Self-reflective questions related to this week’s concepts and your illness narrative – 3 tasks</li> </ol> <p><b>ILLNESS NARRATIVE DUE – SUNDAY</b></p>
<p><b>Unit 3: Illness Narratives - Audre Lorde’s <i>A Burst of Light</i></b></p>		
Week 5	<p><b>Day 1: The Greater Meaning of Illness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Review of Concepts – Looking Toward the Midterm Examination &amp; Second Half of the Semester</li> <li>➔ Who is Audre Lorde?</li> <li>➔ What does the Internet want us to think about breast cancer? About breasts?</li> <li>➔ <b>Audre Lorde, <i>The Cancer Journals</i></b> (Selections)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Midterm study guide and rubric &amp; Brainstorming study ideas</li> <li>2) Discussing political subject matter in a college course – how to engage even when we’re out of our comfort zone &amp; cultivating cultural humility</li> <li>3) Responses to Lorde, re: interpellation &amp; narrative strategies for resistance</li> </ol>
	<p><b>Day 2: What Does it Mean to Live with Cancer?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ What are our expectations for how someone might narrate their experience with cancer reoccurring?</li> <li>➔ How does Lorde tell the story of her cancer’s return?</li> <li>➔ <b>Audre Lorde, <i>A Burst of Light</i> 40-58</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Expectations about cancer narratives</li> <li>2) How Lorde shapes our expectations about how to talk about cancer</li> <li>3) Dr. B model close reading</li> <li>4) Close reading of a passage from Lorde</li> </ol>
Week 6	<p><b>Day 1: What Does it Mean to Live with Cancer?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ <b>Audre Lorde, <i>A Burst of Light</i> 58-109</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Responses to Lorde – 2 tasks</li> <li>2) More close reading</li> </ol>

	<p><b>Day 2: What Does it Mean to Live with Cancer?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ What does the Internet say about “self-care”?</li> <li>➔ <b>Audre Lorde</b>, <i>A Burst of Light</i> 109-133</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Compare and contrast: Lorde’s self-care vs. ours</li> <li>2) Response to Lorde – 1 task</li> <li>3) A final close reading: What does it mean to live with illness?</li> </ol>
Week 7	<b>MIDTERM EXAMINATION</b>	Sign up for an Oral Examination Slot (see Blackboard)
<b>Unit 4: Systemic Illness – Josephine Ensign’s <i>Catching Homelessness</i></b>		
Week 8	<p><b>Day 1: What Makes People Sick?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ How has our understanding of what makes people sick evolved since the beginning of the semester?</li> <li>➔ Can narrative form make us sick? The case of Hannah Gadsby</li> <li>➔ <b>Hannah Gadsby</b>, <i>Nanette</i> (Selection)</li> <li>➔ Who is Josephine Ensign?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Metacognitive reflection on how we understand what makes people sick</li> <li>2) Compare and contrast: Pennebaker and Gadsby</li> <li>3) How do you think Ensign will “catch” homelessness?</li> </ol>
	<p><b>Day 2: The Homelessness Epidemic</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ What does the Internet say about the homelessness epidemic?</li> <li>➔ How to imagine the work of nurses</li> <li>➔ <b>Josephine Ensign</b>, <i>Catching Homelessness</i> xiii-32</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Narrating the homelessness epidemic</li> <li>2) Imagining the typical nurse</li> <li>3) Responses to Ensign: how does her narrative correspond to or diverge from your sense of a “typical” nurse or what nurses do?</li> </ol>
Week 9	<p><b>Day 1: Homelessness as Disease</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Honoring the stories of people experiencing houselessness</li> <li>➔ The relationship between structural oppression and care</li> <li>➔ What is home?</li> <li>➔ <b>Josephine Ensign</b>, <i>Catching Homelessness</i> 33-97</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) How does Ensign “honor” the stories of illness?</li> <li>2) Review: what are structural competencies &amp; how does Ensign help us to gain them?</li> <li>3) How does young Ensign define “home” and how does that definition change while working with the homeless?</li> </ol>

	<p><b>Day 2: Homelessness as Disease</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Biosociality, biological citizenship, and therapeutic emplotment in Ensign</li> <li>➔ <b>Josephine Ensign</b>, <i>Catching Homelessness</i> 98-115</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Review of concepts</li> <li>2) Examples of concepts in chapter 6 of Ensign</li> <li>3) One close reading of how a passage exemplifies a particular concept</li> </ol>
Week 10	<p><b>Day 1: Homelessness as Disease</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ What makes Ensign sick?</li> <li>➔ Ensign's condition of doubt</li> <li>➔ <b>Josephine Ensign</b>, <i>Catching Homelessness</i> 116-171</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) How would you characterize the evolution of Ensign's ideas about what makes her sick over the course of her narrative?</li> <li>2) How does Belling's notion of a "condition of doubt" help us elaborate why Ensign calls it "catching" homelessness?</li> <li>3) Collective close reading of the phrase "catching homelessness"</li> </ol>
	<p><b>Day 2: Homelessness as Disease</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Wrap-up of the narrative</li> <li>➔ Geographical cure – is it enough?</li> <li>➔ <b>Josephine Ensign</b>, <i>Catching Homelessness</i> 172-203</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Final thoughts on the narrative</li> <li>2) Other structural "diseases"</li> <li>3) Other structural "cures"</li> </ol>
<b>Unit 5: Tell Me Where it Hurts</b>		
Week 11	<p><b>Day 1: Healthcare in the USA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ The American search for great healthcare, past and present</li> <li>➔ <b>John Harley Warner</b>, <i>Against the Spirit of System</i> (Selections), <b>Susan Reverby</b>, <i>Examining Tuskegee</i> &amp; the emergence of bioethics, National healthcare proposals through the ages.</li> <li>➔ Trying to tell someone where it hurts: <b>Allie Brosh</b>, <i>Adventures in Depression</i></li> <li>➔ Illness Interview Assignment Sheet</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Responses to national histories of the pursuit of great healthcare</li> <li>2) Response to Allie Brosh</li> <li>3) Brainstorming &amp; Questions re: illness interview</li> </ol>

	<p><b>Day 2: Conducting an Illness Interview</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ How to conduct and illness interview – tips and tricks</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Activities and tasks related to completing your illness narrative</li> </ol> <p><b>DRAFT OF ILLNESS INTERVIEW DUE – SUNDAY</b></p>
Week 12	<p><b>Day 1: Tell Me I'm Fat</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Professional Interviewers: The Art of the Podcast</li> <li>➔ <b>Ira Glass</b>, “Tell Me I’m Fat,” <i>The American Life</i> <a href="https://www.thisamericanlife.org/589/tell-me-im-fat">https://www.thisamericanlife.org/589/tell-me-im-fat</a></li> <li>➔ What is TOFI? What is the obesity epidemic?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Compare and Contrast: interview styles</li> <li>2) What do the interviewees suggest are good ways to talk about being fat?</li> <li>3) Critical assessment of TOFI &amp; obesity epidemic as discursive/narrative practices – in what ways are they helpful?</li> </ol>
	<p><b>Day 2: Memoirs &amp; the Body</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ What is a memoir?</li> <li>➔ Playing with the genre: what does it mean to write a memoir of your body?</li> <li>➔ <b>Roxane Gay</b>, <i>Hunger</i> (Selections)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Identifying the characteristics of memoir in Roxane Gay</li> <li>2) Mini-memoir: remembering a day in the life of your body</li> </ol> <p><b>ILLNESS INTERVIEW DUE – SUNDAY</b></p>
Week 13	<p><b>Day 1: What is Disability Justice?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ What is “normal”?</li> <li>➔ <b>Georges Canguilhem</b>, <i>The Normal and the Pathological</i> (Selections)</li> <li>➔ <b>Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha</b>, <i>Carework: Dreaming Disability Justice</i> (Selections)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Discussion of the concepts “normal” and “pathological”</li> <li>2) What does your space “normalize” re: bodies &amp; mobility?</li> <li>3) Response to Piepzna-Samarasinha</li> </ol>
	<p><b>Day 2: What is Healing Justice?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Finding healing beyond the hospital: a how-to guide</li> <li>➔ <b>Black Lives Matter</b>, Healing Justice Toolkit, <a href="https://blacklivesmatter.com/resource/healing-justice-toolkit/">https://blacklivesmatter.com/resource/healing-justice-toolkit/</a></li> </ul>	<p><b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) What kinds of healing define your life &amp; the spaces in which you live?</li> <li>2) What needs healing in society and what toolkit would you design to address these issues?</li> </ol>
<b>THANKSGIVING BREAK</b>		

Week 14	Course wrap-up & exam review	<b>Instructional Activities &amp; Tasks</b> 1) TBD
Week 15	Final Examination	<b>TBD</b>