

ENGLISH 98r: Literature and Medicine: Illness, Disability & Neurodiversity

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Office Hours: Thursdays X-Ypm EST in Barker ABC or by appointment

Tutorial Description:

This junior tutorial will examine some of the numerous links between literature and medicine in English-language texts from the 19th-century to the present day, focusing mostly on modernist and later texts. In the first unit of the course, we will use memoirs and lyric poetry to discuss the significant features of narratives about medical illness and disability, and also the limits of the language we have for describing life-experiences like pain and illness. As we learn how to conduct scholarly research and write a research paper, we will then consider the histories of medical institutions like the asylum and the contemporary struggle for medical justice through additional media like novels and plays. Throughout, will discuss topics such as the relationships between medical care, disability, and other social identities like race and sexuality, the social vs. medical model of disability, the legacies of eugenics and institutionalization, and the development of activist causes like the neurodiversity movement. We will develop fluency with disability studies as our primary critical framework, though we will also engage somewhat with feminist criticism, queer theory, and the history of modern medicine.

Questions that we will pursue include: how has modern literature shaped our ideas about health, the body, and the mind? And what roles have illness, disability, and neurodiversity played in shaping modern literature's content and form? How do we talk about these features of our lives without reproducing stereotypes or denying anyone's pain? What might the medical establishment have to learn from this literature, and what does literary study have to learn in turn?

General Goals:

- To learn to write a 20-25 page research paper in preparation for an honors thesis, which will also include learning to:
- Design a research question that speaks to specific texts and historical contexts;
- Develop a critical bibliography and gather secondary literature, especially from within the fields of the disability studies and the medical humanities;
- Put secondary literature in conversation with your own ideas and with other criticism;
- Write with greater urgency, impact, clarity, and precision;

Tutorial Specific Goals:

- To study the modern literary history and contexts of representing illness, pain, disability, and neurodiversity in art.
- To investigate the wide range of ways in which literary works intersect with and are invaluable resources to medical knowledge, care, and advocacy.
- To learn from chronically ill, disabled, and neurodivergent authors how different rhetorics, representations, and medical understandings affect all of our lives.

Required Texts:

- Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2007) [ISBN-10: 1400078431]
- Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals* (2020) [ISBN-10: 0143135201]
- Susanna Kaysen, *Girl, Interrupted* (1994) [ISBN-10: 0679746048]
- Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (2007) [ISBN-10: 0143105027]
- Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (2006) [ISBN-10: 0811216713]
- Tony Kushner, *Angels in America* (2017) [ISBN-10: 1848426313]

Other primary and all critical readings will be available as PDFs on the Canvas site.

NOTE: Although not required, the anthologies [Beginning with Disability](#) (2018) and *Disability Visibility* (2020) are great introductions to many of the topics we'll be discussing, and we may refer to these collections occasionally across the semester along with relevant recent news stories.

Graded Assignments:

- **Short Essay** (Week 6, 10%): a 5-6 page paper that provides a close reading of a primary text or applies a critical model to a primary text. Students will receive written feedback and then meet with the instructor to discuss ideas for the final paper.
- **Prospectus & Annotated Bibliography** (Week 8, 15%): A 2 page prospectus that briefly outlines your final project, as well as an annotated bibliography of 8-10 pages. With about 5 sentences per source, the bibliography should summarize the main argument of each source, as well as how you plan on engaging with it.
- **Early Draft of Final Paper** (Week 11, 15%): a partial draft of your final paper or creative assignment, which will be preceded and followed up with student-teacher meetings to discuss the outline of your argument and research progress.
- **Final Paper** (Reading Period, 40%): 20-25 page paper on a major literary work examined in this class, or a similar text discussed with the instructor beforehand. It's important that you use criticism and concepts from disability studies or a related field in your analysis.
- **Participation & Preparation** (20%): since this is a small seminar, active participation is crucial for sharing our ideas and navigating difficult texts together. Participation includes: arriving to class (on time), asking questions, coming prepared with passages you'd like to discuss or point us to, peer-reviewing others' work when applicable, etc.

At the last class, everyone will also give an (ungraded) presentation about their final project to the rest of the class!

Inclusive Learning & Accommodations:

Your success in this class is important to me. We all need accommodations in some form because we all learn differently and have lives beyond the classroom. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we'll develop strategies to meet your needs and the requirements of the course.

The Accessible Education Office (AEO) offers a variety of accommodations and services to students with documented disabilities. For more information please visit:

(<https://accessibility.harvard.edu>) and (<https://aeo.fas.harvard.edu>). All discussions will remain confidential, although the AEO may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation.

Course Schedule:

Content Note: It is necessary (but not sufficient) to note that many of the materials and topics we will be working through are difficult and upsetting in some way. The history of medicine is full of suffering and cruelty, with many harmful and oppressive legacies continuing to the present day. I invite you to talk openly with one another and with me about your responses to the material we cover. I am also happy to provide referrals to campus and community resources whenever helpful.

Week 0: How do we talk about 'illness' and 'disability'?

- Virginia Woolf, "On Being Ill" (1925*)
- Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Disability, Identity, and Representation: An Introduction" in *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997)
- Kerry Tribe, "[Aphasia Poetry Club](#)" (2015) [short video]
- Arvind Nandakumar, "[That's Just Your Autism Speaking](#)" (2019) [short video]

UNIT 1: Expression

Week 1: Narrating Illness and Disability

- Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005)

Criticism:

- Arthur Kleinman, sections from first two chapters of *The Illness Narratives* (1988)
- Mitchell and Snyder, introduction to *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (2000)

Week 2: Articulating Pain (with Poetry)

- Elisa Gabbert, "About Suffering" (2019)
- Kahlil Gibran, "On Pain" (1923)
- Emily Dickinson, poems including "A Clock stopped -"; "There's a certain Slant of light,"; "I like a look of Agony,"; "I felt a Funeral in my Brain,"; "After great pain, a formal feeling comes -"; "They shut my up in Prose -"; "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -"; "Much Madness is divinest Sense -"; "There is a Langour of the Life" (1830s-1840s)
- W. B. Auden, "Miss Gee" (1937) & "Musée des Beaux Arts" (1938)
- Sylvia Plath, "The Surgeon at 2 a.m.", "Fever 103°", "Cut", "Lady Lazarus" (1961-3)
- Elizabeth Bishop, "In the Waiting Room" (1979)

Criticism:

- Elaine Scarry, from *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985)
- Gilbert and Gubar, intro & Dickinson section from *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979)

Week 3: Audre Lorde & Disabled Identity

- Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals* (1980) & selections from *Zami...* (1982)

Criticism:

- Tobin Siebers, "Disability as Masquerade" (2004)

- Stella Bolaki, "Challenging Invisibility, Making Connections: Illness, Survival, and Black Struggles in Audre Lorde's Work" in *Blackness and Disability* (2011)
- Arthur W. Frank, "Tricksters and Truth Tellers: Narrating Illness in an Age of Authenticity and Appropriation" (2009)

Week 4: Poetics of Ill Health

- John Keats, poems including "Ode to a Nightingale", "Ode to Psyche", "Ode on Melancholy", "Ode to Autumn", "This living hand, now warm and capable", "When I have fears that I may cease to be"; a few letters (1818-1820)
- William Carlos Williams, "The Desert Music", "To Daphne and Virginia", "To a Dog Injured in the Street", "The Yellow Flower", "Deep Religious Faith" (1954) & "The Sparrow" (1955)
- Bernadette Mayer, poems including "Chocolate Poetry Sonnet" & "40-60" (2006), "Statement on Poetics" & "EYJAFJALLAJOKULL" (2011), "Walking Like a Robin" (2016)

Criticism:

- Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (1978) [first 5 short sections]
- Hermione de Almeida, short sections from *Romantic Medicine and John Keats* (1991)
- Miriam Marty Clark, "Art and Suffering in Two Late Poems by William Carlos Williams" (2004)

Week 5: Library Visit and Reading Ahead/Catch-up

This week there is little assigned reading so that we could spend the class period learning how to utilize HOLLIS and Harvard's tremendous library resources. Also, students should use this week to catch up on readings and/or to check out any books listed later in the course (or related to what we've read) that they might be interested in writing about! (It's also a good time to chat about and start working on the first short paper!)

Criticism:

- Michel Foucault, from *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1961)
- La Marr Jurelle Bruce, short sections from "Mad is a Place" in *How to Go Mad without Losing Your Mind* (2021)

UNIT 2: Institutions

Week 6: History of 'Hysteria' and Confinement

- Charlotte Perkins Gillman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892)
- Susanna Kaysen, *Girl, Interrupted* (1994)
- Bonus: James Mangold (dir.) *Girl, Interrupted* (1999)

Criticism:

- Elaine Showalter, from *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (1997)
- Vivian Delchamps, "'A Slight Hysterical Tendency': Performing Diagnosis in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper" (2020)

****ASSIGNMENT 1: Short Paper** due at the end of Week 6**

Week 7: The Hospital & Disability Poetics

- Jim Ferris, selections from *The Hospital Poems* (2004)
- Rafael Campo, poems including “The Common Mental Health Disorders of Immigrants”, “Hospital Song”, “Why Doctors Write” (2013)
- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, poems from *Tonguebreaker* (2019)
- torrin a. greathouse, “Abecedarian Requiring Further Examination...” (2020)

Criticism:

- Jim Ferris, “The Enjambed Body: A Step Toward a Crippled Poetics” (2004)
- heidi andrea restrepo rhodes, “Impossible Word: Toward a Poetics of Aphasia” (2020)

Bonus: check out *Beauty is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability* (2011)

Week 8: Memories of Institutionalization

- Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1962)
- Bonus: Miloš Forman (dir.), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975) & Netflix’s *Ratched* mini-series (2020) [1st episode]

Criticism:

- Margaret Price, introduction to *Mad at School* (2011)
- Jennifer Lambe, “Memory Politics: Psychiatric Critique, Cultural Protest, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*” (2019)

****ASSIGNMENT 2: Annotated Bibliography & Prospectus due at end of Week 8****

Week 9: Modernism, Eugenics, & “Deviancy”

- Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (1936)

Criticism:

- Joseph Verlante, “Modernism and Cognitive Disability: a Genealogy” (2013)
- Jay Dolmage, from *Disabled Upon Arrival: Eugenics, Immigration, and the Construction of Race and Disability* (2018)

****Ungraded Assignment:** Everyone will bring in one news article published in the last 1-2 years that talks about immigration status and opportunities for chronically ill or disabled people.**

UNIT 3: Justice

Week 10: Staging Narratives of Autism

- Alex Oates, *All in a Row* (2019)
- *1 relevant short play determined by student input (perhaps by Hayley St. James, Dave Osmundsen, Rhi Lloyd-Williams, Tom Middleton, etc.)*

Criticism:

- Jeffery Renard Allen, “Silence: On the History of Hearing and Seeing Blind Tom” (2015)
- Melanie Yergeau, from *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness* (2017)
- Hadley, Batch, & Whelan, “The Entitled Ally: Authorship, Consultation, and the ‘Right’ to Stage Autistic People’s Stories” (2020)

Week 11: Stories of the HIV/AIDS Crisis

- Tony Kushner, *Angels in America* [part 1] (1991*)

- Essex Hemphill, "When My Brother Fell" and "For My Own Protection" (1992)
- James Merrill, "Christmas Tree" (1995)
- Bonus: D. A. Powell, from *Repast* (2014) & Danez Smith, poems from *Don't Call us Dead* (2017)

Criticism:

- Susan Sontag, from *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (2001)
- G. Thomas Couser, from "HIV/AIDS and Its Stories" (1997)
- Robert McRuer, from *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (2006)

****ASSIGNMENT 3: Early Draft of Final Paper** due at end of Week 11**

Week 12: Reimagining Care & Cure

- Eli Claire, from *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (2017)
- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, sections from *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (2018) and returning to *Tonguebreaker* (2019)
- Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay: The War on Effeminate Boys" (1989)

Week 13: Short Presentations on Students' Research Papers

- National Council on Disability, "[NCD letter to HHS on assisted suicide, medical futility and QALYs reports](#)" (2019)
- Kathryn E. Boonstra, "Constructing 'Behavior Problems': Race, Disability, and Everyday Discipline Practices in the Figured World of Kindergarten" (2021)

Academic Honesty & Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is the use of another person's ideas or writing without giving them proper credit. Consequences of plagiarism can range from failing assignments to dismissal from the course -- or even more serious actions depending on the situation. You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with Harvard FAS's Honor Code and for understanding Harvard's policies on academic integrity: (<https://handbook.fas.harvard.edu/book/academic-integrity>)

Not knowing the rules, misunderstanding the rules, running out of time, submitting "the wrong draft", or being overwhelmed with multiple demands are not acceptable excuses. (It's always better to ask for an extension than to risk plagiarism.) There are no excuses for failure to uphold academic integrity. To learn more about academic integrity and citation rules, please visit Harvard's guide for using sources responsibly: (<https://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu>)

Collaboration:

You are absolutely encouraged to talk with other students about the course and its readings, and to read each other's work. In individual assignments (e.g. drafts, annotated bibliographies), academic collaboration and external sources should be always cited, and you should never literally write any part of another student's assignment for them.

Attendance:

Your attendance in this tutorial is vital to your own success and the success of the class as a whole (as well as the one-on-one meetings we will have). Missing more than one class without an excuse will decrease your participation grade, and excessive absence could result in failing the course. Also, being consistently late disrupts the work we're doing together, so repeated late arrivals without an excuse will also decrease your participation grade.

Email:

We'll primarily use email to distribute readings, handouts, and important information throughout the semester, so be sure to check your email regularly. If you ever have a question about readings, due dates, course content, extensions, etc., you can always email me at (jcareyva@g.harvard.edu) and I will get back to you within 24-hours!

Due Dates & Late Grades:

Assignments are due by 11:59 PM EST on the date listed in the schedule. If you ever need an extension on an assignment please try to email me before the due date, but pending extreme circumstances your final paper must be turned in by the due date. Some assignments may be peer-reviewed by others in the class, so it's important that you try to get everything turned in on time.