



English 290A: Illness and Health in Literature

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Central College – Spring 2009

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“The patient is a geometrically impossible spatial synthesis, but for that very reason unique, central, and irreplaceable...” –Michel Foucault

“Along with their growing scientific expertise, doctors need the expertise to listen to their patients,...to honor the meanings of their patients’ narratives of illness, and to be moved by what they behold...” –Rita Charon

Welcome

Medicine and storytelling go hand in hand. Affirming the interdependence of literature and medicine allows us to claim the best of both traditions, and it also raises questions about the human condition that I hope to understand better with your help. What roles might literature or the creative arts have within medicine? How does one live meaningfully in the face of death? How can we define the relationship between the mind and the body, and how does this relationship influence our approaches to health and illness? Can scientific medicine treat the whole person? I hope you’ll find these topics engaging, and I look forward to the questions you discover along the way.

Course description and objectives

Illness and Health in Literature is a four-unit interdisciplinary course designed for students at the sophomore level. Readings will include fiction, memoir, and drama. Writing assignments will be process-based, and peer review will offer opportunities for drafting, revision, and feedback.

We will emphasize the following student learning outcomes:

- Develop an ability to work creatively at the interdisciplinary boundary of literary studies and other fields of study
- Explicate literary texts effectively
- Communicate complex thoughts effectively through poised and articulate oral presentations and through class discussions
- Produce quality creative, critical, and research writing

Required texts (others will be distributed in class)

Armstrong, Lance and Sally Jenkins. *It’s Not About the Bike*. New York: Berkley, 2001.

Edson, Margaret. *Wit*. New York: Faber and Faber, 1999.

Gawande, Atul. *Complications*. New York: Picador, 2003.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories*. New York: Dover, 1997.

Ofri, Danielle. *Incidental Findings*. New York: Beacon Press, 2006.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Ceremony*. New York: Penguin Books, 1988.

Tolstoy, Leo. *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. New York: Waking Lion Press, 2006.

Attendance

Regular attendance is crucial to the success of the course, but your desire to attend is most important of all. Thus, my policy will be to grant attendance points on a variable ratio schedule. Attendance may also affect the points I reserve for a general assessment of participation.

Due dates

Late work is not acceptable without advance notice. Technological glitches (computer crashes, faulty disks, etc.) should be anticipated, as Murphy's Law dictates that at the last minute whatever can possibly go wrong will go wrong. It is your responsibility to be prepared.

Written assignments: Please type all assignments and use MLA style for citations.

- **Blogs:** These informal reading responses are designed to enrich discussion and promote strong critical thinking. See blog grading rubric for more details.
- **Formal Papers:** Discussions and blogs are opportunities to test ideas that will eventually be refined in your formal papers. The informal writing is meant to help you work through the writing process, so that the formal work grows out of everything that we do in class.

Oral communication: While this class will have no formal requirement for oral communication, I invite you to approach our discussions not only as a great way to share ideas, but also as a way to deliberately challenge yourself as a speaker. To encourage you in this direction, I will record a grade for participation at midterm and will adjust this average at the end of the term.

Prof's Points: This column in the grade book is a way for me to keep track of attendance points, which I will award on a variable ratio schedule. Whatever points remain at the end of the term will be mine to adjust as I see fit. Since the point total will accumulate gradually throughout the term, I will not include Prof's Points in the running weighted average until recording final grades.

Grade evaluation (1,000 points total)

Prof's points:	100
Participation:	100
Blogs:	200
Paper 1:	150
Paper 2:	150
Paper 3:	150
Final exam:	150

Grade breakdown

100-98	A+	97-93	A	92-90	A-
89-88	B+	87-83	B	82-80	B-
79-78	C+	77-73	C	72-70	C-
69-68	D+	67-63	D	62-60	D-
59-0	F				

Service Learning Option

Many of our community partners offer opportunities to explore health and illness. Many sites are also eligible for Central's "x" credit. Those who choose this option will schedule a minimum of fifteen hours with one of our community partners, participate in the usual classes and discussions, and submit all three formal essays. Those who choose the service-learning option will have several essay topics to choose from in place of the final exam and will be strongly encouraged to present a draft of their final paper at the Examined Life conference in Iowa City on May 1.

Plagiarism and other academic dishonesty

Plagiarism and cheating of any form are serious offenses and may result in a failing grade for the assignment, the course, or expulsion from the college. The details of Central College's Academic Integrity policy are found in the Student Handbook, on the web. A copy will be sent to you via email during the first week of the semester. It is your responsibility to read and understand the contents of that policy before you submit work to be graded. Questions regarding the policies and enforcement of the policies may be addressed to me during class or during office hours.

ADA compliance

Central College abides by interpretations of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which stipulates that no student shall be denied the benefits of an education "solely by reason of a handicap." Disabilities covered by law include, but are not limited to, learning disabilities, hearing, sight, or mobility impairments, and other health related impairments. If you have a documented disability that may have some impact on your work in this class for which you may require accommodations, please see me and Nancy Kroese, Director of Student Support Services and Disabilities Services Coordinator (x 5247), during the first two weeks of the semester so that such accommodations may be arranged.

Notification of participation in college sanctioned events

Mock Trial participants, music participants, athletes, and others who must miss a class for participating in a college sanctioned event must notify me in advance and complete work, including exams, in advance of the absence. It is your responsibility to communicate with me in advance regarding absences so that we may adjust our schedules.

COURSE CALENDAR

Scientific Medicine and Storytelling		
Jan. 19	Introductions, syllabus, MLK schedule	
Jan. 21	Gawande, "Introduction," "The Education of a Knife" Discussion of service-learning option Recommended: "The Computer and the Hernia Factory"	
Jan. 23	Gawande, "When Doctors Make Mistakes" Recommended: "When Good Doctors Go Bad"	All bloggers
Jan. 25	Sunday matinee, <i>Anatomie</i> , 2:00 p.m., Cox-Snow	
Jan. 26	Gawande, "The Pain Perplex"	
Jan. 28	Gawande, "Crimson Tide," "The Man Who Couldn't Stop Eating" Recommended: "A Queasy Feeling"	Prospectus
Jan. 30	Gawande, "Final Cut" Recommended: "The Dead Baby Mystery," "Whose Body Is It Anyway?"	Autopsy Debate
Feb. 2	Hawthorne, " Rappaccini's Daughter " (handout) Recommended: Sandel, "The Case Against Perfection"	
Feb. 4	Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" Recommended: "Mr. Peebles' Heart"	
Feb. 6	Williams, " The Use of Force ," "The Practice" (handouts)	
Feb. 8	Sunday matinee, <i>Anatomie II</i> , 2:00 p.m., Cox-Snow	
Feb. 9	Phone interview with Martha Karlstad, University of Nebraska Medical Center	
Feb. 11	Paper workshop	Draft 1, Paper 1
Feb. 13	Introduction to spiritual medicine and the shaman	Paper 1 due

Spirituality and Medicine		
Feb. 16	Silko, <i>Ceremony</i> (2-54)	
Feb. 18	<i>Ceremony</i> (55-106)	
Feb. 20	<i>Ceremony</i> (107-152)	Sign up for 3/7
Feb. 23	<i>Ceremony</i> (153-178)	
Feb. 25	<i>Ceremony</i> (180-223)	
Feb. 27	<i>Ceremony</i> (224-262)	
Mar. 1	Sunday matinee, <i>Jacob's Ladder</i> , 2:00 p.m., Cox-Snow	
Mar. 2	Tolstoy, <i>The Death of Ivan Ilych</i> , Part I-IV	
Mar. 4	Tolstoy, <i>The Death of Ivan Ilych</i> , Part V-XII	
Mar. 6	Anne Flodhin Shook, "An Introduction to Transcendental Meditation"	
Mar. 7	Sweat lodge ceremony (Les and Mindi Obago)	
Mar. 9	No class: conferences	
Mar. 11	Paper workshop	Draft 1, Paper 2
Mar. 13	Introduction to cancer unit	Paper 2 due
Mar. 16-20	Spring Break	

Cancer		
Mar. 23	Armstrong, <i>It's Not About the Bike</i> (1-15, 41-69)	
Mar. 25	<i>It's Not About the Bike</i> (70-125)	
Mar. 27	<i>It's Not About the Bike</i> (126-181)	
Mar. 30	<i>It's Not About the Bike</i> (182-258)	
Apr. 1	<i>It's Not About the Bike</i> (259-end)	
Apr. 3	Ehrenreich, "Welcome to Cancerland"	
Apr. 6	Edson, <i>Wit</i> (5-41)	
Apr. 8	<i>Wit</i> (41-85)	W & F bloggers
Apr. 10-13	Easter Break	
Apr. 15	Paper workshop Evening showing of <i>Wit</i> at 7:00 p.m. in Cox-Snow	Draft 1, Paper 3
Apr. 17	Introduction to narrative medicine	Paper 3 due

Practicing and Participating in Narrative Medicine		
Apr. 20	Charon, "The Patient, the Body, and the Self"	
Apr. 22	Ofri, <i>Incidental Findings</i> (1-37)	
Apr. 24	<i>Incidental Findings</i> (38-74)	
Apr. 27	<i>Incidental Findings</i> (75-131)	
Apr. 29	<i>Incidental Findings</i> (132-175)	W & F bloggers
Apr. 30	Afternoon Q&A with Danielle Ofri and 7:30 p.m. evening reading	
May 1	Examined Life conference – Iowa City Student presentations and Ofri's keynote address	
May 4	Discuss final exam, instructor evaluations	
May 6-8	<i>Something the Lord Made</i> (optional conferences for final exam)	
May 11	Study Day	
May 14	Final exam due on Blackboard by 5:00 p.m.	