ENG 4300-4390-001-099: Illness & Literature, Senior Seminar

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Course Description
Just before his death in 1839, Goethe called the Romantic “the sick,” while claiming “health” to the Classical. Since then, tropes of illness have offered critics a methodology for evaluating and categorizing literary texts. The ways that writers and critics have understood how illnesses “work”—the sciences behind disease—have to a large extent determined how these writers have incorporated illnesses into their textual bodies.

This course will investigate the varied ways that writers have dealt with sickness, both as a literary trope and as a literal threat to human existence. Our readings will span from 350 B.C.E. to the near-present; likewise, we will attempt to read texts spanning the globe. Students will be encouraged to discover and analyze texts dealing literally and/or figuratively with disease. The list below is, therefore, by no means complete, but does provide some idea as to the historical and geographical intent of the seminar.

The senior seminar is the capstone to your literary studies in the English Department. You should therefore demonstrate the reading and writing skills you have been developing since you began your post-secondary education. The word “seminar” springs from the Latin root of seminarium, a seed-plot or plant nursery, out of which the young shoots are later transplanted. The term was first used in German universities (Proseminar, Hauptseminar) to refer to a select group of advanced students associated for special study and original research under the guidance of a professor” (OED), and term was transplanted to English-language universities in the nineteenth century.

You will be expected to participate in our class discussions on a daily basis, so you must come to class having read the course material. Much of the reading will be extensive and difficult: you should count on at least five hours of reading per week.
**Texts**

Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*
Daniel Defoe, *Journal the Plague Year*
Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel*
Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams (Dream Directions)*
Margaret Fuller, *Trip Around the Lakes, 1841*
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Werther*
Heinrich von Kleist, "The Foundling"
Tony Kushner, *Angels in America*
Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *Love in the Time of Cholera*
Mary Wortley Montagu, *Correspondences*
Edgar Allan Poe, "The Mask of the Red Death"
Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*
Adalbert Stifter, "Granite"

Lunsford, Andrea. *Easy Writer.*

Course reader, including some of the above, will be available in early September.

**Academic honesty**: Students are responsible for knowing Eastern Illinois University regulations and policies regarding academic honesty. Plagiarism will likely result in your failing the course and in further action by the university. Here is the English Department's statement on plagiarism:

Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—"The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's own original work" (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignments, of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

**Paper Policies**

Papers—and all other assignments—are due at the beginning of class. **Late papers will not be commented upon, and be marked a half grade lower for every class period late.** Essays turned in a week past the deadline will be given a "zero," but must nevertheless be submitted in order to pass the course.

Your paper should be stapled or paper-clipped and include page numbers. Format: 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins.

**Absence Policy:**

When you are absent—especially when you are frequently absent—two things happen. First, your participation grade drops substantially. Second, you naturally fall behind in understanding course material and neither the class nor the Professor can catch you up on everything missed in a day's class. **YOU need to decide when it is absolutely necessary to miss class.** Be wise. It bears repeating: you cannot make up missed work and late assignments will be penalized. Whether these are excused or unexcused absences does not matter for this course. Being late for class will be counted as an absence.

If you are late for or miss more than five (5) class meetings, you cannot pass this course. If you think you will be late for or miss more than five classes, you should strongly reconsider registering for this class. Once you have missed six classes, you are welcome to continue visiting the class, but you will receive a failure on your transcript.

**Emailing Policy:**

I want to get to know you and your work this semester. Thus I ask that you call me or stop by my office during office hours (or scheduled times) so that we can talk. **DO NOT EMAIL ME TO ASK FOR AN "UPDATE" ON MISSED ASSIGNMENTS, OR TO EXPLAIN AN ABSENCE.** Working groups will be assigned so that you can contact group members for notes and missed work.
**Requirements**

**ALL ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMS MUST BE COMPLETED TO PASS THE COURSE**

Treatise Presentation (20%)
During the first week, each of you will choose an eighteenth-century text that thematizes disease in a literal or figurative way. I will then send you a "copy" of the original publication of this text as a pdf. Some of these texts are poems, others scientific treatises, and still others religious sermons. You will be responsible for finding out as much as you can about the text, and leading a class discussion on the text, for which you will select and, in advance of your presentation, distribute passages to the rest of the class. You will be required to hand out the passages you would like the class to read in preparation for class discussion at least one week before your presentation. The class as a whole will not be reading the entire treatise (only you will be). It will therefore be necessary for you to offer an introduction to the work in your opening remarks. More detail will follow. You may, but are not required to incorporate ideas from the treatise into your final paper. After your presentation, you will write up a two-page synopsis of your presentation and those points of interest raised in the discussion, to be distributed to the entire class. Instead of leading a class discussion, you may create an assignment of your own, based on your individual research or educational needs, for which you will need my approval.

Research Paper (50%)
Early in the semester, I would like you to brainstorm a topic for research—preferably dealing with some of our course material, but this is negotiable—on which you would consider writing a paper of approximately fifteen pages. I will most certainly offer my guidance and help in your developing a topic, but I will not give you a number of topic options. It is contingent on you to create and develop a literary thesis. Around midterm, we will set aside seminar time for each of you to present to the rest of us your intended area of research, during which time we will brainstorm ideas for your project. You will prepare an annotated bibliography of critical scholarship on your chosen topic due by Week 10. In your final project, you will need to demonstrate that you have acquired the reading, writing, and thinking skills demanded of a university degree in literary studies—from graceful literary prose to subtle critical thinking to correct citation format.

Presentation of a Critical Work (0%)
By the end of the semester, you will have found, I expect, many critical works (i.e., secondary sources) while researching your final paper. Choose any one of the critical essays that you have encountered during your research, and present a brief synopsis of the article (or chapter) to the rest of the class. This assignment is required (i.e., you cannot pass the course without completing it), but ungraded (although your performance will be taken into consideration in your participation grade). This article itself should be at least fifteen pages in length. You may present your critical work at any point in the semester.

Final Exam (10%)
The final exam—a university requirement—will verify your engagement with the class material through identification, short-answer, and essay questions. The final exam will contain both take-home and in-class sections.
Seminar Participation (20%)
This course is designated a senior “seminar”. I will expect you to come to seminar having read the material, and with questions or comments on the readings. Some of the course material may be quite difficult; you should pinpoint specific moments of reading difficulty, and query me (“test” me, if you will) about them. If you attend class without reading the texts carefully and completely, you will almost certainly fail the exam, and your class-participation grade will suffer immensely. If necessary, we will have unannounced quizzes at the beginning of class. You cannot “make up” missed quizzes; however, if you perform inadequately on a quiz, you may be required to write a paper demonstrating that you have (subsequently) read the material quizzed.

Important disclaimers…

Conduct
Instructors are responsible for maintaining order and a positive learning environment in the classroom. Students whose behavior is disruptive either to the instructor or to other students may be required to discontinue course activities and to cancel the course registration (or be disenrolled). In addition, students may be subject to disciplinary action.

Grades
Your instructor sets the requirements and grading criteria for specific assignments. Here are general standards for grades:

- A = Achievement that is outstanding and unique
- B = Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet the requirements
- C = Assignment meets the basic requirements in every respect
- D = Assignment meets only some of the requirements and is worthy of credit
- F = Assignment does not substantially meet the basic requirements

For in-class or other brief writing assignments, you will be graded on a scale of \( \sqrt{+}, \sqrt{1}, \) or \( \sqrt{-} \). Work that is strongly engaged and on-topic will receive a \( \sqrt{+} \). Satisfactory work that is on-topic will receive a \( \sqrt{1} \). Work that shows little engagement or is off-topic will get a \( \sqrt{-} \).

Incompletes
Incompletes are not given except in the most extraordinary circumstances (e.g., medical emergency), which a student must be able to document, and only if just a small part of the course remains to be finished. The student and teacher must make a written agreement concerning the condition of the incomplete.

Cell Phones
All those caught not having turned off their cells and/or other electronic devices will be subject to relentless mockery, public shaming, and, if necessary, unimaginably medieval tortures. More importantly, your class participation grade will be severely compromised.

Text Messaging
If you send or receive texts during class, you advertise to everyone around you that you are a pathetic junkie who cannot survive without an umbilical cord to the chatter of others. Just so you know.