

HCB 510 Literature, Compassion, and Health Care
Stony Brook Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care and Bioethics, Spring 2019
3 Credits

Class meetings: Tuesdays, 6 PM, from January 29 through May 7 in HSC L3-069 (large conference room)

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OVERVIEW

How does literature help us understand the nature of human illness and suffering? Can written works of art, classic and contemporary, that depict moments of compassion and compassionate acts lay bare the moral, spiritual, psychological, and physical reality of suffering? There is a long association between literature and medicine, from the viewpoint of physician-writers, such as Anton Chekov, William Carlos Williams, and Richard Seltzer whose literary skills have eclipsed their medical backgrounds. Understanding how physicians are portrayed in literature, such as in Henrik Ibsen's play, *An Enemy of the People*, can help us explore the relationship between patient and doctor, between doctor and society, and the nature of healing. What is your role in healing, and how does reading and reflection help you in this role? In this full semester course, we will study these relationships through the reading of poetry, drama, fiction, memoir, and essay and reflect on the nature of suffering, the intrinsic human need for compassion, and the implications for health and healing.

Educational objectives: Students who successfully complete this course will be able to

1. Discuss and demonstrate the use of literature as one method of enhancing empathy, imaginative identification, and the moral imagination.
2. Understand and explain literary, cultural, and religious attempts to find meaning in human suffering.
3. Demonstrate enhanced skills of “reading” patients and clinical situations through close reading of literary texts.
4. Describe how the arts and humanities provide insight into the human condition, suffering, and compassion.
5. Demonstrate an understanding of physicians’ responsibilities to patients, colleagues, and themselves.

READINGS

Required Tests:

- Richard Reynolds & John Stone (Eds.) *On Doctoring*. 3rd edition. New York, Simon & Shuster, 2001 [Paperback, 2010]
- Pat Barker. *Regeneration*, New York, Plume, 1993 (paperback)
- Paul Kalanithi, *When Breath Becomes Air*, New York, Random House, 2016.
- Victoria Sweet, *God's Hotel: A Doctor, a Hospital, and a Pilgrimage to the Heart of Medicine*, Riverhead Trade, 2013 (selected chapters)
- Heinrich Ibsen. *An Enemy of the People* (any edition)
- Brian Yorkey & Thomas Kitt, *Next to Normal*, Theater Communications Group, 2010
- Additional poems (to be distributed)
- Additional stories (email attachments)

CLASS CALENDAR

Date	Topic	Readings
Jan. 29	Introduction to Course	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Film: <i>Healing Words: Poetry and Medicine</i>. 2. Course Syllabus (handout) 3. Presentation: Why Doctors Write 4. Poems for discussion (handout)
Feb. 5	Healer-Patient Relationship	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>On Doctoring (Stories)</i>: William Carlos Williams, “Girl with the Pimple Face”; Susan Mates, “Laundry.” 2. <i>On Doctoring (Poems)</i>: Dannie Abse, “Case History”; Rafael Campo, and “What the Body Told” 3. Frank Huyler, “Sugar” (pdf) 4. Jay Baruch, “Laceration Repair.” (pdf) 5. Jack Coulehan, “Take Off Your Clothes” (pdf) 6. Richard Bronson, “I Shall be Your Vasari” (pdf)
Feb. 12	Experience of illness and suffering	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>On Doctoring (Stories)</i>: Anatole Broyard, “Doctor, Talk to Me”; Robert Coles, “Medical Ethics and Living a Life”; Richard Selzer, “Witness.” 2. <i>On Doctoring (Poems)</i>: James Dickey, “Diabetes” and “The Cancer Match”; Mary Oliver, “University Hospital, Boston” 3. Louise Aronson, “An American Problem” (pdf) 4. Anne Brashler, “He Read to Her” (pdf) 5. Maria Basile, “Oatmeal Love” (pdf) 6. Jack Coulehan, “Heart Blockages” (pdf) 7. Richard Bronson “Another Country” (pdf)

Feb. 19	Experience of illness and suffering (Women's Health)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>On Doctoring (Stories)</i>: Ernest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants" 2. <i>On Doctoring (Poems)</i>: Linda Pastan, "Notes From the Delivery Room"; Sharon Olds, "Miscarriage" and "35/10"; Mary Oliver, "Beaver Moon—the Suicide of a Friend"; Lucille Clifton, "the lost baby poem" and "poem to my uterus" 3. Charlotte P. Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" 4. Maria Basile, "Goodnight Womb," "Cracked Hands."(pdf)
Feb 26	The Healer's Vulnerability (Less Than Perfect)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>On Doctoring (stories)</i>: David Hilfiker, "Mistakes"; Mikhail Bulgakov, "Baptism by Rotation" 2. Richard Selzer, "Brute" (pdf) 3. Susan Mates, "The Good Doctor" 4. Jack Coulehan, "The Silk Robe" (pdf) 5. Richard Bronson "Sin and Absolution" (pdf)
March 5	The Tyranny of the Normal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Raymond Carver, "Fat" 2. Alice Walker, "Everyday Use" (pdf) 3. Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Birthmark" (pdf) 4. John Updike, "From the Journal of a Leper" 5. Poems: John Ciardi, "Washing Your Feet"; Rawdon Tomlinson, "Fat People at the Amusement Park"; Karl Shapiro, "The Leg"; Miller Williams, "The Ones That Are Thrown Out"; H.N. Beckerman, "To: The Access Committee"
March 12	Poetry Workshop STUDENT POEMS DUE	Student poems

March 19	SPRING RECESS – NO CLASS	
March 26	Death and Dying	<i>When Breath Becomes Air</i> (memoir)
April 2	Death and Dying	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Richard Selzer, “Mercy” and “Tube Feeding” 2. Raymond Carver, “A Small, Good Thing” (pdf) 3. <i>On Doctoring</i> (Poems): Emily Dickinson poems; Dylan Thomas, “Do Not Go Gentle”; Denise Levertov, “Talking to Grief”; Raymond Carver, “My Death” 4. Raymond Carver, “What the Doctor Said” (poem) 5. Donald Hall poems
April 9	Medicine and Society	Selections from God’s Hotel (memoir)
April 16	Medicine and Society	“Enemy of the People” (drama)
April 23	Mental Health	Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey, <i>Next to Normal</i> (drama)
April 30	Society and Medicine	“Barbara” (film)

May 7	Synthesis and Analysis FINAL PAPER DUE	<i>Regeneration</i> (novel)
May 14	EXAM WEEK – NO CLASS	

A note on the workload: The required readings average about 50 pages per week, although they vary dramatically from zero (the poetry workshop) to several hundred (*Regeneration*). We encourage you to read additional material from *On Doctoring* if you have the time and interest. Most of the topics are interrelated. The more you read the more you can grasp the “big picture.” Each student will have the opportunity to explore in more detail a topic of special interest and lead a class discussion on that topic (see below).

These websites may be helpful in finding more material for your research or for creative inspiration.

- NYU Literature, Arts, and Medicine Database (<http://medhum.med.nyu.edu>)
- The Poetry Foundation (www.poetryfoundation.org)
- The Academy of American Poets (www.poets.org)
- The Poetry Archive (www.poetryarchive.org)

ASSIGNMENTS

In addition to reading and class discussion, there are three specific assignments in this course. Each assignment is worth 20% of your final grade.

1. **Creative writing.** The first written assignment (due March 12) is to write a poem prompted by an activity that we will discuss on the first day of class. Our class on Tuesday, March 6 will consist of a poetry workshop in which each student will read his/her poem and receive constructive feedback from classmates and faculty members. We will provide further details on this assignment at the introductory class on January 29.

2. **Oral presentation.** The second assignment is an oral presentation based on a short story, poem, essay, or other piece of literature. During a 20 minute class segment, each student will give a short talk and lead The presentations must: (a) be related to the week's topic, but NOT be based on one of the assigned readings; (b) include the subsequent discussion. These presentations will take place during selected classes between March 26 and April 30.some background about the author; (c) include sufficient description of the piece being discussed so that students who have not read it can understand the discussion; and (d) provide an illustrative handout (including the entire text if a poem). PowerPoint slides or other media are optional. This assignment will also be described in more detail on January 29.
3. **Final essay.** The final assignment (due May 7) is a 3 to 5 page essay, in which you reflect on an aspect of Pat Barker's novel, *Regeneration*. In particular, you must explain why you believe novel is titled *Regeneration* and how the novel is relevant to today's circumstances and health care. Support your ideas with examples from the book.

GRADING POLICY

Your grade for the course will be based on 100 points.

1. Knowledgeable participation in class discussions (40 points, 40% of your grade). This aspect of the course may require some explanation, since students often consider discussion grades to be subjective or arbitrary. Obviously, we expect students to demonstrate that they have read the material by speaking up, offering their interpretations, and defending their points of view. However, we are looking for quality of thinking and expression, rather than simply quantity or frequency of speech. A person who speaks only a moderate amount, but makes very thoughtful comments can score highly, while someone who talks very frequently but doesn't contribute to deepening the discussion may not score highly. The main point, however, is that you have to contribute.
2. Each of the three assignments is worth 20 points. In total, they constitute 60% of your grade.
3. In borderline grading cases, we will take into account a pattern of consistent improvement in performance over time in either, or both, discussion forum and specific assignments. A student who demonstrates such a pattern may receive extra consideration.

Academic honesty statement: Intellectual honesty is the cornerstone of all academic and scholarly work. Therefore, the University views any form of academic dishonesty as a serious matter and requires all instructors to report every case of academic dishonesty to the SPD Committee on Academic Standing, which keeps records of all cases. All work submitted or posted in this course must be your own. Submission of writing or ideas that are not your original work (and are not properly referenced) constitutes plagiarism. Unintentional plagiarism is still plagiarism, so if you have any questions about proper acknowledgement of sources, please ask your instructor who can advise you about various electronic tools to self-screen your work. Refer to page 12 of the online SPD Student Handbook for further information on academic honesty and associated grievance procedures.

(<http://www.stonybrook.edu/spd/bulletin/>)

Disability statement: If you have a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services (444-6748) or <http://studentaffairs.stonybrook.edu/dss/>. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.