

ANG 2454: Literature and Medicine

Hiver 2022

Mercredi, 16h à 19h

Prof. Heather Meek

Description:

In her influential essay *Illness as Metaphor*, Susan Sontag describes illness as both “ineluctably material” and “multi-determined.” In this course, we will study a variety of medically-themed literary works, similarly considering illness and disease as biomedical realities, socio-political experiences, and imaginative constructions. We will explore the ways cultural and historical context, as well as racial, sexual, and gender identity determine experiences and understandings of illness and disease, and we will consider how literature shapes and reimagines physical and psychological humiliation, trauma, and transformation. We will read authors who explore or come to terms with suffering, harness illness as a form of literary expression, and assess with a critical eye medical – as well social and political – institutions and conventions. Reading fictional and autobiographical works will allow us to reflect on the ways in which narratives of illness, disease, and death stimulate a range of unusual and sometimes unsettling explorations of community, politics, identity, and the human condition.

Provisional Reading List:

Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*

Virginia Woolf, *On Being Ill*

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper”

Frances Burney, “A Mastectomy”

Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*

Lorrie Moore, “People Like That Are the Only People Here”

Patricia Lockwood, “The Winged Thing”

Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*

Torrey Peters, *Infect your Friends and Loved Ones*

Mari Kurisato, “Seed Children”

Sarah Manguso, *Two Kinds of Decay*

A selection of secondary reading material will be made available on StudiUM.

Evaluation:

Passage analysis assignment (20%)

In-class midterm (30%)

Final research essay (40%)

Participation (10%)