

ANG 6130 Studies in Eighteenth-Century British Literature: Narratives of Illness and Disease

Automne 2021

Mardi, 13h à 16h

Prof. Heather Meek

Description:

This seminar explores the intimate correlations between the worlds of literature and medicine in the British long eighteenth century (c. 1660-1832). In our study of representations of plague, smallpox, melancholy, consumption, cancer, rheumatism, and other medical conditions, we will consider illness and disease as both containable biomedical realities and malleable configurations. In the process, we will discover a period characterized by debate and ferment – one in which a multiplicity of literary and medical ideas proliferated, intersected, and collided. We will learn how both literary and medical figures – many of whom moved in the same circles, collaborated with each other, or had a profound understanding of one another’s areas of expertise – participated in processes of innovation and experiment, even as they relied on earlier paradigms reaching back to Antiquity. We will explore writers’ contributions to the pre-professionalized medical sphere of their time, and we will consider the influence of contemporaneous medical thought on the development of literary genres and movements. We will thus look at literary and medical authors not merely as purveyors of medical knowledge but also as imaginative thinkers who variously reproduced and questioned conventional medical orthodoxies around sex, gender, race, and poverty; who re-imagined what it meant to be sick, diseased, or disabled; and who drew on medical ideas in ways that helped shape poetic form, narrative structure, thematic content, and character in the literary works they produced.

Provisional Reading List:

Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*

Eliza Haywood, *The Distress'd Orphan; or Love in a Madhouse*

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, from *Turkish Embassy Letters*

Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Humphry Clinker*

Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*

Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*

Frances Burney, “A Mastectomy,” from *Letters*

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus*

Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave*

Links to secondary material, as well as a selection of poetry, letters, essays, and medical text excerpts will be made available on StudiUM

Evaluation:

Seminar presentation (10%)

Short paper (20%)

Final paper proposal and bibliography (10%)

Final paper (50%)

Attendance and participation (10%)