

**SICK:**  
**Gender, Identity, and Illness in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century British Literature and Culture**

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ENGL 3911/4435 • M/W 3:30-4:50 pm • LANG 209 • Spring 2017

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Office hours: M/W 12:45-1:45 pm (or by appointment)

Course description:

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What we now call the long 19<sup>th</sup> century—the period from the French Revolution to World War I—witnessed foundational changes in the practice and theory of medicine, in areas ranging from disease diagnosis and treatment to psychiatric care and sanitation reform. As medicine became increasingly professionalized, literature entered debates raised by medical journals and societies, incorporated new medical research, and posed questions about radical new treatments. Over the course of five thematic units (Weak, Contagious, Hysterical, Addicted, and “Freakish”), we will study the ways in which the poetry, prose, drama, and fiction of this era can be seen to describe and portray the gendered, classed, sexualized, and racialized bodies produced and managed by medical science. Though our focus will be primarily on the literature of the British Empire, we will also be making brief transnational pit stops—in Russia, Norway, Austria, America—to gain a broader understanding of 19<sup>th</sup>-century illnesses and medical practices around the world. Of particular interest to us as we work through these texts of disease and disability will be questions of empathy, perspective, identity, and the construction of normativity and alterity.

NB: While I will certainly guide our class discussions and make sure that we cover all of the textual and historical ground that I consider to be the most interesting and the most important, I will not be lecturing at you. We will be working through these materials together, and your participation and thoughts and questions are not only desired but required.

Texts to purchase:

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Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*. Broadview edition. **ISBN: 9781551115320**  
(All other readings will be in the course reader)

Grade breakdown:

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1. Participation/attendance/effort: 20%
2. Reading grade (determined by pop quizzes): 15%
3. Article overview presentation: 10%
4. Periodical press research paper: 15%
5. Final paper/project proposal: 5%
6. Final paper/project: 20%
7. Final exam: 15%

*Participation, attendance, and effort:* Because your participation is so crucial to the fabric of this class, it will comprise 20% of your grade. Attendance obviously affects your ability to participate, so all missed or tardy classes will serve to lower your participation grade. While a good rule of thumb is to

avoid missing more than 2 weeks of classes to avoid negatively impacting your grade (in this case, a total of 4 class sessions), I do understand that personal and medical emergencies arise on occasion, and I will try to be understanding about these issues if they do not significantly undermine your ability to learn the materials. You must let me know ahead of time when you are going to miss class; I can only be understanding about absences if I understand what's going on. I will also take into account the overall effort you have put forth in the class when determining this part of your grade.

*Reading grade:* You cannot participate if you don't come to class, but you also cannot participate if you don't do the reading. To give you extra motivation to keep up with the reading on a weekly basis, there will be reading-content quizzes at the beginning of certain classes scattered randomly throughout the semester. Glancing over a wikipedia summary will not enable you to do well on these quizzes; reading the actual texts, however, will make this portion of your grade a breeze. No quizzes may be made up, but the lowest score of the semester will be dropped.

*Article overview presentation:* Once over the course of the semester, you will be responsible for presenting (along with a partner) a 7-10 minute powerpoint on an article that provides literary or historical context for the class's assigned reading of the day. I will give more details about how this article overview should be organized, but the main components should be: 1) explaining what the primary point/claim of the article is, 2) laying out the article's various sub-points/examples that are used to support the primary claim, and 3) voicing your own opinion about the article's claims.

*Periodical press research paper:* You will select one illness or disease that was common in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (from a list I will provide) and trace its reception and representation in the British periodical press via UNT's digital databases. You will then write a 3-4 page (double-spaced) research paper summarizing your findings, which you will share with your classmates on 4/3.

*Final paper/project:* You will be able to choose one of two options for your final assignment in this class: you may either write a traditional, thesis-driven, 5-7 page analytic essay that focuses on one or more of the texts that we've read together, or you may do a creative project (make a film, write a short story, etc.) that takes up the issues raised in the class in a serious, intellectually challenging way. More detailed instructions for each of these options will be handed out at a later time. A one-page proposal for this paper/project will be due on 4/12 so that I can give you feedback on the direction it's taking; the final product will be due on the last day of class, 5/3.

*Final Exam:* The final exam will be your way of showing me what you're coming away with at the end of the semester. It will be given in our regular classroom on 5/10 from 1:30 – 3:30 pm.

#### Course policies:

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*Email:* I will, at times, send important messages via my official class email list; please begin checking your UNT email address on a regular basis if you are not already doing so. On the other end of the equation, I make it a policy to respond to student emails within 24 hours except on weekends; if by any chance you do not receive a response within that time frame, please resend your email to make sure it did not somehow disappear in the internet ether.

*Laptops and cell phones:* Because this class is discussion/idea-based (rather than lecture/fact-based) and because you are required to purchase hard copies of all the assigned novels and I will provide handouts of all the assigned shorter readings, you will be freed from the modern dependence on technology for the three hours you are with me each week. If you plan to take notes, bring a pen!

*Plagiarism:* If you fail to give full credit to the sources you are citing, lift a paper off of the internet, reuse a paper that was written for another class, or have someone else write any part of your paper for you, you are plagiarizing and I will catch you doing so. (All papers must be uploaded to turnitin.com via the course's Blackboard page.) Plagiarism will result in failure of the course and permanent documentation on your academic record. Zero tolerance policy.

*Students with Disabilities:* Anyone with a disability requiring accommodation must present a written accommodation request to me within eleven days of the first class session. Copies of the school's ADA Compliance Policy, Policy on Auxiliary Aids and Reasonable Accommodation, and the ADA Grievance Procedures are available through the main office of the School of Library and Information Sciences (940-565-2445). It is also recommended that you register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (940-565-4323).

### Discussion Schedule:

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1/18: Course and student introductions

1/23: Daniel Pool, "Disease" and "Doctors" from *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew*  
Virginia Woolf, "On Being Ill" (1926)

### **UNIT 1: WEAK**

1/25: Harriet Martineau, from *Life in the Sick-room* (1844)

[Article overview (modeled by me): Maria Frawley, "The Range of our Vision: Self, Surveillance, and Life in the Sickroom" and Erika Wright, "The Omniscience of Invalidism: The Case of Harriet Martineau"]

1/30: W.E. Henley, *In Hospital* (1888)

[Article overview: Jennifer Anne Yirinec, "Illness and Identity in W. E. Henley's *In Hospital*"]

2/1: John Keats, "When I have fears," "This Living Hand," "Ode to a Nightingale" (1818-19)  
Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Sonnets 1, 14, and 26 from *Sonnets from the Portuguese, Illuminated by the Brownings' Love Letters* (1845-46)  
Watch clips from biopics *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* (1934) and *Bright Star* (2009)

[Article overview: Katherine Byrne, "Nineteenth-Century Medical Discourse on Tuberculosis"]

2/6: Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych* (1886)

### **UNIT 2: CONTAGIOUS**

2/8: John Snow, "On the Mode of Communication of Cholera" (1855)  
Charles Mackay, "The Mowers: An Anticipation of the Cholera, 1848"  
In-class screening of *Snow* (2011)

[Article overview: Pamela Gilbert, "On Cholera in Nineteenth-Century England"]

2/13 Guest lecture on contagious Victorian skin diseases by Pamela Gilbert

2/15: Henrik Ibsen, *Ghosts* (1881)

[Article overview: Graham Mooney, “‘These Bastard Laws’: Infectious Disease, Liberty, and Localism”]

2/20: John Edgar Wideman, “Fever” (1989)

[Article overview: Katherine Arner, “Making Yellow Fever American: The Early American Republic, the British Empire, and the Geopolitics of Disease in the Atlantic World”]

### UNIT 3: HYSTERICAL

2/22: John Clare, “I am,” “An Invite to Eternity,” and “A Vision” (1840s-60s)  
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892)

[Article overview: Anne Stiles, “The Rest Cure, 1873-1925”]

2/27: George Cukor, *Gaslight* (1944)

[Article overview: Elaine Showalter, “Domesticating Insanity/The Rise of the Victorian Madwoman”]

3/1: Sigmund Freud, *Fragment of an Analysis of Hysteria (Dora)* (1901)

[Article overview: Steven Marcus, “Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History”]

3/6: Virginia Woolf, from *Mrs. Dalloway* -- Septimus’s story (1925)

[Article overview: Wyatt Bonikowski, “The Invisible Wound: Shell Shock and Psychoanalysis”]

3/8: LIBRARY RESEARCH DAY

### UNIT 4: ADDICTED

3/20: Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821)

[Article overview: Louise Foxcroft, introduction to *The Making of Addiction: The Use and Abuse of Opium in Nineteenth-Century Britain*]

3/22: Samuel Coleridge, “Kubla Khan” and “The Pains of Sleep” (1816)

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “A True Dream” (1833)

Elizabeth Siddal, “Lord, May I Come?” (1862) + images of Siddal in Pre-Raphaelite art

[Article overview: Robin L. Inboden, “Damsels, Dulcimers, and Dreams: Elizabeth Barrett’s Early Response to Coleridge”]

- 3/27: Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “The Lotus-eaters” (1832)  
Christina Rossetti, “Goblin Market” (1859)

[Article overview: Shelley O’Reilly, “Absinthe Makes the Tart Grow Fonder: A Note on ‘Wormwood’ in Christina Rossetti’s ‘Goblin Market’”]

- 3/29: James Joyce, “Counterparts” and “Grace” from *Dubliners* (1904)

[Article overview: Jean Kane, “Imperial Pathologies: Medical Discourse and Drink in *Dubliners*’ ‘Grace’”]

- 4/3: RESEARCH PRESENTATION DAY

### UNIT 5: “FREAKISH”

- 4/5: Marlene Tromp and Karyn Valerius, “Toward Situating the Victorian Freak”  
Marlene Tromp, “Empire and the Indian Freak: The ‘Miniature Man’ from Cawnpore and the ‘Marvelous Indian Boy’ on Tour in England”  
Rebecca Stern, “Our Bear Women, Ourselves: Affiliating with Julia Pastrana”

- 4/10: David Lynch, *The Elephant Man* (1980)

[Article overview: Sharrona Pearl, “Victorian Blockbuster Bodies and the Freakish Pleasure of Looking”]

- 4/12: In-class exploration of freaks shows in Victorian Popular Culture Database  
**\* Final paper/project proposals due at beginning of class**

- 4/17: Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886)  
**\* Proposals returned with feedback**

### PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

- 4/19: Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (1847)

- 4/24: *Wuthering Heights*, cont’d

- 4/26: *Wuthering Heights*, cont’d

- 5/1: Susan Sontag, from *Illness as Metaphor* (1978)  
Eula Biss, from *On Immunity: An Inoculation* (2014)

- 5/3: Class wrap-up; final exam prep  
**\* Final papers/projects due at beginning of class**