

Rhodes College Digital Archives - DLynx

ENGL 223-01, Words and Healing, Spring 2001

Item Type	Syllabus
Authors	Pitts, M. E.
Publisher	Memphis, Tenn. : Rhodes College
Rights	Rhodes College owns the rights to the digital objects in this collection. Objects are made available for educational use only and may not be used for any non-educational or commercial purpose. Approved educational uses include private research and scholarship, teaching, and student projects. For additional information please contact archives@rhodes.edu . Fees may apply.
Download date	2026-06-16 18:43:01
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/10267/2976

English 223, Spring 2001
Dr. M. E. Pitts
Palmer 317; 843-3293
pitts@rhodes.edu

Course Description

Titled “Words and Healing: Literature and Medicine,” English 223 seeks to explore the relationships between literature and medicine, which are at least as old as the Greeks. Inscribed over the door of the library at Thebes were the words “Medicine for the Soul.” Both Greek empiricism and Epicurean rhetoric found their methodology in the writings of Hippocrates.

Designed primarily for pre-med majors, this course will focus on literary works, some by or about physicians, that treat subjects from medicine or medical ethics. We will examine a variety of texts that reveal the emergence of “medical science” from the “medical arts.” We will look at medical issues as portrayed in a variety of literary forms, noting at times the cultural biases that underlie the seemingly neutral discourse of medicine.

The course will examine five major themes that emerge in the study of literature and medicine: (1) defining disease/pain and writing, (2) the doctor/patient relationship, (2) healing and conversion experiences, (4) plague literature, and (5) women and medicine. In approaching these themes we will read selections from a wide cross-section of literary figures: Geoffrey Chaucer, John Donne, Daniel Defoe, John Keats, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henrik Ibsen, Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov, Ernest Hemingway, William Carlos Williams, Flannery O’Connor, Walker Percy, Ferrol Sams, James Dickey, and Alice Walker. In addition, we will read from the fiction of contemporary physician/writer Ferrol Sams, the emerging body of fiction and fictionalized accounts known as “plague discourse,” essays/tales by physicians Oliver Sacks and Richard Selzer, and poems by contemporary writers who have published in JAMA and in Literature and Medicine. Although we will read several selections from the medieval and early modern periods of literature, most of the readings will come from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Class Procedures

Classes will emphasize discussion and interpretation. Students will keep reading journals (two entries per week, with journals collected every three weeks). They will write two formal papers, one of which will be a documented essay on a particular text, plus take-home essays for the midterm and the final. Some class time will be devoted to planning, editing, and revising students' work. In preparing their papers, students will be introduced to the rich and growing body of critical studies of literature and medicine. Each student will also give an oral presentation based on one of the papers.

Texts

Reserve materials, including readings from Chaucer, Donne, Defoe, Browne, Goldsmith, Keats, Arnold, Auden, Hawthorne, Lawrence, Hemingway, O’Connor

Selected poems by Gwendolyn Brooks, James Dickey, Alice Walker (handouts)

Selected poems by Dannie Abse and others published in JAMA and in Literature and Medicine (handouts)

Ibsen, An Enemy of the People

Chekhov, Uncle Vanya

Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyitch

Williams, The Doctor Stories

Sams, The Widow’s Mite and Other Stories

Selzer, Letters to a Young Doctor

Edson, W;t

Sacks, The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales
Preston, The Hot Zone

Selections for Further Reading

Foucault, The Birth of the Clinic
Sontag, Illness as Metaphor
Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs, and Women
Hawkins, Reconstructing Illness
Radner, It's Always Something
Hunter, Doctors' Stories
Freud, Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria
Kleinman, The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition
Coles, Medical Ethics and Living a Life
Mitchell, The Autobiography of a Quack
Nuland, How We Die: Reflections on Life's Final Chapter
Garrett, The Coming Plague
Frank, The Wounded Storyteller

Available for Viewing for Extra Credit

BBC film version of Eliot's Middlemarch

Goals and Objectives

- To develop further the ability to read and think critically
- To hone students' abilities to analyze literary texts
- To examine perceived and real relationships between writing and healing arts
- To examine writing as a vehicle for exploring and refining ideas
- To examine the growing body of work on the interrelationships of literature and medicine
- To help students discover how discourse links disciplines
- To examine the literature-medicine link in its cultural context

Assignments

Readings. Each week, students will read selected assigned material. Classes are designed to be interactive, with discussion of the texts, the cultural contexts, literary and rhetorical conventions in the texts, and the interrelationship of thinking and discourse in medicine itself.

Journals. Students will write critiques of and/or reactions to the assigned readings. Journals will be collected every three weeks.

Essays. Students will write two papers on selected texts; one will be approximately 750 words, and the second will be a six- to eight-page documented essay drawing in part on one of the selections for further reading; this paper will be the basis of a report presented to the class. The midterm and the final will be take-home essay exams.

Oral Reports. Each student will be responsible for leading the discussion on one of the assigned texts. Each student will present a brief oral report based on the research project.

Quizzes. We will have twelve reading quizzes (covering simple, factual material). No make-ups will be given, but I will drop the two lowest grades.

Syllabus

Week

- 1 Introduction to the course and to one another; overview of the course; introductory analysis and writing
- 2 T: Selections from early writers, including Chaucer and Harvey
Th: selections from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers, including Defoe, Donne, Descartes
- 3 T: Selections from nineteenth-century writers, including Keats, "Ode on Melancholy" and "When I Have Fears"; discussion of first essay
- 4 T: Hawthorne, "The Birthmark" and "Rappaccini's Daughter"
Th: Ibsen, An Enemy of the People
- 5 T: Chekhov, Uncle Vanya
Th: Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilych (pp. 93-152)
- 6 T: W. C. Williams, The Doctor Stories (pp. 1-68 [through "A Night in June])
Th: The Doctor Stories (pp. 69-134 [through "To Close"]); editing draft of first essay
- 7 T: Hemingway and Lawrence ("Indian Camp" and "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter")
Th: O'Connor, "Good Country People," plus Sams, The Widow's Mite, pp. 1-62; first essay due by 4:00 Friday
- 8 T: Sams, The Widow's Mite, pp. 63-130; distribution of questions for mid-term take-home exam;
Th: Sams pp. 131-218; Browning, "Porphyrias's Lover"; mid-term due by 4:00 Friday
- 9 SPRING BREAK
- 10 T: Sams, The Widow's Mite, pp. 131-218; Browning, "Porphyria's Lover"
Th: Selzer, Letters to a Young Doctor, pp. 13-91
- 11 T: Selzer, pp. 92-205
Th: Sacks, The Man Who Mistook, pp. 3-79; discussion of documented essay
- 12 T: Sacks, pp. 80-177
Th: Sacks, pp. 178-233
- 13 T: Edson, W;t
Th: The Hot Zone, pp. 3-179
- 14 T: The Hot Zone, pp. 180-282
Th: Easter recess

- 15 T: The Hot Zone, pp. 283-411
Th: Verghese, pp. 5-107
- 16 T: Verghese, pp. 108-321
Th: Verghese, pp. 322-429; take-home final distributed)
- 17 Final Exam

Grading Summary

Essays: 15% and 20% (The documented paper counts more heavily.)

Exams: 40%

Journals and class participation: 10%

Quizzes: 10%

Oral presentations: 5%

Honor Code

The Honor Code will apply to all work except for peer editing of essays; in any case, the work and the insights are assumed to be the writer's own.

Attendance

A copy of the English Department's policy statement on attendance is attached. Anyone with excessive absences will be urged to drop the course.

Completion of Work

Students must complete all work if they are to complete the course. If you have a reasonable excuse, I will work with you. However, students who fail to keep up with the writing process, the quizzes, or the exams may fall so far behind that they will be unable to complete the course. Participation in the course is integral to the learning process, and everyone's participation is essential to creating a rich atmosphere of learning.

Level of Sophistication

As a student at a highly respected liberal arts college, you are expected to act appropriately at all times and to show respect for others. Wandering in and out of the classroom or behaving inappropriately in class will not be tolerated.