

## ENGLISH 607—NARRATIVE, MEDICINE, AND THE BODY

Professor Mary Wood  
445 PLC

[mewood@uoregon.edu](mailto:mewood@uoregon.edu)  
Office hours: W 11-2

**Goals of Course:** In this course we will explore recent developments in the interdisciplinary field of Health and Medical Humanities, focusing in particular on the social and representational construction of the medical sciences, the relationship between medical science and popular representations of health and illness, the ways that bodily experiences marked by gender and race and defined as medical are represented and at times reimaged through narrative, and the ways that narratives of medicine and health are used to promote and resist social inequalities. Given that we will be reading works in anthropology, philosophy, and psychology alongside those in literary studies, we will also address a couple central methodological questions: What does responsible, engaged interdisciplinary research and writing look like? How do those of us in literary or film-related fields “do” cultural studies? Can we interpret and analyze non-literary and non-filmic writings, places, and events as if they are literary texts? What is the relationship between Health Humanities and Disability Studies? There are no easy answers to these questions, so I hope we will have a good time exploring them.

**Texts:** Cheryl Mattingly, *Paradox of Hope*  
Helena María Viramontes, *Under the Feet of Jesus*  
Articles and excerpts on Blackboard (“Articles to Read”)

### Assignments:

1)**Journals:** Please post a one-paragraph Journal entry on Blackboard by 9 p.m. every Wednesday. It should be on one particular aspect of the next day’s reading. It should include at least ONE quotation from one of the readings.

2)**Discussion Facilitation:** Each seminar participant will lead discussion about ONE of the course readings during the term (two people per class, starting in Week Two). Discussion leaders should BRIEFLY summarize the main argument, then raise two or three questions for discussion.

2)**Interdisciplinary primary research project:** You will do primary research on material not directly related to literature, then use it to write a brief essay (5-6 pages) analyzing a literary or moving image work. For example, you could read through late nineteenth century articles on “insanity” in Oregon newspapers available on microfilm at the UO Knight library, then refer to them as you discuss

Nellie Bly's autobiographical *Ten Days in a Madhouse*. Or, you could read a few turn-of-the-century issues of the *American Journal of Insanity*, which could similarly be juxtaposed to Bly's work. Another example: Read the declassified documents from the 1954 Bravo nuclear test site in the Marshall Islands, verifying that the Marshallese were studied for the health effects of radioactivity. Analyze these documents (or alternatively the transcripts from Congressional hearings or federal lawsuits on the issue) as you discuss a chapter from Marshallese Robert Barclay's novel *Melal*. **Due in class Week Six.**

3) 10-page conference paper including a bibliography of at least 15 works and an additional 1-3 paragraph discussion of what you would do to develop the paper into a longer article or dissertation chapter. **Due Wednesday, Dec. 11<sup>th</sup>, by 6 p.m. to my email (see top of page).**

4) Part of #3 above: Please send me the first five pages, well-written, by Nov. 30<sup>th</sup> (noon). I will give you feedback in time for you to incorporate it into the final paper.

## **Reading Schedule:**

**Week One**—October 3rd: The Medical Gaze and the Moral Body  
Jerome Groopman, excerpt from *How Doctors Think*  
Abenna Brewster, "A Student's View of a Medical Teaching Exercise."  
Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. Chs. 15 and 16 of *Elsie Venner*

**Week Two**—Oct. 10<sup>th</sup>: Genetics—Map as Narrative  
Jonathan Beckwith, "Whither Human Behavioral Genetics?" In Erik Parens, ed.,  
*Wrestling with Behavioral Genetics*.  
Paul A. Lombardo, Prologue and Chs. 3-4 of *Three Generations, No Imbeciles*  
*: Eugenics, the Supreme Court, and Buck v. Bell*.  
Alice Wexler, Introduction and Ch. 12 of *Mapping Fate*  
Rebecca Skloot, Ch. 23 of *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*.

**Week Three**--Oct. 17<sup>th</sup>: Bioethics and Narrative  
Eva Feder Kittay, "On the Expressivity and Ethics of Selective Abortion for Disability:  
Conversations with my Son."  
Paul John Eakin, "Introduction: Mapping the Ethics of Life Writing," in Paul John  
Eakin, ed., *The Ethics of Life Writing*.  
G. Thomas Couser, "When Life Writing Becomes Death Writing," in Eakin, ed., *The  
Ethics of Life Writing*.  
Arthur Kleinman, excerpt from *What Really Matters*.  
Laurie Zoloth and Rita Charon, "Like an Open Book: Reliability, Intersubjectivity,  
and Textuality in Bioethics," in Rita Charon and Martha Montello, eds., *Stories  
Matter: The Role of Narrative in Medical Ethics*.

**Week Four**--Oct. 24<sup>th</sup>: The Emergence of the Medicalized Body/Narratives of Illness  
Ed Cohen, Ch. 4 and Conclusion of *A Body Worth Defending*  
Arthur Frank, excerpt from *The Wounded Storyteller*  
Anatole Broyard, excerpt from *Intoxicated by My Illness*  
Rebecca Garden, "Disability and Narrative: New Directions for Medicine and the  
Medical Humanities."

**Week Five**—Oct. 31<sup>st</sup>: Whose Story is it and Why Does it Matter?  
Cheryl Mattingly, *Paradox of Hope* (UO Bookstore)  
Everyone is also welcome (but not required) to attend a CSWS Research Interest  
Group (Heath, Narrative, and Social Justice) meeting on this book Tuesday,  
December 3<sup>rd</sup>, at 3 p.m., in 448 PLC.

**Week Six**—Nov. 7<sup>th</sup>: Body/Identity/Narrative/Gender  
Susanna Kaysen, excerpt from *The Camera My Mother Gave Me*  
Eli Clare, "Body Shame, Body Pride," "Stolen Bodies, Reclaimed Bodies."  
Dean Spade, "Mutilating Gender"  
Arthur Robinson Williams, excerpt from *Transgender Considerations: A Clinical  
Primer for the Generalist*.

**Week Seven**--Nov. 14<sup>th</sup>: Defining Mental Health and Illness  
Accounts from *Schizophrenia Bulletin*: Erin Stefanidis, "Being Rational"; Wilma  
Boevink, "From Being a Disorder to Dealing with Life"; Leslie Greenblat,  
"First Person Account."  
Mary Wood, Chapter on DSM-IV Case Book from *Life Writing and Schizophrenia*  
B. Casey, "Meanings of Madness."

**Week Eight**--Nov. 21<sup>st</sup>—Mental Health and Illness continued  
Gail Hornstein, excerpt from *Agnes's Jacket*  
Angela Woods, "Jung and Babette en route to Freud and Schreber"  
Sigmund Freud, excerpt from essay on Schreber

**Week Nine**—Nov. 28<sup>th</sup>—No class.

**Week Ten**—Dec. 5<sup>th</sup>—Social (In)Justice and Health Narratives  
Helena María Viramontes, *Under the Feet of Jesus* (Bookstore)  
Marilyn C. McEntyre, "Sickness in the System: the Health Costs of the Harvest."  
Dora Ramirex-Dhoore, "Dissecting Environmental Racism: Redirecting the 'Toxic' in  
Alicia Gaspar De Alba's *Desert Blood* and Helena María Viramontes's *Under the Feet  
of Jesus*."

**Mini-Conference:** We will arrange an evening or weekend meeting at my house  
sometime in the last two weeks of classes during which each of you will give a five-  
minute summary of your paper. I'll provide food and drink. We'll discuss childcare  
and transportation.