Medicine + Literature
Option for the MA in the History of Medicine, UCL
Autumn 2008, Mondays 10 – 12 noon

Instructors: Dr Michael Neve, m.neve@ucl.ac.uk
Office hours Tuesdays, 1-3pm, and by appointment (room 544)
Erin Sullivan, erin.sullivan@ucl.ac.uk
Office hours Mondays, 1-3pm, and by appointment (room 506)

In this course we will look at Western medicine in its cultural context, as expressed in literature (fiction, drama, letters and memoirs) from Antiquity to the modern day. The objectives are to develop the student’s critical and interpretative skills in understanding the historical development of literary representations of medical practice, and to foster an understanding of the role of imagery and metaphor within the social history of medicine.

For each class all students will be required to read a few central texts (indicated in the reading list with an asterisk) and will be expected to look into other primary readings and background literature whenever possible. All central texts are available in the Student Wellcome library, most of which you can check out from the Student Loan collection (we have included numbers of copies in parentheses next to the title). Several of the items in the ‘Further Reading’ lists are also available in the Wellcome library, either in the Student Loan section or in the general holdings. Many journal articles are now available online, either through JSTOR or PubMed (both of which Wellcome and UCL subscribe to). If you’re interested in a book or article that is not held by the Wellcome, don’t despair—you’re in London after all! Look the title up on the Copac academic and national library catalogue (http://copac.ac.uk/). Here you can see a list of all the libraries in the UK that have the title, including UCL, Senate House, Birkbeck, SOAS, King’s College, LSE, and, of course, the British Library. You can assume that all titles listed within the reading lists will be available at the British Library, which is less than a 10 minute walk towards King’s Cross from the Wellcome Collection. Finally, we very much encourage you all to read widely, including books not mentioned on the reading lists. If you’re interested in other primary and secondary sources related to the week’s topic, by all means read them and bring them to the table for discussion. New York University hosts a very useful database on medicine and the arts where you can search for readings by topic (for example, doctor-patient relationship, illness narratives, dementia, hysteria, etc.). This site (http://litmed.med.nyu.edu/) can help direct you to further readings on class topics and might also prove helpful when researching for your essays.

Course assignments include both unassessed and assessed work. All students are expected to come to class having done the required reading and also to bring with them ideas and questions to fuel discussion—read actively and critically, questioning the arguments put forward in secondary literature and mapping narrative technique, figurative language, thematic content, etc., in our primary sources. If you are unable to attend a class, please contact one or both of us ahead of time. Additionally, each week a volunteer will deliver a short presentation (around 10 minutes) on 1-2 optional readings from the reading list (primary or secondary). The presentation should offer a summary of the books or articles and an analysis of how they relate to the week’s required readings. This assignment is not marked but it is still required—students will sign up for a presentation in the first weeks of the course. Formal assessment will consist of two 3500 essays to be submitted in Nov 2008 and Jan 2009 (dates coming). Each essay is worth 50% of the total marks for this option.
**Course Schedule**

**22 Sept** No class—orientation week

**1 Oct** Introduction: theory, methodology, historiography

This week we will discuss the aims of the class, as well as the possible uses of literature as sources in the history of medicine. We will examine different theories of how to derive meaning from literary texts and we will consider the ways in which various historians in the field have applied such theories in their study of medicine.

*Any journal article or book chapter using literary sources to study medical history (please bring a copy with you to class). You might have a look at one of the books cited below or at any article in the journal *Literature and Medicine*, published twice a year by John Hopkins University Press.*


**Further reading:**


Allan Ingram with Michelle Faubert, *Cultural constructions of madness in eighteenth century writing: representing the insane*, Palgrave, 2005

Clark Lawlor, *Consumption and literature: the making of the romantic disease*, Palgrave, 2006


Josephine McDonagh, *Child murder and British culture, 1720-1900*, Cambridge University Press, 2003

Marie Mulvey Roberts and Roy Porter, eds., *Literature and Medicine during the Eighteenth Century*, Routledge, 1993


**6 Oct** Metaphor and Meaning

In this class we will discuss the nature of metaphorical expression and its role in the construction of rhetorical discourses. We will consider the way engrained metaphors influence cultural perceptions of disease, and we will debate the relevance of conceptual metaphor theory to the study of the history of medicine.

*Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (5 copies)*
Further reading:
Emily Martin, ‘The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles’, in *Signs*, vol. 16 no. 3 (spring 1991), 485-501
Andrew Ortony, ed., *Metaphor and Thought*, Cambridge, 1993 (2nd ed)—see especially the section on metaphor and science

13 Oct Doctors, Patients and Narrative Medicine

This week we’ll be looking at the relationship between doctors and patients as expressed in a variety of literature. We’ll consider literature’s potential to offer the patient’s voice and we’ll discuss the benefits and limitations of using literary sources when trying to write ‘history from below’. We’ll also begin discussing the role narrative plays in arranging information into meaningful experience, both for patients and practitioners.

* Lorrie Moore, ‘People Like That are The Only People Here: Canonical Babbling in Peed Onk’, in *Birds of America* (off prints from Erin)
*Solomon Posen, ed., *The Doctor in Literature: satisfaction or resentment?*—skim through and choose two excerpts to focus on, one pre-20th century and one 20th/21st century (1 copy)
*Brian Hurwitz, ‘Form and representation in clinical case reports’, *Literature and Medicine* 2006 (25) 216-40 (available online)

Further Reading: Primary
Albert Camus, *The Plague* (6 copies)
Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking*, Knopf, 2005
Margaret Edson, *Wit*, Faber&Faber, 1999
20 Oct Representing the Mind: patient memoirs and illness narratives

This week we’ll look at patient memoirs and consider how they compare as sources to the fictional works we looked at last week. In particular, we’ll focus on the use of language and narrative to represent the workings of the ill or disordered mind and also look at how some famous memoirs have become the site of psychiatric diagnosis and treatment, not least after the death of their authors.

*Virginia Woolf, On Being Ill (7 copies)
*Daniel Schreber, Memoirs of My Nervous Illness (6+ copies)

Further reading:

**Primary**

Jean-Dominique Bauby, The Diving Bell and the Butterfly, Knopf, 1997
John Bayley, Iris, Duckworth, 1993
Joan Didion, The Year of Magical Thinking, Knopf, 2005
C. Donley and S. Buckley, eds., What’s Normal? Narratives of Mental and Emotional Disorders, Kent State 2000
D. J. Enright, ed., Ill at Ease: writers on ailments real and imagined, Faber&Faber, 1989
Mike Jay, The Air-Loom Gang (7 copies)
Vaslav Nijinsky, Diaries (4 copies)
Sylvia Plath, The Bell Jar (6 copies)
Peter Schaffer, Equus, Avon, 1976

**Secondary**

Rita Charon, Narrative Medicine: honoring the stories of illness, Oxford, 2006
C. Thomas Couser, Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability and Life Writing, University of Wisconsin, 1997
Brian Hurwitz, ‘Form and representation in clinical case reports’, *Literature and Medicine* 2006 (25) 216-40 (available online)

27 Oct  
**Hamlet: a fictional and medical case study**

Building on our discussions of doctors versus patients, fact versus fiction, and objectivism versus relativism, this week we’ll turn to one of the strangest yet most pervasive medical cases in literary history: Hamlet. We’ll look at different doctors’ attempts to ‘diagnose’ Hamlet, questioning the aims of the many writers who have tried to solve medically the predicament of a fictional character.

*William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Further reading:

**Primary**

Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*
Jennifer Radden, ed., *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva* (8 copies)
John Milton, ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ (can be found online)
Daniel Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (6+ copies)

**Secondary**


3 Nov     **No class—reading week**

10 Nov  
**Medical Monstrosities: science, ethics and the popular imagination**
This week we’ll look at how advances in medical science and technology have influenced writers across time. We’ll discuss the peculiar horrors medicine has sparked in the public imagination and consider how this has influenced (and indeed is influenced by) the genre of science fiction.

*Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: or, the modern Prometheus* (5 copies)*


**Further reading:**

**Primary**
Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (6 copies)
Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, Random House, 2004
Marvin Bell, *Frankenstein’s Monster*, Copper Canyon, 1990
Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (1 copy)
Bruce Sterling, *Holy Fire* (6 copies)
Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Mainstream, 1993
H.G. Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (2 copies)

**Secondary**
Betty Ann Kevles, *Naked to the bone: medical imaging in the twentieth century*, Rutgers, 1997
Jon Turney, ‘In the grip of the monstrous myth’, in *The Public Understanding of Science*, vol. 3 (1994) 225-231

**17 Nov Women and Madness**

This week we’ll focus on the much studied relationship between women and madness, looking largely at fictional and medical cases studies from the 19th century. We’ll continue discussing the potential for literature draw attention to patient voice, and we’ll look at some secondary historical studies that have drawn on literary sources to powerful effect.

*Charlotte Perkins Gilman, ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ (4 copies)*
Further reading:


**Primary**

Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*
Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*
Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (4 copies)
Charlotte Gilman Perkins, *Herland* (1 copy)
Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (6 copies)
Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1 copy)
Elizabeth Wurtzel, *Prozac Nation*

*Secondary*

Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* (6+ copies)
Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The madwoman in the attic: the woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination*, Yale, 1979
Sander Gilman, et al., *Hysteria beyond Freud*, University of California, 1993
Claire Kahane, *Passions of the voice: hysteria, narrative, and the figure of the speaking woman, 1850-1915*, Johns Hopkins, 1995
Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (15 copies)

24 Nov Historical Fictions, Fictional Histories

This week we will discuss the relationship between historical fiction and history as we look at Pat Barker’s celebrated novel, *Regeneration*. We will consider the role of creativity in the writing of both and debate whether or not a clear line can be drawn between the two endeavors. Problems such as historical methodologies, authorial voice, and reader expectations will be addressed, following on from the class on 1 October.

*Pat Barker, *Regeneration* (6 copies)
*Also have a look at some of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon’s poems, many of which are available online.*

**Further reading:**

*Primary*

Umberto Eco, *In the Name of the Rose*, Everyman, 2006
Dalton Trumbo, *Johnny Got His Gun*, Bantam, 1984
Gore Vidal, *Lincoln*, Vintage, 2000 (or just about any other Vidal novel)
Iving D. Yalom, *When Nietzsche Wept*, Perennial, 1993

**Secondary**

Roger Cooter, Mark Harrison, Steve Sturdy, eds., *Medicine and Modern warfare*, Rodopi, 1999
Laszlo Halasz, ‘Psychological differences of reception between literary (fictive) and historiographical (nonfictive) texts’, in *Journal of Literary Semantics*, vol. 30, no. 3 (2001), 147-165
Eric Leed, *No Man’s Land: Combat and Identity in World War I*, Cambridge, 1979 (this was one of Barker’s sources)
Jürgen Pieters, *Speaking with the Dead: Explorations in Literature and History*. Edinburgh, 2005

1 Dec  The Plague as Case Study: facts, fictions, symbols and metaphors

In this class we will continue our previous week’s discussion about history and fiction as we focus on representations of plagues in literature. We will compare historical and modern approaches to writing about the plague and also consider the symbolic potential of disease in literature.

*Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (5 copies)
*Albert Camus, *The Plague* (6 copies)
Further reading:

Primary:

The Bible, sections on plagues.
Tony Kushner, *Angels in America* (3 copies)
Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, Oxford, 1974 (sections on the plague)

Secondary:

Charles Rosenberg and Janet Golden, *Framing Disease: Studies in cultural history*, Rutgers, 1992
F. M. Getz, ‘Death and the Silver Lining: Meaning, Continuity and Revolutionary Change in Histories of Medieval Plague’
Margaret Healy, *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England*, Palgrave, 2001 (see the chapters on ‘The Plaguey Body’)
Eve Tavor, ‘Fictional Facts and Science in Defoe and Camus’ Plague Year’, *Orbis Litterarum*, vol. 40, no. 2 (1985)

8 Dec Roundtable Discussion: language and the practice of history

In our final class we will look back on the topics discussed throughout the preceding nine weeks and see if we can come to any consensus about the use of literature and the role of language in historical studies. Some of the questions we will tackle include: is there a benefit to using literary sources historically? What about ‘literary methodologies’? What is the relationship between literature as historical document and literature as historical analysis? What is the role of creativity in historical writing? What role does the audience/readership play in influencing the aims of literature versus those of history?

For our reading this week, we would like you all to read the article listed above and then to select a primary source from the reading lists that you did not read during the course, but that interested you. Please read this selection as well as some of the secondary literature related to it. Come prepared with questions, problems, observations, and theories.