

Department of English
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

ENGE2170 Literature and Medicine

Course Lecturer: Dr. Carolyn Lau (carolynlau@cuhk.edu.hk)

About the Course

This course aims to broaden discussions of the “medical” from the clinical encounter to technoscientific imaginaries of the concept of the human. Recent developments in biotechnology redefine the boundaries between the normal and the abnormal, the organic and the artificial, and contamination and purity. We examine fictions and narratives that challenge our assumptions about life and death, disease and cure, and selfhood and kinship. Topics include the body, the creation of life, and race, gender and sexuality. To encourage further research, we engage with relevant critical, philosophical, and sociocultural approaches in our readings. This course also includes a narrative medicine unit that addresses the question of representation in conveying experiences of pain and suffering.

Learning Outcomes

Having successfully completed this course you shall be able to:

- demonstrate knowledge of the intersections between medicine, biotechnology, and literature
- understand the ethical and sociocultural aspects of medical discourses
- examine and interpret narratives of illness
- investigate, discuss and write critically, reflectively, and analytically

Texts

Dear, Nick. *Frankenstein, based on the novel by Mary Shelley*. London: Faber & Faber, 2011.

Kavenna, Joanna. *The Birth of Love*. London: Faber & Faber, 2010.

*Lorde, Audre. *The Cancer Journals*. London: Penguin, 2020. (excerpt)

Winterson, Jeanette. *Frankissstein: A Love Story*. London: Vintage, 2020.

*Wojnarowicz, David. "Postcards from America." Wojnarowicz, David. *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2017. 120-145.

*Woolf, Virginia. "On Being Ill." Woolf, Virginia. *Selected Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 101-110.

Note: Please get a copy of these specific editions of the texts. All page references in class will be based on them. Texts marked with * are included in the course pack available on Blackboard.

Recommended Readings

Haraway, Donna J. *How Like a Leaf: An Interview with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Kleinman, Arthur. *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and The Human Condition*. New York: Basic Books, 1988.

Smith, Andrew. *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Sontag, Susan. *Illness as Metaphor & AIDS and its Metaphors*. London: Penguin, 2009.

Assessment

Class preparation, attendance, and participation 10%

Tutorial presentation 20%

Mid-term paper 30%

Final paper 40%

Grade Descriptors

Grade A / Excellent: Outstanding performance on ALL learning outcomes.

Demonstrates the ability to synthesize and apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would surpass the normal expectations at this level and typical of standards that may be common at higher levels of study. The 'A' grade should be reserved for truly excellent work that exceeds the level expected for the majority of students and are expected to be achieved only by a small minority.

Grade A- / Very Good: Generally outstanding performance on ALMOST ALL learning outcomes.

Demonstrates the ability to synthesize and apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would fully fulfill the normal expectations at this level and occasionally reaches standards that may be common at higher levels of study.

Grade B+ / Good (Plus): HIGH performance on all learning outcomes, OR HIGH performance on some learning outcomes which compensates WELL for slightly less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.

Demonstrates the ability to apply WELL the principles or skills learned in the course in a comprehensive manner that would sufficiently fulfill the normal expectations at this level WELL.

Grade B / Good: SUBSTANTIAL performance on all learning outcomes, OR SUBSTANTIAL performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for slightly

less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.

Demonstrates the ability to apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a MORE COMPREHENSIVE manner that would sufficiently fulfill the normal expectations at this level.

Grade B- / Good (Minus): GOOD performance on all learning outcomes, OR GOOD performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for slightly less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.

Demonstrates the ability to apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a COMPREHENSIVE manner that would sufficiently fulfill the normal expectations at this level.

Grade C+ / Fair (Plus): VERY SATISFACTORY performance on the majority of learning outcomes.

Demonstrates the ability to apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a SOMEWHAT SUSTAINED manner that would meet the basic requirement at this level.

Grade C / Fair: SATISFACTORY performance on the majority of learning outcomes.

Demonstrates the ability to partially apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would meet the basic requirement at this level.

Grade C- / Fair (Minus): SOMEWHAT SATISFACTORY performance on A NUMBER OF learning outcomes.

Demonstrates the ability to SOMEWHAT apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would meet the BARE basic requirement at this level.

Grade D+ / Pass (Plus): BARELY SATISFACTORY performance on A FEW learning outcomes.

Addresses the course inadequately by meeting the basic requirement at this level only in some areas while responding minimally with possibly tangential content in others.

Grade D / Pass: ALMOST BARELY satisfactory performance on VERY FEW learning outcomes.

Addresses the course inadequately by meeting the basic requirement at this level only in very few areas while responding very minimally with possibly tangential content in others.

Grade F / Failure: Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements.

Fails to address the course and likely does not understand what the course requires. In other words, the work completely misses the point.