In this interdisciplinary course, we will explore the literary imagination in the face of illness and healing. How does literature offer ways to understand bodily suffering, the social effects of illness, doctor-patient relationships, the ethics of care, and ideas of health? And how has the craft of medicine been a rich resource for literary invention? We will approach the intersection of medicine and literature across several themes: the representational challenge of pain, the voice of suffering, and the social marginalization of the ill; the fashioning of doctor identities and the ethical construction of medical authority; medicine as a realm of cultural analysis, social critique, and political investigation; and the enigma of health, as more than simply the absence of illness. Throughout the semester, you will read closely in a wide range of texts—drama, poetry, a novel, short stories, cultural criticism, memoir—and trace conversations among them. You will also have opportunities to contribute to these conversations in analytical and creative writing.

This is a four-credit course. I expect students to spend at least nine hours a week preparing for class sessions and completing assignments.

**Learning Objectives:**

- to be able to explain the cross-disciplinary relevance of the medical sciences and humanistic inquiry, or, put otherwise, to be able to articulate the relation between the scientific and literary imagination—and, by implication, to acknowledge the role of imaginative, speculative thought in the sciences
- to be able to write essays about how specific literary forms and techniques pose significant questions and generate distinctive meanings related to bodily pain and doctor-patient relationships
- to be able to articulate how literature about illness and healing investigates issues in medical ethics, and to use literature to clarify debates in medical ethics
- to be able to analyze the narrative dynamics and poetic forms that shape experiences of illness and healing
Required Texts (at Brandeis Bookstore, except for Bulgakov’s *A Country Doctor’s Notebook*, which is widely available for sale online):
Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych* (Melville Publishers, trans. Ian Dreiblatt)
Mikhail Bulgakov, *A Country Doctor’s Notebook* (Melville House or Harvill, both trans. Michael Glenny). *Note that this book is out of print and not available at the bookstore. But it is widely available used, at competitive prices at abebooks.com and elsewhere.*
William Carlos Williams, *The Doctor Stories* (New Directions)
Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (Touchstone)
Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)
Margaret Edson, *Wit* (Faber and Faber)
Ellen Forney, *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me: A Graphic Memoir* (Gotham Books)
Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (Penguin)
*All other assigned readings are available on LATTE*

Books on Reserve at Goldfarb Library or Available as Ebooks:
Forney, Ellen. *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me: A Graphic Memoir* …
Sacks, Oliver. The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat. RC351.S195 1987

Class Policies and Requirements:
• Laptops may be used in class only for accessing relevant course materials on LATTE. If you use a laptop for other purposes (email, web browsing), you will be asked to leave the class and be considered absent for the day. Bring other materials (e.g., paper, pens) for taking notes.
• All assignments must be completed and submitted to receive course credit. Late work will be penalized by one plus/minus for each day past due date.
• Three unexcused absences lowers the final course grade by one plus/minus, and each additional absence by another plus/minus.
• Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, please talk with me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as you can. I want to support you. Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, please talk with me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as you can. I want to support you. In order to provide test accommodations, I need the letter more than 48 hours in advance. I want to provide your accommodations, but cannot do so retroactively. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support (SAS) at 781-736-3470 or access@brandeis.edu.
• You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit work to TurnItIn.com software to verify
originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at LTS - Library guides.

Grades, Assignments, and Projects:
Homework Assignments: Approximately 1-2 double-spaced pages in response to the questions below, on 7 designated dates: 9/3, 10/17, 11/5, 11/7, 11/12, 11/19, 12/5. Graded out of 10 points, with 1 point deducted for each day late. 5% each.

Pharmaceutical Advertisement Analysis: A group project, including a presentation and memo, based on Scarry’s interpretive methodology in the assigned reading for 9/17. Students will submit potential ads on 9/12, select an ad and do group work on 9/17, and do class presentations and submit a written memo on 9/19. Graded as a group. 15%

In your 5-7 minute presentation on 9/19, your group should demonstrate the subtle ways by which the advertisement generates its emotional effects, ideological meanings, and compelling stories. Identify its persuasive visual, sonic, and linguistic rhetorics. Groups should also explain relevant social contexts for these strategies and discuss the cultural dynamics they reveal. Groups can organize this presentation in any manner. Please include AV materials for your presentation.

In the group memo of 3-4 pages, include the following:
1) names of group members
2) link to advertisement and advertisement citation
3) Overview: basic historical and medical information about the product, summary information about the advertisement’s publication and circulation history, name of the advertising agency responsible (if possible), and any other relevant background information about the advertisement and its product.
4) Interpretation: a detailed analysis of the advertisement’s crucial aesthetic strategies, rhetorical construction, and implied meanings. Read this advertisement closely, for the emotional and intellectual tensions it generates, as if it were a work of art. Reveal the craft of the text, how it does more than what it merely says.
5) Evaluation and Further Comments: reflect on the efficacy of the advertisement in its cultural context, relate it to other social texts, comment on your own attempts to interpret it, and offer any other discussion about the significance of this advertisement, its product, and your engagement with it. Feel free to refer to Scarry’s interpretive work or any other inspiration for your analysis.

Public Database / Website Contribution: Submit an annotation of a literary text to the Literature Arts Medicine Database [http://medhum.med.nyu.edu/] or a comic review to Graphic Medicine [https://www.graphicmedicine.org/]. This brief annotation or review should describe the principle themes, topics, and styles of your chosen text, in a manner that will be useful for others searching within this field. Please use the appropriate style for your chosen site and confirm that your chosen text has not yet been featured on it. I’ve arranged for this work to be considered for publication by site moderators. Initial proposal, with brief description of your text, due 10/8. Final annotation or review due 10/24. Credit / no credit. 5%.
Medical Ethics Memo and Literary Interpretation: Part 1: in about 3 pages, provide information from reliable academic and journalistic sources about the nature of a medical ethical controversy that interests you and that engages our assigned reading. Summarize, with quotations, this ethical debate with reference to the scientific history, specific policy questions, and prominent participants involved. You do not need to adjudicate this debate, but you do need to present it clearly and explain its significance. Part 2: in about 3 pages, relate this debate to a literary text by Sophocles, Tolstoy, Gaines, Bulgakov, Williams, Sacks, or Campo. How is this ethical issue at stake, even if implicitly, in this text? How does this ethical problem take on narrative or poetic form? What does this different form help us understand about this ethical question or about the resources necessary to confront it? And what judgment does the author seem to offer, if any, about this issue? Include a detailed works cited for your sources. Due 10/31. 15%

Final Project: Develop a final project to demonstrate your learning in the course and to make a contribution to the interdisciplinary field of literature and medicine. This project can revise and develop earlier assignments or be based on new work. The project should be about 8-10 pages of written material or the equivalent in other forms. This project can take many forms: a research paper, interpretive essay, creative writing with a critical self-reflection, memoir or life writing, digital resource, curricular or pedagogical proposal, literature review, visual essay, or other forms. Proposal due 12/3. Final project due 12/16. 30%

Extra Credit: Taking Biss’s essay “The Pain Scale” as inspiration, devise a pain scale, or set of related scales. You can use any combinations of text, image, media, and genre. The scale should capture the complexity of pain and suffering and give patients a chance to register some of the nuances and contradictions of their experiences. In addition to the scale, write an explanation (2-3 pages) of your device in which you identify how your scale works, what failure of established pain-scales that it responds to, and what dimensions of a patient’s experience it is uniquely able to reveal. Points given for creativity. A grade in the A range will raise the final grade by 3 percentage points; a grade in the B range will raise the final grade by 2 percentage points. No credit under B-. Due 9/24.

Class Schedule:
Thur 8/29
Introduction

Representing Pain, Narrating Illness
Tue 9/3
*Homework 1 Due*
Biss, “The Pain Scale”
Scarry, from The Body in Pain
Optional: Woolf, “On Being Ill”

Thur 9/5
Sophocles, Philoctetes

Tue 9/10
Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Illych
Thur 9/12
*Submit Pharmaceutical Advertisement for Potential Analysis*
Gaines, “The Sky is Gray”
Morris, from *The Culture of Pain*

Tue 9/17
*Review Advertisements and Select Preferences for Group Work*
Advertising close reading workshop
Scarry, from *Resisting Representation*, “Obdurate Sensation: Pain”

Thur 9/19
*Pharmaceutical Advertisement Close Reading Assignment Due*
Group presentations, advertising close reading

Genres of Doctoring
Tue 9/24
*Extra Credit Assignment Due*
Gawande, “The Learning Curve”

Thur 9/26
Any, “People Don’t Get Depressed in Nigeria”

*Tue 10/1: no class in observance of Rosh Hashanah*

*Thur 10/3: no class, Brandeis Monday*

Tue 10/8
*Public Database / Website Contribution Proposal Due*
Williams, *The Doctor Stories* (“Mind and Body” through “Jean Beicke”)

Thur 10/10
Williams, *The Doctor Stories* (“A Face of Stone” through “Comedy Entombed”)

*Tue 10/15: no class, Brandeis Monday*

Thur 10/17
*Homework 2 Due*
Charon, “The Patient, the Body, and the Self” (from *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness*)
Charon, “2018 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities”:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yI0rdQEAj
Verghe, “I Carry Your Heart”
Adrian, “Grand Rounds”
Tue 10/22

Thur 10/24
*Public Database / Website Contribution Due*
Campo, from *Comfort Measures Only* (1-74)

Tue 10/29
Special Presentation: Beth Clark Murphy, “LGBT People and the Work Ahead in Bioethics”
Wahlert and Fiester, “Queer Bioethics: Why It’s Time Has Come”

Thur 10/31
*Essay Workshop: Meet in Sections, rooms tbd*
Campo, from *Comfort Measures Only* (75-166)

Theoretical Interlude: Further Paradigms for Cultural Criticism
Tue 11/5
*Medical Ethics Memo and Literary Interpretation Assignment Due*
Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*
Fuks, “The Military Metaphors of Modern Medicine”

Thur 11/7
*Homework 3 Due*
Wald, from *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative*
Nelson, from *The Social Life of DNA*
Freespirit and Aldebaran, “Fat Liberation Manifesto”
Bacon, “The HAES Manifesto”

Terminality
Tue 11/12
*Homework 4 Due*
Farman, “Terminality”
Edson, *Wit*

Thur 11/14
Larkin, “The Building”
Schnackenberg, “Sublimaze”
Merton, “A Widow at 93”
Dent, “What Calendars Have Become”
Moore, “People Like that Are the Only People Here: Canonical Babbling in Peed Onk”
The Meaning of Health
Tue 11/19
*Homework 5 Due*
Tillich, “The Meaning of Health”
Greif, “Against Exercise”

Thur 11/21
Forney, *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me: A Graphic Memoir*

Tue 11/26
Silko, *Ceremony*

*Thur 11/28: no classes in observance of Thanksgiving*

Tue 12/3
*Final Project Proposal Due*
Silko, *Ceremony*

Thur 12/5
*Homework 6 Due*
Silko, *Ceremony*

Tue 12/10
Final class; final paper workshop.

*Final Project Due, Monday, 12/16, noon*
Assignment 1, due 9/3: Biss and Scarry. In a detailed paragraph, using quotations, explain what Scarry means by “the inexpressibility of physical pain.” What issues of language, subjectivity, and knowledge are involved in this problem, for Scarry? In a second paragraph, speculate about Biss’s hypothetical response to Scarry, based on her essay “The Pain Scale.” Describe some way in which Biss seems to capture Scarry’s ideas or develop a strategy for responding to the problems she describes.

Assignment 2, due 10/17: Charon, Verghese, Adrian. In about 1 single-spaced page, transcribe helpful, significant passages from Charon’s “The Patient, the Body, and the Self.” (Think of this page as a stockpile of useful quotes.) In another paragraph or two, identify some way in which Verghese or Adrian responds to one of Charon’s ideas. How does this writer take up an issue in Charon’s work? What commitments do they seem to share? On the other hand, what limitations in Charon’s thinking might this writer expose?

NOTE: this assignment has been cancelled

Assignment 3, due 11/5. Sontag.
Part 1: describe one of Sontag’s techniques, as a cultural historian, that you find effective. What methodological or rhetorical strategy does she use well, in your opinion, to interpret this cultural history or develop her arguments? Show an example of this technique from the text.
Part 2: Sontag analyzes ways in which illnesses, such as tuberculosis, accrued moral meanings or became coercive elements of social identities. She condemns such cultural transformations of illness as distortions of scientific knowledge, distortions that disempower patients. What perspective might challenge this argument? Pose a question about Sontag’s ideas that complicates them, offers an alternative picture, or otherwise opens her claims to further discussion. Feel free to refer to another writer from our syllabus to formulate this alternative perspective, if you’d like.

Assignment 4, due 11/12. Farman and Edson.
Part 1: Transcribe a passage from Farman’s essay about terminal illness—a few sentences, a paragraph—that you feel might be relevant to Edson’s play. Your selection from Farman can be based on an intuition or initial hunch about the way his ideas might engage Edson. In a sentence or two, write a brief explanation of your choice.
Part 2: Edson’s play literally stages the encounter between literature and medicine. In an exploratory paragraph, consider what Edson suggests is the relationship between the literary imagination and medical practice, some way that these two worlds engage one another. How
does she imagine their mutual relevance, the way their powers are complementary? How does the play help us understand some aspect of their intersection?

Assignment 5, due 11/19. Tillich and Greif. Read Tillich and Greif and select one of the following prompts.

1) Tillich. In a paragraph, describe a complicated aspect of Tillich’s idea of health. Why is health a challenging phenomenon to understand, for Tillich? Quote passages that capture the complexity of some of his ideas. In a following short paragraph, pose a question about Tillich’s essay. What would you like to understand better about it? Or what aspect of his thinking seems unfinished?

2) Greif.

Part 1: Make a list of key words and phrases from Greif’s critique of modern exercise. Arrange them in a word-cloud with the word “exercise” in the center. Draw lines to connect conceptually related words to one another, a visual map of his themes and concepts. Think of this word-cloud as a rough, associative gathering of his different claims and insights. At the bottom of the page, use some of these terms to write a sentence explaining one of his critiques of exercise.

Part 2: In a few sentences, describe a contrasting value or perspective that Greif offers for a more rich, fulfilling, or ethical concept of health. How does he begin to present an alternative picture of human well-being, beyond modern exercise and the medicalization of life?

Assignment 6, due 12/5. Silko. Open response. Write a page or two about your experience reading Ceremony, so far. Where has it particularly absorbed your attention, perplexed you, or helped you think about something that matters to you? Feel free to focus on a particular passage or two to develop your response.