

**New York University, Gallatin**

Spring 2008

**Writing Seminar II: Reflecting on Illness and Disease**

Monday/Wednesday 11:00 – 12:15, Bobst 537

**Professor: Kimberly Lewis**

**Office: 715 Bway, Rm 416 (Phone: 212-998-7322)**

**Office Hours: Monday 9:45 – 10:45**

**Email: kal8@nyu.edu**

**Course description**

From the bubonic plague to AIDS, illness has captured the imagination of writers, artists, and other thinkers for centuries. Pestilence and contagion, whether individual or epidemic, of the body or of the mind, have long inspired fear and continue to do so today, despite the progress of modern medicine. How has societal dis-ease with disease affected its representation? As a weakness of character, a weakness in the body politic? Is the verbal and visual depiction of illness an act of containment, resistance, revision, or censure? In this course we will explore a range of interdisciplinary texts, including literature, drama and film, and essays, to examine the many ways illness has been constructed as a reflection of or response to social norms, moral codes, historical events, and cultural conventions.

The course will be broken down into four overlapping sections: 1. Representations of the plague 2. HIV/AIDS: stereotypes, media, representation 3. Mental illness, madness, and gender 4. Illness of the individual, illness of society.

**Course Procedures and Writing**

During the semester, we will examine literary texts, film, and essays in our discussion of illness, disease, and its representations. We will also devote a significant portion of our time in class to discussing both the critical essay as a form of public dialogue and student writing and responses to the reading. It is therefore imperative that students always bring to class hard copies of all reading and writing assignments for that day, as well as drafts of major essays during the scheduled writing workshops.

**RESPONSES TO THE READING:**

Reader responses will be assigned frequently in order to facilitate class discussion and to help you prepare for critical essays and your longer research paper. While these are more informal writing assignments, they are intended to be *critical* responses to the reading, and you should devote the necessary time and energy to making them as interesting and coherent as possible. No late responses will be accepted, as these shorter writing assignments are most useful both to you and to class discussion when completed on time!

**CRITICAL ESSAYS, PRESENTATION, AND RESEARCH PAPER:**

You will write 3 critical essays (3 – 5 pages each), give one presentation, and write one research paper (10 – 12 pages) this semester. Just as your reader responses are intended to

help you develop ideas for your critical essays, your shorter essays and presentation are intended to help you devise and pursue a topic for your longer research paper. This means that you should start thinking as soon as possible about what you might want to work on for your longer paper. I will be giving you a choice of topics for the critical essays, but the final paper will be on a topic of your choice and creation.

#### **CLASS PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE:**

You are expected to come prepared to every class this semester, and to participate in class discussion. If you need to miss a class, please let me know ahead of time, and you are responsible for finding out what you missed. More than 2 unexcused absences will jeopardize your grade. You should also expect to attend office hours at least once over the course of the semester to discuss work in progress, doubts, confusion, or anything else.

You will be graded on the quality of your writing, the quality of your involvement in the class (participation, attendance in class and in office hours), and on the improvements that you make as a writer, reader, and thinker. The following percentages are however intended to give you a basic idea of how grading in this course works:

- Participation in class, including presentations and responses to reading (20%)
- 3 critical essays, 3 – 5 pages each (45%)
- Final research paper, 10 – 12 pages (35%)

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a grave offense, and will be treated as such in this course. Any case of plagiarism will result in an F in this course, and further disciplinary action in accordance with Gallatin policies. If you have any doubts about how or when to cite the work of another scholar, ASK!

#### **REQUIRED TEXTS:**

(Available in NYU bookstore, although you may also purchase novels in other editions):

- *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Paper*
- Henry James, *Daisy Miller*
- Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice*
- Course Packet
  
- Albert Camus, *The Plague* (listed as optional at NYU bookstore, but you are responsible for either getting your own copy or reading excerpts in the copy on reserve at Bobst)

In addition, we will be watching several films in class, and other films will be put on reserve for you at Bobst library throughout the semester, in case you are interested.

## SCHEDULE

	<b>READING and discussion</b>	<b>WRITING</b>
<b>January 23</b>	<b>Introduction</b> -- Discussion of layout and expectations of course -- Introduction to forms and representations of illness, themes of the course	
<b>January 28</b>	<b>James: <i>Daisy Miller</i></b>	
<b>January 30</b>	<b>James (cont)</b>	<b>Response to James due.</b>
<b>February 4</b>	<b>Boccaccio: "Prologue", "First Day"</b>	
<b>February 6</b>	<b>Boccaccio: "Fourth Story", "Fifth Story"</b> <b>Tuchman: "This is the end of the World"</b> -- Continuation of discussion.	<b>Response to readings due.</b>
<b>February 11</b>	<b>Cantor: "All Fall Down", "Rodents and Cattle"</b>  Optional Film: <i>Outbreak</i> (on reserve at Bobst)	Topics for analytical essay distributed.
<b>February 13</b>	<b>Poe: "The Mask of the Red Death"</b>	<b>Response to Poe due.</b>
<b>February 18</b>	<b>NO CLASS, Presidents' Day</b>	
<b>February 20</b>	Writing Workshop	Bring in drafts of Essay 1.
<b>February 25</b>	Introduction to HIV/AIDS section of course  <b>Sontag: "AIDS and Its Metaphors"</b>	<b>Essay 1 DUE</b>
<b>February 27</b>	<b>Shilts: "Talking AIDS to Death"</b>  Discussion of "critical essay"	<b>Response: What makes these essays "critical"?</b>

<b>March 3</b>	<p><b>Rodriguez:</b> "Late Victorians: San Francisco, AIDS, and the Homosexual Stereotype"</p> <p>Discussion of current issue articles.</p>	<p><b>Bring in one article on current issues surrounding HIV/AIDS, and a free write response to it.</b></p> <p>Topics for comparative essay distributed.</p>
<b>March 10</b>	<p><b>In class discussion:</b> Tony Kushner's <i>Angels in America</i> (HBO series will be on reserve in Bobst library)</p>	
<b>March 12</b>	Writing Workshop	Bring in drafts of Essay 2.
<b>March 17 – March 23</b>	<b>SPRING BREAK</b>	
<b>March 24</b>	<b>LIBRARY VISIT</b>	In this section of course, students will be required to find one additional primary or secondary source on gendered visions of mental illness/madness/disease.
<b>March 26</b>	<p>Introduction to mental illness, madness, and gender. Discussion of presentations.</p> <p><b>Freud:</b> "Katerina"</p>	<b>Essay 2 DUE.</b>
<b>March 31</b>	<b>Gilman:</b> "The Yellow Wallpaper"	<b>Response to Gilman and Freud due.</b>
<b>April 2</b>	<b>Student presentations of readings on gender and mental illness.</b>	Essay 3 assigned.
<b>April 7</b>	<p><b>Student presentations of readings on gender and mental illness.</b></p> <p>Optional film: <i>The Hours</i> (on reserve, at Bobst)</p>	
<b>April 9</b>	Writing Workshop: Honing a topic for a research paper.	<b>Students should bring to class notes, outline, or abstract of a potential topic for final paper.</b>

<b>April 14</b>	<b>Discussion of <i>The Madness of King George</i>.</b> (Film will be on reserve in Bobst as well.)	<b>Essay 3 DUE.</b>
<b>April 16</b>	<b>Camus: excerpts from <i>The Plague</i>.</b>	<b>Response to Camus and <i>The Madness of King George</i> due.</b>
<b>April 21</b>	Writing Workshop on final papers.	Bring drafts of research paper to class.
<b>April 23</b>	<b>Mann: <i>Death in Venice</i></b>	
<b>April 28</b>	<b>Mann: <i>Death in Venice</i></b>	<b>Response to Mann due.</b>
<b>April 30</b>	Writing Workshop.	Bring drafts of research paper to class.
<b>May 5</b>	Wrap up. Evaluations.	