



VANDERBILT
UNIVERSITY

MHS 6500.01: NARRATIVES OF CONTAGION // CONTAGIOUS NARRATIVES

FALL 2018 | WEDNESDAYS 2:10-5:00PM, 122 WILSON HALL

INSTRUCTOR: Kym Weed, Ph.D. (she/her/hers)

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OFFICE LOCATION: 113 Garland Hall

OFFICE HOURS: Mondays & Wednesdays, 10:00-11:00 a.m. and by appointment

COURSE OVERVIEW

This graduate seminar will explore how narratives of contagion impact issues of individual and public health; social, environmental, and health justice; and cultural belonging. Like the germs themselves, stories about contagious disease spread and mutate in various forms of fiction and nonfiction. Through our study of narratives of contagion, broadly defined, we will attempt to answer some of the following questions:

- How have conceptualizations and representations of contagion changed over time?
- What is the relationship between contagious disease and forms of literary and cultural production?
- How has the rhetoric of epidemics been adopted in different contexts? To what ends?
- How do narratives of contagion constitute a vision of what society is and may become?
- Why are we compelled to respond to and prepare for epidemics through fiction?

The goal of the course is to offer students tools to analyze literature, make them more familiar with histories of contagious disease responses, and provide them with tools to think critically about pressing health and social issues.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Required Books:

- Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (Penguin Random House, 2003)
- MK Czerwiec, *Taking Turns: Stories from HIV/AIDS Care Unit 371* (Penn State UP, 2017)
- Stephen Johnson, *The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic—and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World* (Penguin Random House, 2006)
- Cherríe Morga, *Heroes and Saints* (West End Press, 1994)
- Priscilla Wald, *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative* (Duke UP, 2008)
- Colson Whitehead, *Zone One* (Penguin Random House, 2011)
- Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (1978) and *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (Picador, 1989)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Weekly Reading Blog: 20% – Using the reading questions prepared by the discussion leaders, write a short response to one or more of the readings for the week. These responses should be posted to Brightspace by Wednesday morning (i.e., 10:00a.m.) to give your peers and instructor adequate time to read responses before class. *NB:* Students may skip the blog post for the week in which they are a discussion leader.

Discussion Leader: 20% – Each student will lead class conversation at least once, likely with a partner (Frequency of presentations and groupings will depend on course enrollment). By the Monday before class meets, discussion leaders will pre-circulate reading questions based on the assigned readings for that week. During the class period, discussion leaders will be responsible for facilitating dialogue with their classmates by posing the reading questions and additional discussion question. In addition to leading discussion, you will be expected to locate a piece of secondary material (e.g., an article or book chapter) that you feel is relevant to the course material for that day. You will present the secondary material along with the rest of the texts for the day and make a copy available for the class through the Brightspace site. Presentations will begin Week 3.

Final Project: 25% – In this course, I want you to pursue an intellectual project that interests and inspires you. Therefore, you will have the option to develop a project in whatever mode of composition or expression best suits your learning, whether independently or in a group. This may include:

- A grant proposal
- A research proposal/prospectus (i.e., for a Master's thesis or capstone, dissertation, etc.)
- A creative project (a performance, work of art, composition, etc.)
- A digital or multimedia project
- A podcast
- A conference paper/poster (developed with a specific CFP in mind)
- A research article (as long as you define an audience and publication venue)
- A thesis or dissertation chapter

Final Project Proposal & Preliminary Assignments: 10% – In preparation for your final project, you will submit a brief proposal that includes an overview of your project/argument, preliminary resources, and a brief analysis of a model of the genre you select. In addition, you will turn in a revised project abstract and literature review or annotated bibliography.

Contribution to Learning Community: 25% – Consistent attendance and critically engaged participation is crucial for a successful and productive graduate seminar; therefore, students should attend every class meeting. In the event that you need to miss class, please contact the professor *before* class. If you have concerns that may affect your attendance, please let me know in private.

COURSE SCHEDULE

*Readings and assignments may be revised based on course progress and student interests.

Date	Readings	Assignments
Week 1 8/22	<p>Topic: Why Study Contagion?</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Martin Pernick, “Contagion and Culture,” <i>American Literary History</i>, vol. 14, no. 4 (2002), pp. 858-865 • Lorenzo Servitje and Kari Nixon, “The Making of a Modern Endemic: An Introduction” from <i>Endemic: Essays in Contagion Theory</i>, eds. Kari Nixon and Lorenzo Servitje (2016), pp. 1-17 	
Week 2 8/29	<p>Topic: Contagion as Metaphor</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cynthia J. Davis, “Contagion as Metaphor,” <i>American Literary History</i>, vol. 14, no. 4 (2002), pp. 828-836 • Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Lady Eleanore’s Mantle” (1838) • Edgar Allan Poe, “The Masque of the Red Death” (1842) • Henry James, <i>Daisy Miller</i> (1879) • Edith Wharton, “Roman Fever” (1934) <p>Optional Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sarah Marsh, “Malaria and the Revision of <i>Daisy Miller</i>,” <i>Literature and Medicine</i>, vol. 30, no. 2 (2012), pp. 217-240 	Sign up for Discussion Leader date.
Week 3 9/5	<p>Topic: Living with Germs</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nancy Tomes, Introduction and Part III from <i>The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life</i> (1999), pp. 1-20, 157-233 • John McAuley Palmer, “The Inoculation of Mr. Skads” (1904) • Wilbur D. Nesbit, “The Bacillus of Conscience” (1905) • Francis Stevens, “Unseen—Unfeared” (1919) <p>Optional Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Olaf Briese, “‘Social Contagionism’: Psychology, Criminology and Sociology in the Slipstream of Infection” from <i>Contagionism and Contagious Disease: Medicine and Literature, 1880-1933</i>, eds. Thomas Rütten, Martina King, and Moritz Baßler (2013), pp. 17-39 	Prepare at least two discussion questions based on the readings and bring them to class.

<p>Week 4 9/12</p>	<p>Topic: Mapping Epidemics</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stephen Johnson, selections from <i>The Ghost Map: The Story of London’s Most Terrifying Epidemic—and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World</i> (2006) • Sari Altschuler, “Cholera” from <i>Medical Imagination</i> (2018), pp. 85-120 • George A. Soper, “The Work of a Chronic Typhoid Germ Distributor” (1907) and “The Curious Career of Typhoid Mary” (1939) • Priscilla Wald, “The Healthy Carrier: ‘Typhoid Mary’ and Social Being” from <i>Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative</i> (2008), pp. 68-113 <p>Optional Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peta Mitchell, “Geographies/Aerographies of Contagion,” <i>Environment and Planning D: Society and Space</i>, vol. 29 (2011), pp. 533-550 	<p>Student Discussion Leader</p>
<p>Week 5 9/19</p>	<p>Topic: Epidemic Empire</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laura Otis, Introduction and Chapter 1 from <i>Membranes: Metaphors of Invasion in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Science, and Politics</i> (1999), pp. 1-36 • H. G. Wells, <i>The War of the Worlds</i> (1897) • Jack London, “The Unparalleled Invasion” (1910) <p>Optional Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ed Cohen, “Metaphorical Immunity: A Case of Biomedical Fiction.” <i>Literature and Medicine</i>, vol. 22, no. 2 (2003), pp. 140-163 	<p>Student Discussion Leader</p>
<p>Week 6 9/26</p>	<p>Topic: The Outbreak Narrative</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priscilla Wald, Introduction and “Imagined Immunities: The Epidemiology of Belonging” from <i>Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative</i> (2008), pp. 1-67 • Wolfgang Petersen, dir., <i>Outbreak</i> (1995) • Catherine Belling, “Dark Zones: The Ebola Body as a Configuration of Horror” from <i>Endemic: Essays in Contagion Theory</i>, eds. Kari Nixon and Lorenzo Servitje (2016), pp. 43-66 <p>Optional Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sarah Monson, “Ebola as African: American Media Discourses of Panic and Otherization,” <i>Africa Today</i>, vol. 63, no. 3 (2017): pp. 2-27 	<p>Student Discussion Leader</p>

<p>Week 7 10/3</p>	<p>Topic: HIV/AIDS</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MK Czerwiec, <i>Taking Turns: Stories from HIV/AIDS Care Unit 371</i> (2017) • Susan Sontag, Ch 1-3 from <i>Illness as Metaphor</i> (1977) and Ch 1-3, 5-7 from <i>AIDS and Its Metaphors</i> (1988), pp. 1-26, 89-125, 132-159 • Susan Sontag, “The Way We Live Now” (1986) • Paula A. Treichler, “AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic in Signification” from <i>How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS</i> (1999), pp. 11-41 	<p>Student Discussion Leader</p>
<p>Week 8 10/10</p>	<p>Topic: The Myth of Patient Zero</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roger Spottiswoode, dir., <i>And the Band Played On</i> (1993) • Randy Shilts, selections from <i>And the Band Played On</i> (1986) • Priscilla Wald, “The Columbus of AIDS: The Invention of ‘Patient Zero’” from <i>Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative</i> (2008), pp. 213-263 • Jad and Robert Krulwich, “Patient Zero,” <i>Radilab</i> (2011): https://www.wnycstudios.org/story/169879-patient-zero 	<p>Come to class with a list of final project ideas and be prepared to workshop those ideas with your peers.</p>
<p>Week 9 10/17</p>	<p>Topic: Contagious Environments</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rob Nixon, Introduction to <i>Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor</i> (2013) • Cherríe Morga, <i>Heroes and Saints</i> (1994) • Oscar Lopez and Andrew Jacobs, “In Town with Little Water, Coca-Cola Is Everywhere. So Is Diabetes,” <i>The New York Times</i> (2018): https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/14/world/americas/mexico-coca-cola-diabetes.html 	<p>Student Discussion Leader</p>
<p>Week 10 10/24</p>	<p>Topic: Speculative Fiction & Epidemics</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, selections from <i>The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins</i> (2015) • Margaret Atwood, <i>Oryx and Crake</i> (2003) • Octavia Butler, “Speech Sounds” (1983) 	<p>Project Proposal due (2-3 pages that describe your project, focusing on your argument, genre, and organization. Include your tentative bibliography)</p>

Week 11 10/31	<p>Topic: Apocalyptic Contagion</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colson Whitehead, <i>Zone One</i> (2011) • Carmen Maria Machado, “Inventory” (2017): http://strangehorizons.com/fiction/inventory/ • Ed Young, “The Next Plague Is Coming. Is America Ready?” <i>The Atlantic</i> (2018): https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/07/when-the-next-plague-hits/561734/ 	Student Discussion Leader
Week 12 11/7	<p>Topic: The Rhetoric of Epidemics</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zachary Siegel, “Is the U.S. Knee-Deep in ‘Epidemics,’ or Is That Just Wishful Thinking?” <i>The New York Times</i> (2018): https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/14/magazine/epidemic-disaster-tragedy.html • Susan Greenhalgh, “A Biocitizenship Society to Fight Fat” from <i>Fat-Talk Nation: The Human Costs of America’s War on Fat</i> (2015), pp. 3-38 • “Tell Me I’m Fat,” <i>This American Life</i> (2016): https://www.thisamericanlife.org/589/tell-me-im-fat • Student-selected readings <p>Optional Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lauren Berlant, “Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency),” <i>Critical Inquiry</i>, vol. 33, no. 4 (2007), pp. 754-780 	Identify a popular or scholarly article that utilizes epidemic or contagion to describe a non-communicable disease or social phenomenon. Come to class prepared to share your article (and your analysis of it) with the class.
Week 13 11/14	<p>Topic: The Opioid “Epidemic”</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • William Brewer, selections from <i>I Know Your Kind</i> (2018) • Beth Macy, selections from <i>Dopesick: Dealers, Doctors, and the Drug Company that Addicted America</i> (2018) • Keith Wailoo, “Thinking Through Pain,” <i>Perspectives in Biology and Medicine</i>, vol. 59, no. 2, (2012), pp. 253-262 	Attend “Reframing Addiction: Poets and Poetry on the Opioid Epidemic” reading on November 12 at 3:00p.m. in Light Hall, Room 208
11/21	Thanksgiving Break	
Week 14 11/28	Topic: Project Draft Workshop	Bring a 5-10 page draft of your final project to class.
Week 15 12/5	Topic: Student Project Presentations	Prepare a brief presentation of your final project.