

**English 577**  
**Contemporary Literature: Graphic Medicine**  
Spring Semester 2014  
**As of 1.12.14**

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Office Hours: T,  
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Course description:

Whether your focus as a scholar is literature, rhetoric, cultural studies, or science studies, and whether you plan to write about comics in your dissertation or are merely curious about the medium, this seminar will introduce you to *graphic medicine*: comics that address issues of illness, disability, and medicine from the perspectives of patients, health care workers, caregivers and/or family members. Because there is growing interest in graphic medicine in the *medical humanities* and the *health humanities*, this course also will introduce some of the foundational works in those fields, areas of study that also have their own journals (among them *Literature and Medicine* and *Journal of the Medical Humanities*), their own conferences (*American Society for Bioethics and Humanities* and the *International Health Humanities Conference*), and substantial representation at the MLA as well.

During the semester, we will read some of the best works in graphic medicine, as well as several studies that present synoptic theories about the medium of comics in general and about graphic medicine in particular. And, because in my view the way to write about comics with authority is to have an appreciation of what it takes to create them, we'll devote part of each class to studio time in which we will learn about the construction of comics, on a practical and pedagogical level. While most of you are talented writers, I do not assume that you think of yourselves as artists. That is NOT a problem. Knowledge of the nuts and bolts of comics creation will make you a better comics critic or theorist.

The field of graphic medicine is a vibrant one, with its own website (<http://www.graphicmedicine.org> hosted by cartoonists and health care practitioners Ian Williams and MK Czerwiec), its own international conference whose fifth annual gathering will be held June 25-27, 2014 at Johns Hopkins Medical School, as well as its own book series and a range of publication venues, including an upcoming special issue of *Configurations* on Graphic Medicine that I will be

editing this semester. You will review a work of or about graphic medicine which (if you wish) you may submit for that special issue. And you may also write your seminar paper with an eye to participating in the Hopkins conference if you wish.

By the end of the seminar we will have covered:

The foundational concepts of the medical humanities and the health humanities.

The basic lexicon of comics.

The basics of storytelling, visual and verbal, in comics.

And you will have:

Taken your own work of graphic medicine from a faint idea to a finished form.

Written a review of a work of graphic medicine and presented it to the class.

Written a seminar paper that contributes to the study of graphic medicine, and incorporates analysis of one or several comics (no longer than 20 pages).

**Required Texts** to order or buy from the Comic Swap (Fraser Street, State College) and also on reserve in Pattee:

Brian Fies, *Mom's Cancer*

Harvey Pekar and Joyce Brabner, *Our Cancer Year*

Marisa Acocella Marchetto, *Cancer Vixen*

Frederik Peeters, *Blue Pills*

Ken Dahl, *Monsters*

Marjane Satrapi, *Embroideries*

David Small, *Stitches*

Darryl Cunningham, *Psychiatric Tales*

Sarah Leavitt, *Tangles*

Ellen Forney, *Marbles*

Cathy Leamy, *Mindful Drinking* (this is a web comic which will cost everyone \$2.50: I am ordering it and will ask you to reimburse me.)

**Additional readings are on line in ANGEL under required readings.**

### **Course Requirements:**

1. A response paper to the readings for each class. (One page single spaced please)
2. Facilitation of one class.
3. Review of one work of graphic medicine. These should be written in review format, either based on the formatting requirements of a target journal or as an online review for <http://www.graphicmedicine.org>. They will be read to the class, workshopped if we find we have time, and then you will turn in

the revised draft. I encourage you to submit your reviews for publication.

4. A four-page work of graphic medicine *of your own*, to completed on your own schedule, and then shared with the class on May 1.
5. A seminar paper on a topic relating to graphic medicine chosen in consultation with me. The paper should be article-length (i.e. 4000-6000 words). Paper abstracts due 2/27. The first 5-8-page chunk will be work-shopped in class on 3/20; the final version of the paper is due 4/17.

### **Class Schedule (subject to change if necessary)**

**1/16           Introduction to medical humanities and graphic medicine**

Draw?!"       **Reading:** MK Czerwiec (Comic Nurse) "Why Don't You  
**(online in ANGEL under Studio Tools)**  
 Studio time: drawing ourselves; glossary of comics

**Part One: MANIFEST MODES OF ILLNESS (Williams, forthcoming)**

**1/23**       Brian Fies, *Mom's Cancer*  
 Studio time: jam comics  
 Essays: read the four articles in Debate Over the Medical Humanities as a Field (**In Angel under required readings in a folder with that title.**)

**1/30**       **No class** (I will be presenting on graphic medicine at the University of British Columbia.)  
 Assignment: Read chapter 1, Abel and Madden 3-13, and Charles Hatfield, "An Art of Tensions: *The Otherness of Comics Reading*" in Hatfield, *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature* (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 2005): 32-67. **In Angel under Required Readings**)

**2/6**       Harvey Pekar and Joyce Brabner, *Our Cancer Year*  
 Studio time: exercises in Abel and Madden, p. 11.  
 Essay: Discussion of Hatfield reading. For this class, read Ian C M Williams, "Graphic medicine: comics as medical narrative," *Medical Humanities* (2012). Doi. 10.1136/medhum-2011-010093. **In Angel under required readings.**

**2/13**       Marisa Acochella Marchetto, *Cancer Vixen*

Studio time: working with an image. Lynda Barry exercise (adapted)—**On Line in ANGEL under Studio Tools.**  
 Essay: Jared Gardner, “Autography’s Biography” *Biography* 2008 **31:** 1-26. **In Angel as a link under Required Readings.**

- 2/20 Kaisa Leka, *I am Not These Feet* (PDF online in Angel courtesy of Kaisa Leka.)  
 Studio time: Page-Building Basics (from Robyn Chapman, *drawing comics lab* (Beverly, Mass, Quarry Books: 2012): 38-39. **Online in ANGEL in Studio Tools.**  
 Article: Charles Hatfield, “I Made That Whole Thing Up! The Problem of Authenticity in Autobiographical Comics” in Hatfield, *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature* (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 2005): 32-67. **In Angel under Required Readings**

**Part Two: CONCEALED MODES OF ILLNESS**

- 2/27 **Abstract of seminar paper due in class.**  
 Frederik Peeters, *Blue Pills*  
 Studio time: Scripting and thumbnailing your strip.  
 Article: Green and Myers, "Graphic Medicine: The Use of Comics in Medical Education and patient Care" BMJ 13 March 2010: 574-577. **Online in ANGEL in required readings.** “What’s Up, Doc? How Comic Strips Are Improving Bedside Manner,” BBC Health November 30, 2013. **In Angel under required readings.**
- 3/6 Ken Dahl, *Monsters*  
 Studio time: work on your comic  
 Article: t.b.a.
- 3/13 SPRING BREAK
- 3/20 **Workshopping first chunk of seminar paper**  
 Marjane Satrapi, *Embroideries*  
 Studio time: work on your comic  
 Article: t.b.a.
- 3/27 David Small, *Stitches*  
 Studio time: work on your comic  
 Article: t.b.a.

**Part 3: INVISIBLE MODES OF ILLNESS**

- 4/3 Darryl Cunningham, *Psychiatric Tales*

- Studio time: work on your comic  
Article: t.b.a.
- 4/10 Sarah Leavitt, *Tangles*  
Studio time: work on your comic  
Article: t.b.a.
- 4/17 **Final Seminar papers due in class**  
Ellen Forney, *Marbles*  
Studio time: work on your comic  
Article: t.b.a.
- 4/24 Cathy Leamy, *Mindful Drinking*  
Presentations of final seminar papers  
Studio time: work on your comic
- 5/1 Wrap up  
Presentations of your works of graphic medicine.