

CULTURE & EXPRESSION

(Fall 2013: HUHC 011 & HUHC 013)

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That's Sick! Illness and Health of Mind and Body in Ancient and Medieval Culture

Sickness of mind and body is arguably as much a cultural or social construction as a scientific fact or assessment. The status of one's mental and bodily health or illness relates always to the current body of knowledge in that society as a deviation, or not, from some norm or ideal. This semester, C&E will broach the issue of illness as a cultural text, whereby each work will present the body and/or the mind as symptomatic of cultural issues and values that extend beyond the work. Each work will incorporate in some way the normative portrayal of health or illness in terms ranging from early scientific thinking about the diagnosis of physical ailments and their treatment; to psychological illness or madness; to love and desire as an affliction or form of derangement, both mental and physical; to sin as moral or metaphysical sickness and anguish with guilt, shame and suffering as penance in a theological view; to mass illness or plague as collective fate or retribution, or on the contrary, as simple consequences of complex physical processes without divine or metaphysical implications. This range extends from the somatic (bodily) to the semiotic (textual signifiers, signs): for example, from discussions of *midwifery*, the practice of assisting a mother in the birthing or delivery of a child, to *maieutics*, the Greek word for midwifery used in philosophy for the art of helping others give birth to ideas, as in the Socratic method. Ultimately, the description of illness or well-being can function both as historical record of or philosophical inquiry into or as a critical metaphor of an issue, an individual or a whole society, as in the body politic. This study of ancient and medieval pathologies will examine the specific works and their cultural contexts.

Don't worry – the doctors are in!

The Strategy

C&E consists of two related courses in both fall and spring semesters. *HUHC 011 and 012: Social Sciences* has its emphasis on understanding the structures and values of a culture or civilization through the disciplines of history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, religion, economics and geography. *HUHC 013 and 014: Humanities* has its emphasis on artistic expressions of the cultures under examination through the disciplines of literary analysis (e.g. English, Classics, Romance and Comparative Literatures), linguistics, music, drama, dance, the visual arts, architecture and aesthetics. Faculty on both teams develop a reading list and lecture schedule that work in tandem to reinforce a student's understanding of the ancient world through to the Middle Ages and the modern world since the Renaissance. Twice weekly faculty lectures set the context for student-based discussion sections.