

Course Syllabus

Medical Modernism: The Clinical Gaze in Literature, Art, and Science

In his draft material for what would later become *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the young James Joyce observes that the “modern spirit is viviseptive.” Himself a former medical student, Joyce draws our attention to the way the artist seeks to anatomize culture “by the light of day”; that is to say, by representing both individuals and communities “in action.” In doing so, he sets up an intriguing yet problematic parallel between modern literature and scientific inquiry. Offering a genealogy of “medical modernism,” this course investigates the historical, political, and aesthetic contexts of the clinical gaze, from the intervention of the literary community in the late nineteenth-century vivisection debate to the appropriation of viviseptive imagery by writers and artists of the interwar period and beyond. Over the course of the semester, we will draw upon a wide range of verbal and visual texts in order to carry out our own “examination” of art’s investment in medical discourse and vice versa; the relationship between artists, surgeons, and (mad) scientists; and the manner in which modernism embraces an aesthetics of vivisection at the expense of dehumanizing or “bestializing” its subject. Finally, as we trace the artist’s desire to “play doctor”—from William Wordsworth’s conception of the poet who “[murders] to dissect” to Joyce’s own association of the writer with the criminal transgressor—we will consider the extent to which literature is aware of its own “malpractice,” its aestheticization of bodily violence “for art’s sake.”

Students will complete two papers and a final exam. Students will also receive an additional grade based on attendance and class participation.

Grading

Paper 1	30%
Paper 2	30%
Final Exam	20%
Participation	20%

Week 1, Introduction to Literary Anatomy

William Wordsworth, “The Tables Turned” and “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*”

John Keats, “Ode to Psyche” and “On Some Skulls in Beaulieu Abbey, near Inverness”

I. The Vivisection Debate

Week 2, Writers vs. Naturalists

Charles Dickens, “Inhumane Humanity”

Lewis Carroll, “Some Popular Fallacies about Vivisection”

Christina Rossetti, “To what purpose is this waste?”

Rod Preece, “Darwinism, Christianity, and the Great Vivisection Debate”

Week 3, Man and Animal

Robert Browning, “Tray” and “Arcades Ambo”

Robert Louis Stevenson, “The Character of Dogs,” “The Scientific Ape,” and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

Week 4, A Cautionary Tale

H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*

II. The Clinical Aesthetic

Week 5, Slices of Life

John Ruskin, "Fiction, Fair and Foul"

Émile Zola, "Preface" from *Thérèse Raquin*

Michel Foucault, "A Political Consciousness" (*The Birth of the Clinic*, Chapter 2)

Weeks 6-7, The Pathology of Realism

Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*

Week 8, Verbal Dissections

Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives*

Daylanne English, "Gertrude Stein and the Politics of Literary-Medical Experimentation"

III. Medical Modernism

Week 9, Pen and Lancet

James Joyce, *Stephen Hero* (excerpt) and *Giacomo Joyce*

Week 10, War Wounds

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered"

Rupert Brooke, "The Dead" and "The Soldier"

Wilfred Owen, "Dulce Et Decorum Est," "Exposure," and "Disabled"

Week 11, Invasive Surrealism

Georges Bataille, "The Pineal Eye"

Slides: Joan Miró, *Peinture*; Salvador Dalí, *Le jeu lugubre*; Jean Fautrier, *L'homme ouvert*

Film: *Un Chien Andalou* (dir. Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí)

Week 12, Body and Mind

Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny"

Film: *Spellbound* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock)

Week 13, A Postmodern Postmortem

Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell, *From Hell*