

# SICK GIRLS & HARDY HEROINES

GNDR\_ST 101-6

WINTER  
2023



Ill women are scattered across the pages of literature, from swooning ladies in sentimental novels to cancer patients in popular fiction. Illness acts as narrative momentum, as a metaphor for social “ills,” and as a signifier of tragic virtue in an individual character. Focusing on the 18th and 19th centuries, this class will examine how the tropes of illness in

popular literature pertains to our broader cultural assumptions about illness, health, and gender. How do traits associated with femininity resemble literary representations of illness, and vice-versa? How might we locate or analyze femininity in representations of ill men? How do these tropes change over time? What happens if health, rather than illness, becomes a primary marker of virtue? And what does all of this mean for us today? How has the construction of ill femininity been bound up in whiteness, and how has this contributed to systemic and medical racism? What is the relationship between the representation of ill femininity and contemporary “wellness culture”—or even contemporary feminism?

Hannah Chaskin

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TTh 12:30-1:50pm  
Allison Residential  
Comm 1021