

# ILLNESS AND FEMININITY: FICTIONS AND FACTS

GNDR\_ST 361 & ENGLISH 381

WINTER  
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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. From the 19th century to the present, this class will examine how the tropes of illness in popular literature pertains to our broader cultural assumptions about illness and gender. How do traits associated with femininity resemble literary representations of illness, and vice-versa? How have these associations changed over time? 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”? How might we locate or analyze femininity in representations of ill men? What about mental illness? Our readings will be split between popular representations of illness in novels and writings by ill authors, and we will consider how literary tropes are or are not reappropriated by the latter.

Hannah Chaskin

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MW 2-3:20pm  
Harris Hall L06