

## International Summer School 2025

# ISSU9MH – Literature and the Body 1500-1900

## Module outline

This module will provide you with a general introduction to central medico-literary concepts, and their evolution, surrounding the body between 1500 and 1900 in Britain. After taking this course, you will be familiar with a wide range of literary works that centre the body, as well as key theories in Literature and Medicine Studies: accompanying primary historical and literary materials will be secondary sources which examine conceptual frameworks of both the body and the practice of medicine. On this module you will critically analyze literary representations of the early modern humoral body, bodily blazons, doctor-patient relations, and Gothic medicine. Primary readings will introduce you to various historic literary genres, such as Renaissance drama, metaphysical poetry, Elizabethan sonnets, medical life writing, and the Gothic novel. Indicative texts include works by William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, John Donne, Edmund Spenser, Samuel Warren, Mary Seacole, and Arthur Conan Doyle.

## Learning Outcomes

On completion of the module you will be able to:

1. Gain an understanding of key medical concepts of the body and their historical representations in British literature between the years of 1400 and 1900.
2. Develop textual analysis and critical thinking skills in relation to medicine, illness, and embodiment in literature, recognizing the intellectual, social, and cultural contexts in which these ideas developed.
3. Critically evaluate conflicting interpretations of literary representations of the body by undertaking interdisciplinary research that demonstrates an awareness of the complexities surrounding representations of embodiment and the social history of medicine.
4. Learn to construct viable arguments about medico-literary texts, combining close reading with a variety of theoretical and historical methodological frameworks.
5. Work effectively, both independently and in collaboration with others.

## Teaching

There will usually be two weekly two-hour seminars. Students will be expected to contribute to class discussions as well as give a small presentation in a group. All students will also be expected to attend a field trip. Attendance is compulsory and preparation essential.

### Indicative Content

**Week 1:** Reading the Humoral Body: Physiology and Theatre in Early Modern England

**Week 2:** Constructing the Other: Hierarchies of Gender, Sexuality, and Race in 16th & 17th Century Poetry

**Week 3:** Gothic Pathologies: Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Representations of the Body

**Week 4:** Victorian Bodies: Patient Narratives, Medical Technologies, and the Hospital in Literature

## Assessment

| Assessment type                     | Weighting |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| Prospectus & Annotated Bibliography | 40%       |
| Essay                               | 50%       |
| Online Presentation                 | 10%       |

## Key reading List

### Week 1

Ben Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*

William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*

### Week 2

John Donne & Richard Barnfield (various poems)

Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*

### Week 3

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818)

### Week 4

Mary Seacole's *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857)

Arthur Conan Doyle's *Round the Red Lamp* (1894)