

2026 Spring
ENGL5369 Topics in English (Seminar)

Health on Display: Curious Medicine & Spectacle Stories in the Long Eighteenth Century

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Office Hours: Wednesday 10-1, and by appointment (see Canvas for Zoom link)

Course Overview

Today, we often imagine science and storytelling as opposites – hard facts versus creative imagination, data versus narrative, evidence versus feeling. But in the eighteenth century, these categories were not yet divided. Far from being a stable or purely objective enterprise, scientific knowledge was a contested and often spectacular practice that was shaped by everyday life and the publics.

This semester, we will explore the eighteenth century as a pivotal moment in which ideas about the human body and health were reimagined alongside the rise of Enlightenment science. We'll look at how medical knowledge circulated through advertisements, satire, and visual culture, and how these forms shaped – and were shaped by – the norms that scripted eighteenth-century society. Various forms of literature and visual texts will serve as key archives that reveal how medical knowledge was produced: as narratives, as performances, and as commodities.

Learning Goals

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Analyze medical knowledge as historical & cultural construct
- Assess how scientific discourse reflected and reinforced social hierarchies and norms
- Conduct archival and visual analysis of primary sources
- Produce quality, original research project that is historically and critically situated

Technology

- Students are required to have reliable access to a laptop and the Internet. Students are responsible for being updated with course schedules, announcements, and materials.
- For technical issues, contact Canvas or UT Tyler "Help Now."
- Students are expected to maintain regular communication with the instructor throughout the semester.

Reading

All required readings will be available on Canvas or through the university research databases.

Sample Reading List

Blackwood, A., and H. Williams. "Writing Doctors and Writing Health in the Long Eighteenth Century." *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 46, 2023, pp. 3-20. doi.org/10.1111/1754-0208.12870

Bynum, W.F. and Roy Porter, ed., *Literature and Medicine in the Eighteenth Century*. Archive.org, archive.org/details/literaturemedici0000unse_c7d2

- Chico, Tita. "Wonder and Wonders: Eighteenth-Century Science and the Imagination." *The Huntington*, www.huntington.org/videos-and-recorded-programs/wonder-and-wonders-eighteenth-century-science-and-imagination
- Daston, Lorraine. "Fear and Loathing of the Imagination in Science." *Daedalus*, vol. 127, no. 1, Winter 1998, pp. 73-95. The MIT Press on behalf of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, www.jstor.org/stable/20027477
- Gabbard, D. Christopher. "Disability Studies and the British Long Eighteenth Century." *Literature Compass*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2011, pp. 80–94. doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2010.00771.x
- Oh, June. "Aging Faces and Gowland's Lotion in Austen's *Persuasion* (1817)." *Age, Culture, Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 5, Jan. 2021, pp. 1-23, [doi:10.7146/ageculturehumanities.v5i.130862](https://doi.org/10.7146/ageculturehumanities.v5i.130862)
- . *The Aging Mind and Body in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture, 1680-1830*. Michigan State University, 2022. ProQuest. Web. 21 Apr. 2026.
- Porter, Roy. *Health for Sale: Quackery in England 1660–1850*, Manchester University Press, 1989.
- . "Quacks." In *Health for Sale: Quackery in England 1660–1850*, Manchester University Press, 1989.
- Roberts, Marie Mulvey, Roy Porter, ed., *Literature & Medicine During the Eighteenth Century*. Routledge, 1993.
- Wheeler, Roxann. *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000.
- Wragge-Morley, Alexander. "Habit, Medicine, and Society in 18th-Century Britain." *Medical History*, vol. 70, no. 1, 2026, pp. 1-19. doi.org/10.1017/MDH.2025.10042

Course Structure

This class is built as an online class. Much of our communication and learning will be textual.

Each module will provide you with key ideas and guiding questions to help you through the primary reading materials.

After you complete the reading, you'll post your response on the discussion board and reply to peers. In order to build a collaborative learning space, you will be asked to upload a video on the discussion board. You will practice close reading, critical analysis, and academic argumentation – sometimes informally ("tell me what you think"), sometimes through more formal, evidence-based writing.

This class will also ask you to produce quality original research. It is my belief that students learn best when they pursue something of their genuine interest and practice self-discipline. Thus, this class will be highly individualized and require an active, self-directed approach to learning. About 1/3 of reading in this class will be student-selected, meaning you will choose texts that support your developing research interests and weekly work. This process will demand initiative, practice, and self-discipline.

Tips for Success

Read and write. This is a literature course. You will read and write a lot. And, to state the obvious, that takes time. Find your joy in that.

Engage, deeply. The online nature of this class will push you to take an active role in the learning process. You will do this by thinking deeply and collaborate with the readings, the instructor, and other students' ideas on all assignments beyond what is "required."

Use Canvas notification settings but don't trust it to do *your* job. Canvas can ensure you receive timely notifications in your email or via text ([Canvas Notification Guide](#)). Note that some assignments like the discussion posts and responses have "hidden" due dates. Buy a planner or keep a digital calendar to help manage your workload.

Ask for help. If you have questions or concerns, I expect you to reach out to me or your classmates for support. I am happy to help.

Course Grade

Component	points
Responses	40
Archival object research	20
Research	40
Total	100

Grade Scale

A	90 to	100	points
B	80 to	89	points
C	70 to	79	points
D	60 to	69	points
F	0 to	59	points

Minimum Requirement to Earn a C in the Class

To earn a C or above in the class, students must earn a C or above on all components.

Syllabus Changes

Per the UTT Syllabus Policy: "The information contained in the syllabus, other than the grading criteria and absence and make-up policies, may be subject to change with reasonable advance notice as long as the change is without prejudice to the students." See our class Canvas for course schedule.

Important Dates

August 24	Classes begin
October 30	Last day to withdraw
November 23-27	Thanksgiving
December 7-11	Final week

Public Writing

All writing in the class is public writing. As a class, and in small groups, we may discuss what is working in student papers and areas for improvement. I may also select your writing as samples for the future students to look at. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Major Assignments

Responses

Students will upload short responses to discussion prompts in a written or video format (depending on requirement of the week) and reply to peers by the due date. Typically, there will be one primary text from 18C and a peer-reviewed research article to read. There will be a reading guide helping students with what to focus on. Often, students will select what to read for the week.

Archival Research (ECCO)

Students will analyze eighteenth-century medical culture through one primary object of investigation (e.g., advertisement, remedy, case history, manual, testimony, fiction, poem).

The analysis object should be grounded on texts found in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* database. Students will read the respective primary text in the archive, analyze it, and contextualize it within scholarship. Students are expected to communicate with the instructor on their chosen topic.

Possible object/topic topics:

- Apothecaries and home remedies (“recipes”)
- Beauty products (e.g., Gowland's Lotion, “tinctures”)
- Midwifery and childbirth
- Spa culture (e.g., Bath waters)
- Various regimen (e.g., diet plans, sleep practices, etc.)
- Quack medicines and elixirs (“charlatan”)
- Medical technology (e.g., forceps, blood-letting, leeches, etc.)
- Life stage technology and regimen (e.g., menopause medicine, wine for the elderly, etc.)
- Physician, quacks, training
- “fat” and weight-watching
- Various diseases and illnesses (consumption, gout, venereal diseases, etc.)
- Family planning
- Pocketbook
- The idea of “fair sex”
- Hysteria and gendered illnesses
- Vaccinations (“inoculation”)
- “fainting spells”
- “Man of feeling”
- Sympathy
- Slave-ship surgeons

They might ask the following questions: What is this object/technology/genre/practice? How is this object introduced (i.e., story-told)? What is presented as scientific or medical evidence here? How did eighteenth century people encounter and interpreted this? How does this artifact reflect the time period and its value? In other words, how does it engage with social values, scientific beliefs, and cultural anxieties of the time? How is knowledge about the body produced?

Research

Building from their Archival Research, students will write a research paper and present on a historical artifact that analyzes how representations of medicine, health, or the body reflected and shaped the eighteenth century.

Students will select their research topic based on their interest but will need to justify the relevance and scope. The paper should be historically grounded, academically rigorous, and engage scholarships (at least 3 secondary sources for undergraduates and 8 for graduate students). On the final weeks of the semester, students will present on their project in a video format.

Important Policies and Resources

Attendance

Students are expected to attend all class sessions. In an online setting, this means completing assigned tasks. Students who miss more than three weeks' work (e.g., missing discussion, responses, assignments.) will automatically fail the course unless they withdraw by the census date. See "Standard UT Tyler Syllabus Policies" for information on the census date.

Submitting Written Work

To be counted for a grade, written work must be submitted (unless instructed otherwise) via Canvas. Assignments that do not follow the designated format, that are emailed, that are submitted to the wrong drop box, or that I cannot open (e.g., zipped files, ios files, .pages files, damaged files) will receive 0.

Late Work

Any assignments submitted after the deadline will receive a 15% deduction for each day they are late. I understand that life happens. If you have circumstances that impact your academic performance, contact me as soon as possible so we can figure out a plan together.

Academic Dishonesty & Disruptive Behavior

This class has a zero tolerance policy for academic dishonesty. Any act of academic dishonesty will result in immediate failure of the entire course and will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Intervention.

For the UTT definition of "academic dishonesty," go to the UT Tyler Syllabus Module in the class Canvas shell. Click on "University Policies and Information." Scroll to the "Academic Honesty and Academic Misconduct" section. Click on "Student Conduct and Discipline policy." Read Section 8-802 "Academic Dishonesty."

Disruptive behavior will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Intervention and may result in failing the class and/or University sanction. Disruptive behavior includes, but is not limited to:

- hindering other students from working on the tangible learning activities taking place during face-to-face and online class sessions
- talking when the instructor is talking
- repeatedly arriving late and/or leaving early
- using technology for purposes other than working on the tangible learning activities taking place during the class period
- doing something other than working on the tangible learning activities taking place during the class period
- sleeping during class

For the UTT definition of “disruptive behavior,” go to the UT Tyler Syllabus Module in the class Canvas shell. Click on “University Policies and Information.” Scroll to the “Academic Honesty and Academic Misconduct” section. Click on “Student Conduct and Discipline policy.” Scroll to Section 8-804 “Certain Other Offenses.” Read item number four “Disruptive Behavior.”

Artificial Intelligence Use Policy

UT Tyler is committed to exploring and using artificial intelligence (AI) tools as appropriate for the discipline and task undertaken. We encourage discussing AI tools’ ethical, societal, philosophical, and disciplinary implications. All uses of AI should be acknowledged as this aligns with our commitment to honor and integrity, as noted in UT Tyler’s Honor Code. Faculty and students must not use protected information, data, or copyrighted materials when using any AI tool. Additionally, users should be aware that AI tools rely on predictive models to generate content that may appear correct but is sometimes shown to be incomplete, inaccurate, taken without attribution from other sources, and/or biased. Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research. You are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate the guidelines specified for this course (see below) is considered a breach of academic integrity. The student will be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler’s Academic Integrity Policy.

For this course, I expect all work students submit for this course to be their own. While using artificial intelligence assistance can aid various parts of the writing and analysis process such as brainstorming, managing and analyzing data, editing, and peer review, **this class is not the place to experiment with it.** In other words, any AI-facilitated work will be considered cheating and will be directly reported. Violation of this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including full revocation of credit for the assignment, and other sanctions. If a student wishes to utilize Gen-AI to promote specific parts of their learning, they are welcome to consult the instructor.

To comply with the class AI policy, you will need to disable Copilot in Word and the “Help Me Write” and “Smart Compose” in Google Docs. Note that *Grammarly* and sentence-level language checkers are AI writing assistant tools.

For more, see “University Policies and Information” in the class Canvas shell.

Class Conduct

Sensitive topics may be addressed during discussion, and passionate opinions are welcome. We will approach topics with an understanding of their historical context and cultural nuances, recognizing that some issues may be uncomfortable from a modern perspective. Each student should remain respectful and civil.

Contacting the instructor

If you have individual questions, you can set up a time to meet either in-person or via Zoom.

To contact me, use UTT email or Canvas messenger. Per the [UTT Email Policy](#), I will not reply to emails sent from non-UTT email addresses.

Emails and Canvas messages should provide a succinct overview of the topic and be written using complete sentences, reasonably correct grammar, and proper structure. In the subject line list the class (ENGL4379), your name, and a topic.

University Policies and Information

Go to our class Canvas for information relating University Policies.

Student Resources

Go to our class Canvas for information relating University Policies.

[Course schedule \(Subject to change based on class interest and progress\)](#)

Unit 1. Making Science: Empiricism and Error

This unit introduces the intellectual foundations of eighteenth-century science: Enlightenment empiricism and the ambition to systematize knowledge of mind and body. We will see how fragile these ideals were and how wonder, fraud, and spectacle coexisted with claims to scientific truth.

- What is Enlightenment science? What did it promise?
- What does it mean to study the body scientifically?
- How is science storytelling?

Week 1-2: en-Lighten-ment: What was it like to talk about your mind and the body, your health in 18C? How was your body and mind a philo-scientific subject?

Readings

- Immanuel Kant, [“What is Enlightenment”](#)
- David Hume, *The Enquiry* (Excerpts)
- Helpful resource: [“Enlightenment” from OER project](#)

Week 3-4: Going “viral” in the 18C: How does curiosity turn into “science”? What counts as science? How do bodies become evidence?

Readings

- Mary Toft controversy
- Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* (pp. 13-66)
- Helpful resource: [“Monstrous birth of Mary Toft”](#)
- Fun resource: 18C satiric illustration, [Hogarth and Rowlandson on Mary Toft](#)
- Optional:
 - Lawrence Stern, *Tristram Shandy*, birth scene
 - Peter Wagner, “Satire on Doctors”

Unit 2. Selling Health: Medical Voices in the Marketplace

How does the public (patients, consumers, readers) shape medical authority? Medicine in the eighteenth century flourished outside elite institutions. This unit examines how medical authority was performed, advertised, and contested in public spaces. We will explore quackery, satire, and visual culture to understand how health was a commodity.

Week 5-6: Through gossip and authority: How did medical knowledge circulate? How did the public influence medical knowledge production?

Readings

- Roy Porter, Introduction, *Lit & Med in 18C*
- [“Weird and Wonderful Medicine in 17th and 18th Century England”](#)
- Select one from the below to learn about the public’s role in shaping medical knowledge
 - *The Spectator*
 - No. 10 “The aim of the Spectator”
 - No. 25 “Valetudinarians: scientific dieting”
 - No. 115 “On the Spleen”
 - No. 195 “Quacks”
 - Helpful resources: [Introduction to *The Spectator*](#) ; On [the coffeehouse-hopping public](#)

Week 7-8: Feeling too much: In an Enlightenment attempt to categorize and explain all human body and health, they encounter a conundrum. Is there an individualized difference in how people feel pain? Are women more susceptible to certain illnesses or pain than men? And what would that mean?

Readings

- G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility* (Intro)
- Houston, [“Madness and gender in the long eighteenth century”](#)
- George Cheyne, *The English Malady* OR Excerpts from Fanny Burney’s mastectomy account
- Optional: Epstein, [“Writing the Unspeakable: Fanny Burney’s Mastectomy and the Fictive Body.”](#)

Unit 3. Digging the Archive

Week 9-10: “Meet my object”; archival object research (with Introduction to semester project) & Midterm check-in

- Read example research
 - [On Mary Toft](#) (analysis)
 - Wragge-Morley, [“Habit, medicine, and society in 18th-century Britain”](#)
 - Darcy, [“Jane Austen’s Sandition, Doctors, and the Rise of Sea bathing”](#)
 - Elliot, [“Catching your death: Infectious rain in the works of Jane Austen”](#)
 - Oh, [“Aging faces and Gowland’s lotion in Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*”](#)
- Select one archival object/topic [Make sure you block out enough time for this. You’ll need to do some preliminary research]

Week 11: Research progress report

Week 12: Draft

Unit 4. Little Scholar’s Stage

Week 13: Presentation

Week 14. Final paper

Week 16. Reflection