

# Literature and Medicine

Syllabus, 2013-2014

## Session I

9/24/13      SW107      7:30-9pm

### The Vitally Painful Edition

We will open the 2013 season of Literature and Medicine not too far (geographically) from where we left off the 2012 season with *The Tiger's Wife*. In **Anthony Marra's** *A Constellation of Vital Phenomena*, we will find the stories of a people rarely mentioned (at least until the recent events in Boston). Set in Chechnya in 2004, this work explores the lives of people who find themselves both post war and still at war. We will read this work against Eline Scarry's *The Body in Pain*. Her study of pain as the impetus for the unmaking of the world that stands in contrast to creation that makes the world will serve as our platform for discussing Marra's portrayal of a world struggling to create in the face of destruction.

## Session II

10/29/13      SW107      8:15-9:30pm

### The Junior Edition

Echoing the 2012 reading of **Junot Diaz's** *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, we will embark on Diaz's second short-story collection *This is How You Lose Her*. Listing the collection of Diaz's accolades is almost futile but still... for *Oscar Wao* in '07, Diaz won the big three - Pulitzer, National Book Award and National Book Critics Circle. Only 7 authors have ever won both the Pulitzer and NBA together (the last being another novel we had read last year – *A Visit From the Goon Squad*). He then won the NBA and NBCC again in 2012, this time for the collection we will read in this session.

In this collection, we will find an even more mature and honest narrative and even more heartbreaking protagonists. We will, of course, read Diaz against Diaz's early work. Reading *Oscar Wao* prior to this session is a pleasure, not a prerequisite.

### Session III

12/10/13      SW107      7:30-9pm

#### The Sweaty Edition

As we approach the winter season, we will begin our migration toward the alligator-wrestling lands of Ten Thousand Islands, Florida. In **Karen Russell's** *Swamplandia!* – the 2012 Pulitzer Prize finalist and member of multiple short-lists – we will find a bildungsroman aptly called the “North American take on magic realism.” We will read Russell against poetry by Lewis Carroll. And amidst a holiday season, we can all appreciate a little magic.

### Session IV

1/21/13      SW107      7:30-9pm

#### The French Edition

We return from the holidays and jump right into the realm of philosophy, opening with a few brief excerpts from the French post-structuralist philosopher Michel Foucault. We will continue to visit with Foucault and his contemporaries throughout our discussion of this session's focus: **Muriel Barbery's** *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*. This enchanting account of an unlikely friendship between a brilliant 12-year-old daughter of a parliamentarian and middle-aged erudite yet ‘uneducated’ doorwoman is both disarming and strangely empowering. Barbery's work is filled with allusions to literature, art, and philosophy and serves as a perfect springboard for unexpected tangents. And yes, a clip from the movie may be in order.

### Session V

3/4/13      SW107      7:30-9pm

#### The Sweet Edition

In our post-holiday session, we will transition from a young author's breakout novel to a new genre by a well-seasoned writer. In **Ian McEwan's** *Sweet Tooth*, we will find a tasteful take on the romance-novel. We will continue to trace the thread of bildungsromans with this Cold War story of a bishop's daughter recruited by MI5 to combat communism. Watch out, Ian Fleming.

## Session VI

4/8/13      SW107      7:30-9pm

### The Low Edition

After winning the Pulitzer for her collection of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies*, **Jhumpa Lahiri** continued to explore the intimate connection between the American and the Indian facets of the Indian-American experience through *The Namesake* and *Unaccustomed Earth*. In her latest novel, *The Lowland*, the impact of culture and environment continues to play a central role in the narrative. We will read Lahiri's latest novel, which was selected for the Man Booker Prize long list, against excerpts by Arundati Roy and Salman Rushdie.

## Session VII

5/8/13      SW107      7:30-9pm

### The Ending Edition vs The Red Edition

*Below are my two spiels. We can vote during our 6<sup>th</sup> session to decide which, of these two books, we should read for our final session.*

Who makes a better narrator – a coin, Satan or red (yes, the color)? there's only one way to find out. In our penultimate discussion, we will join the Nobel Prize winning author **Orhan Pamuk** in his journey through *My Name is Red*. Expect a rich and exciting discussion which may very well leave us with more questions than answers. We will use Nabokov's Lecture on Literature (and Nabokov's own writing) as our guide.

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What better way to end the 2013-14 season than with an appropriately selected title. In **Julian Barnes'** *The Sense of an Ending* we will finally discuss the reflective/nostalgic narrative that seems so pervasive in literature. The good news: no, we will not be discussing Proust and *Remembrance of Things Past*. Bad news: the end of the season means that we will have to adjourn until next September.