Kaylyn Pogson

English Honors Thesis

Cancer is an ancient foe; as scientific and medical advances have been made through time, the dialogue surrounding cancer has changed. This project seeks to explore how narratives about breast cancer have changed over the centuries using Siddhartha Mukherjee’s *The Emperor of All Maladies* as a framing text. The texts begin with Frances Burney’s account of her mastectomy in a letter to her sister in 1811, an account complemented by the writings of a surgeon who conducted a mastectomy during the same era, jump to Audre Lorde’s *Cancer Journals* and *Illness as a Metaphor* by Susan Sontag in the 20th century, to the early 2000s graphic novel *Cancer Vixen* by Marisa Acocella Marchetto, then Dr. Jennifer Ho’s blog *No F****** Pink Ribbons!*, Tig Nataro’s comedic stand-up routine about her breast cancer diagnosis, and finally extend to Marvel’s Thor comic books beginning in October of 2014, wherein Jane Foster, a woman with breast cancer, becomes Thor. Within this honors thesis, ideas, thoughts, and reflections about breast cancer will be examined in the listed texts for similarities and differences in view on topics including impact on life, role of partner, doctor-patient relationships, community, public versus private, how each author managed his/her experience, and, when appropriate, how writing the text fit into that experience. In addition, a complementary analysis will occur regarding the use of different genres as time progresses, with emphasis on why the change occurred and the benefits of each genre for telling a cancer narrative. This project is in its early stages, with all readings completed and writing beginning in early November.