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### **History of writing about illness challenges the field of literary criticism**

PITTSBURGH—Tracing the twentieth-century emergence of personal writing about illness, Ann Jurecic, in her new book, examines the challenges these stories pose to criticism and the teaching of literature.

*Illness as Narrative*, forthcoming from the University of Pittsburgh Press, seeks to draw wider attention to this unique form of life writing. Jurecic calls for an approach that's both compassionate and critical. She asks that we consider why writers compose stories of illness, how readers receive them, and how both use these narratives to give meaning to human fragility and mortality.

For most of literary history, personal confessions about illness were considered too intimate to share with the public. By the mid-twentieth century, however, a series of events set the stage for the emergence of the "illness narrative:" the increase of chronic disease, the transformation of medicine into big business, the women's health movement, the AIDS/HIV pandemic, the advent of inexpensive paperbacks, and the rise of self-publishing.

While the illness narrative is now a staple of the publishing industry, the genre itself has posed a problem for literary studies. What is the role of criticism in relation to personal accounts of suffering? Can the narratives be judged on aesthetic grounds? Do they express a lost intimacy of the patient-doctor relationship? Is their function to elicit the reader's empathy?

To answer these questions, Jurecic turns to major works by Susan Sontag, Elaine Scarry, and Eve Sedgwick, and reads them alongside illness narratives by Jean-Dominique Bauby, Reynolds Price and Anne Fadiman, among others—exploring a wide range of critical responses.

Jurecic is assistant professor of English at Rutgers University. A native of Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania, she now resides in Princeton, New Jersey.

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*Illness as Narrative* by Ann Jurecic will be published by the University of Pittsburgh Press later this spring 190 pp. • 6 x 9 • ISBN 978-0-8229-6190-1 • Paper \$24.95