The Doctor Will See You Now
Writers as Doctors & Doctors as Writers

— Anton Chekhov | William Carlos Williams —

Fall 2016, Dept. of English, University of North Florida

ENC 2451 Mon. and Wed. 12:00-1:15 p.m. Bldg. 39, Rm. 2006

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— Anton Chekhov

“The physician enjoys a wonderful opportunity actually to witness the words being born. Their actual colors and shapes are laid before him carrying their tiny burdens which he is privileged to take into his care with their unspoiled newness. He may see the difficulty with which they have been born and what they are destined to do. No one else is present but the speaker and ourselves, we have been the words’ very parents. Nothing is more moving.”
— William Carlos Williams, “The Practice”

“That is why as a writer I have never felt that medicine interfered with me but rather that it was my very food and drink, the very thing which made it possible for me to write. Was I not interested in man? There the thing was, right in front of me, I could touch it, smell it. It was myself, naked, just as it was, with out a lie telling itself to me in its own terms.”
— William Carlos Williams, “The Practice”

“Medicine is my lawful wife and literature my mistress; when I get tired of one, I spend the night with the other.”
— Anton Chekhov

What is it that a good doctor and a good writer have in common? The most obvious answer is that both must pay strict attention to that which is before them, to see lucidly and intelligently, with care and compassion, describing (as if diagnosing) the unique facts and features of the place, the person (the patient) before them.

Two of modernism’s greatest writers were — not coincidentally — also doctors: the Russian Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) and the American William Carlos Williams (1883-1963).

And so, in this class, we will read a selection of short stories and poetry of each of these doctors/writers, seeking to understand more fully the ways in which their being doctors impacted their being writers, and how the one vocation may have fed and fueled the other.

Required Texts: