***Cutting for Stone***

*By Abraham Verghese*

IDH 2930 1G51

Fall, 2017 Tuesday, 6th period (12:50-1:40)

Location: LIT0117

Instructor: Nina Stoyan-Rosenzweig, Communicore C1-21; [nstoyan@ufl.edu](mailto:nstoyan@ufl.edu); 352-273-8406

“I will not cut for stone even for patients in whom the disease is manifest; I will leave this operation to be performed by practitioners, specialists in this art.” Hippocratic Oath <http://www.duhaime.org/LegalDictionary/H/HippocraticOath.aspx> (note that this phrase is translated differently in various texts) <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/body/hippocratic-oath-today.html>

**Class description:**

Cutting for Stone is a novel by doctor writer Abraham Verghese, whose other notable books- My Own Country and The Tennis Player are non-fiction descriptions of his experiences as a physician and the challenges of delivering compassionate patient care. Cutting for Stone, while fictional, seems to draw from Verghese’s own life experiences highlighting as it does the experiences of an Indian raised in Ethiopia and trained in an international medical school who was able to gain US licensure only after completing a residency in a non-competitive medical field- generally rural or urban settings among underserved populations.

Cutting for Stone is set initially in Ethiopia in a healthcare facility staffed by foreign healthcare providers- a British surgeon and nuns and doctors, who generally were from Christian parts of India. With Ethiopia as the land of their birth, the novel actually is the tale of twins born to the surgeon and a nun who were deserted at birth and adopted by other doctors in the facility. As they grow the twins become estranged from one another. Then during the upheaval after Haile Selassie’s rule, one moves to the United States where he becomes licensed as a surgeon in an urban hospital serving underserved populations and eventually reconciling with his long absent father and his brother.

This well written and compelling book introduces a number of questions and issues that will be explored over the course of the semester. The course will explore the history and position of Ethiopia and the events that served as the backdrop of the book, including its position as an African nation not subject to imperial rule, and the events leading to the downfall of Haile Selassie that catapulted one of the characters to America. It also will explore the role of writing in healing- a role heightened by the setting in Ethiopia, a country with a tradition of healing scrolls, works with words believed to have the power to heal and that were prescribed by healers. The importance of writing in healthcare and healing, however, is personified by Abraham Verghese himself who in addition to writing the novel and memoirs has greatly advanced the role of the humanities in promoting compassionate health care. Verghese’s belief in the practice of medicine as a calling may put him somewhat at odds with modern trends in medicine, but it does heighten the sense of an almost mystical role for medicine and healers- <http://www.ted.com/talks/abraham_verghese_a_doctor_s_touch?language=en> . His attitude certainly provides room for discussion about the role of physicians in the healing encounter and the role of the arts in healthcare.

The book also allows for more discussion about provision of and the nature of healthcare. In both the Ethiopian hospital and the urban setting in which Marion trains, limited resources challenge the provision of adequate healthcare while the experience of training in an urban or rural setting- where competition for coveted residency spaces is virtually non-existent- is one common to many internationally trained physicians.

Finally, in this story Verghese examines the nature of families and familial relationships- connections and competition between twins- who were originally connected by blood vessels, a connection severed at birth, the loss of parents and the (eventual) reconciliation of an absent father and his children.

**Class Schedule and Reading Assignments**

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| Date | Topic | Reading assignment | Supplemental due dates/deadlines, topics, and materials |
| August 22 | Who is Abraham Verghese? |  | <http://www.ted.com/talks/abraham_verghese_a_doctor_s_touch?language=en>  <http://abrahamverghese.com/home/biography/>  <http://www.abrahamverghese.com/images/NEJM_TheCalling.pdf>  <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/27/opinion/27verghese.html?_r=2&scp=1&sq=verghese&st=cse&>  <http://www.abrahamverghese.com/images/TX%20Monthly,%20Bedside%20Manners,%20sml,%2002-07.pdf> |
| August 29 | Ethiopian history | Chs 1-5 | Background: Ethiopian history- overview  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwihu7o6YxM>  <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13351397>  <http://www.ethiopiantreasures.co.uk/> |
| September 5 | Kerala and English history | Chs 6-10 | Background: Kerala history- overview  <http://www.prokerala.com/kerala/history/history-landmarks.htm> |
| September 12 | Imperial Britain | Chs 11-15 | Class field trip- meet at the Harn Museum of Art.  Submit proposed project topic via email (nstoyan@ufl.edu) |
| September 19 |  | Chs 16-20 | Imperial Britain- overview  Receive back proposal topic with comments. |
| September 26 | Health issues in Africa | Chs 21-25 | **Health issues and concerns in Sub-Saharan Africa generally.**  **Consider the chapter “Continuity, change and Challenge in African Medicine.” In this ebook-** <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=39bd2bf1-d9a7-40c6-9514-3d747b990def%40sessionmgr4001&crlhashurl=login.aspx%253fdirect%253dtrue%2526scope%253dsite%2526db%253dnlebk%2526db%253dnlabk%2526AN%253d99390&hid=4201&vid=0&bdata=JkF1dGhUeXBlPWlwLHVpZCZzaXRlPWVob3N0LWxpdmU%3d#db=nlebk&AN=99390> |
| October 3 |  | Chs 26-30 | Finalize projects. |
| October 10 | Meet at Harn Museum | Chs 31-35 | Museum Tour of Ethiopian art and healing scrolls. |
| October 17 | Traditional Ethiopian healing systems | Chs 36-40 | “Traditional” Ethiopian healing practices and Cutting for Stone  <http://botanicaethiopia.com/herbs/>  <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27828907?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents> |
| October 24 | Export of healing processes elsewhere | Chs 41-45 | “Traditional” Ethiopian healing practices in the US  <https://ethnomed.org/clinical/pharmacy/ethiopian-herb-drug-interactions>  Write up of museum tour due. |
| October 31 | Ethiopia and its role in the OAU | Chs 46-50 | Ethiopia and the Organization of African Unity  <http://www.au.int/>  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zD9wkQ3DEo> |
| November 7 | International degrees and residencies in the US | Chs 51- 55 | Medicine, international medical degrees and residencies in the US  <http://abrahamverghese.com/home/biography/>  <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/about-ama/our-people/member-groups-sections/international-medical-graduates/practicing-medicine.page>?  <http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1475200> |
| November 14 |  |  | Review of Cutting for Stone due via email |
| November 21 | Medical humanities |  | **Medical humanities** |
| November 28 | Writing and medicine |  | Writing and medicine |
| December 5 | Last class |  | Potluck and discussion of projects |

**Requirements:**

1. Complete reading as assigned and be prepared to discuss in class.
2. Attend a minimum of 13 classes.
3. Complete a 2 page write up of Cutting for Stone, incorporating material from one other source. Due via email by November 17.
4. Complete a project investigating some aspect of the material covered in class. This project can be creative- writing a literary narrative; or it can be an academic research paper.

**Grading:**

Students will be graded on the following criteria:

1. Attendance and participation in class (35 points)
2. Project (25 points)
3. Write up of museum tour (15 points)
4. Reflection/summary of book(25 points)

**\*Completion of all requirements is needed for grading**

**Attendance:** Attendance in this course is mandatory. One absence will be allowed without a deduction of points; every absence beyond one will result in a reduction of 10 points from the final grade. One additional absence documented by a doctor’s note can be made up through special write up.

**Academic Honesty:** All students sign the following statement upon registration at the University of Florida: “I understand that the University of Florida expects its students to be honest in all their academic work. I agree to adhere to this commitment to academic honesty and understand that my failure to comply with this commitment may result in disciplinary action up to and including expulsion from the University.” As instructors for this course, we fully support the intent of the above statement and will not tolerate academic dishonesty.

**Student Responsibility:** Students are responsible for understanding all course policies and for accessing all course materials on the UF E-Learning Website through the URL listed above. All assignments should be submitted through the website and in hard copy when requested. Students are also responsible for checking their UF e-mail account for course notifications and for communicating with the instructors related to any situation that may hinder his or her progress or participation in the course.

**Disabilities:** Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the instructor when students request accommodation.