

LTWR113 INTERCULTURAL WRITING Fall 2014  
Writing the Ill Body  
Dr. Rivera Garza

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Office: Lit432  
Office hours: W: 11:00-12:00; Th:12:00-1:00pm

Thursdays 5:00-7:50 pm

This is a cross-genre, cross-cultural exploration of the relationship between illness and writing. Based on readings from medical anthropology (Kleinman's *The Illness Narratives*), literary criticism (Sontag's *The Way We Live Now*), non-fiction texts (Jamison's *The Empathy Exams*), and contemporary poetry (Beauty is a Verb. The New Poetry of Disability), we will closely examine the writing strategies used by a range of contemporary authors from the United States, France and Mexico as they unfold the experience of the ill body: from personal ailment to social suffering, from the private space of home to various hospital halls, from diagnoses to treatment, from doctor-patient relationships to the specific worlds of alternative medicine as practiced by a variety of societies over time and across cultures.

Students will write, share, and revise at least three 5-page writing samples on a topic related to illness and the body. Depending on workshop comments and suggestions, we will collaboratively devise writing prompts and in class exercises for all members of this class. Organized on rotational basis, we will be able to workshop at least four (and no more than five) pieces per session. Please, bring appropriate number of copies on your designated date.

Students will also be responsible for leading at least one discussion throughout the quarter, so select your reading early in October. I will ask each main discussant to write a 3-4 page essay, which must be turned in on the date of his/her discussion. Please, read carefully and bring questions and/or comments to class.

Your attendance and participation are central to this experience. Our aim is to complete a chapbook at the end of the quarter.

#### REQUIRED WORK:

Attendance and Participation  
3 5-page writing samples and revisions  
Weekly written comments for each of the 4 or 5 writing samples.  
1 3-4 page essay  
1 final chapbook (number of pages depending on the nature of project)

#### REQUIRED READINGS:

Arthur Kleinman, *Illness Narratives. Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition*  
Susan Sontag, *The Way We Live Now* (on line)  
Sections from Juliana Spahr, *Well There Then Now* (on line)  
Jamison, *The Empathy Exams*  
Hector Viel Temperley, *British Hospital*  
Jennifer Bartlell, Sheila Black, and Michael Northen, eds. *Beauty is a Verb. The New Poetry of Disability*

## CALENDAR

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Week One

October 2

INTRODUCTION

Read:

Selections from Fidget, by Kenneth Goldsmith (in screen):

<http://ge.tt/4Xes0qe/v/0I>

In-class writing exercise

See:

Pictures by blind photographers

<http://www.diecisiete.mx/escrituras/catalogo-la-mirada-invisible.html>

In-class writing exercise

WORKSHOP schedule:

5-page (up to) sample of your work:

W#1 List

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

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Week Two

October 9

ILL BODIES IN PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS

[I will be in Santiago, Chile, this week, participating in an International Book Fair. Please, read the texts listed below and meet at the usual hour in our classroom to distribute W#1]

Read:

Phillipe Lopate, Portrait of my Body: [http://www.360sxn.com/nimifinnigan/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Portrait-of-my-Body\\_Philip-Lopate.pdf](http://www.360sxn.com/nimifinnigan/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Portrait-of-my-Body_Philip-Lopate.pdf)

Kleinman, "The Meaning of Symptoms and Disorders; The Personal and Social Meanings of Illness; The Vulnerability of Pain and the Pain of Vulnerability; The Pain of Living," in *The Illness Narratives*, 3-87

WORKSHOP schedule:

W#1

Distribute appropriate number of copies of your work

W#2:

List of 5 participants (bring appropriate number of copies next week):

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Week Three

October 16

ILL BODIES IN PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Discussion of Lopate, Kleinman, Davidson, Black

Read:

Michael Davidson, "Missing Larry: The Poetics of Disability of Larry Eigner," in *Beauty is a Verb*, 27-36

Sheila Black, "Waiting to Be Dangerous; Disability and Confessionalism," in *Beauty is a Verb*, 205-216

### **Workshop #1**

WORKSHOP CALENDAR:

W#2: distribute appropriate number of copies of your work

W#3: List of participants

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Week Four  
October 23  
COMPARATIVE ILLNESS AND WRITING

Read:  
Kleinman, "Neurasthenia Weakness and Exhaustion in the United States and China,"  
in *Illness Narratives*, 100-121

Lisa Gill, "Mapping Caesura: The Encompassing Body," in *Beauty is a Verb*, 245'254.

### **Workshop #2**

WORKSHOP CALENDAR  
W#3: distribute  
W#4: participants

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Week Five  
October 30  
CHRONICITY

Kleinman, "Conflicting Explanatory Models in the Care of the Chronically Ill; The  
Social Context of Chronicity," in *Illness Narratives*, 121-137; 170-187.

Sontag, *The Way We Live Now*  
<http://teacherweb.com/IN/Burris/Comber/SontagWayWeLiveNow.pdf>

### **Workshop #3**

WORKSHOP Schedule:  
W#4: distribute  
W#5: participants

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Week Six  
November 6  
DOCTORS AND PATIENTS

Read:  
Jamison, *The Empathy Exams*

Cynthia Hougue, "The Creature Within: On Poetry and Dis/Ability," *Beauty is a Verb*,  
306-312.

### **Workshop #4**

W#5: distribute  
W#6: participants

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Week Seven  
November 13

DOCTORS AND PATIENTS

[I will be touring different ITESM Campuses in Mexico this week. Two MFA graduate students will lead this session. Please, read the books listed below and distribute appropriate number of copies for your workshop]

Read:  
Jamison, *The Empathy Exams*

Danielle Pafunda, "Meat Life," *Beauty is a Verb*, 313-320.

**Workshop #5**

W#6: distribute  
W#7: participants

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Week Eight  
November 20  
HOSPITALS

Read:  
Temperly, *British Hospital*

David Wolach, "Body Maps and Distraction Zones," in *Beauty is a Verb*, 334-345.  
Juliana Spahr, "Sonnets," *Well Then Here Now*

**Workshop #6**

W#7: distribute  
W#8: participants

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THANKSGIVING

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Week Nine  
December 4  
ALTERNATIVE HEALING

[I will be at the Guadalajara Book Fair this week. Two MFA students will lead this session. Please, read the books listed below and distribute appropriate copies of your work]

Read:  
Kleinman, "The Healers Varieties of Experience in Doctoring; The Challenge of a Meaning-centered Model for Medical Education and Practice," in *Illness Narrative*, 209-227; 252-269 "

PREPARE FINAL DRAFT OF CHAPBOOK

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Week Ten  
December 11  
WORKSHOPS

Discussion of Kleinman.

Workshop #7  
Workshop #8

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LTWR113

INTERCULTURAL WRITING: Writing the Ill Body

Cristina Rivera Garza

### **Guidelines for discussion/presentation**

1. Read selected work carefully and actively. Underline, mark, scribble, jot, in a word, generate your own marginalia.
2. After your first reading, it would be wise to select a couple of themes/concepts that especially interest or intrigue you. You may want to attempt to give us your general interpretation of the selected piece, and this will be fine, but it will be way more interesting for both you and the seminar to highlight and analyze in depth those topics that truly engage your critical imagination. We are aiming here for something beyond the summary of the piece or the proverbial "what the author meant by," and instead we will be privileging a focused and critical take on the book under analysis. Remember that you do not have to like the piece or be in agreement with it. You do have, however, to read it carefully and critically, providing specific evidence from the book to substantiate your claims.
3. All books are written in context, and they usually partake of a series of ongoing conversations. Do some research on the author of your piece and the ways in which your book has been received by readers (contemporary or otherwise). Try to figure out the larger dialogue your book is participating in and contributing to. Keep in mind that this information may be of great use to you as a discussant, but you do not have to use it all in your presentation.
4. Writing your 3-5 page presentation essay will help you to identify major issues in your discussion as well as to organize your material. While this text is meant as a working tool for your presentation, try to write in complete paragraphs as you develop your main argument. Be mindful of the allotted time.
5. Please, feel free to refer to other books, whether academic, theoretical or creative, as you develop your arguments. Make sure you include appropriate bibliographical information in your essay.
6. Remember that you will have to email a final version of this essay at least one day before your presentation is due. You will have to make copies for all members of the seminar (including myself, especially if you altered the piece you emailed to me earlier). You will be receiving these copies back, with comments, at the end of the session.
7. Feel free to prepare a Power Point/Keynote presentation or to employ appropriate visual or sound aids for your discussion. If you are planning to use the screen or your computer, please, arrive early and make sure all the equipment is in working condition before class starts.
8. You will receive your essay(s) back, with my written comments, the day of your presentation.

9. Do come to my office in case you need more help to prepare your presentation/discussion. We can arrange an appointment at a different time in case your schedule conflicts with my office hours.

Dear All—

I am so much looking forward to your final projects this week. As we agreed upon, this Thursday, December 11<sup>th</sup>, we will start our much-expected PUBLIC READING of your work.

In order to have the best reading possible, please, take into consideration the following suggestions:

1. Prepare your piece with care. Remember that you will only read for about 3 to 5 minutes, so plan accordingly. Select the passage or section of a poem thinking of how to better connect with readers in our class. Granted, we know your work, but this will be the first time that we will be exposed to it as a piece of work, as work completed.
2. Do not be shy, dress for the occasion. I know the public in this public reading will consist mostly of us in class, but this is a special event. Let us make it as special as possible. If your text requires you to transform your appearance or even disguise yourself, go for it.
3. Rehearse. It is always wise to rehearse. We never know what will happen to us, to our bodies, when we read our material for the first time in public (I have been overcome by emotion in the most unlikely of places, and it was not nice), but you can better control the outcome if you rehearse. Read your selected piece out loud. Even more, read it for your family or friends. Take a look at their reactions. Evaluate, even then, what you can change or improve.
4. Remember to bring a hard copy of your final project to our final class/public reading. I do believe that 15 pages will allow you to develop some solid, meaningful work. But as I have said before, this amount of pages may change, and drastically so, depending on your use of paragraphs or verses or even some visual materials. Add a bibliography at the end only if it is relevant for your project.
5. Handmade books are more than welcome, of course. You may even want to make enough copies for all of us in class—so we can actually keep an objectual memory of our participation in this workshop. I have to say, regretfully so, that double-sided stapled copies are fine as well.
6. You have written about the assigned readings already, and you have even commented on them in class, linking them to your own reading of other pieces. This would be a fine time to bring them back for our public reading. Please, select your favorite passages or sections from the required reading



you chose this quarter, and prepare to read it out loud as well. Yes, this means you will READ TWICE this coming Thursday: first, your work; then, not necessarily immediately afterwards, a fragment of your assigned reading. I do believe that intercalating poetry would be especially powerful in our final reading.

7. Yes, feel free to bring non-alcoholic beverages or cookies or other goodies to this session.