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## Teaching Lucy Grealy's "Mirrorings" and the Importance of Disability Studies Pedagogy in Composition Classrooms

It is the second half of the semester and my students and I are talking about Lucy Grealy's essay "Mirrorings," published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1993. The piece was later expanded and developed into the highly regarded memoir *Autobiography of a Face*. The memoir, like the essay that preceded it, addresses Grealy's diagnosis of cancer at the age of nine, the partial removal of her jaw, and a lifetime of painful procedures in order to "fix" her face. Grealy's work, acclaimed by scholars and critics, has been described as "wise and harrowing" (*Publisher's Weekly*). These adjectives too, are worthy of interrogation.

I teach Grealy's "Mirrorings" during the life-writing unit of my Introduction to Composition class, a mandated course for all students at the university. Most students—though not all—have chosen the class for time or day of the week, their registration process an elaborate puzzle where English needs to fit effortlessly between chemistry lab and psychology. Most never thought they'd spend a semester studying "Representations of Disability." On the first day, I watch them hedge and bristle. Some students worry they can't connect to the topic. Others worry it will be too depressing. "Stick with it," I tell them, "and by the end of the semester you will realize it is relevant to almost everything."

In class we interrogate headlines, commercials and documentaries, pulling back layers until we get to the core. "What does it mean and what does it *mean*," I ask my students, moving my hands as I elongate the word. Twice a week, during our seventy-five minute classes, we analyze texts, placing them in the context of politics and history. Though most are familiar with the Americans with Disabilities Act, passed in 1990, far fewer have heard of the "Ugly Laws," in which it was illegal for "any person, who is diseased,

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maimed, mutilated or deformed in any way, so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object, to expose himself or herself to public view” (Albrecht 1575).<sup>1</sup> My students are based in Columbus, Ohio, and they are shocked to learn their city didn’t withdraw the law until the early 1970s. We talk about what are comfortable, palpable narratives, and what moments are missing from textbooks, the experiences reshaped or reframed to form a more justifiable memory. I bring in excerpts from Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha’s *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, where she decenters whiteness in her documentation of disability solidarity and community, and we discuss the radical work of maintaining an archive. In the chapter “Care Webs,” Piepzna-Samarasinha writes: “I wrote this essay because I passionately believe in the power of our stories” (35).<sup>2</sup>

We discuss intention versus interpretation, perspective and tone. I ask: “Whose stories are told, and what stories are deemed worthy of telling?” One afternoon we break down the trailer of *Me Before You*, a popular novel adaption from 2016 in which Will Traynor, a wealthy white man with quadriplegia, in love with his quirky and beautiful caretaker, chooses to end his life. We watch the trailer once, and then again, writing down the details we find to be the most interesting. Students point out the protagonist’s pigtails, the lyric *loving can heal*, the abundance of red, and the words “live boldly.” By the end of the class we’re discussing how a romantic movie can *also* participate in eugenic ideology. After, a student tells me, joking but also entirely serious, that I take the fun out of everything.

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Ugly law” was established after the passing of the initial ordinances. It was originally referenced in Marcia Pearce Burgdorf and Robert Burgdorf Jr.’s 1975 article “A History of Unequal Treatment: The Qualifications of Handicapped Persons as a ‘Suspect Class’ under the Equal Protection Clause.” The first ordinance was passed in Chicago in 1881 and was subsequently enacted in cities across the country.

<sup>2</sup> It’s important to distinguish between disability justice and disability rights, which remains the dominant narrative on disability. The framework of disability justice was developed by the “black, brown, queer, and trans members of the original Disability Justice Collective, founded in 2005 by Patty Berne, Mia Mingus, Leroy Moore, Eli Clare, and Sebastian Margaret,” with the goal to center disabled people marginalized by the mainstream discourse, which continues to be dominated by white cis-het disabled people (Piepzna-Samarasinha 15).

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And this is a risk, isn't it? Any time educators choose to bring identity into discussion, turning the classroom into a politicized space. In a teacher training course the instructor tells us to keep politics out of the curriculum. "Students should be writing without bias," he states. Our sample assignments include an analysis of an ad for Pantene Pro-V. Yet the ad features a white woman; she holds the blow dryer in a provocative way. "It's always political," I argue. "Whenever bodies are put on display."

We talk about performance, power, agency, all key terms necessary to build a critical foundation in a composition course rooted in Disability Studies. The interdisciplinary field of study is often affiliated with its academic cousins Narrative Medicine and Medical Humanities, but whereas the latter features clinicians and practitioners, and stories of cure and healing, Disability Studies focuses on the experiences of disabled people, critiquing social and political practices and beliefs that isolate and endanger those with non-normative bodyminds.<sup>3</sup> As an educator I've been teaching courses informed by Disability Studies since 2010, and I've been studying the field in a formal capacity since 2013. Through these practices I've come to claim a disabled identity, a status I don't openly disclose to students, though I won't refute it if it comes up organically. Some may argue that this jeopardizes opportunities in an already slim tenure-track job market, or that students shouldn't worry about their teacher's wellbeing.<sup>4</sup> I argue that an educator who

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<sup>3</sup> Though disability is frequently considered an experience of the physical body *or* of mental processes, scholars have moved away from distinctive categories and are considering the ways body and mind consistently engage. I first became familiar with the term through the work of Margaret Price, who cites trauma studies as a field grappling with the ways "mental and physical processes not only affect each other, but also give rise to each other—that is, because they tend to act as one, even though they are conventionally understood as two—it makes more sense to refer to them together in a single term" (269). In considering the significance of memoir in representing complex experiences of the bodymind, Porochista Khapour's *Sick* and Sonya Huber's *Pain Woman Takes Your Keys, and Other Essays from a Nervous System* both interrogate how chronic pain results in constant negotiation between the mental and physical responses happening in their bodies.

<sup>4</sup> Abby Wilkerson addresses the complexities of disclosure in the classroom in her essay "Should I Tell My Students I Have Depression?" This essay was published as part of *The New York Times* weekly series on disability, which is written "by and about people with disabilities." During the life-writing unit, students are asked to choose an essay from the series, and to come to class prepared to summarize and respond to their reading.

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speaks realistically about how they move through the world can be a powerful step towards destigmatizing disability.

“Stigma” is a concept we speak about repeatedly; we break it down during the very first week. In the foundational text *Keywords for Disability Studies*,<sup>5</sup> Heather Love writes: “Stigma is part of the complex of factors that transform impairment into disability...it’s repercussions can be far-reaching” (176). Love goes on to outline the ways societal responses to disability inform circumstances like job placement, housing options, educational opportunities, sexual partnerships and other forms of intimacy. She identifies how preconceived notions of ideal existences and normative ways of being influence community development, and how ableist practices can isolate and endanger those whose lived experiences evoke fear or pity. She considers how the responses of others can be internalized, so “shame becomes a central possibility” (Goffman 7). This certainly was the case for Lucy Grealy, whose body of work demonstrates how an individual’s perception of the self can be negatively shaped by society.

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For the first three quarters of the semester, most of the disability narratives that students encounter are told from the outside looking in: *Nike* advertisers, who utilize Paralympians in their marketing campaigns; television shows like *House* or *Glee*, in which a nondisabled actor portrays a character with a disability;<sup>6</sup> newspaper articles with headlines about overcoming and “beating the odds,” the kinds of feel-good stories activist Stella Young warned about in her TED Talk, [“I’m Not Your Inspiration, Thank You Very Much,”](#)

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<sup>5</sup> Although in my composition course I do not assign the text as a whole, I use several of the entries when introducing key concepts in Disability Studies.

<sup>6</sup> For their first formal writing assignment students craft contemporary film and television reviews, choosing a source with disability content and analyzing the filmmakers’ representational choices. Students share the reviews, anonymously, on a public WordPress so they can engage with outside readers. This enables students to consider how writing for a public audience compares to constructing material for a more contained environment.

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in which she resists being a motivational tool for “normates.”<sup>7</sup> In these examples, a disabled Other is displayed for an assumed nondisabled audience. The rhetorical purpose is not to arouse empathy or allyship or solidarity. These artifacts evoke a range of responses from pity to horror, and rarely do they present disabled people as fully developed figures, or as agents in their narrative retellings. Even highly acclaimed journalistic endeavors like Rebecca Skloot’s *The Immortal Life Of Henrietta Lacks*, from which my students read the prologue, invite critique of the author’s relationship to her subject matter. There is value in the book—as a model for research methods and effective storytelling—but it is an illness narrative constructed by a third party,<sup>8</sup> a text that turns one woman’s exploitation by the medical establishment into a story with larger, more universal meaning. And although illness narratives are not synonymous with stories about disability, they are deeply enmeshed through notions of recovery, survivorhood, and healing.<sup>9</sup>

Yet with “Mirrorings” we have an opportunity to discuss the representation of the self, and the differentiation between “disability memoir” and “memoir about disability.” With so many nonfiction narratives of disability constructed by nondisabled authors (any perusal of popular titles at a local Barnes & Noble will reveal the prevalence of children writing about a disabled parent, and parents writing about a disabled child), what does it mean when a disabled writer controls the telling of their story? In the

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<sup>7</sup> In *Extraordinary Bodies*, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson defines the normate as “the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them” (8).

<sup>8</sup> Though Skloot’s work addresses the long racist history of medical institutions, it is important to pose questions of recognition and privilege when a white writer constructs the narrative of a member of a marginalized group. In a recent piece, “The Optics of Opportunity,” Hafizah Geter writes: “It is a tightrope to walk: having to rely on white platforms to tell brown stories.”

<sup>9</sup> It’s important to emphasize that illness can but does not always indicate disability, and disability status can shift over time. That being said, the interrogation of illness narratives can universally be informed by a critical disability studies framework, which complicates the cure model. My students also read excerpts from Audre Lorde’s *Cancer Journals*, which, like Grealy’s work, utilizes a first-person POV to critique the medical model as well as societal assumptions of femininity and sexuality.

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introduction to the anthology *Staring Back: The Disability Experience from the Inside Out*,<sup>10</sup> writer and editor Kenny Fries addresses the importance of giving “voice to the disability experience, an experience which throughout history has been marginalized or co-opted, if not ignored” (9). The pioneering anthology, published in 1997, consists entirely of writers who identify as disabled, and all who construct their narratives as complex experiences, avoiding the trope of the tragedy. “Pony Party,” the first essay in the collection, was written by Lucy Grealy.

A graduate of the MFA program at the University of Iowa, Grealy was a self-proclaimed literary darling, and the overwhelmingly positive response to her *Harper's* essay propelled her career, which peaked in her mid-thirties. Her work was accepted by the mainstream while also displaying raw—and for many readers, uncomfortable—vulnerability. Susannah Mintz argues: “Grealy writes not as a passive body onto which otherness, in the form of gender or deformity, has simply been pasted, but rather as a uniquely lived body enmeshed in social practice, family circumstance, and private desire” (52). Twenty-five years after her memoir's publication, it continues to be used as a primary example of how one can write about their body. *The New York Times* recently listed it as one of the top fifty memoirs since 1969. Grealy still appears on most disability studies syllabi. In textbooks, “Mirrorings” continues to be widely anthologized.

Like many successful narrative essays, “Mirrorings” defies linear construction, and moves seamlessly between present and past and back again. Grealy begins in adulthood, noting: “There was a long period of time, almost a year, during which I never looked in a mirror” (66). The *why* emerges in the origin story, in her descriptions of her childhood toothache and subsequent cancer diagnosis, which resulted in chemotherapy and multiple surgeries. Of these treatments, she writes:

Dry retching began in the first fifteen seconds, then the throb behind my eyes gave everything a yellow-green aura, and the bone-deep pain of alternating extreme hot and cold flashes made me tremble, yet still I had to sit motion-less and not move my arm. No one spoke to me, not the

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<sup>10</sup> This introduction is the first reading in our life-writing unit.

doctor who was a paradigm of the cold-fish physician, not the nurse who told my mother I reacted much more violently than many of the other children, and not my mother, who, surely overwhelmed by the sight of her child's suffering, thought the best thing to do was remind me to be brave, to try and not cry (67).

In this section, Grealy describes “the piss and the shit,” as my mentor, memoirist and craft scholar Louise DeSalvo, used to call it. It’s the responsibility of the nonfiction writer to honor the truth of the body, and to capture seemingly contrary responses like joy and pain, interrogating how they are intertwined. In Grealy’s writing, cancer isn’t wrapped up in a pink ribbon, or told through the lens of recovery. Grealy does not overcome illness, nor is she delegated to martyrdom; she doesn’t perpetuate reductive stereotypes about disability. She narrates the complexity of her experience with illness, and how it informs her identity. Through this lens, readers *empathize* with Grealy, as opposed to *sympathize*, an important distinction my students and I discuss early in the semester. Grealy’s intimate portrayal doesn’t evoke pity from her reader, but rather enables a greater understanding of the negotiations one must undertake as they move through the world in a non-normative body.

“What does Grealy want?” I ask my students, beginning with an inquisition into desire, an interrogation of loss.

“She wants to be loved,” a student says. Another points out Grealy’s admission that she “viewed sex as my salvation” (73). We talk about how disabled characters are regularly presented as asexual, unworthy of companionship, or deviant, citing texts they read in high school like *The Glass Menagerie* and *Of Mice and Men*. When we discuss the latter, I watch as students process George’s “mercy killing” of Lenny; they grapple with what was previously understood as a necessary death. Lenny’s trajectory mirrors narrative arcs that have been ingrained in literature they’ve encountered from a very young age. In *Narrative Prosthesis: Disabilities and the Dependencies of Discourse*, David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder interrogate the children’s book *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*, in which the disabled toy protagonist goes on an Odysseus-like

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adventure, falls in love with a paper maiden who pirouettes on one leg, and is thrown into a fire by the child who once coveted him. Mitchell and Snyder write: “One can read this ending as a punishment for his willingness to desire someone physically perfect and therefore unlike himself” (56). The tin soldier is thus, not very different from Lenny or Quasimodo or Will Traynor, or an array of other disabled characters in popular texts where death (or, as in the case of *Ugly Laws*, being hidden from society) is written as a far more appropriate alternative to love and companionship.

My students agree that Grealy desires normalcy, a concept we’ve complicated throughout the semester. “I was sure that if I had a normal face, then I would be happy,” Grealy writes (73). Why, in disability narratives, is the norm the ideal, the average optimized? Colloquially, the use of “normal” has shifted dramatically from its statistical origin, a history deconstructed by Lennard Davis in his book *Enforcing Normalcy*. Particularly in the beginning of the semester, many students use the term “normal” in the same way “us” and “them” seem to arise organically. These moves solidify their own status as nondisabled, while (unintentionally) othering the disabled subject. When these moments happen, I point them out gently, thus encouraging students to interrogate their assumptions about the people in the room, as well as the ways perceptions of “normal” are culturally and socially devised.

Grealy longs to exist without the burden of “stares”—the word repeated five times in the essay. She wants to see her reflection and not feel ashamed. In the essay, Grealy relays the story of a Halloween night when she was a child. She loved the holiday, she writes, “because I could put on a mask and walk among the blessed for a few brief, sweet hours. Such freedom I felt, walking down the street” (67). In this description, Grealy is relinquished from the power embedded in the stare, a common social interaction when one encounters the unfamiliar or the “strange” (Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 15). By donning the mask, Grealy has the freedom to “stare back” without consequence. What some might interpret as a moment of hiding is also a moment of agency.



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“Does she get what she wants?” I ask the class. This is a more difficult question to answer. As Grealy reveals throughout the essay, each attempt to “fix” her jaw resulted in complications and physical pain. She spent months isolated in recovery, swollen and bruised, only to find, months later, that she looked exactly the same. However, the final image in the essay is one of hope. After a year refusing to face her reflection, Grealy looks at herself in the window while talking to a man in a café. The action alludes to potential self-acceptance, or at least, self-recognition. She describes the scene as “a moment of freedom,” and with it, a release from societal perceptions of beauty.<sup>11</sup>

Some instructors might choose to discuss “Mirrorings” as a study of reflection (as noted in the textbook from which I originally pulled my class’s copy of the essay) and end the conversation there, to resist treating character as author and providing further context to the story. Some might choose not to divulge Grealy’s death in 2004, at the age of thirty-nine, only nine years after the publication of “Mirrorings.” Yet I ask my students: “Does the knowledge that Grealy dies from a drug overdose impact your interpretation of the essay?” A few are already familiar with this information. They’ve taken to Wikipedia and Google Images, seeking out evidence to corroborate Grealy’s descriptions of her face, and in the process encountered her obituary. For those unfamiliar with Grealy’s trajectory, their reactions range from unsurprised to dismay. We talk about the cyclical nature of recovery, the ways that healing can defy finality. They return to the text, identifying examples of her reconstructive procedures, the many doctors who promised to “fix” her flaws through the insertion of tissue expanders and taking out “large chunks of muscle [and] skin” (71). We discuss Grealy’s documented addiction to pain medications, which were prescribed as post-operative care. This conversation expands the study of the essay into an important

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<sup>11</sup> This conclusion demonstrates how, though Grealy’s face isn’t “fixed,” her relationship to it shifts in an affirmative way. Her ability to experience her reflection is also an overcoming of her internalized ableism. This appeal to a “recovery” or overcoming narrative is perhaps one reason why both “Mirrorings” and *Autobiography* are consistently highlighted on “best of” lists.

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interrogation of the medical establishment. Grealy writes: “Society is no help; the images it gives us again and again want us only to believe that we can most be ourselves by looking like someone else” (75).

“Can society change?” I ask my students. In a class of twenty, they are evenly split. Some argue that perceptions of beauty and normativity are so entrenched in our society that it is impossible to disengage from them. They cite beauty blogs and YouTube videos, social media posts featuring celebrities touting weight-loss beverages. Yet others argue that change can come from education, intervention when witnessing ableism in their communities, and engagements with texts such as this one.

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I’ve taught “Mirrorings” almost every semester I’ve been in the classroom. There is tremendous value in what it accomplishes as an individual essay, particularly in the ways it contextualizes the relationship between disability and identity. At times, I’ve taught it as a singular entity. Yet the work transforms when placed in conversation with two other pieces of writing: “The Face of Pain,” by Ann Patchett, and “Hijacked by Grief,” by Suellen Grealy. With the addition of these texts, we see the ways *truth* and *memory* can be misaligned, the ways the well-intentioned can risk exploiting another person’s story, what happens when a nonfiction writer’s commitment to Story conflicts with a writer’s ethical responsibility. “What do we owe others?” I ask my students, and then: “Is this a question we need to be considering?”

When Lucy Grealy wrote *Autobiography of a Face*, she couldn’t have predicted her legacy would be intertwined with the career of Ann Patchett, a college and graduate school classmate and author of the memoir *Truth & Beauty*. Yet the two authors are often spoken of as if twins sharing literary wombs and then publication victories. In conversations about Grealy’s work, I’m invariably asked if I’ve read Patchett’s account of their friendship and her caretaking responsibilities. Even *The New York Times* perpetuates their alignment. In the book critics’ list of “Top 50 Memoirs of the Past 50 Years,” they acknowledge Grealy’s work as “a moving meditation on ugliness and beauty.” They add: “Grealy’s life is the subject of another powerful memoir, Ann Patchett’s *Truth & Beauty*” (Garner et al).

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Yet what does it mean when one's life becomes the subject of *another person's* memoir? This is the question my students and I interrogate as we grapple with "The Face of Pain," Patchett's front-page article in *New York Magazine*, published two months after Grealy's death. Of their time at Sarah Lawrence College, Patchett writes: "[Lucy] was the campus mascot, the favorite pet in her dirty jeans and oversize Irish sweaters. She kept her head tipped down so that her long dark-blond hair fell over her face to hide the fact that much of her lower jaw was missing." The essay chronicles Patchett's college observations of Grealy, and their subsequent friendship during and after their years as housemates at University of Iowa, where they both studied writing. The piece is a manifest of love and grief. It is also an introduction to a second Lucy Grealy.

"Who is Lucy Grealy?" I ask the class. I place them into groups, assigning each an essay. I have them pick out adjectives and anecdotes, to consider the relationship of the author to the material. I instruct them to identify intervention and urgency. "Why is the author writing this?" I ask my students. "Who is their audience and how does this influence their descriptions of Grealy?" I encourage them to consider how the order of their readings impacts their response to each text. One group takes on "Hijacked by Grief," a *Guardian* essay published by Lucy Grealy's older sibling. The essay serves as a direct response to the publication of *Truth & Beauty*, and poses important questions about consent and perspective, the malleability of memory. The essay proves there can be three sides—or more—to every story. Suellen Grealy's critique isn't limited to Patchett, though she does have harsh words for her sister's former classmate (the harshest being the label of "grief thief"). Of reading *Autobiography of a Face*, she writes: "I realised how easy it was for Lucy simply to select her vantage point. I learned, too, how easily readers would accept it as the only true vantage point."

"*Your* story is always *our* story," one student notes, highlighting the inherent risk embedded in nonfiction writing. To write a life is to introduce other characters and their own vulnerabilities. Yet one person's version of events might be very different than another person's memory. This is certainly

indicated when comparing Lucy Grealy's description of her sexuality to Ann Patchett's retelling. In "Mirrorings," Grealy writes:

I was sure that if only I could get someone to sleep with me it would mean I wasn't ugly, that I was an attractive person, a lovable person. It would not be hard to guess where this line of reasoning led me, which was into the beds of a few manipulative men who liked themselves even less than they liked me, and I in turn left each short-term affair hating myself, obscenely sure that if only I had been prettier it would have worked, he would have loved me and it would have been like those other love affairs I was certain "normal" women had all the time (73).

Yet in "The Face of Pain," Grealy is described as having a several years-long affair and "a couple of guys who were very steady in her life." She becomes a sex educator of sorts, introducing Patchett to illicit practices "reading off her notes in the morning." Whereas Grealy presents herself as shy, often alone, Patchett frequently places her friend surrounded by others drawn into her vibrancy. Patchett writes: "At any given moment, [Lucy] could think of fifty different people she could call for coffee."

I ask students if they think Patchett had a "right" to curate this version of Lucy Grealy, when it contrasts so greatly from the story Grealy tells about herself. "Right," we note, is such a complicated term, tied up in notions of principle and integrity. In her memoir *The Sparkling-Eyed Boy*, Amy Benson states: "Writers have no ethics, if by ethics you mean respect for the lives and truths of others, and if by respect you mean leaving them alone, and if by leaving them alone you mean not ever seeing them as material" (92). Was Benson correct? Was writing an inherently unethical profession? Should Lucy Grealy have been left alone, when she died so young, when she had a family that had already grappled with multiple deaths and felt overwhelmed by tragedy? This is certainly Suellen Grealy's stance. "I wished that Ann would not publish the book," she writes. "I wish Lucy's work had been left to stand on its own."

My students agree that everyone is entitled to tell the stories they are compelled to share. When discussing their own writing, I encourage them to weigh the benefits and the drawbacks of each detail,

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example, or source they incorporate into an essay. We turn back to that here, the inevitable questions all memoirists must ask: What is the impact the work will have, and who might be hurt along the way?

While unpacking these essays, I tell a story about Louise DeSalvo's teaching at Hunter College. She used to tell her students that while writing can be an act of healing (she even wrote the book *Writing as a Way of Healing*), writers need time to reflect on and process their grief before publishing. I can't help but wonder what Patchett's essay might have looked like if she waited to publish until a few more months after Grealy's death. I can't help but wonder if *New York Magazine* would have placed Grealy on the cover if her face wasn't deemed "shock-worthy." I have my own strong feelings about Patchett's use of "pet" and "mascot," how she describes Grealy "throwing herself into my arms like a softball." It's not my job to project my opinions onto my students, but rather to guide them with critical questions, to give them the tools to interrogate structure and detail and word choice, and to utilize this process when crafting their essays. Some students understand and respond to Patchett's work in ways I do not, and I also know they are bringing their own truths to how they read these stories.

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Overall, my students and I spend one week—two seventy-five minute classes—with Lucy Grealy. From here we move on evaluating sources, merging conversations about content and form with the development of research strategies. Final project proposals are due the following week and I wish we could spend more time languishing in our life-writing unit, to sit alongside more disabled writers who refuse to be pitied or tokenized, who "speak openly about a form of embodiment often excluded from the conversation" in creative and scholarly communities (Mintz 1). "There's never enough time," I repeatedly comment, and with this material I feel it especially. Yet in final reflections, at the end of the semester, many students cite our life-writing unit as the one they've connected to most deeply. The three different perspectives—and platforms—emphasize the significance of tone and style, what might be gained or lost when writing for a particular audience. The high stakes of the material reinforces the importance of authority.

Although most students construct more traditional analytical research papers as their final projects, several write autobiographical essays, articulating personal experiences of illness and disability. Some of these students, only sixteen weeks prior, would not have conceived this an option. They'd identified as "us," thinking disability didn't impact their life. In "Mirrorings," Grealy reflects: "I once thought that truth was an eternal, that once you understood something it was with you forever" (75). Subsequently she realizes, as my students do—what her work helps them realize—that this isn't how "truth" operates. It shifts and evolves as we do, and contending with the tension between these truths is often what makes the most compelling—and honest—story.

*Many thanks to my students at The Ohio State University and at NYU Gallatin, for helping me think through the teaching of these materials.*

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