



Audrey T. Heffers

In the Room Where it Happens: Access, Equality, and the Creative Writing Classroom

“At its best, teaching is a caring profession.”
- bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*

I. Introduction

One semester, I was assigned to teach on the third floor of a building. Given the ebb and flow of my fibromyalgia, there was no guarantee on any given day that I could climb the steps. I discovered upon a pre-semester visit to this classroom that this particular building had no elevator. I had to put in a request for a room change with my department chair who had to put in a request with some office or dean until my course was finally moved to a different building. This was not the last time that I would have to seek a room change. As the instructor, I had enough power to change the room, but not so much power that one blanket request worked for every semester. What, I wondered, would happen to students assigned to such an inaccessible room who had signed up for my course? Would they be told they couldn't take the course? Would they only make this discovery on the first day of classes? Would the class be moved?

In *Academic Ableism: Disability and Higher Education*, Jay Timothy Dolmage poses the question “Could we live in a society in which the accessibility we create for one person can also lead us to broaden and expand accessibility for all?” (10). I would further specify this query: How can radical inclusion and access for disabled people transform creative writing education? By putting the fields of Creative Writing Studies and Disability Studies into conversation with inclusive pedagogy scholarship, we might begin to

examine how disability and resulting marginalization are treated within academia, creative writing classrooms, creative writing programs, and the literary world.

These spaces are all interconnected, and they are spaces where ableism is entrenched in ways both obvious and insidious. In “The Significance of Crashing Past Gatekeepers of Knowledge,” Claudia Gillberg identifies this as “the ableist knowledge paradigm in which academic disciplines exist and keep producing, perpetuating and endorsing ableism, mostly unwittingly” (18-19). Access to the creative writing classroom is both a matter of equity for disabled people *and* a potential transformation of the classroom itself into a more inclusive space, one which is more creatively and intellectually diverse in its approaches to literature and writing. bell hooks writes in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* that “Ideally, education should be a place where the need for diverse teaching methods and styles would be valued, encouraged, seen as essential to learning” (203). In light of hooks’ assertion that there needs to be “a rethinking of the ways of knowing, a deconstruction of old epistemologies” (29), it is useful to consider Anat Greenstein’s view of “learning as contextualised and relational, created through a constant process of dialogue between people in the world” (80). Exclusively honoring ways of knowing which acknowledge abled experiences ignores a significant population of people in the world. (The CDC, for example, cites that 26% of Americans are disabled.) Whether recognized or not, disabled students, faculty, and writers are part of the context of learning. Dialogues within academia that seek to synthesize and generate knowledge *must* include disabled writers, students, and instructors.

II. Students

First thoughts about disability in the academy may revolve around student accommodations for test taking and assignment deadlines, but accessibility and inclusion should evolve beyond simple expectations of letters from disability services. While it is important to create inclusive and accessible education environments, students’ experiences with disability services can significantly impact their access to

education. Consider, for one, the expense of medical documentation, especially for those without insurance or with insurance insufficient for their specific chronic illness/disability needs. Or consider the degree to which a patient's symptoms (for myriad intersectional reasons) are or are not taken seriously by a particular doctor, or by the medical profession writ large; this is especially common for women. For example, whose pain is seen as valid, and how tenacious will a medical professional be in pursuing a diagnosis that can be presented to disability services? On the campus level, one should also consider the power that an individual disability services coordinator has in assessing the degree to which particular accommodations are deemed necessary and/or reasonable. There is a constellation that must align for a student to get the complete accommodations that they require, and this constellation relies on encounters with multiple professionals who may themselves have implicit ableist biases that have as of yet been unexamined, and these biases may insidiously affect the professional's ability to assist the disabled student to the fullest extent necessary.

Instructors must acknowledge their position as a part of this constellation. In the classroom itself, it is not uncommon for students to have experiences with professors who question, challenge, and even belittle their legally and ethically required accommodations. Students have confided in me more often since I started using a cane, a visual cue that marks me as disabled. They have at times been surprised that I granted them their accommodations without argument, and that I strategized with them to improve their educative experience. A student in one of my courses, for instance, had days when they needed to be absent because of a chronic illness, but instructors often wielded absence policies like a cudgel, wanting to know if the student *really* needed that many absences. This sort of policing from instructors serves, more than anything, ableist systems—not the student and, very often, not the class itself. (It is, in truth, also faculty energies ill-spent.) Such difficulties happen with other offices on campus as well. A different student once discussed with me the way that they were treated by a testing center that they used for their

disabilities—they were berated as though the assumption was that they would cheat, as though their accommodation was something “extra” that would, one way or another, grant them an unfair advantage.

These experiences reveal a pervasive ungenerous approach to disabled and chronically ill students and their needs. Such an approach is not community-minded, instead often making students feel excluded within academia because of their identities. This disbelieving attitude toward disabled students and their needs may come from a place of wanting to provide equal—rather than equitable—education, one where no one gets particular “special” help. But this approach only works in a system which is already equitable, where disabled people are not inherently disadvantaged and oppressed. Simply put, academic institutions are not constructed to inherently accommodate disabled and ill students, defaulting instead to a normative ideal (namely, abled and healthy students). Understanding students’ experiences and how one’s own pedagogy contributes to them is a skill that must be nurtured throughout a career in education.

Skepticism towards disabled and chronically ill people is a widespread cultural belief system, one which very likely has strong roots in how the medical community treats particular people and particular medical conditions. For instance, my own condition—fibromyalgia—is considered “controversial” in the medical community because it relies on tests which eliminate possible diagnoses and—critically—on self-reports of symptoms such as pain and fatigue. This is a theme in many chronic illness memoirs: a journey toward knowledge, a kind of quest to understand one’s mind and body against the adversity of institutions which dismiss such a quest as a simple case of stress, or as moderate symptoms of anxiety or depression. “Where is your proof?” is a question that disabled and ill people face again and again, in ways explicit and implicit. It is imperative that we, as educators, reflect on our own biases, especially the biases which have worked their way into our theory and praxis by posing as innocuous assumptions and attitudes because they are passed down as cultural norms. To continue unquestioningly in a system which enforces such a hierarchy of power—one where disabled people are systemically disempowered—perpetuates toxic classroom dynamics.

The realities at play only make clearer the necessity to evolve inclusive pedagogy beyond narrow and specific accommodations. In *Toward an Inclusive Creative Writing*, Janelle Adsit writes that “A critical creative writing pedagogy values flexibility, collaboration, and student agency” (117). Dolmage similarly frames the Universal Design of Learning as including “varied forms of applied and interactive learning” and “multiple options for student design, delivery, and expression,” which are driven by “greater communal shaping” (131). Universal Design of Learning does not need to incorporate every possible mode of learning; however, in being open to “greater communal shaping” (Dolmage 131), to “collaboration, and student agency” (Adsit 117), perhaps we have the opportunity to understand the “options for student design, delivery and expression” (Dolmage 131) that would work best for a particular group of students. Or perhaps we can offer (for example) two options for expressing learning per assignment, with an open mind to new ideas if students trust us with them.

In light of what many disabled and chronically ill students experience, educators have an opportunity to experiment and adjust and innovate toward a more equitable praxis. What are ways in which instructors can shift away from rigidity and toward flexibility in the creative writing classroom? How can instruction become more adaptable and student-centered, valuing student agency as vital to the learning experience? These questions are not rhetorical, but the answers are also not universal. Each instructor and each classroom and each class meeting will produce different requirements—and, along with it, different possibilities for what creative writing education can do. In *Radical Inclusive Education*, Anat Greenstein writes about how “Radical inclusive pedagogy should... promote knowledge and learning that are contextualised in students’ varied experience and that take into account the social structures within which such experiences are embedded” (90). The emphasis on adaptability is in part a way to encourage a creative and dynamic praxis, and to acknowledge the ever-changing contexts of learning.

These kinds of questions have already begun shifting creative writing pedagogical theory. In *Craft in the Real World*, Matthew Salesses provides fourteen alternative workshop models, several of which might

be useful to consider in this context. Author-Choice Workshops (Salesses 136-137) are the most obviously student-centered, as student writers dictate the terms of their own workshop. But other approaches—such as Only Questions from the Workshop (Salesses 133) and the observation, question, and suggestion-reliant approach of Critical Response Process workshop (Salesses 130)—can help to empower students. When relying on observations, questions, and suggestions, it is possible to move away from rigid prescriptive workshop models that validate one kind of learning and one kind of knowledge, models which have roots in what Paulo Freire terms the “‘banking’ concept of education,” which only allows students to “receive, memorize, and repeat” (53). In addition to other benefits, new approaches can honor different aesthetics, knowledges, lived experiences, and viewpoints. Such honoring works against a socialization that bell hooks describes in *Teaching Community* as “the consequence of unjust hierarchy and dominator culture,” further specifying that “The politics of domination as they are played out in the classroom often ensure that students from the marginal groups will not do well” (86).

In “Why Teach Creative Writing?” Francis Gilbert analyzes five pedagogical models. One might consider the activist model of teaching, for instance, which can acknowledge “creative writing as a way to make... people more politically and socially conscious” (158), an approach which can be geared toward consciousness of disability. Or a vendor-minded teacher might “prepare their students to promote and sell their writing in the ‘real’ world” (157). The vendor approach can prepare disabled student writers to envision selling their work as a reality. Janelle Adsit outlines six kinds of pedagogical approaches, including professionalizing pedagogical approaches similar to the vendor-minded model; progressive pedagogical approaches, which emphasize “the creative and expressive capacities of every human” (33); and experimental pedagogical approaches. When students have their writing taken seriously in the classroom (whether it is framed in terms of aesthetics or publication), they are encouraged to take themselves seriously as writers. This needs to be extended to and inclusive of disabled student writers and the writing which they produce.

In making the creative writing classroom more accessible writ large, rather than solely making adjustments for individual-by-individual accommodations, instructors have the power to lift some of the excessive labor demands currently placed on disabled students. Such approaches to the classroom also have the ability to move toward better overall accessibility and inclusivity. Even an individual disabled person's needs may change day-to-day; Louise Toller and Hannah Farrimond write in "The unpredictable body, identity, and disclosure" about "the centrality of unpredictability to students' experiences: unpredictability of the body, of institutional responses, and of whether or not support and other strategies will be successful," which also harkens back to concerns regarding experiences with disability services. As mentioned in the first paragraph, my fibromyalgia can oscillate between having relatively little interference with daily activities and flare-ups that significantly interfere; my condition manifests as what Brianne Benness terms a dynamic disability, one where "needs and abilities are different from day to day" (par. 4). Benness further writes that "In mainstream culture and media 'disabled' usually refers to people with static and visible disabilities. And when institutions and organizations talk about building a more inclusive environment, they're usually talking about providing static accommodations like ramps and closed captions" (par. 5).

Continuous adjustments—such as those which would be required for dynamic disabilities—can be hard work, but they are necessary work, and not only in terms of disability. Modifications can happen in small ways; if I'm moderating a discussion of an assigned essay with my students and they have low energy and aren't engaged, I might adjust my approach by asking different kinds of questions, or by having them work on a writing exercise—or I may simply and directly ask my students what the source of the disengagement is. The latter especially invites students to be collaborators in their own education, involving them in an immediate reimagination of praxis that improves their learning experience.

On a broader scale, instructors' ability to adjust has been evident in the transformation of lessons, assignments, and modes of instruction throughout the pandemic, sometimes without much time to

prepare. Courses that are reimagined in this context are often not ideal, since the changes are formed by public health considerations and many external stressors are present. But experimentation and innovation can help our pedagogy and our praxis evolve, even if circumstances are not what we wish they were. As academic institutions return to pre-pandemic learning models, it is imperative to interrogate our pedagogy and our praxis: what pandemic-inspired pedagogy can instructors implement in the coming years? What did we, as educators, accomplish that we might not have thought possible? What have our students engaged with in productive ways? How does remote learning benefit some students and disadvantage others? In what ways is pandemic learning more or less equitable and accessible than the physical classroom?

We can take this opportunity to recenter the classroom not only on intellectual goals, or even creative ones, but also on accounting for the humanity of students and faculty. In *Teaching Community*, hooks discusses how

When as teachers we teach with love, combining care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust, we are often able to enter the classroom and go straight to the heart of the matter. That means having the clarity to know what to do on any given day to create the best climate for learning. Teachers who are wedded to using the same teaching style every day, who fear any digression from the concrete lesson plan, miss the opportunity for full engagement in the learning process. They are far more likely to have an orderly classroom where students obey authority. They are far more likely to feel satisfied because they have presented all the information that they want to cover. And yet they are missing the most powerful experience we can offer students, which is the opportunity to be fully and compassionately engaged with learning. (134)

We have the opportunity to reflect on the ways in which there is not a universally beneficial ‘one-size-fits-all’ model for the classroom or our approach to it. Instead, we can attempt to meet the most students where it would most benefit their educative goals.

III. Faculty

The experiences of disabled instructors and scholars within the academy are often overlooked, but such experiences are vital to a comprehensive understanding of how to construct inclusive learning environments. In *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights*, legal scholar Kenji Yoshino talks about the pressure to pass—to “hide [his] identity from classmates” (18)—but as relevant here, if not even more so, is his discussion of covering. When he describes the pressure to cover as a gay professor, Yoshino writes about how a colleague suggested there is “a better chance at tenure... if you’re a homosexual professional than if you’re a professional homosexual,” meaning that Yoshino “would fare better as a mainstream constitutional law professor who ‘happened to be gay’ than as a gay professor who wrote on gay subjects” (17). There is a similar unspoken pressure for disabled faculty to pass or cover in attempts to be taken seriously as professors and scholars. With this in mind, abled faculty can be more vigilant about the ways that this pressure is placed on their disabled colleagues, a vigilance which many disabled faculty must already maintain to succeed in the academy. This may mean reexamining job descriptions, requirements, and specializations; it may mean updating diversity, equity, and inclusion policy language, or inquiring about implicitly exclusionary practices at conferences. It may mean assessing what departmental courses, assigned readings, and faculty specializations involve Disability Studies or nuanced disability representation in some way.

One might consider the role that assigned readings could play in educating the next generations of faculty. Many MFA and PhD programs have pedagogy courses, but graduate-level workshop and literature courses are also populated with potential educators who are not only learning about craft and literary analysis, but also about what kind of educator they wish to be. A text like James Tate Hill’s *Blind Man’s Bluff* can be studied for its craft elements; it can be appreciated and analyzed on an artistic level. But, as is so often the case with literature, *Blind Man’s Bluff* also offers a window into another person’s experiences;

here, specifically, it significantly weaves in themes of passing and covering with a disability, and why a person might be compelled to do so. There is an opportunity for a reader to absorb a narrative of one disabled person's experiences—the way that Hill made choices about living arrangements, for instance, or the way that he navigated the dating world while trying to pass for sighted—but a reader with a curious mind might form inquiries beyond this one person's experience as well. Literature can inspire contemplation about the human condition in ways individual and communal. Hill's memoir gestures toward the greater cultural implications of disability in our society, which can inspire potential educators to question their relationship to those cultural implications. While this memoir can certainly be valuable to undergraduate students, it can have very particular enlightenments for graduate students, especially graduate students who are teaching or are thinking about teaching as a profession. Reading can be a path toward knowing another's experiences; if MFA and PhD students have read about what it can be like to move through academia as a disabled person, then how might they apply that knowledge toward a more inclusive pedagogy and praxis? How can this clarify new angles of consideration, and engender more humaneness in an instructor's relationship with the classroom? How might this help to create solidarity with disabled colleagues who may face a very particular set of obstacles within academia?

Another reading to consider for graduate students, especially those interested in teaching, might be *Pain Woman Takes Your Keys, and Other Essays from a Nervous System* by Sonya Huber. Again, students can learn as writers from the experimental and lyrical forms that these essays take, but Huber also details her experience with academia—how being a tenured professor grants her certain privileges, such as being “‘out’ despite the consequences” (77), but how her position was also used by medical professionals to deny her chronic pain as a true issue (because she “was a young, attractive professor who ‘looked great’” (11)). Huber also addressed some of the ways her pain has affected her writing, both in terms of craft and process. *Pain Woman Takes Your Keys* can be a text which helps aspiring disabled faculty feel the concrete

possibility of their aspirations, while also continuing to add perspectives of consideration for those who are not chronically ill and/or disabled.

The systemic pressure to pass as abled or to cover a disabled identity in academia is one that can be experienced as an undergraduate student, as a graduate student, as a scholar on the job market, or within instructor positions. For instance, Janelle Adsit writes about how “Hiring practices promote inequities—inequities which may be impossible for many candidates to confront, given the power differential at play in the interview situation” (139). Inequitable hiring practices may be one particular situation that causes potential faculty to feel the need to pass or cover as able-bodied. Advice for the job market sometimes includes not disclosing marginalized identities such as “disabled.” If one does choose to disclose, then this is a calculated risk, weighing the possibility of discrimination against the possibility of openly claiming an identity that may hold not only personal significance, but also professional significance, for the potential faculty member. For some, this covering is not an option because of some visual identifier that will become obvious in the interview process, and/or because of the presence of disability in one’s scholarship and/or creative works. If one is encouraged to hide their disability or illness on the job market, will they feel that it is safe to disclose in the classroom? If not, how does this affect the classroom environment, and the ways in which disability is or isn’t overtly present?

In *Claiming Disability*, Simi Linton writes that disabled people have a difficult time advancing to positions such as researcher because of “limited educational opportunities” and “discrimination in hiring and promotion” and, due to a lack of accommodations, “one seldom finds in one person the expertise of the trained researcher combined with the expertise of the disabled subject” (73). There are physical barriers to the academy (like buildings without elevators) and ideological ones (like scholars who think that work from marginalized perspectives is inferior, or is activist in nature and therefore inherently less rigorous than traditionally centered perspectives). Systems which marginalize perpetuate through their participants if left unexamined.

A faculty member should have full autonomy to disclose (or to not disclose) their disability as they see fit; however, it may not always feel safe for a faculty member to do so for any host of reasons. In addition to benefits such disclosure may have for the disabled faculty member, there are various benefits for students depending on the instructor's individual experiences and academic focuses. At minimum, students would become aware that they are interacting with someone who is disabled and successful in the field. This might work toward what Jessie Male identifies as an effort in pursuit of "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" (par. 15). Additionally, a disabled professor might be more privy to and assign readings by disabled/chronically ill writers (such as those listed in the Appendix), or a disabled faculty member might connect with a student's work about disabled characters in enlightening ways for the student. It also would help to normalize disability as a fact of life, as a fact of academia, and as a fact of the literary community for disabled and abled students alike.

When faculty members try to seem like they're not disabled or 'too' disabled, it costs invisible labor, and these emotional and intellectual resources can be better dispersed by the instructor elsewhere. (This is in addition to the obvious contradiction that such ableist/ability-normative (Carroll par. 13) expectations have with principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion as set forth by many institutions.) Further, in appropriately inclusive learning environments, openly disabled faculty might have resources and support that they wouldn't while passing or covering. Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic is an opportunity to see more of the humanity in the room, in students but also in faculty. This is a chance to imbue more humaneness and more grace moving forward, for students and instructors alike, and it need not come at the expense of academic rigor or creative quality.

IV. Literature and Literary Community

Janelle Adsit writes that “All forms of representation, including literary production, can be interrogated for assumptions, values, and ideologies” (104). Literature’s representation of disability and disabled people can be analyzed as a craft element in the classroom, addressing representations that lack verisimilitude and perpetuate cultural harm. Consider disabled characters whom you have encountered in literature and media; consider disabled characters whom your students might have encountered. How many of those characters are either evil or objects of pity? Jessie Male discusses with students “comfortable, palpable narratives, and what moments are missing from textbooks, the experiences reshaped or reframed to form a more justifiable memory” (par. 3). And Matthew Salesses writes about how “The way we tell stories has real consequences on the way we interpret meaning in our everyday lives” (14).

If we believe that creative writing and literature open us up to different perspectives, then literature can be one avenue that educates not only our students, but also us as instructors. In my article “Positionality and Experience in the Creative Nonfiction Classroom” (*Assay*, 7.1), I discuss the ways I think about assigning creative nonfiction readings, in part to help students to understand their own positionalities in the world. This can work especially well, in my own experience, if the students can also find points in the text that they relate to. With this in mind, *Sick: A Memoir* by Porochista Khakpour and *The Collected Schizophrenias* by Esmé Weijun Wang provide entry points for creative writing students to invest themselves in the stories, to see themselves reflected back in the text since they, like the memoirists, are writers, too. Simultaneously, however, these texts can help to broaden a reader’s perspective of the world; this can be true for readers who are abled student writers, as well as for student writers who are disabled/ill in ways that differ from the memoirists in question. But these pieces of literature can also be a spark of unraveling ableist assumptions for faculty. (In fact, Porochista Khakpour’s and Esmé Weijun Wang’s collections deal, in part, with how one might experience higher education as someone who is chronically ill/disabled.) This process of challenging problematic notions can be most intellectually and

artistically fruitful when the classroom feels like a community where everyone can participate to discuss different perspectives, experiences, and challenges. In this sort of environment, classroom discussions of the texts can generate fresh knowledge, allowing students and faculty to synthesize different knowledges of the world and engage with literature in profound ways.

Literature and the literary community can become implicitly and explicitly places where disabled people belong, which can be encouraging for disabled writers and enlightening for abled writers. We might instruct our students on the practicalities of the writing life: how does one sustain a writing process, especially outside of the academy? How do life factors affect such a process, and what tools can we give students in light of these scenarios? These life factors can include disability and illness, among many other scenarios, and incorporating craft and creative nonfiction texts which speak to these sorts of obstacles can guide student writers in their professional lives. Further, disabilities can develop at a later point; abled writers could become disabled writers, a growing possibility in the aftermath of COVID-19. Access and inclusion in the classroom make access and inclusion seem more possible in the literary world. By positioning disability as integral to literature and the literary community, student writers who might later become disabled will be less likely to feel that they cannot exist as a disabled person and a writer at the same time.

Ability-normativity is not only a real and present issue within the literary community, but also within literature itself. In “Learning to Write My Truth as a Deaf Queer Writer,” Ross Showalter writes that he initially “regurgitated the stories [he’d] read before” (par. 7), and these stories “revolved around abled straight people discovering disability and queerness” (par. 8). Showalter came to the conclusion that he “had to move away from writing stories that were in line with what people expected” (par. 15). What effect does it have when readers come to expect what Amara George Parker dubs in “Wheelchairs and Wyverns: Where Are My Role Models?” their “disability take on Chekov’s gun,” i.e. that “If in the first act you see a disabled character, by the novel’s end they must be either cured or dead” (114)? What ethos does

it create when Deaf characters seem, as Patrick Thomas Henry writes in “Silence Is Seldom Still: Deafness, Sound, and Character in Fiction,” like they’re “metaphors or cheap jokes pining for audible sound” (173)? Jessie Male writes about representations that “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” (par. 8). If space is not made for disabled students and faculty in the classroom, if a disabled student’s voice and perspective is not honored in the same way as abled students’, and if disability is not framed as an innate part of literature because it is an innate aspect of the human condition, then the pedagogy and praxis in question are both creating exclusionary and elitist environments in which writers hone their craft. Exclusionary and elitist practices have a strong risk of polluting the craft itself, and the nature of how the world is represented in literature.

On the other hand, Adsit recognizes that “Literature can forward social change and the transformation of culture. Literary production is a unique means of putting the world into question” (107). As James Tate Hill discusses in the AWP panel “Disability’s Influence on Literature: Realism As A Craft Concept,”

a faster path to self-acceptance for me would have been greater representation in media and pop culture and literature and to see stories where people are not just accent marks and not just stereotypes but people are the same three-dimensional heroes with disabilities, or disabled heroes, and not people who just happen to have a disability and are taking up some sort of background space for the purpose of furthering the main character’s story.

In regards to literature, there are multiple layers of consideration: first, the lack of disabled characters in literature; second, the tendency toward crafting disabled characters who are flat, two-dimensional, and rely on harmful stereotypes when they are represented; third, the degree to which the disabled characters are or aren’t centralized within the narrative; and fourth, the degree to which a disabled character’s story is or isn’t reduced to their disability.

In regards to the literary community, how inclusive are writing retreats and literary magazines and scholarly journals? How easy or difficult is it for disabled and chronically ill writers to attend or access conferences? (A key question here for a world that has existed with COVID-19: How many virtual options will still be available when no longer deemed a requirement for abled people?) How are disabled writers excluded from community building in spaces like Twitter, or in physical spaces where literary opportunities might present themselves (such as a conference)? And how can we, as creative writing instructors, foster inclusivity and access for disabled and chronically ill writers, within our classrooms and beyond them?

V. Conclusion

Inclusion and access are beneficial for everyone—the university that names diversity, equity, and inclusion as part of its mission; the creative writing program that can attract student enrollment through inclusive practices which encourage the disabled student's place in the classroom; faculty who are disabled and have that perspective to offer; faculty who are abled but can learn from disabled students and literature; disabled students who deserve equitable inclusion in the creative writing classroom and literary community; and abled students who should see disabled writers as their colleagues with much to offer their creative enrichment and development. We can consider, too, T.K. Dalton's point in the "Disability's Influence on Literature: Realism As A Craft Concept" panel, namely "how disability can make visible other systems of oppression that need reform or evolution." In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks argues that "The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy" (12).

The pandemic has caused long-term health effects in an untold number of both students and faculty. In fact, COVID-19 (and more specifically Long COVID) "could be one of the largest mass disabling events in modern history" (Lowenstein and Davis par. 7). With this in mind, we should feel even more urgently compelled to incorporate humane practices as essential parts of our pedagogy. We can no longer unquestioningly ignore such praxis in the name of elitism, an allegedly objective methodology, or

detached professionalism. In many ways, creative writing is the study of humanity, and as such it seems difficult if not impossible to reconcile disengaged and bloodless practices with such a human project.

Appendix

Hill, James Tate. *Blind Man's Bluff: A Memoir*. W.W. Norton Company, 2021.

Huber, Sonya. *Pain Woman Takes Your Keys, and Other Essays from a Nervous System*. University of Nebraska Press, 2017.

Khakpour, Porochista. *Sick: A Memoir*. Harper Perennial, 2018.

Norman, Abby. *Ask Me About My Uterus: A Quest to Make Doctors Believe in Women's Pain*. Nation Books, 2018.

Ramey, Sarah. *The Lady's Handbook for Her Mysterious Illness*. Doubleday Books, 2020.

Wang, Esmé Weijun. *The Collected Schizophrenias: Essays*. Graywolf Press, 2019.

Wong, Alice, editor. *Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the Twenty-first Century*. Vintage, 2020.

Works Cited

- Adsit, Janelle. *Toward an Inclusive Creative Writing: Threshold Concepts to Guide the Literary Writing Curriculum*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.
- Beness, Brianne. "My Disability Is Dynamic." *Medium*, 8 Dec. 2019.
- Carroll, Audrey T. "Authenticating Detail and Disability Narratives." *So to Speak*, 2019.
- Carroll, Audrey T., editor. *Musing the Margins: Essays on Craft*. Human/Kind Press, 2020.
- Cronin, Eileen, Dalton, T.K. and Hill, James Tate, panelists. Panel discussion. "Disability's Influence on Literature: Realism As A Craft Concept." *Youtube*, uploaded by AWPWriter, 2 Dec. 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1-Ah9kCOr4>.
- "Disability Impacts All of Us." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 16 Sept. 2020.
- Dolmage, Jay Timothy. *Academic Ableism: Disability and Higher Education*. University of Michigan Press, 2017.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum, 1995.
- Gilbert, Francis. "Why Teach Creative Writing? Examining the Challenges of Its Pedagogies." *Changing English*, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 148-168.
- Gillberg, Claudia. "The Significance of Crashing Past Gatekeepers of Knowledge: Towards Full Participation of Disabled Scholars in Ableist Academic Structures." *Ableism in Academia: Theorising experiences of disabilities and chronic illnesses in higher education*, edited by Nicole Brown and Jennifer Leigh, 2020, pp. 11-30.
- Greenstein, Anat. *Radical Inclusive Education: Disability, teaching, and struggles for liberation*. Routledge, 2016.
- Heffers, Audrey T. "Positionality and Experience in the Creative Nonfiction Classroom." *Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2020.

-
- Henry, Patrick Thomas. "Silence Is Seldom Still: Deafness, Sound, and Character in Fiction." *Musing the Margins: Essays on Craft*, edited by Audrey T. Carroll, Human/Kind Press, 2020, pp. 165-189.
- Hill, James Tate. *Blind Man's Bluff: A Memoir*. W.W. Norton Company, 2021.
- hooks, bell. *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*. Routledge, 2003.
- hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Routledge, 1994.
- Huber, Sonya. *Pain Woman Takes Your Keys, and Other Essays from a Nervous System*. University of Nebraska Press, 2017.
- Khakpour, Porochista. *Sick: A Memoir*. Harper Perennial, 2018.
- Linton, Simi. *Claiming Disability*. NYU Press, 1998.
- Lowenstein, Fiona and Hannah Davis. "Long Covid Is Not Rare. It's a Health Crisis." *The New York Times*, 17 Mar. 2021.
- Male, Jessie. "Teaching Lucy Grealy's "Mirrorings" and the Importance of Disability Studies Pedagogy in Composition Classrooms." *Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2019.
- Parker, Amara George. "Wheelchairs and Wyverns: Where Are My Role Models?" *Musing the Margins: Essays on Craft*, edited by Audrey T. Carroll, Human/Kind Press, 2020, pp. 114-125.
- Salesses, Matthew. *Craft in the Real World: Rethinking Fiction Writing and Workshopping*. Catapult, 2021.
- Showalter, Ross. "Learning to Write My Truth as a Deaf Queer Writer." Catapult, 2021.
- Toller, Louise and Hannah Farrimond. "The unpredictable body, identity, and disclosure: Identifying the strategies of chronically ill students at university." *Disability Studies Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2021.
- Wang, Esmé Weijun. *The Collected Schizophrenias: Essays*. Graywolf Press, 2019.
- Yoshino, Kenji. *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights*. Random House, 2007.