OISE, University of Toronto

Hosted by: Ben Gallagher & Ashleigh Allen

**Poetry** **and Dis/Ability**

**Workshop description**:

Our 90-minute creative writing workshop explores **Poetry and Dis/Ability** as we read contemporary poets exploring aspects of dis/ability, both mental and physical, in relation to their selves and the culture around them. This workshop we take up recent poetry by Roxanna Bennett, as well as the most recent issue (twelve.2, 2019-2020) of *Hamilton Arts & Letters*, which specifically addresses dis/ability poetry and poetics   
- https://halmagazine.wordpress.com/hal/

- https://samizdatpress.typepad.com/hal\_magazine\_issue\_twelve/hal-magazine-issue-twelve2-cover.html

The purpose of this workshop is to expose participants to different ways of reading and writing poetry as a community, and to think about the possibilities for poetry in our lives and classrooms. Today we specifically want to focus on the various ways that poets have tackled issues of dis/ability in their writing, and what a disability poetics suggests for our writing practices.

We are grateful to be a part of a community that values engagement with writing and reading.

**Workshop outline:**

*(5 minutes)*

**Welcome participants & introductions / check-ins**

* Names, pronouns, a word to describe how each person is feeling today

*(5 minutes)*

**Share the purpose of this workshop**:

* To explore issues of disability within poetry
* Creativity often linked to suffering/madness/unstable “genius” YET the lived reality of mental and physical ill health is rarely allowed to enter art itself
* What do poems that tackle these issues look and sound like
* What might constitute a “disability poetics”?
* What are the implications for our own writing when we begin to explore how mental/physical disturbances shape our language and creativity?

*(5-10 minutes)*

**Read three poems by Roxanna Bennett (“In a Nutshell”, “Language of Hospital”, “Blue Rose”) from her 2019 collection *Unmeaningable***

*(20 minutes)*

**Writing from prompts**

* Begin your poem with a line of dialogue, or make your entire poem a speech/ conversation
* Make a list of 3 homonym pairs, and use at least one in your poem (soul/sole)
* Make a list of 5 slant-rhyming words (ex: exist/this, letters/pleasures), and include two pairs in your poem
* Make a list of 6 word pairs that begin with the same letters (ex: violet/violence) and use a word pair in your poem
* Think about a place with a specialized Language of.. (ex: hospital, army, university) and address it in your poem
* Make up a new word by adding “un” as a prefix (ex: unsorry, unreason)
* Choose a colour to apply to various objects (blue stone, swan, rose)
* Take a phrase and separate it by a comma so it ends one clause and begins another (ex: “needs seen to, seen to mean”)
* Make something quotidian be “contagious”

*(5 minutes)*

**Optional: Look through/ read excerpts from Disability Poetics issue of *Hamilton Arts & Letters***

*(20 minutes)*

**Phone call/Skype with Roxanna**

*(5-10 minutes)*

**Read sections from Dominik Parisien’s essay “My Body Exists in Another Language” published in Hamilton Arts & Letters, Issue twelve.2, 2019-2020:** https://samizdatpress.typepad.com/hal\_magazine\_issue\_twelve/my-body-exists-in-another-language-by-dominik-parisien-1.html

*(15-20 minutes)*

**Writing from prompts:**

* Consider: What are your poetics of pain? For this free verse writing, you’re invited to choose a moment of pain or a consistent pain (physical, mental, spiritual, etc.) to write from.
* Flow between languages if you know more than one (one could also be slang) to describe pain or sensations/ experiences as they alter you
* Describe someone close who knows you – how do they “read” or describe the state you’re in? How do you “read” them?
* Think about how you want to be cared for – write about this ideal handling in as much detail as you want

*(5 minutes)*

**Ideas for exit conversation**. **Participants invited to discuss:**

* What did you notice as you read and wrote? Were you surprised by anything? Comfortable or uncomfortable with the ideas/ experiences expressed?
* Benefits / uses of reading and writing into dis/ability poetics?
* Do you think you will use this or a version of this in your own classrooms? How? In conjunction with what texts/ ideas/ questions?