

# GLOBAL NARRATIVES OF ILLNESS AND DISABILITY

FRENCH 375MGW

\*TAUGHT IN ENGLISH

**4-WEEK SUMMER SESSION 2021**

MAY 19 – JUNE 16

TUES - THURS, 10AM– 2:10PM

COUNTS FOR...  
GE-B  
GE-G  
DIVERSITY  
FRENCH &  
NARRATIVE STUDIES



FILM STILL FROM "THE LITTLE GIRL WHO SOLD THE SUN" BY DJIBRIL DIOP MAMBÉTY

**"MY NARRATIVE ARC INCLUDES MY OWN BODY'S EXPERIENCES" –ROBIN BOYLORN**

This course is about narratives—or what we often just call “stories.” It is about the way we tell stories, and it is about the *kinds* of stories we tell about ourselves and about others. Why illness and disability, then? Because the experiences of the body are not only those which seem to require a narrative: “How did you catch COVID?” “How did you become disabled?” but are also those which dramatically inform our own “narrative arc” as Robin Boylorn states above, or our own sense of self and sense of identity.

This 4-week intensive and immersive summer course will be comprised of short lectures, deep discussions, and thinking + writing workshops in addition to visits by guest speakers working in the fields of Disability Studies and the Medical Humanities. Within these various spaces, we will explore the multiple sociocultural, political, economic, and historical forces that can shape our experiences of health and embodiment, as well as what kinds of meanings we ascribe to them and the stories we tell about them. Through the study of narrative forms such as novels, films, photography, and testimonies from Africa, the Caribbean, France and the U.S., we will study how their authors challenge those conventional (“master”) narratives of disability and illness can only be understood through the lenses pity and tragedy, on the one hand, or triumph and cure, on the other. These diverse narratives will not only upend our assumptions about the meanings and experiences of illness and disability, but also help us to better articulate our *own* experiences of embodiment, health, and (dis)ability.

Course materials will include novels, films, oral testimonies, and theoretical works from the U.S., the Caribbean, France, Senegal, and South Africa. In our readings and viewings, we will consider questions of self-representation, stigma, racial and gender biases, cultural politics, and belonging. Readings include Ken Bugul's *The Abandoned Baobab* and excerpts from Hervé Guibert's *To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life*, Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and Susan Sontag's *AIDS and its Metaphors*. Films include Djibril Diop Mambety's *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun*, Moly Kane's *Moly* and *Goom Bi*, and Rodney Evans' *Vision Portraits*.

**Taught in English**, this course satisfies GE-B, GE-G, the Diversity Requirement, and counts towards French and Narrative Studies major/minor. Please contact Dr. Julie Van Dam, USC Department of French and Italian, for more information ([julie.vandam@usc.edu](mailto:julie.vandam@usc.edu))