

21W.011 Fall 2015

Homework: Due Thurs. 10/29: Susanna Kaysen, *Girl, Interrupted* (excerpt)

Name _____

In her memoir *Girl, Interrupted*, Susanna Kaysen reflects on her experience, as a young adult during the late 1960s, of being an in-patient at McLean Hospital in Belmont, Ma. Suffering from mental anguish (and later diagnosed with “borderline personality disorder”), Susanna Kaysen is pressured by her psychiatrist and parents to sign herself into McLean. Once an in-patient, however, she discovers, to her surprise, that it is quite difficult for her to leave. As a result, Kaysen spends about 18 months as an involuntary psychiatric in-patient at McLean. Her memoir reflects on the nature of what many call “mental illness” and prompts readers to think about what they can learn from her experience.

Write about Ques. 1 and two other questions.

1. Comment briefly on these two quotes from the Kaysen excerpt. How do they influence the way that you see mental anguish/illness?

“But most people pass over incrementally, making a series of perforations in the membrane between here and there until an opening exists. And who can resist an opening?”

“In the parallel universe the laws of physics are suspended. What goes up does not necessarily come down. A body at rest does not tend to stay at rest, and not every action can be counted on to provoke an equal and opposite reaction.”

2. Why do you think Kaysen includes the section “Etiology”?

3. What’s the effect of reading “Velocity vs. Viscosity”?

4. After reading this excerpt, what do you think is Kaysen’s purpose in writing this memoir? How does mental anguish/illness compare to the other social issues/problems we have discussed so far this term?

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21W.011 Writing and Rhetoric: Rhetoric and Contemporary Issues
Fall 2015

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.