



Picturing Health and Illness: Images of Identity and Difference

By Professor Sander L. Gilman

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Ours is a culture riddled with preoccupations about health and disease, this text puts forward. In this study Sander Gilman demonstrates how images of beauty and ugliness have constructed a visual history which records the artificial boundaries that continue to divide "healthy" bodies from ones that are ill. He shows how cultural fantasies of health and illness have come to be identified and defined by means of visual, aesthetic criteria - for the healthy is now seen as beautiful and the ill as ugly. The history of our perception of the "beautiful body," Gilman finds, is charged with anxieties about contagion and ugliness and, furthermore, entangled with political implications brought about by our interpretation of "race" as a medical category. Gilman looks at how 19th-century theorists collected medical and racial data from the shapes of noses, and at contemporary fears concerning syphilis, as vividly personified in the diseased hero of Leroux's "The Phantom of the Opera". He also scrutinizes Mark Twain's frank account of a visit to the Holy Land for signs of implicit prejudice about the health or illness of the resident Arabs and Jews. These concerns are brought up-to-date when the author turns to pathological case histories and recent AIDS posters issued by governments worldwide.

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"Each of these essays affords fascinating and provocative interpretations that will be recalled each time one looks at a new medical image." -- William H. Tucker, Journal of the American Medical Association

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