

In Sickness and In Health: Narrative and the Art of Healing

Higgins School of Humanities New Commons Course

Mondays, 2:50-5:50pm; Dana Commons Lounge

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Jonas Clark 312

Course Description

In this course, we will grapple with a series of questions that engage with the power of narrative, or stories, within the discourses of illness and wellness and the role narrative might play in the healing process. We begin with such questions as what is narrative and what is its purpose? How does narrative shape our understanding of illness and wellness? Why and how have stories been utilized by traditional healers to provide medicine for their communities? What role can narrative play in both the physician's training as well as in the patient's efforts at ontological coherence in the face of illness? And how can we—even for those of us who do not intend to become medical or psychological practitioners, but who may find ourselves working within people-oriented industries—use narrative to perform our work more effectively in the world? Designed as an advanced seminar with an enrollment cap of 16.

Course Objectives

- to link individual stories to stories of the collective
- to understand the cultural construction of illness (and wellness)
- to engage with the ways in which narrative might engender compassion, develop increased empathy, and promote physical and psychological health
- to explore how these concerns may inform the formation of personal/professional ethics

Texts

Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*

Abraham Verghese, *Cutting for Stone*

Clarissa Pinkola Estes, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*

Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition*

Lewis Mehl-Medrona, *Healing the Mind through Power of Story*

-----, *Narrative Medicine: The Use of History and Story in the Healing Process*

Margaret Edson, *Wit*

Rita Charon, *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness.*

Robert Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*

Assignments & Assessment

Higgins Symposium on Narrative [15%]

Students will attend 3 of the Difficult Dialogue/ Higgins School symposia. Attending Arthur Kleinman on 10/20 is mandatory. Students may choose 2 additional symposia to attend from the following: 9/9, 10/2, 10/7, 11/4

Writing the Self: An Illness Narrative [15%]

In order to attune students to the ways that narrative has and continues to shape their lives and understanding of the self and others, one of the first writing assignments will likely direct students to share portions of their own life histories. Using the form of creative nonfiction or personal narrative, students will be invited to reflect on how story has impacted the ways in which they make meaning of their own lives. Later in the semester, students will return to this narrative for a reconsideration and revision, updating their sense of self and other based on readings, discussions, and Higgins School/Difficult Dialogues programming.

Gathering a Life History [15%]

Interview conducted with a family member utilizing the *Life Story Interview Guide* (McAdams, 2008) to familiarize students with the act of eliciting narratives.

Annotated Bibliography [20%]

Research focused on a particular mental or physical health issue and the biographical/autobiographical, literary, and case study representations of it.

Final Paper or Project [20%]

A weaving together of the personal narrative or gathered life history and the researched health issue/topic that seeks to create a narrative that provides insight about narrative and one of the guiding questions of the course delineated in the course description.

Participation & Leadership of Discussion [15%]

Seminars are discussion-based and require that each student come to class prepared to engage in active dialogue with the materials, the instructors, and each other. Attendance does not constitute participation. Furthermore, students will be assigned shared responsibility for facilitating certain discussions following Higgins Event. We need and value everyone's voices in equal contribution!

Classroom Conduct and University Resources

Academic integrity is a basic value for all higher learning. Simply expressed, it requires that work presented must be wholly one's own and unique to that course. All direct quotations must be identified by source. Academic integrity can be violated in many ways: for example, by submitting someone else's paper as one's own; cheating on an exam; submitting one paper to more than one class; copying a computer program; altering data in an experiment; or quoting published material without proper citation of references or sources. Attempts to alter an official academic record will also be treated as violations of academic integrity.

To ensure academic integrity and safeguard students' rights, all suspected violations of academic integrity are reported to the College Board. Such reports must be carefully documented, and students accused of the infraction are notified of the charge. In the case of proven academic dishonesty, the student will receive a sanction, which may range from an F in the assignment or course to suspension or expulsion from the University.

The complete academic integrity policy is available with Academic Advising at <http://www.clarku.edu/offices/aac/integrity.cfm>

Students with Disabilities

If you require accommodations in this course due to a disability, you must be registered with the Office of Disability Services. For information, please contact Emily Tarconish, Director of Disability Services, at 508-798-4368 or at etarconish@clarku.edu.

Reading Schedule

Subject to change as deemed necessary.

8/25 – What is Narrative? Why Narrative in this conversation about healing and the heart of healing.
Psychology and English and specific goals of each discipline

Readings: Charon, Preface & Ch. 1-3; Mehl-Madrona (*Narrative Medicine*), Intro & Ch. 1

9/1 – Labor Day

THE PERSONAL

9/8 – Writing the Self

Readings: Lorde, *Cancer Journals*; Charon, Ch. 4

9/9 - Narrative and the Storyteller Within; Facilitated by Jessica Bane Robert

9/15 – Writing the Self (cont)

Readings: Edson, “Wit”; Charon, Ch. 5

9/22 – Fiction/Memoir as Method

Readings: Tretheway, “Knowledge”; Charon, Ch. 6-8

THE CULTURAL/SOCIAL

9/29 – Healing the Mind

Readings: Mehl-Madrona, *Healing the Mind*, Ch. 1-6

DUE: Writing the Self: An Illness Narrative

10/2 - Two Women Talking: *RESTOR(Y)ING Culture, Gender, Sexuality and Tradition*; Benaifer Bhadha and Monsoon Bissell

10/6 – *Women who Run with the Wolves*

Readings: Pinkola-Estes, Intro – Ch. 3; Mehl-Madrona, *Healing the Mind*, Chapters 7-11; listen to stories

10/7 - Narrating Race; Facilitated by Betsy Huang

10/13 – Fall Break

THE ETHICAL

10/20 – Kleinman; Caregiving as Moral Experience

Readings: Kleinman, Ch. 3, 7, 10; Kleinman & Benson (2006), *Anthropology in the Clinic; DSM-V*, Cultural Formulation Interview; Kleinman's 7 questions

10/20 - Kleinman Caregiving as Moral Experience; Arthur Kleinman

10/27 – Debrief/Kleinman Discussion & Intro to Ethics

DUE: Annotated Bibliography

Readings: Charon, Ch. 9-11; Mehl-Madrona, *Healing the Mind*, Ch. 12; Trethewey, “Miracle of the Black Leg”

THE CLINICAL

11/3 – Gathering a Life History (experiential)

Readings: Mehl-Madrona, *Narrative Medicine*, Ch. 3-6; Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*; Kleinman, Ch. 15 (suggested reading)

11/4 - Poetry and History: An Evening with Natasha Trethewey

11/10 – Trethaway Debrief; Narrative Medicine: History and Story

Readings: Mehl-Madrona, *Narrative Medicine*, Ch. 7-9; Saltzman et al., 2013, *Enhancing Family Resilience*

11/17 – Narrative Medicine: History and Story

DUE: Gathering Life History

Readings: Verghese, Ch. 4, 7-14

11/24 – Narrative Medicine: History and Story

Readings: Verghese, Ch. 20-35

12/1 – Student Presentations (Conference Style)

12/8 – Student Presentations

12/12 – Final Papers Due!

Faculty Collaboration

Esther L. Jones, Ph.D., is a literary scholar interested in the ways in which narrative might be used to develop both individual and a broader cultural sense of ethics toward alien others. Focusing primarily on the twinned tropes of “alien-ness” and “pathology” within the burgeoning field of narrative ethics, her research explores how constructions of the difference of alien others in science and speculative fictions

expose our naturalized assumptions about normalcy and pathology, sickness and wellness, self and other. Her contribution to this course will offer students pathways for engaging with the structural features of narrative and the ways in which narrative can either reinforce or disrupt our habits of mind when it comes to relating across differences, particularly in the ethical gray areas of narrative medicine.

Professor Laura McKee's training as a clinical psychologist has afforded her numerous opportunities to work as a "healer" with children, adolescents, and their families struggling with issues ranging from temper tantrums to trauma. Her training in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavior Therapy (TF-CBT), in particular, has attuned her to the use of story and narrative in the healing arts as the "trauma narrative," the reconstructed story of the traumatic event, is the key ingredient in the treatment. In fact, this tradition of cognitive processing and exposure-based learning via the use of story-telling in clinical psychology is wide-reaching and empirically-based. It fits within a broader tradition that includes decades of research by social psychologist James Pennebaker and others about the power of writing one's story as well as a relatively newer therapeutic approach, Narrative Therapy, crafted to help individuals address suffering. Professor McKee brings to bear her interest in the use of stories by traditional healers in Native American tribal ceremony (i.e., Lakota and Cherokee) as well as knowledge of techniques developed by Arthur Kleinman for eliciting the stories of illness and pain across culture divides. As a former English major, she is excited to be dipping her toes back into the power of poetry and fiction to unpack the topic.