

Eng 389WR-006/ IDSWR-003
Emory University
Spring 2009
Mondays 2-5 PM
Ignatius Few Hall 129

Professor Laura Otis
N306 Callaway Center
lotis@emory.edu
(404) 727 2234
Office Hrs Mon-Wed 6-7 PM

Writing It Out: Healing Narratives in the Health Sciences

Course Objectives: In this class, we will explore how writing and listening to stories can enlighten sick people and all those who care for them, from doctors to the care-givers of aging parents. We will study the ways that creating and interpreting narratives can help patients and health care workers to deal with their emotions and to build valuable medical knowledge. Rita Charon, one of the founders of narrative medicine, defines narratives as “stories with a teller, a listener, a time course, a plot, and a point.” By reading stories, case histories, and memoirs of illnesses from multiple points of view, we will consider how closer attention to narratives might transform health care.

Course Requirements: The conduction of an original research project analyzing past or contemporary narratives in the health sciences, summarized in a 15-20 page essay, two 5-10 minute class presentations on your research project, weekly 1-2 page reading responses, and active, energetic participation in class discussions

Grading: Grades will be based on your research paper (60%), your class presentations (10%), your reading responses (20%), and your class participation (10%). Because the final essay is such an important part of the learning process and the final grade, it should be revised one time in response to my comments and suggestions. The grade on the revision will replace the original grade the essay receives.

Honor Code: It is expected that all the work you do in this course will conform to the Emory University Honor Code. All this means is that no matter how exhausted you are, make sure all your work is your own, and take pride in it. Show the same respect for other people’s achievements and originality that you would want them to show for your own.

Special Note to Undergraduate Students: Health Science Humanities courses bring together students from Emory College (grad and undergrad), the Medical School, the Nursing School, and the School of Public Health. The diversity of student backgrounds and perspectives drives the learning process. Don’t be surprised if you know much more or much less about some subjects than your fellow students do, and don’t expect them to know everything that you know. Look on this course as an opportunity to teach as well as learn, and show respect for students who lack your knowledge in some areas but may exceed it in others.

Course Texts Available at the Emory Bookstore:

Jean-Dominique Bauby, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*
Albert Camus, *The Plague*

Rita Charon, *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness*
Anton Chekhov, *Ward Number Six*
Arthur Conan Doyle, *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Stories and Tales*
Sigmund Freud, *Dora: Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*
Kathryn Montgomery Hunter, *Doctors' Stories*
Susanna Kaysen, *Girl Interrupted*
Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*
V. S. Ramachandran, *Phantoms in the Brain*
Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*

Additional readings will be available through Reserves Direct in the Emory Library. I have established a Learnlink Conference for our class for communicating and posting announcements.

Part I: Health Science Narratives in Context

- January 26 What Is (Medical) Narrative?
Readings: Rita Charon, *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness*,
 ch. 1 & 2
Kathryn Hunter, *Doctors Stories*, ch. 1
Supplemental literary readings, distributed in class:
Honoré de Balzac, *Père Goriot* (1834)
Samuel Butler, *Erewhon* (1872)
- February 2 Detective Stories: A Model for Medical Narratives?
Readings: Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, “A Scandal in Bohemia,”
 “The Yellow Face”
Rita Charon, *Narrative Medicine*, ch. 6
Kathryn Hunter, *Doctors Stories*, ch. 3
Carlo Ginzburg, “Clues: Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes” (optional)
- February 9 Classic Case Histories: Narratives in Need of Healing?
Readings: S. Weir Mitchell, *Doctor and Patient*, “The Physician” and
 Nervousness and Its Influence on Character”
Sigmund Freud, *Dora: Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*
Charles Berheimer and Claire Kahane, *In Doras Case* (optional)

Part II: The Patient's Point of View

- February 16 How Important is Language in Health Care?
Reading: Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*
Rita Charon, *Narrative Medicine*, ch. 4 & 5
- February 23 It's All in Your Head: The Struggle for Credibility
Readings: V. S. Ramachandran, *Phantoms in the Brain*, Preface, ch. 1 & 3
Susanna Kaysen, *Girl Interrupted*
Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, Introduction and ch. 3 (optional)

- March 2 **Workshop I: Presentation of Student Research Proposals,**
With in-class discussion and feedback
- March 9 **Spring Break**
- March 16 What Is Human Dignity?
Reading: Jean Dominique Bauby, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*
Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, ch. 1
Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, Introduction and Part Two ch. 1-5
- March 23 When Healing Is no Longer an Option
Reading: Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, ch. 1-7, 10
Linda Emmanuel, “Re-examining Death: The Asymptomatic Model”

Part III: The Healthcare Giver’s Point of View

- March 30 How Useful is Distance?
Reading: Albert Camus, *The Plague*, Parts I and II
- April 6 Confronting Hopelessness
Reading: Albert Camus, *The Plague*, Parts III-V
Rita Charon, *Narrative Medicine*, ch. 9
- April 13 Self-Reflexive Case Histories: Inspiring or Annoying?
Reading: V. S. Ramachandran, *Phantoms in the Brain*, ch. 8 & 11
Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, “The Man Who
Mistook His Wife for a Hat,” “The Disembodied Lady,” “The President’s
Speech”
Antonio Damasio, *Descartes Error*, ch. 1 & 3
Kathryn Hunter, *Doctors Stories*, ch. 4 (optional)
First Draft of Essay Due
- April 20 Writing Narratives to Heal the Healer
Readings: Anton Chekhov, *Ward Number Six*
Robert Coles, Foreword, *Chekhovs Doctors*
Atul Gawande, *Complications*, “The Education of a Knife,” “When Doctors
Make Mistakes,” and “When Good Doctors Go Bad”
- April 27 **Workshop: Presentation of Student Projects**
Final Draft of Essay Due