

Narrative Medicine
is
Narrative Ethics

Craig Irvine, PhD | 12 November 2017



"I need someone well versed in the art of torture—do you know PowerPoint?"

“Story is the mind’s way of molding a seeming whole from out of the messiness of the distributed, modular brain. At the same time, shared stories are the only way anyone has for escaping the straightjacket of self. Good medicine has always depended on listening to histories. So any attempt to comprehend the injured mind naturally inclines toward all the devices of classic storytelling. . . .

Only inhabiting another’s story can deliver us from certainty.”

~ *Richard Powers*

I didn't ask you to undress so I could examine you. I asked you to undress because it's essential to the doctor-patient relationship that I be fully clothed and you be sitting there in your underwear.



“What you have to do is this, Bosk. When you get up in the morning, pretend your car is a spaceship. Tell yourself you are going to visit another planet. You say, ‘On that planet terrible things happen, but they don’t happen on my planet. They only happen on that planet I take my spaceship to each morning.’”

~ *Charles Bosk*



“Life [is] an activity and a passion in search of a narrative. . . . [Our life] is the field of a constructive activity, by which we attempt to discover . . . the narrative identity which constitutes us.”

~ *Paul Ricoeur*

“Our very selves are perpetually recreated in stories. Stories do not simply describe the self; they are the self’s medium of being.”

~ *Arthur Frank*

“Aristotle did not hesitate to say that every well-told story *teaches* something . . . [I]t is certain that tragedy, epic and comedy, to cite only those genres known to Aristotle, develop a sort of understanding that can be termed narrative understanding and which is much closer to the practical wisdom of moral judgment than to science, or, more generally, to the theoretical use of reason.”

“Narrative is a profound mode for understanding ethics consultations, not because it resolves problems, but because it forces us to attend to the human voices, including our own, behind what is being said.”

~ *Larry Churchill*

Cartoonist
NETHERLANDS



Cartoonists International: www.nyfbym.com/cartoons


CA/NYTS

“[N]arrative ethics is more interested in preventing breakdowns in mutual understanding from happening in the first place than in adjudicating conflicts over preferred courses of action. The primary focus is to prevent situations from turning into cases. Thus narrative ethics necessarily morphs into narrative medicine, including in its purview how everyday clinical practice proceeds and how well such practice honors people’s stories of suffering. . . . Ethics conflict—autonomy being set in opposition to beneficence—can be avoided by a physician who practices narrative medicine.”

~ *Arthur Frank*

“My books are about very specific circumstances, and in them are people who do very specific things. . . . The plot, characters are part of my effort to create a language in which I can posit philosophical questions. I want the reader to ponder those questions not because I put them in an essay, but because they are part of a narrative.”

~ *Toni Morrison*

“Morrison is able to place the reader into an imaginative *lived* space, a powerful narrative space that is able to articulate modalities of lived existence . . . Hence, one might say that Morrison posits philosophical questions that are linked inextricably to narrative. After all, our lives are lived narratives, journeys of pain, endurance, contradiction, death, intersubjectivity, suffering, racism, sexism, terror, trauma, joy and transcendence. Avoiding abstract . . . discourse, Morrison reveals the power of literature to embody the flesh and blood reality of what it means to-be-in-the-world. . . . Morrison is not depicting abstract and universal truths, but ‘accidents of private [and public] history’ that philosophically shed light on what it means to be a self.”

~ *George Yancy*



"Is there a doctor of literature in the house?"

She was an evil stepmother.
In her old age she is slowly dying
in an empty hovel.

She shudders
like a clutch of burnt paper.
She does not remember that she was evil.
But she knows
that she feels cold.

~ *Anna Swir*

Translated from the Polish by Czeslaw Milosz and Leonard Nathan



*"I wish you would make up your mind, Mr. Dickens.
Was it the best of times or was it the worst of times?
It could scarcely have been both."*

“The novel reader’s experience of free submission, her response to the ‘hailing’ performed by the novel, becomes . . . a necessary condition for the social achievement of diversity, a training in the honoring of Otherness, which is the defining ethical property of the novel—and is also what makes literary study, and novel reading in particular, a crucial pre-condition for positive social change.”

~ *Dorothy Hale*

“We tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated. This remark takes on its full force when we refer to the necessity to save the history of the defeated and the lost. The whole history of suffering . . . calls for narrative.”

~ *Paul Ricoeur*



Leo Wilton
CN

"Good news. The test results show it's a metaphor." COLLECTION