

# Why Medical Humanities? Applications in General Practice

Medical Humanities Seminar  
Tieteiden talo  
Helsinki  
1 June 2012

How many a man has  
dated a new era in his  
life from the reading  
of a book!

Henry David Thoreau  
*Walden*, 1854

# 1989

Middlemarch

Emma

Bleak House

Anna Karenina

- one's self-satisfaction is an untaxed kind of property which it is very unpleasant to find depreciated.

George Eliot  
*Middlemarch*, 1872

If there had not been so much anger, there would have been more desperate awkwardness; but their straightforward emotions left no room for the little zigzags of embarrassment.

Jane Austen  
*Emma*, 1815

He knows that by touching her with his skilful and accustomed hand, he can soothe her yet more readily.

Charles Dickens  
*Bleak House*, 1852-3.

Both of them now had only one thought - the illness ... and the nearness of his death - which stifled all else. But neither of them dared speak of it, and so, whatever they said - without uttering the one thought that filled their minds - was all falsehood.

Leo Tolstoy  
*Anna Karenina*, 1873-77.

I thought then that the sensitivity of the artist may equal the knowledge of the scientist. Both have the same object, nature, and perhaps in time it will be possible for them to link together in a great and marvellous force which is at present hard to imagine.

Anton Chekhov  
*Coope J. Doctor Chekhov. 1997*

Poetic knowledge is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge.

Aimé Césaire  
*Poetry and Knowledge, 1944-5*

“We all think we know what a lion is. A lion is a desert-colored animal with a mane and claws and an expression like Garibaldi’s.”

Aldous Huxley  
*Do What You Will, 1929*

“But it is also, in Africa, all the neighboring antelopes and zebras, and therefore, indirectly, all the neighboring grass ... If there were no antelopes and zebras, there would be no lion. When the supply of game runs low, the king of beasts grows thin and mangy; it ceases altogether, and he dies.”

Aldous Huxley  
*Do What You Will, 1929*

It is just the same with  
knowledge. Scientific  
knowledge is a lion without  
antelopes and zebras. It is  
gnawed from within. Gnawed  
by hunger, the hunger of  
feeling, the hunger of life.

Aimé Césaire  
*Poetry and Knowledge, 1944-5*

- the informing  
reciprocities between  
grammar and vision.

George Steiner  
*Errata: an examined life, 1998*

- and I would give,  
 While yet we may, as far as  
       words can give,  
 Substance and life to what I feel

-

William Wordsworth  
*The Prelude*, 1805

The physician enjoys a wonderful opportunity actually to witness the words being born. Their actual colors and shapes are laid before him carrying their tiny burdens which he is privileged to take into his care with their unspoiled newness. He may see the difficulty with which they have been born and what they are destined to do. No one else is present but the speaker and ourselves, we have been the words' very parents. Nothing is more moving.

William Carlos Williams  
*The Doctor Stories*



It is difficult  
to get the news from poems  
yet men die miserably every day  
for lack  
of what is found there.

William Carlos Williams  
*Asphodel, that greeny flower*  
1955

- the shortest emotional  
distance between two  
points: the writer and  
the reader.

Robert Frost

Now we were getting ready  
To go on our holidays  
And I'm losing weight,  
Losing weight  
Losing weight.  
I was 15 stones  
And I went down to 12.  
And that was in two months.  
And that's when I knew  
There was something wrong with me.

Murray S, Kendall M, Boyd K, Worth A, Benton F, Klauser H.  
'I knew ...' *Br J Gen Pract* 2001; September: 776-777.

The world is different after it  
has been read by a  
Shakespeare or an Emily  
Dickinson or a Samuel  
Beckett because it has been  
augmented by their reading  
of it.

Heaney S. Joy or Night.  
In: *The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures*. 1995.

To try to understand the experience of another it is necessary to dismantle the world as seen from one's own place within it, and to reassemble it as seen from his. For example, to understand a given choice another makes, one must face in imagination the lack of choices which may confront and deny him.

John Berger and Jean Mohr  
*A Seventh Man, 1975*

Thou art no slave  
Of that false secondary power, by which,  
In weakness, we create distinctions, then  
Deem that our puny boundaries are things  
Which we perceive, and not which we have  
made.

William Wordsworth  
*The Prelude, ii, 220-4.*

# labelling

- definitions belong  
to the definer, not  
the defined.

Richard Flanagan  
*Gould's Book of Fish, 2001*

This attempt to “humanise” nature by naming its parts has a long and distinguished history. Once a given subject is broken down into its parts, each one identified, named and placed into groups - the periodic table, strata of minerals, weight divisions of prize-fighters - the whole is given limits and becomes acceptable, or digestible, almost. It may as well be regarded as residual evidence of the oldest fear, the fear of the infinite. Anything to escape the darkness of the forest.

Bail M. *Eucalyptus*, 1998.

- its commitment to the separateness of persons and to the irreducibility of quality to quantity; its sense that what happens to individuals in the world has enormous importance; its commitment to describe the events of a life not from an external perspective of detachment, as the doings and movings of ants or machine parts, but from within, as invested with the complex significances with which human beings invest their own lives.

Nussbaum, MC.  
*Poetic Justice: the Literary Imagination and Public Life*, 2001.

- to the moral relevance  
of following a life  
through all of its  
adventures in all of its  
concrete context.

Nussbaum, MC.  
*Poetic Justice: the Literary Imagination and Public Life*, 2001.

no one who reads  
thoughtfully...will  
ever again be  
certain

Trilling L. *The Moral Obligation to Be Intelligent:  
Selected Essays*  
*New York Review of Books*, 2001

Beware, my body and my soul,  
beware above all of crossing  
your arms and assuming the  
sterile attitude of the spectator,  
because life is not a spectacle,  
because a sea of sorrows is not a  
proscenium, because a man who  
cries out is not a dancing bear.

Aimé Césaire  
*Return to my Native Land*, 1939 (1956) (1969)

the golden mean  
of informed  
consent

Perhaps reading and writing books is one of the last defences human dignity has left, because in the end they remind us of what God once reminded us before He too evaporated in this age of relentless humiliations - that we are more than ourselves; that we have souls.

Richard Flanagan  
*Gould's Book of Fish, 2001*

- something is always pure & beautiful, if you will just look beneath the scabs & sores.

Richard Flanagan  
*Gould's Book of Fish, 2001*



