**The patient as text – revisited. Call for papers.**

It has been 20 years since the Norwegian literary scholar Petter Aaslestad published *The Patient as Text. The Role of the Narrator in Psychiatric Notes, 1890-1990* (1997). In this book, Aaslestad explores around 150 patient files from a Norwegian psychiatric hospital, written between 1890 and 1990. By using narratological categories, he analyses who is speaking in these reports, which perspectives are reproduced in them, and in what ways those perspectives are reproduced. In this way, he unravels how patients suffering from schizophrenia are narratively present or absent in their own medical files and how the psychiatric professionals—as constructors of these narratives—are surrounded and affected by ideological and medical changes. The book was a pioneering work, using a narrative model as a methodological tool on a hitherto unorthodox material within comparative literature. Aaslestad’s oeuvre is an example of how utility and disciplinary skills may be combined and lead to interdisciplinary gains in all respects.

The interest in patients’ stories, their perspectives and experiences has also come to the fore of other academic disciplines (Daniel 1986). Such interest has been mostly evident in sociology, the history of science and medicine, and cultural history. A pivotal role in this context was Roy Porter’s article on “The Patient’s View. Doing Medical History from Below” where he argues for taking account of patients’ historically and culturally changing views on health and illness to better understand medical development (Porter 1985, Condrau 2007). Contrary to Aaslestad’s book, sociology and historiography are inevitably less interested in asking how narration takes place in stories written by or about patients, and more in using these stories as documents capable of exemplifying or explaining historical and social processes (Ernst 1999, Nolte 2009). A later example of the interest in patient stories is rendered through narrative medicine whose most prominent spokesperson is the physician and literary scholar Rita Charon from Columbia University. She conceives of narrative medicine as a response to a bureaucratic health care system and argues that by making genuine contact with patients by storytelling, narrative medicine leads to a more humane, ethical and effective health care (Charon 2007).

Despite a certain academic interest in different aspects of patient stories during the last few decades and despite an obviously growing number of patients’ testimonies that represent experiences of illness from the viewpoint of patients or their relatives, these mostly written stories are still a rather uncharted territory – especially within the field of literary studies (Rimmon-Kenan 2006, Stene-Johansen and Tygstrup 2010). Pathographies, i. e. autobiographical stories about illness (Hawkins 1999, Engelhardt 2002), are often narrated by lay people who are neither trained authors nor intellectuals. Their value is not considered that of grand literature, although surprisingly many of those that are published are of high literary quality. In recent years pathographies—and patient stories in general—have, however, given way to a broad scope of illness stories not only rendered in books, but also in both new digital formats like blogs (Podnieks 2016, Nesby and Salamonsen 2016) as well as appearing frequently on TV, and in newspapers and magazines as a result of the public interest in these stories (Walter 2010). What are the literary techniques used in these formats, how do they differ from older, perhaps more traditional formats and what are thematic implications of a day to day rendering of own illness – as is the case with patient blogs? How has the communicative aspect changed from older patients stories to the stories of today, and how are e.g. relatives and friends depicted? Furthermore, the question of why these stories attract so many readers, has yet to be explained —both as a literary and cultural phenomenon. Rita Felski’s argument for a “neo phenomenology” can be used to explain the historical and social dimensions in catching the attractiveness that patient stories have had and will continue to have on their readers: “If historical analysis takes place in the third person, phenomenology ties such analysis back to the first person, clarifying how and why particular texts matter to us” (Felski 2008: 19).

To investigate these questions the research group «Health, Art and Society» at UiT The Arctic University of Norway would like to invite researchers and Ph.D. students to the symposium “The patient as text – revisited”. The symposium will take place at the Norwegian University Centre in Paris 11-13 September 2018.

The symposium will explore the role of patients’ narratives presented via the above mentioned channels and special focus will be given to stories by patients and/or their relatives. The following topics are of particular interest but others may also comply:

* Genres of illness narratives (fictional/factual, diaries, autobiographies, letters, blogs, small stories – big narratives, oral – written)
* Gender aspects
* Intercultural aspects (e. g. encounters between patients and physicians with different cultural background)
* Intertextual aspects, metalepsis and/or thematic relationships within patient stories
* Readers and the reading of illness narratives
* Relationship(s) between illness (somatic/mental) and writing
* Use of narratives in medical practice

The symposium may be of interest to researchers within the medical humanities, narratology, medical practitioners, literary scholars, psychiatric practitioners and those with an interest in medical history and critical theory.

The participants will be invited to submit their proceedings in the interdisciplinary peer-reviewed Danish journal “Tidsskrift for Forskning i Sygdom og Samfund” (Journal of Research in Sickness and Society) autumn 2019, (<https://tidsskrift.dk/sygdomogsamfund>). The deadline for submitting the article will be 1 November 2018.

Proposals for 20 minute lectures in the form of abstracts (300 words) can be submitted by the deadline 1 March 2018 per e-mail to [marie-theres.federhofer@uit.no](mailto:marie-theres.federhofer@uit.no) and [linda.nesby@uit.no](mailto:linda.nesby@uit.no).

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