
2016 Symposium Proceedings

Communicating through the Arts: Lessons for Medicine and Health

Matera | Caserta | Paestum
Italy



Our History

Every summer for almost three decades, Professor Judy Raggi-Moore (Director, Italian Studies, Emory College of Arts and Sciences) has led a group of undergraduate students on an academic journey and cultural immersion in Italy. In 2000, she invited her colleague, Dr. Ruth Parker (Professor of Medicine, Emory University School of Medicine), to develop a course that would become an integral part of this program. The “Medicine and Compassion” course uses art and architecture, literature and landscape, cuisine and culture, and cross-disciplinary discussions to encourage a deeper understanding of compassion and healing.

In 2010, Drs. Parker and Raggi-Moore began to invite visiting faculty from various disciplines to join their traveling “classroom” for a concluding week-long Symposium in southern Italy. Over the past six years, they have built a strong and truly interdisciplinary Symposium.

This year, Drs. Raggi-Moore and Parker welcomed co-host Dr. Arri Eisen (Professor of Biology and faculty at the Emory Center for Ethics) to the Medicine and Compassion Symposium. Our distinguished guests included Winston Wong, MD, senior executive at Kaiser Permanente and developer of the ALL/PHASE program for safety net providers, and Lois Nixon, PhD, a nationally recognized scholar in the health humanities. Participants explored “Communicating through the Arts: Lessons for Medicine and Health” and the major themes of the course (death, dying and suffering; beauty, balance, and harmony; communication and compassion) through the lens of health disparities and health equity.

We are pleased to offer these proceedings from our 2016 Symposium and we invite those interested to contact us regarding future symposia.



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2016 Symposium Proceedings Overview

Communicating through the Arts: Lessons for Medicine and Health

17 June - 23 June, 2016

Matera | Days 1-3

Castel del Monte, Altamura, Carlo Levi, Sassi di Matera, Palazzo Lanfranchi

poverty, suffering, understanding, resilience

Caserta | Day 4

La Reggia di Caserta, Diana and Actaeon

violence, justice, beauty, healing

Paestum | Days 5-7

Tenuta Vannulo, Agriturismo Spinaruccoli, Temples and Museum of Paestum

disparities, equity, privilege, communication



2016 Symposium Participants

Hosts



Ruth Parker, MD
Professor of Medicine,
Pediatrics, Public Health
Emory University SOM



Judy Raggi-Moore, PhD
Professor of Pedagogy, Italian
Director, Italian Studies
Program, Emory College of
Arts and Sciences



Arri Eisen, PhD
Professor of
Pedagogy, Biology
Emory University

Visiting Faculty



David Anderson
Pinellas County
Park Ranger



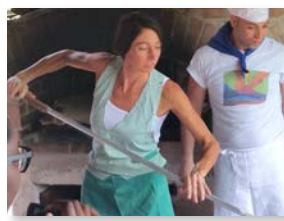
Donald Batsky, MD
Professor of Pediatrics
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Jary Nixon, JD



Lois Nixon, PhD,
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Professor of
Medical Ethics,
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Catherine Wilkins, PhD
Professor of Humanities,
Honors College
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Winston Wong, MD
Medical Director,
Community Benefit
Director, Disparities
Improvement and
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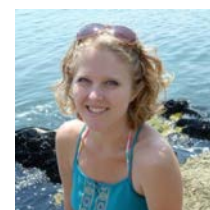
Medical Student Participants



Sammy Abusrur
MD Candidate,
Class of 2019
USF MCOM



John David Ike
MD Candidate,
Class of 2017
Emory University



Rachael Postlethwait
MD Candidate,
Class of 2018
USF MCOM

On our first morning together, student groups delivered 20-minute PowerPoint presentations to their symposium faculty leaders. The students were asked to both introduce the newly-arrived faculty to our journey thus far and to anchor their presentations on one of three major themes from the course (death, dying and suffering; beauty, balance, and harmony; communication and compassion) in the context of site visits, art, literature, landscape, cuisine, and architecture.



Matera | Day 2

Castel del Monte

Perched on a hill close to the Adriatic Sea, not far from present day Bari, Castel del Monte sits high above the surrounding landscape. Built by Emperor Frederick II in the first half of the 13th century, the structure has remained largely unchanged, but the original décor (marble cladding, mosaics, and statues) has been pillaged over time. UNESCO has designated the castle as a World Heritage Site because of its geometrical perfection and harmonious

blending of architectural elements from northern Europe, the Muslim world, and classical Rome.



The function and inspiration of this building still elude us today. However the seamless fusion of Classical, Romanesque, Gothic, and Islamic stylistic traditions underscore the title of "*Stupor Mundi*" attributed to this scholarly emperor.

It is said the emperor collaborated with the famous medieval mathematician, Fibonacci, in the conception of the unique octagonal design. The visitor is challenged to combine keen intellect and broad scholarship in order to perceive the mysteries of beauty it encompasses.



Matera | Day 2

Visit to Altamura

With evidence of inhabitation spanning back to the 5th century BC, Altamura was re-founded by Frederick II in the early 13th century. Altamura is an excellent example of a medieval town, with narrow streets connecting small, enclosed piazzas ("*claustri*").



The Romanesque style cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta was completed in 1232 and its main entryway is framed by magnificent carvings depicting the life of Christ. Like many of the spectacular historical buildings in Basilicata and Puglia, this too was commissioned by Emperor Frederick II as a "palatine" chapel granting the emperor and all successors rights of jurisdiction over this religious structure. As in all his commissions, Frederick's buildings illustrate the successful fusion of styles and craftsmanship, teaching us today how beauty can unite even the most seemingly disparate people.

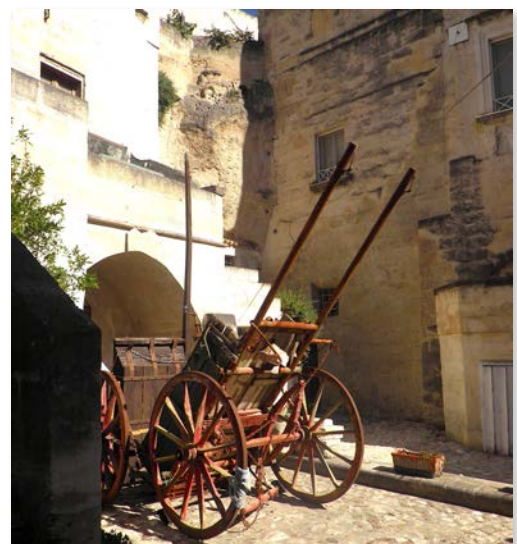
However, Altamura's most recent claim to fame is due to an incredible scientific discovery made in 1993, the "Uomo di Altamura" a perfect skeletal remains of a *Homo Neanderthalensis* who lived in this area about 150,000 years ago. Altamura is also reputed to bake the best bread in Italy, a claim that visitors enjoy verifying.

Matera | Day 3



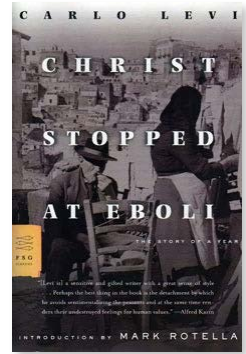
The Sassi district of Matera provides a unique study of the balance between harsh natural conditions and human ingenuity. Declared a World Heritage Site in 1993, UNESCO describes the Sassi as “the most outstanding, intact example of a troglodyte settlement in the Mediterranean region, perfectly adapted to its terrain and ecosystem.”

Dr. Raggi-Moore walked the group through this barren and baked, colorless landscape. We pondered the immense fortitude and in-depth understanding of nature required to survive for centuries in this environment. This is the Basilicata of Carlo Levi’s *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, where Levi describes peasants surviving in desolate poverty in a land where humans, livestock, and crops struggled, but malaria thrived.



Matera | Day 3

Dr. Ruth Parker led the discussion of *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, Carlo Levi's novel chronicling his exile in this region. A painter, writer, and physician, Levi begins his novel by declaring that "Christ stopped short of here," the land of the south. The peasants of Matera identify themselves as not-Christian, as animals rather than humans, and yet they provide hospitality to Levi, who describes the sense of community with the peasants as a "passive brotherliness, sympathy in the original sense of the word." This "suffering together" is facilitated by Levi's position as a prisoner subject to the whims of the state. The peasants also viewed their lives as "saddled" by their fate, poverty, and disease (malaria).



Dr. Wong noted that Levi, in his reluctant medical practice, provides "the humanity of trying to diagnose" and treat the ailments of the peasants who consider themselves not-human. North and South, Christian and not-Christian, peasant and gentry . . . the novel deals with the roads that divide. These dividing roads certainly exist today, in health disparities and social determinants of health. Dr. Parker challenged the group to consider what we can do to cross these roads, and what it would mean to do so.

Following our discussion of Levi's text, students and faculty stood in front of Levi's *Lucania 61* in the Palazzo Lanfranchi, a large 3.2 x 18.5-meter painting. The group read the painting in the context of Levi's written work, what we had seen of the region of Matera, and through our broader lens of disparity and equity.

The power of this painting lies in Levi's ability to portray the ancient struggle for survival faced by the peasants. He conveys this through the earthen, muted color palette, through the despair in the eyes that stare directly out at the observer, and in the faces of the young children that appear far too somber. We spent the afternoon discussing Levi's decision to represent these people with such honesty on a national stage, his understanding of his position of privilege, and his use of that position to give voice to this forgotten region through his art.



La Gravina | Day 4

"The greatest travelers have not gone beyond the limits of their own world; they have trodden the paths of their own souls, of good and evil, of morality and redemption."

- Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*



Stopping on the ridge of the Murgia Materana en route to Caserta, we observe Matera from afar. Dr. Wong and Dr. Batisky read aloud the foreword and first chapter of *Christ Stopped at Eboli*.

Listening to Carlo Levi's reflections on his time in Matera, we are again struck by his dedication to depicting the people of the region. Looking across this geographical chasm, we are reminded to consider how we cross the road that divides.

Caserta | Day 4

La Reggia di Caserta

Commissioned by the Bourbon king Charles III and designed by architect Luigi Vanvitelli, La Reggia di Caserta is an immense 18th century palace and another UNESCO World Heritage Site. The palace was intended to compete with Versailles outside of Paris, and was reportedly the largest building in 18th century Europe.



The expansive grounds of the palace span almost 300 acres. The central path contains immense fountains and flowing pools, while the gardens continue symmetrically on either side. The central path ends at a waterfall into the main fountain depicting the myth of Diana and Actaeon.

Diana and Actaeon – A Discussion of Beauty and Violence



Our conversation centered on the cruel punishment exacted by the goddess Diana on the young hunter Actaeon for his unintentional violation of her privacy. While out hunting, he inadvertently stumbles upon the goddess bathing. Furious, Diana transforms the young man into a stag, and as soon as he changes from hunter to prey, he is cruelly torn apart by his own dogs.

We discussed the interpretation and weight of intentionality in a debate on crime and punishment. As students unraveled the many layers of this complex myth, they begin to understand something new about the violence they are witnessing in the world, in Italy, and in their own lives.

Paestum | Day 5

A Discussion of Disparities – Dr. Winston Wong

Dr. Wong works at the epicenter of the national discussion of health disparities and health equity and his presence this summer inspired our focus on health disparities. Dr. Wong described the Asian-American community of his childhood as deeply impacted by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and shaped by the sense of “not belonging” in America. He noted that “your agency, your ability to navigate, is dependent on the majority culture to



grant you that agency.” That sense of being politically and socially unimportant parallels what Carlo Levi observed in Matera, where people were subject to the laws of a distant government. Dr. Wong also told of a visit to Oakland’s Chinatown where people had not seen a doctor since arriving in America because it was assumed that “they don’t trust Western medicine, therefore there is no need.” Levi encountered the same attitude when he arrived in Matera; local doctors told Levi that the peasants did not want or need the help of

physicians because they were entrenched in folk medicine and distrustful of western medicine. We are left with the question: Who determines need? The “experts” from outside the community? Or the community itself? And who can speak for the community?

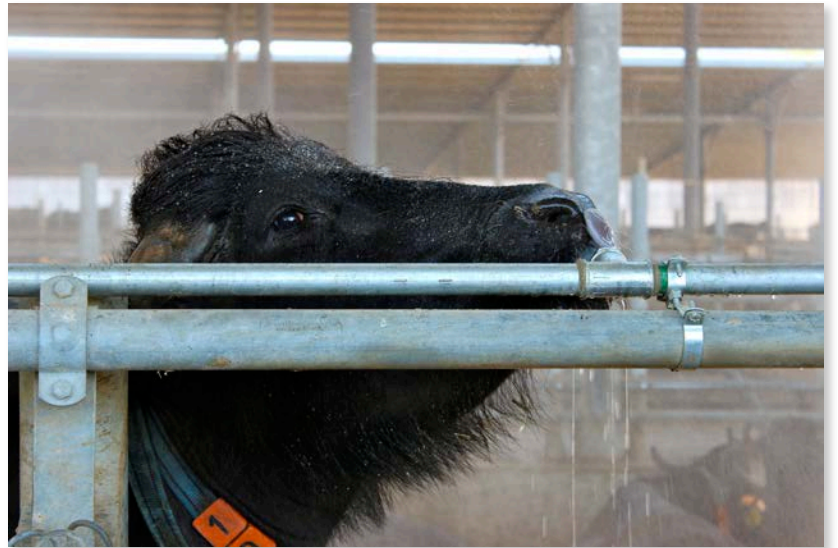
Dr. Wong defined the difference between equality and equity: “In any given community, resources are limited. In order for there to be equity, those with privilege must sacrifice. Equity is about achieving justice. In any given scientific phenomena, you’re going to see variance. Some things happen, some things don’t happen to that group, that’s disparities. Equity is an active opportunity, disparity is passive.”

“Equity is about justice and seeking to know what you don’t always see. Art is about illuminating what we carelessly do not see, hear, or comprehend.” We must not be blind to these opportunities for further understanding. Those who are engaged in the conversation about disparities, about equity, about privilege, about art - we are the privileged and we must ask how we use this privilege. Dr. Wong reflects, “I think about [privilege, equity, and justice] if I have the opportunity, not to declare what I think, but to bring the voices to the people that really are living on the margins. Because that’s the voice that that we have to hear. That’s the art that you have to illuminate.”

Paestum | Day 5

Tenuta Vannulo

The Tenuta Vannulo ecological farm is home to several hundred female water buffalo employed in the art of making *mozzarella di bufala*. Buffalo milk has been traditionally used in the making of mozzarella from the region of Campania for hundreds of years.



This ecological farm combines traditional practices with modern technology to produce an organic product. One of the ways the operators ensure quality is by providing the buffalo with a comfortable life. Each buffalo decides when she wants to be milked (they wear chips that the milking machine uses to recognize each animal), and is provided with massagers and showers. The farm also plays Mozart to the buffalo in the mornings.



Paestum | Day 6

Agriturismo Spinaruccoli

The owners of the Agriturismo Spinaruccoli, long-time friends of Dr. Raggi-Moore, welcomed our traveling classroom with open arms. They gave the group a tour of their vegetable and herb gardens, and took us to meet some of their farm animals. Faculty assisted in gathering herbs, eggs, tomatoes, and zucchini flowers needed to prepare our lunch – pizza!

Following our meal, students listened attentively as Park Ranger and horticulturist, David Anderson, discussed the importance of being an ecologically-minded consumer and the role of sustainable farming in modern society.

Students were also given the opportunity to work with their assigned mentors to prepare their final presentations.



Paestum | Day 6

Visit to the Temples and Museum of Paestum



The Greeks founded the city of *Poseidonia* (today's Paestum) in the 7th century BCE. Paestum's archaeological park contains three massive Doric temples. The two central temples are dedicated to Hera. The temples were built approximately 100 years apart, with the oldest dating to the 6th century BCE. Their proximity in age and location allows us to trace the progression of the Greek's understanding of proportion, symmetry, and mathematics in creating perfect form.



Perhaps the most significant piece in the Museum of Paestum is the Tomb of the Diver. One of the most complete examples of Greek wall paintings, the tomb dates to 480-470 BCE. The frescoes on the four walls and roof of the tomb face inward toward the deceased's resting place. Images of a classical Greek symposium, complete with drinking vessels, are depicted on the walls, while on the lid is the diver, his body straight and suspended above the water.



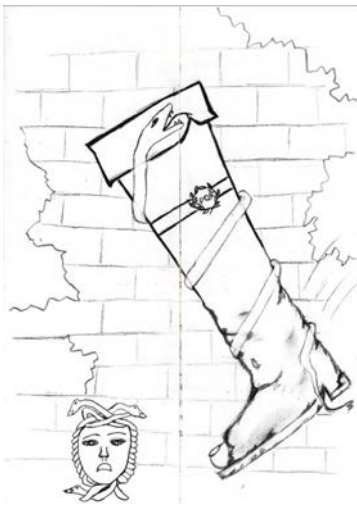
The symbolism of the diver plunging confidently into a blue flowing body of water leads to reflections on our arduous academic journey, whose finality is uncertain. Thus students question how to reconcile future plans with daily challenges and how to face adversity.

Dr. Cory Labrecque, a previous participant and host in our symposia, offers his reflections on the tomb in his article, "Commentary on La Tomba del Tuffatore." Access the article from our website.

Paestum | Day 7

Student Final Presentations

For their final assignment, students were asked to work with their visiting faculty to create a visual aid and a 4-minute group presentation. Their goal was to integrate the content of the "Communicating through the Arts" Symposium, the "Medicine and Compassion" course, and their assigned theme (Communication and Compassion; Beauty, Balance, Harmony; and Death, Dying, and Suffering). Students were told to be creative and pushed to make meaningful integrations – to see their 5-week journey as a pilgrimage. To see what each of the five groups did, please visit our website! Below are examples from two of our groups.



Group 2: Beauty, Balance, and Harmony

Students focused on the divide between Northern and Southern Italy with special attention given to the health and poverty disparities in the Southern region. The students created a work of graffiti that symbolized this disconnect. They sought to highlight the didactic power of art and its ability to express the voice of those on the margins of society.

Group 4: Communication and Compassion

Students used poetry to highlight the importance of listening. Each student wrote a poem about their individual struggles and then read another's poem aloud to symbolize the importance of giving voice and listening to others.



Faculty Final Reflections



“ . . . I am reminded so much of John Stone, and his connection to Emory, while I’m here with you.”

- Lois Nixon, PhD

“Students are learning the importance of the humanistic aspects of medicine and the significance of not just physical, but emotional, intellectual, and spiritual caregiving. I am deeply appreciative of your recognition of the arts as a tool for cultivating and promoting these values which I also hold dear. Your love of the arts and - more importantly - your love for people is evident in all that you do, and is inspiring to me. “

- Catherine Wilkins, PhD

“You have opened doors for my discovery; reached out to collaborate, and most importantly, embraced me as a friend, and for that, I am most grateful.”

- Winston Wong, MD

Final Reflections from a Student

“As someone who has the privilege to receive an education, “what do I not see?” I did not see that health inequity is the “most inhuman of all injustices in the world,” because I forgot that each human has a right to seek a healthy physical and mental state. I also failed to see other “inhuman” things. The only way I can actively listen at this stage is to become educated and let my knowledge empower me. “Listening” is active not because it produces an immediate action, but it cultivates a mind that ultimately leads to a better decision.”





Please Join Us!

The next Medicine and Compassion Symposium will be June 8 – June 15, 2017.

For further information, please contact Rachael Postlethwait, Symposium Manager, at rachael.postlethwait@gmail.com.

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