

# **My Life in Europe**

**A brief history of  
Autobiography and Narrative  
Methodologies**

**Grazia Chiarini – Sara Calcini  
LUA**



# The concept of storytelling is very broad

The narrative refers to myth, legend, fairy tale, popular novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, cinema, theater, comics, conversation.

*«...life itself is narrative as a story»*

(J. Bruner, 1988)





# Storytelling is a need

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**The narrative of themselves responds to the individual's need to rebuild reality by giving it a specific meaning at a temporal or cultural level.**

**The narrative is a space for reflection through which the picture of one's own existence emerges.**

**(Jerome Bruner, 1988)**

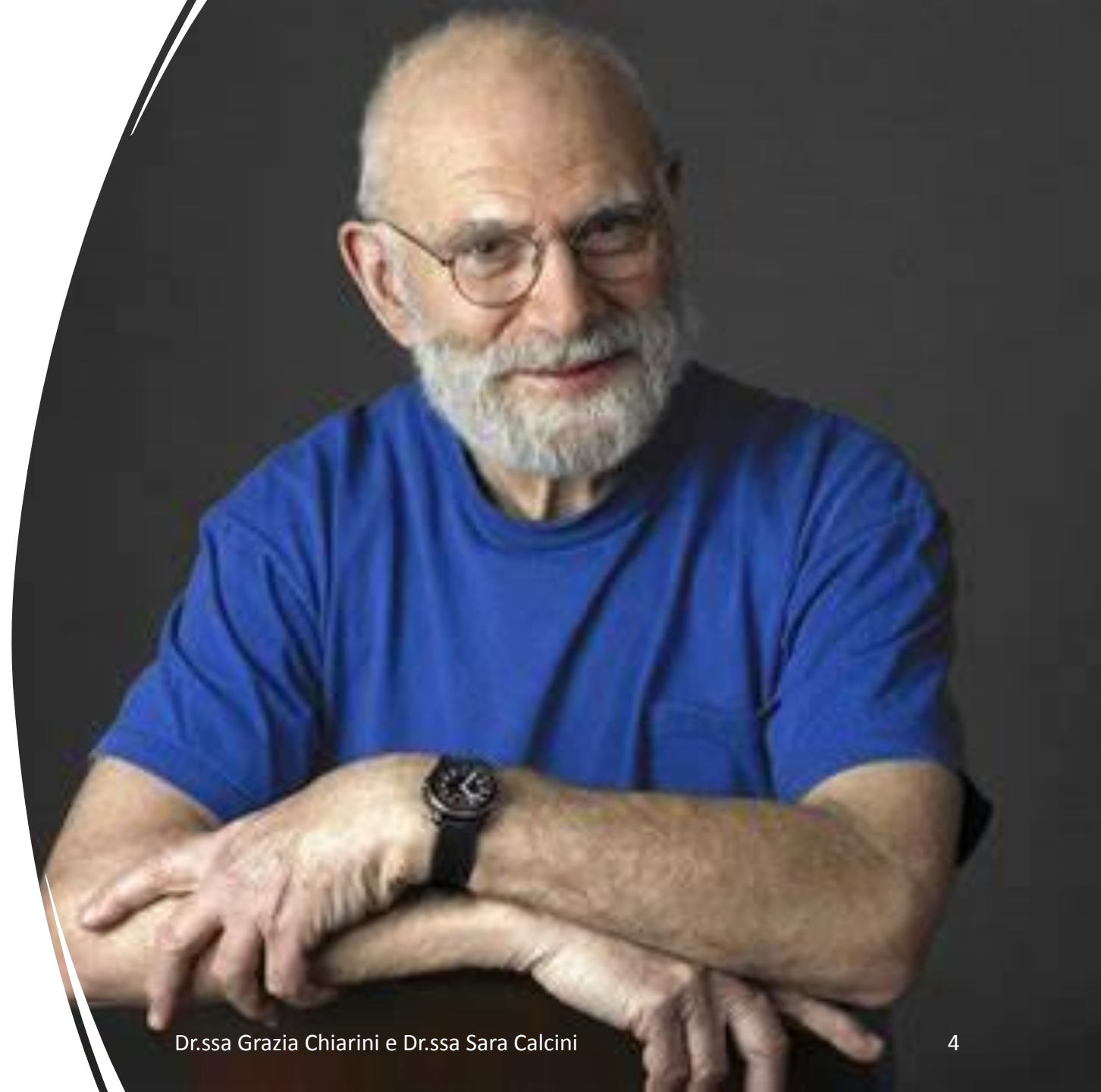


# Each of us is unique

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«Each of us is a biography, a story. Each of us is a peculiar story, built continuously... through our perceptions, our feelings, our thoughts, our actions; and, last but not least, our discourse, our oral narratives. From a biological, physiological point of view, we do not differ much from each other; historically, as stories, each of us is unique.»

(Oliver Sacks, 1985)



# Diary and Autobiography

Diary is a narration, through writing, almost daily. It is written for themselves, or to an imaginary interlocutor. It is often written at a young age and the linguistic register is informal.

Autobiography is an ancient literary genre for all those who want to tell of themselves and their lives, of what they have done and learned over the years. Through the autobiography everyone, at any age, learns to document their own experience, to leave a testimony of themselves to others, to think and reflect better.





# The autobiography may take several forms

It can be a story in prose, in verse, an essay, a play, a documentary, a film, a comic book, a photo, a drawing.

It can become memorialistic, take the form of a biography (a person who writes about another person's life) or it can take the introspective form of a novel.





# Short history of Autobiography

The oldest example of biography is from the 10th century B.C. and it is attributed to the Egyptian author of the Adventures of Sinuhe, pharaoh's servant.

Self-writing was practiced by Greeks and Latins through memoirs, letters, commentaries and prayers (Demetrius, 1996).

These texts are far from the autobiography and autobiographical covenant in which the author undertakes to tell the truth of himself, dictated by the desire to represent himself (Lejeune, 1986).





# Short history of Autobiography

**St. Augustine was the first to use autobiography in an introspective sense and as a technology of self-narration.**

**“Confessions” are the beginning of the introspective genre based on meditations on the past and one's own actions**

**For St. Augustine to know means to remember. Time exists only as a subjective system of detection that places events in succession: first the past through memory, then the present through attention and finally the future through waiting.**





# Short history of Autobiography

Another important author for autobiographical thought was Michel de Montaigne: his «Essays» (1588) are a collection of passages that constitute an example of diary on various topics.

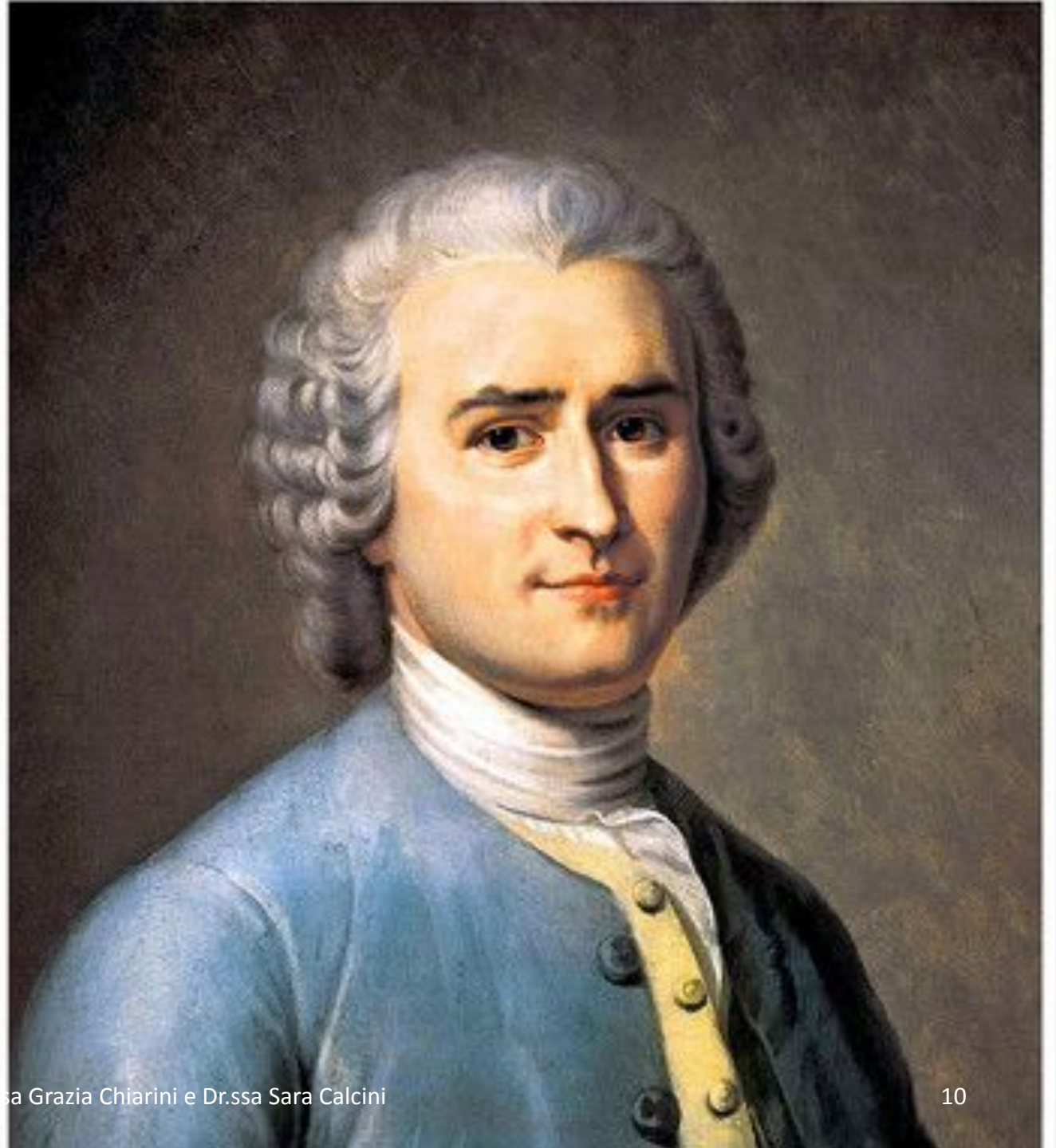


# Short history of Autobiography

Jean Jacques Rousseau is the one who left of himself in the "Confessions" (1782- 1789) one of the most significant portraits of autobiographical literature.

He tells the first 53 years of the his life in 12 books.

From Rousseau on we see the birth of a series of thematic autobiographical productions on childhood, the past, memory. Chateaubriand, Stendhal, Tolstoj, Pellico, Leopardi.





# Short history of Autobiography

The autobiography as a literary genre appears in 1798 in a text by Friedrich Schlegel, although it is present, not as a genre, in the history of literature since the fifteenth century with Dante and Petrarch up to Goldoni, Alfieri, Leopardi but also Goethe and Stendhal.

The autobiography, in the twentieth century, is often confused with the novel and is not always faithful to the original traits that describe stories of learning, change and reflection. (Demetrius, 2000).



# Short history of Autobiography

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It is "rediscovered" in the eighties by French, Canadian, Swiss and Italian scholars belonging to different fields of knowledge: psychological, sociological and pedagogical (Lejeune, 1986; Pineau, 1989; Dominicè, 1992; Jedlowsky, 1994; Demetrio, 1996; Formenti, 1998; Fabbri, 1991);

The writing of themselves and the stories of life become, for these authors, occasions of meditation and intellectual regeneration.



# Life Stories

**Interest in life stories was born in the 1920.**

**Numerous research on urban social marginality in New Deal America is being carried out by the Chicago School of Sociology.**

**The biographical sociological model will be taken up again in the seventies by the French school that will choose, as subjects of the workers' research, artisans and their families (Olangero, Saraceno, 1993).**

**This approach is sociological ("qualitative sociology") and addressed to biographies.**

# Life stories

**The use of life stories in the pedagogical field is rediscovered and used in the 1970 by a group of researchers in France (Pineau, Dominicè), in Italy Duccio Demetrio.**

**At the beginning of the nineties in Milan was born a research group of the University , coordinated by Demetrio, which deals with Adult Education.**





# The clinical writing

The autobiography is considered a self-healing method (Demetrius, 1996) because it gives meaning to memories and generates thoughtfulness, as well as exploring one's own identity.

Writing about oneself becomes a way to retrace one's own history and thoughts according to a possible plot.



# The autobiography as a care

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The autobiographical approach develops, as well as in the field of education, also in the field of care and research and focuses on the interest in life stories, conditions and cognitive processes that allow the story in a reflective, formative and self-educational perspective: a process in which order is given and meaning is attributed to events, decisions, feelings, diseases.

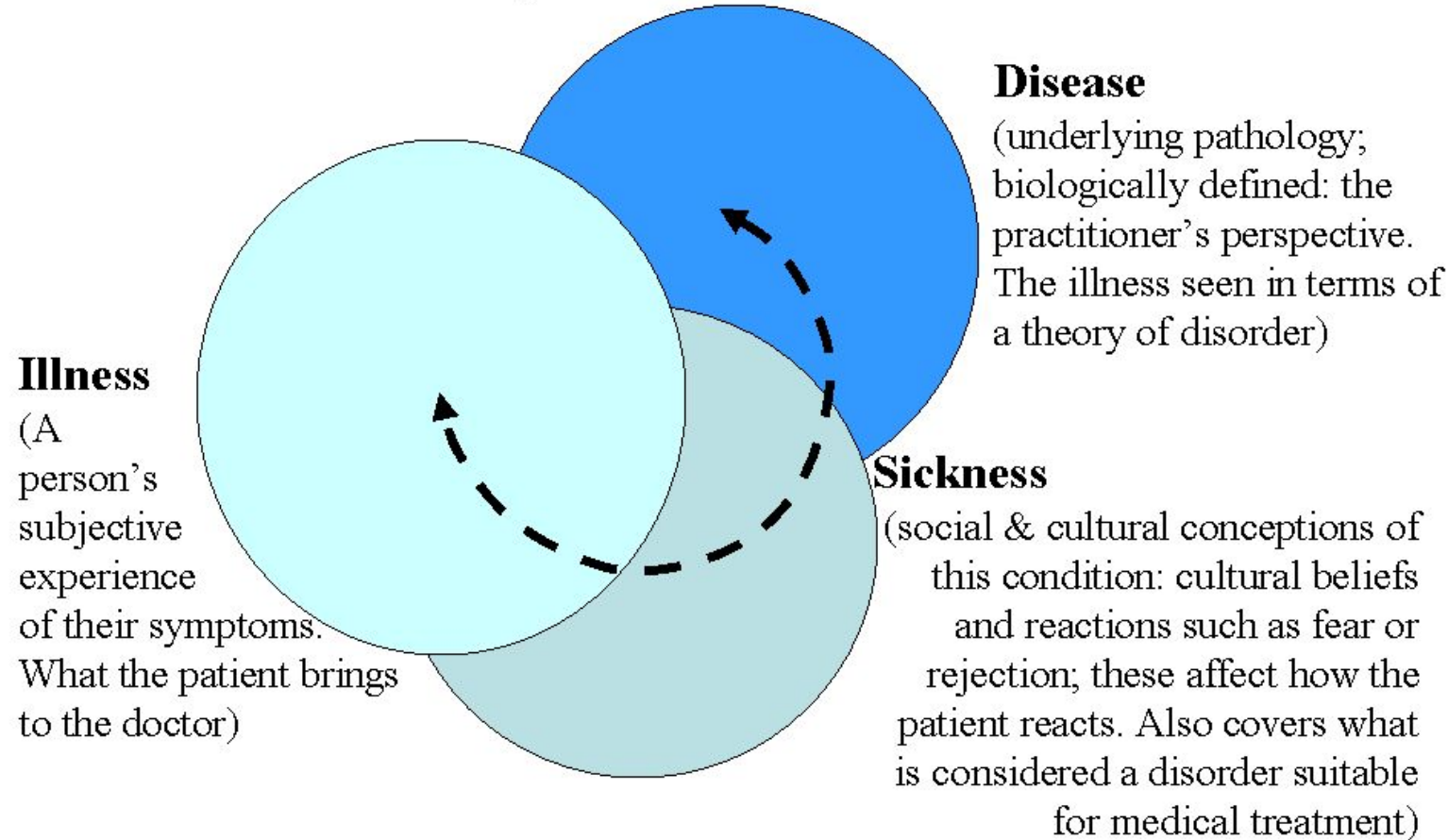




# **The origin of Narrative Based Medicine**

The concept of narrative medicine was born in the USA in the '90, within the framework of the Harvard Medical School where psychiatrists and anthropologists Byron Good and Arthur Kleinman were among the first to emphasize the importance of "stories" as a tool for assessing the effectiveness of treatment and building a solid therapeutic relationship. Arthur Kleinman distinguishes the disease into: disease, illness and sickness.

# Three Perspectives: Disease, Sickness & Illness







# Narrative Medicine

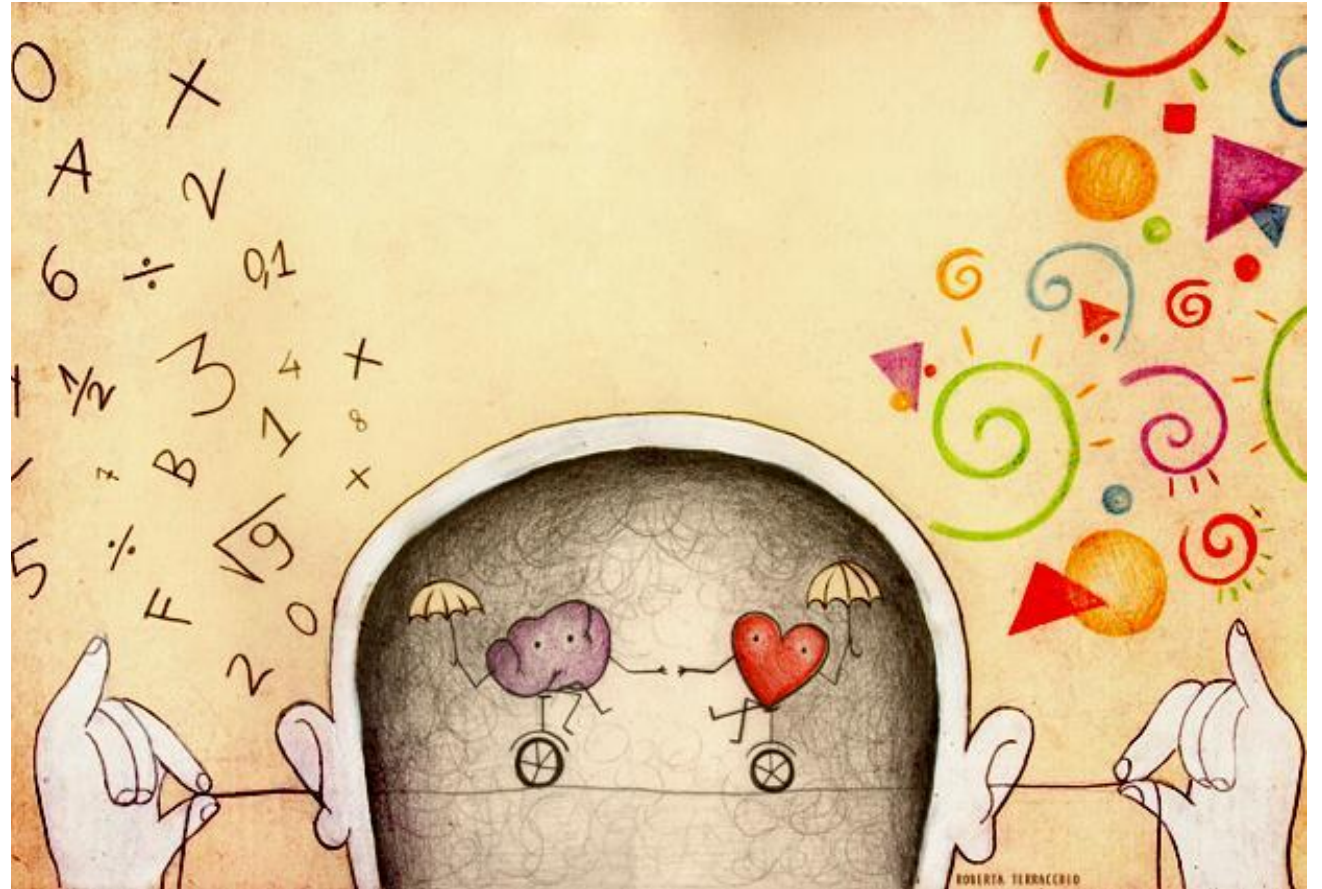
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**Rita Charon calls narrative competence that set of abilities that relate to recognizing, absorbing, interpreting and being somehow conditioned by the stories of other people's lives in the context of a narrative interrelation (Charon 2008).**

**Rita Charon talks about narrative competence and refers to health/care/disease experiences in health contexts. It is useful to recall here the distinction present in the English language between care, "cure" in the therapeutic sense, and to care, "take care".**

# Narrative competence and autobiographical competence

A competence of this kind when expressed through writing can be called autobiographical competence. More generally the first, more specific the second, both can be considered part of a relationship of help and care in the holistic sense.







# The fable of the stork

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There's a man who lives in a round house near the pond. One night he is awakened by a big noise outside: he goes out in the dark to understand what happened.

He goes to the pond; he stumbles, then falls into a ditch and gets up, then into another, then into another.

Then he heads south, but hears the noise again and returns north.

Then he sees a hole in the pond embankment, and works to close it. He finally goes back to sleep.

In the morning he looks out at the window and, looking at his path, he sees that it had the shape of a stork!

# The fable of the stork: a metaphor

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The Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero begins her reflection on the narrative citing the African fable of the stork told by the Danish writer Karen Blixen (Cavarero 2001).

The fable of the stork is a metaphor of how important it is to be able to connect all the fragments of one's life. You also need to be open to unexpected outcomes and wait until the game is over to grasp its meaning.

The sense is the shape of the stork that the man has traced. They are his steps on the sand, the having walked.

The author asks, "when the drawing of my life will be complete, will I see - or will others see - a stork?"



# The experience of the Free University of the Autobiography of Anghiari

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The Free University of the Autobiography of Anghiari was founded as a non-profit cultural association by Duccio Demetrio and Saverio Tutino in 1998.

The meeting between the scholar of autobiography in the formation of adults and the inventor, the animator, the organizer of the Diaristic Archive of Pieve Santo Stefano signed the constitution of a research community, of formation, of diffusion of the culture of memory in every unique field.



# The training proposals of the LUA

The Triennial School of Autobiographical and Biographical Writing, called Mnemosyne, with the first preparatory year (Graphein), the three advanced paths of the second year (Koinonia, Mimesis, and Ta Eis Heauton) and the three specialization paths (Biblos, Klinè and Morphosis/Mnemon) is the only example in Italy to acquire the title of connoisseur in autobiographical writing' (1 year. year), expert in autobiographical methodologies' (2 years) or still specializes in the paths of the 3 years. year.

<http://lua.it/formazione/>



# Mnemosyne

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**The course of the school Mnemosyne (Μνημοσύνη) allows people who participate in it to write their own autobiography offering varied educational and methodological solicitations. After the first year the person can stop or continue choosing a specialization of the second year. Then continue towards the third year.**

**Mnemosyne is the goddess of memory in Greek mythology. "Mnemosyne" is derived from the same source as the word mnemonic, that being the Greek word mnēmē, which means "remembrance, memory".**



# Other proposals

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- **Course of Formation of Formators for LUA Graduates.**
- **In-depth seminars and research**
- **Autobiographical workshops in various cities.**
- **The Summer Week of autobiography**
- **The Summer School of Econarration and Green Autobiography.**

## Training contexts in autobiographical practice:

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Work  
individually

Pair-work

Teamwork

# Teamwork

**The autobiographical practice in a group must provide for the creation of a narrative context where participants can exchange their own narratives.**

**Within this context there is always a comparison. It is a work of co-construction.**

**Individual history begins to enter another story, that of the group and, together, individual history allows a new knowledge of oneself.**

**The group participates in the history of each, gets in touch with the history of all and emotional, content, self-reflective aspects emerge, mixing meanings.**

**The formative context becomes a narrative context because it allows the narration of fragments of oneself without the fear of the judgment of others.**







# **Autobiography is an autoformative method**

**Autobiography can be defined as an autoformative method that everyone, alone or with the help of a facilitator, can experience in the first person: self-correcting, self-evaluating, discovering previously unknown narrative potentials and thus revealing his hidden creative gifts.**

**To appreciate yourself more, to take care of yourself, to build and accompany the development and changes of your identity, taking advantage of the written page (a diary, a memorial, a letter, etc.) and, therefore, to get to know each other better.**

**Moreover, it is now scientifically established that writing one's own history, practicing daily, taking stock from time to time in certain passages and phases of existence, educates one to the development of one's own inner world: it stimulates one to remember, to concentrate, to reason from oneself, to appreciate solitude and meditation.**

A circular inset image on the left side of the slide shows a woman with dark hair, wearing a yellow dress, looking into a mirror. The mirror reflects her face and upper body. The background of the inset is a warm, brownish-gold color.

# The cognitive bilocation

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**In the autobiographical practice happens what Demetrius (1996) has called “cognitive bilocation” that is the ability of everyone in the narrative to divide without getting lost in order to be able to “look”, the operation of distancing happens both in time (then-now), both in space (there and here), both in becoming characters of a story (author and protagonist in the autobiography coincide).**

# Narrative devices

**With the bilocation each participant undertakes a mnemonic and introspective path through the use of narrative devices ( in MY LIFE are the cards of the game) that favor the story in written form.**

**This phase implies a disposition to listening to oneself (Formenti, 1998) and the desire to communicate one's own experience to an interlocutor, listener or reader.**





**We are all travelers of the world, and each, capturing shattered parts, sensations, builds, as a subject capable of giving "meaning" to what sees, listens, touches, meets, its representation and narration.**

***V.Volpe 2001***

**As a solicitation of writing,  
thinking of your trip (in the  
space, in the mind, with the  
heart) write your own memory  
or reflection.**

**Thinking about my trip I write...**

