Marzia Beltrami (Université Paris 3, Sorbonne Nouvelle)

*Literature as Cure? Exploring Bibliotherapy Through the Medical Humanities*

In 2018, Elena Molini opens in Florence a small independent bookshop, “La Piccola Farmacia Letteraria” (The Little Literary Pharmacy), whose distinctive feature is the selection principle underpinning its catalogue: rather than by genre or by author, books are organised on the basis of the emotions and existential states they capture or elicit, and are offered as remedies for a broad range of life challenges and mental health problems. The idea that books can be used to cure is not a new one, as it also lies at the core of bibliotherapy, a discipline whose modern history dates back to the early 20th century. This contribution examines Molini’s initiative in dialogue with more standard forms of bibliotherapy and suggests that, despite significant differences, the two also share a number of elements, including the employment of images linked to the trope of literature as cure; the cultivation of reading habits; the facilitation of human relationships built on trust and on the discussion of books in relation to personal experience. This comparison becomes the point of departure for a broader interrogation of the role of the Medical Humanities in negotiating and problematizing the delicate balance between therapeutic and literary interests in this kind of hybrid practices. If books can be used to cure, does it mean that they merely turn into technologies of care or are they capable, in turn, of affecting the therapeutic thanks to their nature as complex cultural objects? In particular, it will be suggested that literature-based bibliotherapeutic practices not only can promote an understanding of therapy that is more dynamic and dialectic, but also help us rethink healthy practices as operating both inwards in terms of self-construal and outwards through the cultivation of an activist stance towards society and the world.

Événement réalisé grâce au soutien du MHIC-Lab (Medical Humanities in Context) et de l’Université Paris 3, Sorbonne Nouvelle. Pour plus de renseignements: guidofurci@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr