



ONLINE COURSE:
LITERATURE & MENTAL HEALTH / READING FOR WELLBEING

First run: Registered learners – 23,029
Comments on online forum – over 80,000

Content

The great 18th century writer Dr Samuel Johnson, who suffered from severe bouts of depression, said that “the only end of writing is to enable the reader better to enjoy life or better to endure it.” The world's first free online course in *Literature and Mental Health* explores how enjoying literature can help us to endure life.

The course asks how poems, plays and novels can help us understand and cope with times of deep emotional strain. The reading load is flexible, and Learners have the opportunity to exchange ideas and feelings via the online discussions with other learners.

The course explores six themes:

1. **Stress:** In poetry, the word “stress” refers to the emphasis of certain syllables in a poem’s metre. How might the metrical “stresses” of poetry help us to cope with the mental and emotional stresses of modern life?
2. **Heartbreak:** Is heartbreak a medical condition? What can Sidney’s sonnets and Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* teach us about suffering and recovering from a broken heart?
3. **Bereavement:** The psychologist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross famously proposed that there are five stages of grief. How might Shakespeare’s

Hamlet and poems by Wordsworth and Hardy help us to think differently about the process of grieving?

4. **Trauma:** PTSD or “shellshock” has long been associated with the traumatic experiences of soldiers in World War 1. How is the condition depicted in war poetry of the era? Can poems and plays offer us an insight into other sources of trauma, including miscarriage and assault?
5. **Depression and Bipolar:** The writer Rachel Kelly subtitles her memoir *Black Rainbow* “how words healed me – my journey through depression”. Which texts have people turned to during periods of depression, and why? What can we learn from literature about the links between bipolar disorder and creativity?
6. **Ageing and Dementia:** One of the greatest studies of ageing in English Literature is Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. Is it helpful to think about this play in the context of dementia? Why are sufferers of age-related memory loss often still able to recall the poems they have learned “by heart”?

There are contributions from doctors, who offer a medical perspective on the conditions discussed in the course, as well as from a range of people who have turned to literature at moments of crisis, including such well-known figures as Melvyn Bragg and Stephen Fry.

Learners have the opportunity to share their own experiences, discover new texts, and take part in activities that explore the relationship between reading and wellbeing.

The public benefit of the course is both *medical* – thoughtful reading is offered as a *complementary* therapy for stress and related conditions – and *educational*, in that Learners have the opportunity to advance their knowledge of classic, and often demanding, literary texts.

Evidence for the effectiveness of the course is provided by the thousands of comments made by learners on the online forum. The following is a small selection from them, arranged in groups based on the various interviewees (some of them doctors, some writers, others readers) who contributed to the course.



Learner Comments: Dr Andrew Schuman

Jane Dey

Absolutely amazing - very moving - I wish Dr Andrew Schuman could be my GP. Such complete understanding of the human condition is a rare human gift.

I had never heard of Takotsube before but my grandparents died within months of each other, I believe under similar circumstances.

Emily Dickinson's *The Bustle in the House* is just so perfect that it is making my own heart ache with sadness.

Lin Ball As you and several others have commented, oh to have GPs with this level of sensitivity!

Samantha Kirby

An amazing GP, its great to see the use of different resources to help someone, and the openness to it, "here you go this might work, if not scrap paper", I feel that it encourages people to explore different ways to healing and achieving well being. I have known people who use poetry, lyrics and quotes to help them with heartbreak and loss.

Deborah Vass

A fascinating and moving discussion. It answered my query about the physical pain felt upon heartbreak clearly and comprehensively. I was very touched by the recommendation of the Emily Dickinson poem. What a wonderful GP.

Isabel Coughlin

This is all so interesting. Andrew Schuman is a healer, as well as a doctor - what an inspiration.

Natalie Smith

Wish Andrew was my GP - so tuned in to the power of non-medical treatments. The two poems were perfect - so condensed, so powerful.

Cathy Marsden

I wish Dr Schuman was my GP. It's wonderful to hear that a doctor knows his patients so well as a person that he can suggest reading poetry to them.

Gregor Groenewold

Dr Schuman seems such an inspiring person. His voice is already incredibly calming, yet one's always keen to know what he has to say next. I love the way he deals with poems and poetry in the context of helping people. Both works he chose were perfect, and I can imagine they would both be able to help me when necessary.

Lynn Waddington

I really enjoyed this insightful discussion. I wish there were more GP's who recognise the value of literature and poetry when treating their patients. So much content in a short video. Thank you.

John Middleton

Hugely impressed by Andrew Schuman and his approach to grief/heartbreak. had never heard of Taketsubo and found it fascinating, will have to read more about it.

Raihana M

I wish there were more GP's like him.

Kandala Singh

So great that there are open minded GP's like Andrew Schuman. I enjoyed hearing about the stories he talked about. And 'Sometimes' is so soothing! Thank you for sharing!

cherry chapman

Dr. Andrew Schuman's sensitive and insightful approach to bereavement must be very comforting for his patients who have suffered loss. The fluidity in which he approaches the Kubler Ross stages is to be commended. Loss comes in many forms, it is a unique and at times overwhelming sensation.

Suzanne Hillier

A really inspiring and informative video .
Such a wonderful doctor, and yes, a great choice of poems .
Thank you .

Fruzsina Tóth

As a medicine student I really appreciate this video. It is inspiring to see that a doctor is capable of doing much more than writing prescriptions.

Victoria Jay

That was a really wonderful conversation to listen into. I appreciated Andrew Schuman's comments and choice of poems. He is so right to consider his patients sensitivities when they may be grieving, vulnerable or distressed and to delicately offer literature to them. In this way he offers a gift and not a 'solution' because there

may not be a 'solution' to the pain they are experiencing. A gift may more easily be accepted.

Amanda Simmonds

Dr Schuman is such an inspiring GP. To be able to so sensitively help his patient discover what it is that works for them, rather than being prescriptive, a very humane approach. Even just the act of taking the time to really listen to the patient must be healing. The old prescriptions for melancholy are so sensible; but it seems it really is about finding what works for each person. Writing/journaling, mindfulness, gratitude - scientific evidence now show the benefits to our mental health and as guards against depression, although these are really ancient wisdom. They can empower individuals where external situations are hard to change.

Sue Reid

Andrew Schuman is so interesting to listen to, I really appreciate his viewpoint on things and his sensitivity. I wish he were my GP.

Kelly Ingrid Holman

I'm lost for words. This discussion was so sensitive, so exquisite. I feel I would like to say so much more but can't. Much to reflect on. Thank you.

Melody Emmett

What an amazing thing for a doctor to prescribe poetry to a patient. How wonderful. I feel deeply moved by this. I have never heard of such a thing. I have never heard of Takotsubo either. How absolutely fascinating. I am learning something new every minute. Feeling very stimulated and alive.

Lynsey Calderwood

I agree. Brilliant and inspiring video. I had to stop half way through watching to tell my partner to go watch it!

jane dederick

Dr Schuman's sensitive approach to people and appreciation of their emotional diversity and capacity as well as his evident love of literature are wonderfully portrayed in the video and I hope the dimension in which he operates can be made an essential part of medical training courses - soon!

Marie Kenny

What an enlightening and humane video. I really want to go back over so much of this course, truly inspirational. I know of couples who have died within a short time of each other. They cannot go on without their other half. Heartbroken! I think you young people are vulnerable when a relationship breaks up . They too are heartbroken and some sadly cannot go on. They cannot "get over it" Dr. Schuman is an amazing GP and the idea of giving poetry, anthology to allow them to choose . Agency and choice when a death occurs is so important. I love Emily Dickinson's poem about the bustle in a house, so simple yet profound.

Louisa Heno

Can he be my GP? He seems to be genuinely interested in helping his patients - as individual people - the best way he possibly can. Rare quality, that.

Katie Couper

I have really appreciated all of Andrew Schuman's explanations related to mental health over the course. He puts things in such a clear and honest way that makes it very easy to understand.

Jackie Brown

I have often wondered precisely what bipolar is, and that was a very clear and understandable approach to the condition. Thank you, Dr Schuman. It must be a very good feeling having Andrew Schuman as one's GP.

Cristina Suarez

I think so every time there's an interview with him.

Isabel Coughlin

Very informative thank you. It sounds as though Dr Schuman's patients are not only well cared for, but treated with great respect and involved in their treatment. He also made the point that drugs have different effects on different people - how refreshing to hear a recognition that 'no one size fits all' in drug treatment.

Dr Schuman personifies the medical practitioner as described in Saki Santorelli's book 'Heal Thy Self' - he seems to recognise the collaborative nature of the relationship between the doctor, a vulnerable healer (because he acknowledges that he doesn't have all the answers) and the patient's own powerful inner healer ("I know what's right for me"). Saki Santorelli reminds us that neither party is more or less than the other and that patients want to be seen as whole and not simply as a collection of symptoms or labelled as an illness or disability. May there be more like Andrew Schuman.

Learner Comments: Dr Simon Curtis

Ann Ruane

Simon's voice is soothing, relaxed and non threatening. It was a pleasure listening to his experiences of learning and treating dementia patients and their careers. It is my

belief that this interview between Paula and Simon Ought to be published and broadcast worldwide. I feel a whole new world is opening up for me in following my first love of music and sharing it with others. Thank you

Irene Hill

Another very good interview, and Simon is so caring, and so calm in his talking, while being very informative. Thank you both.

vivien teasdale

How very informative this was, and what a lovely person Simon Curtis seems - what a pity all doctors aren't like that.

Carol Groves

Like so many fellow learners, I find Dr Curtis inspirational in his attitudes and commitment to care for dementia patients.

Cheryl Kashuba

Fascinating discussion. Dr Curtis is such an articulate man with a soothing voice and a marvelous manner of explaining himself.

Maggie Holmes

Brilliant interview with Dr Simon Curtis - informative and sensitive - it felt therapeutic just listening to him!

Leslie Corona

Dr. Curtis has beautiful points of view about dementia and everything surrounding it. I've received lots of classes about this but none a humanitarian as this.

Steph N

How I wish we had more doctors like Dr Curtis. I am sure a little bit of help in the right direction would make the world of difference.

Rose Roberts

Thank you, Dr. Curtis for your expertise, insights and compassion.

Mary Donnelly

This was so powerful and enlightening. Thank you Dr Simon Curtis.

Nadezhda Bronnikova

I admire such people as Dr. Curtis. I enjoyed the lecture (if I can say it was a lecture). It's very informative, logical and passionate in its own sort of way.

Margaret Grant

Really enjoyed hearing from Dr. Simon Curtis. Informative and thought provoking.

Jacqueline Budris

KUDOS to Dr. Simon for explaining in such simple terms the adverse effects of stress. I could listen to him forever. thank you.

Joanna Shacklock

Wow! I wish Dr Curtis was my GP! I think the idea of having poetry on the walls in the waiting room is genius - so much better than live TV, which is normally a news loop creating more stress (for me, anyway).

Kate Parrott

Really good to hear a GP who genuinely seems to care and understand

Daphne Franklin-White

What a lovely person Dr Curtis is. I wish he were my GP.

Casey Dorman

Being a psychologist who has studied stress, I thought of skipping through this video, as it would teach me little, but Dr. Curtis is both eleganta and informative in his discussion and it left even me thinking about stress and literature on a more profound level.

Mel Jackson

If only all GP's took this way of looking at and treating stress and its related symptoms!!

Margaret Kennedy

What a super caring doctor. Lots of great information on current research into areas other than drugs. His last comment about owing our older demented patients much better care than is currently given was powerful.

Demelda Penkitty

Very taken with Dr Curtis and his sensitive approach, his acknowledgement of our differences as unique individuals rather than a generic group makes a refreshing change

Diana Walsh

Simon Curtis has such a calming voice any stress I was feeling went whilst listening to him. A great opening discussion on how literature may or may not help individuals suffering from what after is a very disabling condition.

Learner Comments: Dr Jennifer Wild

Janine J

Dr. Wild was an excellent guest. She has such a calm and clear way of speaking.

Mariana Casale O'Ryan

[...] This is such a valuable conversation! Very very helpful to listen to a specialist!

Ancuta Bell

Until today I associated PTSD with war and disasters. It is interesting to find out that different genders can experience PTSD. The poem is a reflection of a personal experience and I find it very sad. I enjoy listening to the soft and clear voice of J.Wild.

Dawn S

Interesting video. Jennifer Wild had such a calming, soft voice. Amazing to learn it can be 10 years before being diagnosed & getting treatment. Excellent touching poem & good to hear from a woman's perspective too. Interesting to discuss the gender issues of PTSD.

Eric John Large

It greatly helps to hear the gentle voice of a therapist or teacher.

Karen Hastings

Really enjoyed the talk with Jennifer and I found the poem deeply moving.

Amanda Smith

The video with Dr Jennifer Wild was very informative... and I'm enjoying the balance of information that we are presented with... I was not expecting a poem written in 1653 to be so amazing...

Sergey Solomonov

I was very impressed by Dr Jennifer Wild's voice and manner of speaking. I felt relaxed, listening to her answers. I like her ability to calm down by voice!

Ann Ruane

I found the interview with Dr Jennifer Wild extremely informative and personally beneficial. Thank you

Lorna Koskela

What a fabulous interview. So much content - and different aspects of PTSD - thank you.

Annabel Seargeant

Jennifer Wild's calm voice would be enough for me to begin feeling relaxed! Her authoritative yet measured approach is very reassuring.

Dr. Rachael L. Turner

I thoroughly enjoyed listening to Dr Wild and got a lot out of this interview. I was staggered that it was typical for patients not to seek help for their condition until some 10 years after the initial event. Modern treatments for PTSD including writing, reading and sharing experience online is very helpful. I participate in similar online forums myself to learn from others and to help cope with some inexplicable physical/mental symptoms I encounter as a result of a traumatic event I experienced last year. It's one of the reasons I signed up for this course.....to learn, listen, share and heal.

Clara E. Herrera

Perfect explanation of the condition. Finally I got it!!

Debra Zyla

Yes! Thank you for this! Dr. Byrne, you could easily lead a course on literature and women's mental health, especially with guests like Dr. Wild, and I would immediately enroll. T

Nilufar Imam

Extremely helpful way of Dr Wild explaining manifestation of PTSD after as long as ten years!

Jackie Brown

This was one of the very best discussions on the course for me.

Michelle Thomasson

I really appreciated the discussion between Paula and Jennifer, it was full of understanding and gentleness

Sarah Holmes

This is fascinating. I'm interested in how Dr Wild reinforces the importance of talking therapy, reiterating what Dr Rivers believed to be important at Craiglockhart, almost 100 years ago.

Liz Hegarty

It was so interesting to hear Dr Wild talk about updating trauma memories as a way of slowly moving on from them. Time can lend another perspective. Almost like a story continuing to unfold.

Aileen Gasson

" I can't find these words. I feel them" - what a beautiful way Dr Jennifer Wild describes how a poem can touch the heart.

Robert Jackson

The discussion is as ever fascinating and in this instance, my lack of expertise in assessing and identifying with poetry is not an issue. This is such a beautiful, simple poem that even I can understand the pain and trauma of this woman, from 400 years ago.

Another thoroughly moving section.

Learner Comments: Stephen Fry

Jode Matthews

Perhaps if Stephen Fry had taught poetry at school I would have developed a better appreciation of it by now - I could listen to him all day! And while almost all of these formal concepts were new to me, and sometimes pretty hard to grasp, I found myself relating to some of the content by drawing from my experience in graphic design. EG I love Wordsworth's idea that it is the rules and constraints of the "scanty plot of ground" that liberate the artist. I hear ya there, WW!

Irene Hill

I could listen to Stephen Fry forever. Thank you for this interview. Thank you to both of you for this conversation.

I appreciate both Stephen's openness and honesty in speaking of his depression, and also of his love of language and poetry. I appreciate that he says no particular poem could be prescribed - we are all different and different poems speak to different people. The two poems he mentioned that speak to him so deeply do not speak to me, but that is okay, many others do. But his love of language and words and the feel of a poem in your mouth - that speaks deeply to me.

I also really appreciate about what he said about writing on paper. - that brain hand connection. I have noticed that too.

I have not worded this well, but I so appreciated this conversation. Thank you.

Andrea Mbarushimana

I love the interviews in this course. This was no exception. Stephen's language and imagery were so inspiring I had a kind of epiphany about a memory that's been haunting me recently and began to write a poem about it. Suddenly the emotional context of the memory made sense, listening to him talk about turbulence and calm.

Rose Roberts

Thank you Stephen Fry for sharing your story. I am left humbled and speechless -- it has taken a few days to for me to leave any type of response. Stephen and fellow-learners, like Lesley in her comment below, have stated: we have language. Yes! It was language in the form of books and my love of reading that became my anchor when I was very young and very lost. The words of authors let me step outside of my pain and gain perspective, kept me company when I felt isolated, spoke to me as if they knew my story and had decided to write it for me until I could write my own. I didn't realize it back then. No matter. They did their work. Decades later, language -- reading and writing -- continue to be my 'lifeline'.

Ann Ruane

Thank you Stephen for enlightening me on so many issues that puzzled me during my life. There are expressions that support me now. "the first thing to go is energy", "giving form to the chaos of life", "doubt about the meaning of life can disappear". The one I love is "poets refresh an experience", " things that can be annoyance to me". These are experiences I have and never seem to meet friends who feel the same. Now I know I am not alone

Anne Dickson

Now if I had had a teacher like that explaining and talking poetry to me at school (or even during my abortive university career) I would have felt much more comfortable exploring and understanding it. Stephen set the scene so much better for explaining form and structure which so often frustrated me and I am definitely going to read the book to find out more about some of the principles they talked about. The one that resonated most was negative capability. Just being in the moment rather than dissecting and searching for meaning which is what we did at school.

Rosie Godfrey

What a joy to witness Stephen Fry (in conversation with Jonathan) speaking so eloquently, with that gentle passion for words that he has. Yet with such humility and generosity to the 'audience' who he knows will be watching at a later date. I could watch and listen to him for hours. Worth doing the course just for that!

John Edwards

To say that Stephen Fry is good is an under-statement for he is even more than excellent. Each listen or read of it would reveal another interesting point. A great video and well done.

Judith Mathews

I really enjoyed this discussion. I loved Fry's comment on reading poetry slowly and aloud. I will try rereading the same poem over several days, as he suggests, until I "own it"!

Laura Jones

What a wonderful interview. I wish Stephen Fry could see himself through his fans eyes, that he is a warm, funny, charming and incredible intelligent man. This seems

to be one of the cruellest things about mental health illnesses - people cannot see how wonderful they really are, only others can see it for them.

Jane Abson

It's always a joy to listen to Stephen Fry, and this interview is no exception. I love that he is so knowledgeable yet modest with it. He probably hates being called a "national treasure", but that's how I think of him.

Emma Brown

I've always loved Steven Fry, after all he was the person who read me Harry Potter. What he said that connected with me the most is how there are these things, whether it be poems, lyrics or quotes but they feel like they're giving you a hug, like they're telling you it's okay. There is nowhere I feel safer or more at home than I do when I'm listening to my favourite band, whether it's in my room with my headphones on or standing in a ground with thousands singing those songs out along side them.

Chris P

I really enjoyed this interview, a real treat. Thank you. Stephen made such inspiring and individual comments,
'Wherever I go I find a poet has been there before me'
'Poets can refresh an experience'
His deep connection with poetry comes over with such passion.

Eliška Hudcová

I simply love Stephen Fry. His honesty and kindness. Do you know his "The Secret Life Of The Manic Depressive"? I really admire how vividly he talks about mental health's issues.

Margaret Young

Ah the eloquence of Stephen Fry! Yet again this course presents us with excellence. I began the course out of interest and curiosity, I suppose, but have found the discussions inspiring way beyond any expectations. Wonderful!

Helen Bennett

Inspiring - I have learnt so much from listening to Stephen and Jonathan in conversation - Thank you

Angela E. Brooks

Always good to listen to Stephen Fry, he is knowledgeable and very giving with his personal experiences and difficulties.

Lesley Pearce

I brilliant conversation to eavesdrop on! It was a shame when it ended. So many salient points. I loved the description by Stephen Fry of writing being like a maelstrom funnelled into a point where the pen meets the paper.

Katie Couper

Stephen Fry is so natural and honest about his own experience - a particularly interesting interview - thank you!

Sue Turner

I found the interview with Stephen most enlightening. He has an endearing and humble manner and makes such intelligent observations. I found the quote from WH Auden about one's demons and angels to be very perceptive and thought-provoking.

Kate Baty

Another fabulous interview with Stephen Fry - I'm truly in awe of the intelligence of the man and love how he approaches the topic with deep thought and also humour. So much interesting information in here and I'm glad Stephen has found this outlet that helps him - the emphasis on "for me" is key. Personally, I don't write poetry, but I can see the appeal of creating order from chaos during tough times.

Missus Webster

Ever since week 1 I have been looking forward to hearing from Stephen Fry again. The more I hear of his ideas, the more my respect and admiration grows. Thank you so much for sharing so openly, and honestly of your art, and of your opinions. I too, love the Nightengale piece, and was delighted that the Romeo and Juliet reference came up, since I'd often wondered about that. It's almost like nowadays when people make a "pop-culture" reference. How fun. The other point I loved was talking about writing with pen and paper rather than with the keyboard. :) I type so quickly, it's easy for dreck to come through my fingertips. But because writing with a pen takes effort - one has to slow down long enough to put the effort in, during which time - my mind filters out the lesser ideas. My paper writing plays, or stories are always of a higher quality because of the pace and the forethought put into them.

Lorraine Craig

A very interesting interview. Stephen Fry is so passionate and eloquent on his love of poetry. Thank you for another frank and interesting discussion.

Tricia Waller

Think he should be a poetry ambassador and then maybe it would become a bit more popular

Sue Ashford

Stephen Fry again opening his soul and talking with so much honesty I found the whole interview not only very interesting but also very touching

Tricia Waller

What an amazing and generous soul Stephen Fry is! I don't think anyone could fail to be moved by that interview. He must have suffered a great deal during his lifetime and yet he bounces back so certainly an inspiration to us all.

Connie Garrett

Outstanding interview... I have never felt so interested or mesmerised with a subject before.

Learner Comments: Lord Melvyn Bragg

Mary Donnelly

Such an interesting discussion with Melvyn Bragg. How beautifully he reads and is so honest without an ounce of egotism Reading aloud would give people living alone an opportunity to actually use their voice which many say is a real difficulty for them. sometimes when I don't understand something I go back and read it aloud. I too used to think of Wordsworth in terms of Nature poems without much depth. How wrong I was! Michael is such a beautiful poem, enhanced by the way Melvyn read it. I need to look up the complete one. I really smiled when I heard him talk about his influences being comics. My brother spent all his pocket money on comics and was an early reader at a time when there wasn't money for books and we were still on rations. after the war. It was interesting that he experienced depression at 13 and 14. Food for thought and something that the education system needs to be aware can happen at that age. (edited)

Stuart Holding

What an age we live in. No more heroes for us; the Gods have taken their leave, Hector, Odysseus, Achilles - all just men with feet (or heels) of clay. Well if there was ever a hero for our times it's Melvyn Bragg - the more so now as I wasn't aware of his background of depression. I've even listened to the video twice! I had a very similar background and upbringing to him - not in specifics but in terms of working class background to grammar school via an all female primary school ("spinsters" for him, nuns for me). I can also connect with his childhood reading habit. I also read everything I could get my hands on - including all of the comics he mentioned.

Linda Hallam Bailey

I so enjoyed listening to Melvyn Bragg. I recall childhood depression and how I wish I had read more at that time. Reading out loud brings a sense of the self and since starting this course I have benefited from this. The course is like music to my ears. I've just remembered that at around 12/13 I read Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys which had a profound effect on me. I recall it was a heavy and dark book but I identified with it and my own dark adolescent feelings at that time. Breathing words, pipeline, most of what Melvyn said resonated with me. I am finding this start to the week inspirational. Thank you

Philipa Coughlan

Can Melvyn Bragg run the country please he talks such sense.

Jennifer Shoemith

Yes what an amazing Education Minister he would be.

Kim Griffiths

How wonderful to hear Melvyn Bragg read that poem. I'd love to hear him read more poems. I loved how he read the poem, his voice and how it sounded.

The whole interview was very thought provoking about breath and breathing out words and hearing the written words aloud.

It was interesting to have him actually say what depression meant to him and how it felt. Having to regroup oneself and living in tiny moments to survive, to face up to life.

Diane Wiseman

What a insightful and moving discussion-all just breaths-but what impact! It is so helpful to hear someone as respected as Melvyn Bragg speak openly of his experience of depression and 'the works of imagination 'which helped him. He wears his erudition so lightly, but uses it to such good effect. It is particularly good to hear men speak out. I think as women, we often are more willing and able to share our feelings and it is good that more men do so, both for themselves but also to help younger men and boys.

I think both Paula and Melvyns' points on reading aloud are right and important for all the reasons they identified, but also it brings together those involved in a common moment and a sharing of imagination and emotion. It definitely should be part of school day to day activity.

Mary Acton Adams

I am all lit up by this interview with Melvyn Bragg. The poem 'Michael' is sad beautiful and poignant. The crag somehow lodged itself in my imagination....the old dog too. And the heartbroken shepherd.....

My husband and I read aloud at times not knowing what a beneficial thing we are doing. Melvyn Bragg's description of 'the struggle to get through the next hour' was very apt as was his comment that way depression is self focused. Explains much . Reading poetry or a novel must literally lift our attention out/up and that must be

the relief factor. The question is how does this work...can reading affect us this dramatically? And I think it can.....especially after all the considerations of this course.

Victoria White

Much wisdom expressed in this discussion. I plan to listen to it a second time. Thank you to Lord Melvyn Bragg. This is probably the first time I have heard this shared and articulated: the sheer energy and effort required just to get through a day, from one hour to the next, when one is suffering from depression. This is so true, so recognizably true. Reading can definitely be a lifeline at those times, when life slows to an agonizing crawl.

Robert Jackson

Week after week on this course, I find myself moved by conversations such as this one. I have always admired and loved the range of work by Melvyn Bragg, so I knew I would find this fascinating, but never imagined he would speak this movingly and frankly about his bouts of depression.

I have said that this course has affected me in many ways, but none more so than this video. The genius of this man in explaining this subject matter is clear for all to see. And the way he was so clearly moved on reading that beautiful poem (check out the Wordsworth course, fellow learners) is plain to see, and something which I readily identify with myself.

On a lighter note, about childhood reading. I'm some years younger than Lord Bragg, but I too remember comics such as Rover, Wizard, Hotspur (I'll throw in Victor and Hornet for others who might be listening) and spent hours reading and re-reading them. Nick Smith! It's Goals That Count!

Now I'll go and dry my eyes...

Robert Jackson

Just as an adjunct to an earlier post of mine, this has moved me so much that I am going to save it and use it as some form of 'life manual' :-)

Rose McCready

I'm a big fan of Melvyn Bragg & was drawn to him even more when some time ago I heard him discussing the depression he experienced in his 20s. And I think it's true, particularly if you experience depression or anxiety at a young age, it helps to know you are not going mad as such and it's OK to talk about it & to get support.

I hadn't considered the thing about reading aloud being a form of breathing exercise.

I live a very isolated life and hardly talk to anyone, so it's something I could try for therapeutic reasons alone.... to just read aloud.

A big thank you to Lord Bragg for such a great contribution to the course!

Robert Jackson

Is there anyone in this country who speaks so eloquently and sensitively on so many subjects? No, I think not!

Rose McCready

He has a great mind and a big heart. Perfect!

Patricia Gibbs

Loved it when Melvyn Bragg said that reading aloud is the 'best lining of the mind you can get' and a 'great reservoir for the rest of your life'. He is such a lovely man, so wise, yet unpretentious. He hasn't experienced an easy, cushioned life and, importantly, he can connect with ordinary people.

Of all the excellent guest speakers so far, I find his testimony to the use of literature as resource to heal and comfort, the most compelling.

Gillian Taylor

Really enjoyed this interview. Melvyn Bragg appeared to speak very openly and sincerely and a lot of what he had to say resonated with me. I too was an avid reader as a child. Books, stories, trips to the library were a lifeline for me. There were no other children to play with close by, there was a big age gap between me and my sister and my mother had her own mental health issues. So reading was my great escape, companionship and diversion. I also enjoyed being read aloud to by my mother. If I particularly enjoyed a book or found a passage difficult I would read it aloud to myself.

In the last section I commented about how depression for me was all consuming and the effort it took to get through a rather simple day. To hear Melvyn also spontaneously express this was very revealing and comforting. I know people do nod sympathetically and say I know how you feel or that it must be awful. But my mind is always saying back, do you really. I know that experience of depression is highly personal but hearing Melvyn speak I did think we have trodden a very similar road and survived

Margaret Barrie

Wonderful conversation on many levels. I have tended to see depression as a sort of implosion of the person - withdrawing from the external world into a deep and often dark place within where there is no energy left to deal with anything outside - Lord Bragg describes it extremely well. And the concept of the breath being the core aspect of speech - really resonate with that.

Anne Harding

What an insightful and moving interview. Melvyn Bragg gave such a valuable description of the overwhelming nature of depression. I loved what he had to say not only about the benefits of reading Wordsworth and the like, but also of comics, and of libraries. The closure of so many that is happening now is a tragedy. I absolutely agree about the value of reading aloud, and felt very privileged to be involved with the Reader Organisation for a couple of years, doing shared reading aloud with groups of people in their late eighties and upwards. It was a wonderful experience.

Judith Ball

I agree that Melvyn Bragg gave a fantastic interview. I have enjoyed reading his novels set in the Lake District and agree with him that both prose and poetry are equally valuable sources of comfort. I especially liked his comments about depression manifesting itself as an obsession with oneself and that poetry and prose can provide an escape route from this obsession. A very interesting and illuminating interview ... Thank you.

Alberta Manfredi-Woodall

Also, when the conversation came around to imagination; works of imagination can take you into your own imagination really struck a chord with me. I like to draw and paint for relaxation and many times when I can't find a muse I pull up You Tube and watch painters painting and it sets me free to do my own. Again, this interview was just the best! I was so happy when Melvyn Bragg said not only poetry but prose, plays and even comic books are of value.

BEV COLE

I cannot talk of depression so I will exert myself on Lord Bragg of Wigton! I adore this man for all his many talents and virtues. On the radio he is a walking encyclopaedia, as a presenter he is camera-friendly but shy and in his novels he is supreme in his ability to convey how the past feeds the present. He is open about his tragic & happy life, high & low points – for me these contradictions add to his firm and constant appeal. Ordinary people love him because he talks the talk of the working class and likewise, the 'actors and men of refinement and education (Garrick Club)' meet him on equal terms. He has a special place in my heart because of his close relationship with his mother; his novel 'Grace and Mary' touched me deeply as it laments the past, ageing parents and dementia.

Liz Watson

Oh my goodness, how moving to watch and hear Melvyn Bragg reading that extract from 'Michael' which clearly means so much to him. Thanks for your honesty, Lord Bragg!

I love the idea of reading as a reservoir you can draw on when life is tough.

Rose Roberts

Authentic, wise, realistic, helpful, hopeful. These are the words that whirled through my head as I listened to Melvyn Bragg speak of his experience. I hear so much of my own experience in his words. But also in his voice...that instrument which shapes our breath into words that we settle in our hearts. A truly moving and valuable conversation. Grateful to have witnessed it.

Learner Comments: Jack Lankester

Denise Hayes

His enthusiasm and engagement with his subject is contagious. I really enjoyed this discussion. I also think that reading aloud and visualising is helpful and not worrying when you don't understand every word.

Ellen Simmons

I agree with Jack. I also believe that he conveyed his love for poetry beautifully and he is very inspiring.

Pei Hsin Lu

The interview was really helpful. With honesty, openness and kindness, their words made me feel I am not alone. When I first started to read literature as a way to relieve sadness, my friends asked me if literature made me feel happy. I said: "No, but it helps me feel better." My friends thought that I was weird since I read sad poems when I was already very upset. During the interview, they perfectly expressed how I felt. And their conversation really makes me feel that people all have the same experience, we suffer together and none of us will be alone in the sadness.

Janet McCarthy

I wish Jack had been my teacher. To be told I don't have to understand everything to enjoy a poem is revolutionary and to read aloud - it's as though I have found the key to a whole new world. Thank you.

Joanne Woof

Thank you Jack, for sharing your experiences. I found his story touching and really felt for him especially when he was talking about the shame of having these natural feelings. This is something people with poor mental health feel frequently! His attitude towards the poetry was refreshing and I'm sure it appeals to his students, knowing that they don't have to understand all the words to appreciate the poem must help.

Anne Dickson

Inspired. Once again I would have been reading poetry for years if I had teachers explain it like this.

Joanne M

How honest and inspiring ! I really appreciated Jack being so open and vulnerable during this interview - I mean who really WANTS to talk about having their heart broken in public ? I learned so much. I loved that Jack says we don't need to understand everything about the poem and to visualise and try and feel the emotion. What a wonderful Teacher he must be. Thank you Jack for telling us about your experience - you are inspiring !

Ann Ruane

What a thought inspiring interview with Jack. I have never understood poetry in the way he describes it. I think my mind has been opened to risk taking the time to explore poems from a fresh viewpoint Many thanks

Isabel Coughlin

Oh my, what an inspirational teacher he must be! So reassuring to hear him say that he thinks the emotional response to the poem is more important than dissecting it and endeavouring to understand every word, as though there's one right answer. I lacked confidence in my own thoughts and feelings (not just about literature) partially as a result of being taught like that all those years ago...it took me until my 50s to realise that I actually had a valid opinion!

Jane Derbyshire

When I read Sonnet 31 to myself I thought- oh forget it, I'll never relate this convoluted, clever language. But then, listening to Jack Lankester talk about his relationship with the poem and then read it, I realized that I've had that experience of heartbreak myself, and I let down the barrier I'd put up to the language. I love the way the poet uses the last six lines to ask the moon the questions he really wants his human lover to answer. Asking the moon instead is such a lonely effect of the poem.

Cristina Chelli

I love Jack's honesty and humility when he talks about his own experience with heartbreak and with poetry as relief. I have really enjoyed his invitation to read a poem without expecting to understand everything. It's a very liberating condition for a student.

John Middleton

An inspirational teacher. Loved the quote from Tony Harrison about poetry allowing us to look into the darkness without turning to stone. He echoed comments from week 1 about the value of a formal structure to capture and control the emotions in a poem.

I think I went to music more at his age, rather than poetry but now wish I had found Sidney's work back then.

P Dagherne

I really like Jack's honesty as he shares this deeply distressing period in his life. What I find interesting is when he explains how the poem transforms into an intimate friend and one no longer feels alone in the world. When he reads the poem it is very moving because he still feels so connected to this poem as if it is his dearest friend. I am also starting to understand now why literature has such an effect compared to films or visual representations of art. Reading literature as he says is not a passive process. It makes the mind work to conjure images. This process is highly intimate, creative and hence therapeutic.

Carole Fry

Thank you to Jack for sharing such a personal event, and introducing me to Philip Sidney, who I am interested to find out more about. I am sure your students find you inspiring.

Irene Hill

I thank you, Jack, too. I am decades older than Jack, but wish that I had had a teacher like him in school. When I was younger I loved to read (still do) but I found everything that we read in high school - the way it was taught - it took the life out of everything we read. Except for one teacher, who opened up everything we read. I think he must have been like Jack. But we moved house so I only had that teacher very briefly. But everything I read in his class is still alive for me. Because of my high school experience of English, I totally avoided this when I went to university, because I did not want to lose my love of reading. How I wish that there were more teachers of literature like Jack.
(edited)

Jacob Cross

Thank you Jack for your heartfelt and profound statements! I really liked his discussion of a sonnet or other structured form putting emotions into a proverbial "cage."

Aileen Stevenson

I have to say that this video is the most enlightening insight into how poetry can assist in times of turmoil I think I will ever hear. Thank you to Jack Lankester for agreeing not only to being so open and honest about his own experience but being able so eloquently describe and explain his thoughts on the process and how it can help others. This was no prepared speech but from the heart with knowledgeable expression of the workings of the poetic subject matter. Thanks to Paula too for setting up this interview. I rarely download transcripts but I will this one although nothing can match seeing and listening to this.

Jennifer Shoemith

Wow. I was so deeply moved by Jack's ability to express his emotional experience so honestly and openly. I could almost share his pain. I imagine he's an inspiring teacher. Thank you so much Jack and I wish you love in your life. (edited)

Jennifer Jones-Spross

Jack's description of his suffering through heartbreak moved me deeply. I experienced something similar while at university and escaped to the poems of John

Donne (and other literature). I agree with Jack that you never really get over heartbreak.

I would love to have had him as an English teacher as in my day the emphasis was in understanding every word and line and as a result the musicality of the verse was lost.

I shall adapt his approach in my future reading.

Robert Jackson

I'm almost speechless at this and I have to say that this course continues to bring out new masterpieces and thought-provoking moments. That was a quite wonderful discussion. I could feel Jack Lankester's heartbreak as he was talking (I had a distinct lump in my throat), but also how he found the way forward to recover. And Paula's astute questioning perfectly set the scene.

Deborah Fyrth

A really insightful and interesting interview. I was particularly interested in the idea of poems - being contained themselves - becoming a container for the reader's emotions. So much of what counsellors offer is to do with containment and a safe, boundaried space that makes the client feel safe enough to express their deepest emotions.

John Smith

I found Jack Lankester to be truly inspirational, and I would love to have had him as my English teacher at school. He has such a profound insight into the human condition.

Ellen Moody

I very much appreciated Jack Lankester's honesty and genuineness. I thank him.

Michael Reardon

Absolutely understood and praise be to Jack Lankester. No pretenses. Straight talking.

Ana Skinner

I find it very comforting how human feelings and emotions seem to be the same over thousands of years. I think Jack Lankester must be a very inspiring teacher. He makes me feel like reading far more poetry. He is right that there must be something very special about poetry given that it has been around since the beginning of times, in one form or another. I am also reassured by the idea that you don't have to try and understand every word as that prevented me from reading poetry in the past. I deal with several languages on a daily basis and try to understand the meaning of every word. I now realise that applying that principle to poetry might not always work.

Brenda Healy

To me Jack put into simple words what poetry is all about, he was so concise and spoke in plain language. He was truly inspirational especially explaining that you

don't necessarily have to understand every word or line of a poem. How lucky his students are to have such a teacher.

Learner Comments: Lucy Clarke

Melanie Santamaria

Lucy expresses beautifully ideas about time and grieving. I loved her idea about literature being in the present continuous, so that as we loop through cycles of grief the text remains constant.

Rhon Shara

It's amazing to hear Lucy articulate so many things. Definitely, the pressures of not moving on fast enough and of not conforming to a particular phase of grief, makes is all horribly worse. Also, what Lucy said about when you're feeling sad and having that feeling of failing etc as opposed to going back to that moment in Hamlet is so very eye opening . Thank you

Ellen Simmons

WOW! This interview blew me away. Lucy knew what she was talking about and her insight into Hamlet was amazing. Her speech about how we don't heal but we are constantly healing for the rest of our lives meant a lot to me. Grief will constantly return to us during our lives and literature will always be there to comfort.

Kandala Singh

What a lovely, honest interview! She spoke so deeply and beautifully about her loss and her relationship with literature. I think I am going to show this video to anyone who says that one can't be nuanced in one's thinking and emotional at the same time.

kirsty stringer

You are great Lucy Clarke. Very enjoyable and interesting. Thank you.

Erica Game

Can we get Lucy to run a Future Learn poetry course? Seriously she is awesome. I only wish I had had her as a teacher

Marialuisa Vitali

Thank you Lucy. Your perspective was inspirational to me, that's true "you'll never get it over", simply because being different, feeling different from now on.

Sally Harris

Wouldn't have minded Lucy Clarke as my English Lit teacher! There were so many interesting points in her talk that resonated with me but in particular the idea of being 'undone' by grief; the feelings of not being oneself, not computing things clearly, not processing life well. When my father (who taught me to read before I went to school) died, I couldn't read a single thing for over a year. I really worried that in losing him I'd also lost forever the thing that we loved and shared. The desire to read has returned but I can understand what Lucy says about the absolute joy and intensity that was felt is not quite the same. I don't think I believe that literature can be harmful, or any more harmful than other influences, on a depressed person.

Frances Saunders

The interview with Lucy Clarke was inspiring, thank you Lucy. Her comment that 'You don't get over it' was a revelation. We are expected to move on and the most intense grief does lessen, but we still cherish the memory.

Karen Jowitt

What a beautiful, honest conversation and so brave of Lucy to share. I believe that sharing a narrative like this can be so powerful in helping others to heal. I do hope that Lucy will at some stage will return to reading for pleasure, but I can empathise with her current position. Thank you, once again an excellent learning took place for me.

Sonia Barnard

What a wonderful conversation. I hadn't taken on board Hamlet,s visible means of expressing his mourning. I had tuned in to the invisible thoughts of the mind Perhaps because I have experienced inner turmoil. Trying to hide the grief I felt from my children. It was such an encouraging conversation especially when Lucy said that wearing certain clothing was her way of expressing I'm a bit fragile today keep away from me. I have a locket I wear for similar reasons. It contains pictures of myself and my late husband. My close friends know I wear it for those reasons but also for happy occasions that I wish he could share . Interestingly the word widow ones from a word meaning empty.

Beatriz Brasil

Brilliant, honest all encompassing testimony on Grief. Thank you Lucy Clarke for your Hamlet. (edited)

Ruth Cowan

Thoughtful, sensitive and thought-provoking interview. Thank you Lucy

Kay Ridings

The interview with Lucy was beautiful and her honesty about the grieving progress was a very relevant and true reflection of what I myself have experienced and still very much trying to work through. Thank you for sharing this on the course.

Katia Shulga

What a beautiful interview, feel touched to the core. Thank you Lucy for your openness and honesty, your students are very lucky.

Margaret Dennison

I have had to listen to this three times and read it very closely. There is so much depth to this conversation. I found myself saying "yes that is what it is like" over again - the indecisiveness, the lack of concentration the feeling that I have changed and can never be the same again.

June Lowery-Kingston

Lucy made the view of Hamlet (at the start of the play) as a character in mourning (and not being allowed to mourn in his own time and at his own pace) very compelling. A very moving and insightful conversation. Thanks to both ladies for being willing to discuss their losses with us so openly. I felt I was there in the garden with them anyway.

Rosie Godfrey

Paula and Lucy have done it again! I could listen to them discussing poetry for hours. What a joy! And once more, a poem worth pouring over.

Jane Abson

How I would have loved a teacher like Lucy when I was a student! I never have been able to relate to Emily Dickenson's work but Lucy has given me something to work with.

Nelly Kelly

Lucy seems like a wonderful teacher. I would have loved to have had her teach me! I have always been very moved by Emily Dickensian poems, they have such an impact on me. 'And creak across my soul with those same boots of lead again' i find this image very powerful.

Angie Gurner

I could have listened to Lucy for much longer and her style, enthusiasm and way of articulating the meaning of a line struck a chord with me - lucky students!
The first line, I felt a funeral, in my brain, was such a powerful draw for me. The dread of attending a funeral, the memories of previous funerals that come crowding in, and the cold, the chill of sadness that creeps into your bones at a funeral.
The sense of detachment and jarring unreality is also vividly described and when I think back to funerals of those close to me I have little recollection of complete events but rather a series of images, almost like watching an old slideshow of black and white images, sharp, abrupt and deeply uncomfortable. I need to read some more E Dickinson!

Nina Chatelain

I feel the same as many of you have expressed here: that the discussion was inspiring and really demonstrated the complexity of 'unpacking' a poem. I love

Dickinson's use of sound and dashes and those 'awkward rhymes' that add many dimensions of resonance and meaning. She did write poetry like a kind of code that needs to be 'cracked' as Lucy commented at the beginning of the interview. It would be great to take a class from Lucy.

Lesley Pearce

I loved this discussion - Lucy's analysis of the poem was amazing. I started off not 'getting' the poem but after hearing Lucy, she totally made it understandable and I loved it. I want to read more Emily Dickinson now.

Sarah Gray

Lucy is an engaging speaker and I love listening to her. I want to read more Dickinson now I've been inspired.

Stevie Karahousou

Lucy Clarke - just lovely. More teachers like her please - what a world she must open for her students. She made the poem come to life for me and I will certainly be looking at further ED poetry.

Learner Comments: Rachel Kelly

Anthea CLARKE

What a wonderful interview with Rachel Kelly giving such a joyous way of healing. Thank you.

Kimberly Poindexter

I've felt low at times, but I don't think I've had a clinical depression. However, I feel I am getting so much advice as to how to prevent or lesson the affects of depression- exercise, eat well, help others, talk with someone, have meaningful work, practice mindfulness and read(out loud, poetry or prose, often). This was a great conversation.

Ms. Kelly encouraged me in so many ways. I really enjoyed hearing her personal story and how the bible, prayers and poetry soothed her when other things were not breaking through. Her work with depression support groups seems exciting as well. Awesome conversation! (edited)

Akosua Eghan

I totally get it. This week I have been struggling to keep my head above water and her emphasis on changing your story reminded me that we do have control over our lives and our choices. I remember the experience of being depressed as a teenager and she expresses it so well. But for me her courage to use her experience to help others, to write about it and to make her personal contribution to the management of depression...what a lovely lady.

Monica King

Wow! What an incredible conversation! It was so good to listen to Rachel's experience and I loved the way her mum was able to choose a verse that began to lighten the darkness. She is now fulfilling a great need herself, having experienced the lows and the restoration provided by literature. Excellent!

Carol Barnfather

Thanks to Rachel for explaining her experiences so clearly. It was moving and insightful. Loved the description of lines of poetry being like "words verbally stroking you". Wonderful picture. Thank you!

judith trewick

I enjoined a creative writing group and often we read poems aloud I find that extremely helpful in finding my voice. Rachel needs to be cloned and prescribed on the NHS!

Joanna Shacklock

I love these interviews - such a great way to understand and learn. Thank you to Rachel and Paula. I can resonate with Rachel when she talks about using lots of different approaches - the body and mind have to be treated together though therapy, diet, mindfulness, exercise etc. The one aspect that I hadn't appreciated was poetry and prose and that's why, for me, this course has been invaluable.

Cally Booker

Rachel speaks very eloquently about that moment of starting to change the narrative in her mind. A lovely interview.

Rob Agg

I agree Cally. I think this is a brilliant interview and one that I will be returning to many times in the future. Listening to Rachel clearly explains some of the experiences I had when I went through a serious depression 10 years ago - the effects of that time have never really left me, always in the background. This course has been very important to me, helping me to cope with my anxiety, and listening to Rachel is a reminder to me that I am not alone. (edited)

Lesley Pearce

Really fascinating and informative video - Rachel spoke very eloquently and yet clearly about her experiences with her fight against depression. I feel I understand so much more as a result.

Michèle Bethke

[...] I have to say that watching this video this morning was a very uplifting experience for me. I have sensed a lowering of my spirits recently, plus some anxiety and a general feeling of a blanket of blueness hovering over my head. I think I can catch this early and shake it off. The poetry Rachel has shared was been very healing.

Deborah Fyrth

Another incredibly honest interview. Rachel makes so many really important points, not least that depression can manifest itself so very physically, and therefore needs to be treated holistically. I also love that she's so generously sharing poetry with her groups, and that she can very openly admit that this is therapeutic for her, as well as for the participants.

Christine Taylor

Rachel is an inspiration I have found this segment of the course very helpful and of course Rumi is most enlightening.

Wendy Greenberg

I listened and listened again and then again...extraordinary honesty and insight. Thought provoking and the nudge in the guts I needed in searching for new literature to "use". Started the course feeling the content was classic and been done to death. Interviews with Rachel and Lucy Clarke have woken me. I could sit, listen and be healed by just hearing their thoughts and experiences of and with literature

Debbie Rudell

OMG. My favorite discussion so far. So true, so true, so true. All of it. Thank you.

Susan Groom

What an amazing person Rachel Kelly is to share her story with us and to give her time to help others suffering from depression. About fifteen years ago my brother had a breakdown, he was a teacher at an inner London school and one day he just couldn't go into work and he just fell apart. He was prescribed medication and he saw a psychiatrist for awhile but one of the things that helped him was reading books. He wouldn't read anything that was too sad or that had anything too unpleasant in, even now when he feels himself getting depressed he turns to his books and becomes absorbed in them.

Alexa Brown

My favourite conversation of the course so far. I love Rachel's energy and enthusiasm in sharing the healing power of words in the groups she runs, and her

eloquent description of her period of depression. And the description of her life before depression sounds a warning bell - it's so easy to think of depression hitting you as a bleak fog when things are going badly, but less so of it hitting when life is running too fast and with too many pressures. This alone, for me, serves as a good reminder to take care of mental health as much as physical health.

Eduardo Villanueva

Listening to Rachel Kelly is very inspiring, for she has been in hell and returned alive, well, and wiser. Along the way, she has rediscovered nature and the nature of poetry's healing power. I will definitely get her book, because she has found words others others can't.

Cath Mason

I am deeply moved by Rachel's story and particularly how in the extremities of pain a soothing repetition breathed by her mother caused a shift I how she felt. This is astonishing and reassuring. Thank you Rachel and Paula for this discussion.

Kate Baty

A fascinating and honest interview - she is so expressive and articulate about her depression. She also speaks so passionately about poetry, which is wonderful to hear.

Margaret Harris

I found Rachel Kelly such an engaging and inspirational personality, but practical too, in her approach to helping those suffering from depression. I was interested in her mention of guilt, which I find seems to linger on way after getting over the depression. I still feel guilt in thinking I might not have given my children the best start in life, even though they are all seemingly happy adults.

Lorna Koskela

what a fantastic interview

I LOVE the way Rachel Kelly engages with the subject - knows her poets and the positive effect they had on her, but also her refreshing honesty in talking about her depression and breakdown and the false guilt associated with it.

Judith C

I absolutely loved this interview, I was so moved by Rachel's interview and the passion she spoke with. I loved the way Rachel shared her personal experiences so candidly and now using her experiences to help others. I also liked the fact she reads poems for the experience and how it makes her feel and not getting caught up with the technical. I think this was very well put. I often worry about the technicalities of a poem and get turned off as I feel I don't understand how it was put together. I don't know why as I am a feeling person who is moved by emotions. I also liked the mention of moving towards a holistic approach. I too feel this is the way forward using a variety of methods to heal our hurts. I feel so lifted by having listened to

Rachel. There is hope.....Thank you Rachel and all the best with your journey and the amazing work you are doing.

Learner Comments: Kate Behrens

Benita Kape

Two very brave and articulate people Kate and Peter. It is a courageous course all round.

Thank you to all involved including fellow student here.

claire hunt

I feel honoured to of heard such stories of survival. The poetry more examples of pain being turned into something beautiful, I can imagine how therapeutic it was to write, as I myself write to release my pain. I am keen to purchase kates book. A truly riveting discussion, thank you again for sharing.

Maureen Hasirci

Thank you for such a moving account of your experiences.

Victoria Jay

I liked Kate's reflection on alchemy. As a therapist I am aware of the concept of 'Wounded healer'. This refers to the transformation of the 'wound' into a force for good - healing. In Greek mythology Chiron a Centaus is the archetype of the Wounded Healer.

Kate refers to imagination being helpful. Imagination is absolutely helpful in transforming trauma. Traumatic memories reside in imagination and in the body. In a sence all memories are imagined in that they are not happening now even if the affect is still present often triggered unconsciously. Thank you Kate and Peter for your very thoughtful reflections and for sharing these with us

Janet Blackburn

Thank you Kate and Peter for your generosity in sharing your experiences and responses to them, listening and reading has broadened my understanding of trauma. It has also reinforced my belief that we need to do much more to protect

children's mental health. I hope that you have also gained something from contributing to the course.

Evelyne Thum

Thank you so much for sharing your experiences with us, I am deeply moved! Your poems touched me in my soul, and your soft and fragile way of reading them to us will stay in my heart forever. Thank you!

Alison Adams

Thank you for this very moving session. The stories of Kate and Peter's experiences were heart rending and it was so kind of them to willingly share them with us. I hope that the experience of writing their poems will be useful to them and that they in turn will be helped through the work of others. This session certainly brought PTSD home to me in a new light.

Wean Khing Wong

This is very powerful. I am touched, especially by the bravery of Kate coming forward to speak about such painful matters.

Melanie Weeks

What an inspiring discussion - so brave and honest. Deepened my understanding of PTSD by expanding it away from situations of war. Thank you to all involved.

Sophia Karayiannis

Kate's poems really struck a chord deep inside and I became quite emotional. Her poems are absolutely beautiful, I liked deciphering the hidden deeper meanings/ metaphors and I could really relate to these.

Evelyne Thum

For me the poems of Kate and Peter are the highlights of this course until now. They speak so deeply to me. Thank you for letting me discover their work (I didn't know them).

I've always thought, I'd prefer rhyme, but as I see now I love the contemporary form.
(edited)

Alison Adams

Thank you. This has been a very moving and enlightening week, and a special thank you to Kate and Peter.

Antonia Monson

I feel incredibly moved and privileged to have watched this video of poets Kate and Peter speaking of their experiences and believe that in doing so they have given something life-changing to others suffering trauma perhaps never shared or articulated.

Kathleen Murray Tearne

Quite breathtaking to hear Kate Behrens and Peter Robinson not only read their poetry but articulate so profoundly on their own experience, trauma, and the role of

poetry in understanding and grace. I will be playing this interview many times as it is has so much to say about so many ideas about creativity and hope.

Tracey Roberts

I don't think I can add anything profound which hasn't been articulated. It's just a thank you from me. A very beautiful and moving interview. Articulate and emotionally intuitive. It fused the trauma of PTSD and the writing together for me and it was deeply humbling to listen to the poetry and prose of Kate and Peter.

Clare Cotterill

Two beautifully expressed insights particularly struck me in this interview. Firstly, the idea of recovering a kind of agency in writing about a traumatic experience that was beyond your control; that writing transmutes that memory, that experience, into something over which you can have some power. Secondly, the concept of finding a narrative that relocates you in the world in the wake of trauma, and in some way writing your way into that narrative. Powerful insights, thank you for sharing.

Mia Barrow-Sullivan

Kate Behrens poetry is beautiful, it has really moved me.

Roisin Newman

Thank you Peter and Kate for sharing your very personal stories with us. It was lovely to hear Kate read her poems albeit that it was so emotional and raw. I particularly loved her last poem.

Diane Hupcey

I can only echo all the other comments. Thank you to Kate and Peter for sharing their experiences and their poetry with all of us. It shows great courage and great generosity of spirit. This has been by far the most powerful and emotional session we have done so far and I am overwhelmed by it all. And apart from the emotional experience the poetry is absolutely beautiful with incredible choice of words and imagery. Thank you again.

Carolyn M. LeVering

I am just overwhelmed. Kate's poetry is beautiful. Such vivid images, sporadic correlations. A truly wonderful interview all around. Thank you.

Sharon Catt

A fascinating conversation with so many profound insights shared - I am, like others grateful to Kate and Peter for sharing. I particularly valued the discussion, with so many seeds of wisdom. I loved Peter's description of the transformed self as having a currency which you cannot use and Kate's description of the need to cross a bridge into the new reality after the trauma as the world is no longer as it was before. Extremely moving, thank you.

Learner Comments: Professor Peter Robinson

Benita Kape

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Thank you to all involved including fellow student here.

Maureen Hasirci

Thank you for such a moving account of your experiences.

Janet Blackburn

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Helen Nash

Powerful interview. I found Peter's poem beautiful and moving - that feeling of powerlessness...

Melanie Weeks

What an inspiring discussion - so brave and honest. Deepend my understanding of PTSD by expanding it away from situations of war. Thank you to all involved.

claire hunt

This has been an extremely interesting topic, that again as in previous weeks, touched me personally. I enjoyed this poem and will be interested in reading more of Peters work. As for the discussion as to the effect of trauma on survivors, it seems logical that something such as 'survivors guilt' could progress into PTSD. (edited)

Evelyne Thum

For me the poems of Kate and Peter are the highlights of this course until now. They

Speak so deeply to me. Thank you for letting me discover their work (I didn't know them).

I've always thought, I'd prefer rhyme, but as I see now I love the contemporary form.
(edited)

Alison Adams

Thank you. This has been a very moving and enlightening week, and a special thank you to Kate and Peter.

Antonia Monson

I feel incredibly moved and privileged to have watched this video of poets Kate and Peter speaking of their experiences and believe that in doing so they have given something life-changing to others suffering trauma perhaps never shared or articulated.

Kathleen Murray Tearne

Quite breathtaking to hear Kate Behrens and Peter Robinson not only read their poetry but articulate so profoundly on their own experience, trauma, and the role of poetry in understanding and grace. I will be playing this interview many times as it has so much to say about so many ideas about creativity and hope.

Tracey Roberts

I don't think I can add anything profound which hasn't been articulated. It's just a thank you from me. A very beautiful and moving interview. Articulate and emotionally intuitive. It fused the trauma of PTSD and the writing together for me and it was deeply humbling to listen to the poetry and prose of Kate and Peter.

stephanie newham

Thank you for sharing your process Peter, it was so interesting to follow your mental meanderings and understand how the poem came into being. Very helpful.

Tony Ashcroft

A very heartfelt and moving poem. Once again the video is a useful source of information giving us Peter's commentary. Some very emotive images. Thank you as it gave me a new insight into what it must have felt like.

Ita Hicks Houlihan

A beautiful poem, linking the resonance of war with the throttling of a woman - another intimate trauma. Peter writes so well - I found myself clutching my own throat as I listened to his work.

Grace Benson

I will have to read more of Peter Robinson, I was very moved by him

Sandra Davies

Thank you, Peter. Having the context explained was extremely helpful and also interesting and enhanced the enjoyment of the poem.

Marie Kenny

Thank you Peter for this sensitive, thoughtful and powerful poem

Theresa Weston

Peter I love this poem. I often think, when my family and I are sitting with friends from countries (which were vague to me as a child or which were footnotes to a war I learned about at school), this is a quiet miracle that we're here. When I've comforted my friend, who is Romanian, and who suffers from paranoia largely as a result of her experience growing up, I feel as if in trying to reach her and the so called "iron curtain" is still there, as if she was one woman representing many

Diane Hupcey

I can only echo all the other comments. Thank you to Kate and Peter for sharing their experiences and their poetry with all of us. It shows great courage and great generosity of spirit. This has been by far the most powerful and emotional session we have done so far and I am overwhelmed by it all. And apart from the emotional experience the poetry is absolutely beautiful with incredible choice of words and imagery. Thank you again.

Sharon Catt

A fascinating conversation with so many profound insights shared - I am, like others grateful to Kate and Peter for sharing. I particularly valued the discussion, with so many seeds of wisdom. I loved Peter's description of the transformed self as having a currency which you cannot use and Kate's description of the need to cross a bridge into the new reality after the trauma as the world is no longer as it was before. Extremely moving, thank you.

Friedrich Hajek

What a thoughtful poem. I had goosebumps. Thank you for sharing.

Missus Webster

I loved this poem. I felt like I was standing there on the corner, and experiencing the moment with them. The poem draws me in and I appreciate the bravery it takes to write in such an intimate way, and I really like what he has to say in the accompanying commentary. This course has very good guests, and I enjoy hearing their various points of view.

Learner Comments: Dr Sophie Ratcliffe

Deanne Hammer

Thank you Sophie, I loved your reading of, and interpretation of "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning". Such a beautiful poem!

Benita Kape

A complicated poem which I'm sure over the years will reveal more and more wonderful things to take on board. Thank you for a lovely reading Sophie.

Margaret Dennison

I have never read this before and when I just read the words found it very difficult to understand. As Sophie read it made beautiful sense and described so well how I felt about our love and how it bound us and binds us still. Thank you - I will also probably cry a lot and listen to it over and over.

Breda Hill

Lovely to hear Sophie talking of her experience through this poem. It's new to me and didn't speak to me as others have - yes puzzling - but Sophie's experience shows the magic of poetry in that it meant so much to her to find it and it gave her so much. Thank you.

Mary Hill

How strange. I've found the course so far very interesting and engaging, but it hasn't really resonated with me emotionally, in that my heartbreaks and bereavements all seemed to me to be in the past and dealt with - lucky me! I know this poem well from long ago when I studied Eng. Lit. so was fortunate not to find the language as daunting as I might otherwise have done - and suddenly as Sophie read the last couple of verses, while I was following the script, I felt a rush of emotion and thought - but that's how I feel about my Mum! I suppose because Sophie was relating it to the loss of her father, I was able to hear the words out of the context of a lover to the beloved, and suddenly felt that one reason I still feel close to my mother, and was not totally devastated by her loss 14 years ago, is encapsulated in those last two lines "Thy firmness makes my circle just, and makes me end where I begun." My mother, and all she taught me and gave me, is still an intrinsic part of my life, the sort of root of it, and we are not parted entirely because I always come back to what she made me, and the certainties she gave me. What a revelation - thank you!!

Carole Fry

Thank you so much for this, Sophie, it was beautiful, so gentle and soothing. All that you were saying was so close to what I have felt in my own heart - you have put into

words so much of what I have felt about those close to me who have "passed on" and that there is a way of having the person still with you.

Dawn S

Thank you Sophie for your explanation of the poem & how it helped you through a difficult time. The poem means more to me now than when I initially read it on my own.

Julia Bond

Thank you for introducing me to this poem. Sophie's sensitive reading and the related discussion brought it alive for me. It certainly requires some effort and thinking to grasp but well worthwhile I feel. I find it comforting to think that the person lost is still in some way "there".

Joan Clancy

I'm afraid reading it aloud to myself it's meaning was lost on me, I found the language difficult even after several readings. Having Sophie read & talk about it completely changed it for me, I loved the 6th stanza , it is in line with newer models of grief that speak about "a continuing bond" and like Sophie said , " we don't ever entirely lose people and that is something lovely to hold on to. Thank you Sophie.

Roger Stirling

I loved this poem and the interview with Sophie. I have not read many poems by John Donne, not really bothering to to make the effort of really reading him. But coincidentally this is the second poem I have read this week in depth by Donne, that has moved me. So I have had an interesting awakening and will certainly seek more of his poetry out.

I liked the quote ' writing is the voice of the absent person' .

Tricia Gilbey

I love this poem and know someone else I think will love it too. Thank you Sophie.

Erica Game

What a wonderful reading of this poem. Thank you Sophie. I think the idea of keeping memories of the loved one alive in our hearts is a very comforting one.

Liz Watson

Beautifully read by Sophie who drew out the meaning for me. What struck me is that Sophie (and to some extent Lucy) found comfort in something that they were reading in any case at a time of grief. It shows that in looking to literature at a time of loss, there is no one size fits all.

As Sophie said, what helped her was as much about the rhythm of Donne's poem as its content, she found comfort in its intricacy rather than poetry that is too easily consumed. There is also a secrecy about it, the way two people can be physically apart yet still joined, and how a voice (whether a poet or a father) can still be heard from beyond the grave.

Judith C

A lovely interview with Sophie. I was moved by the sentiments in this poem although I couldn't understand the entire poem I did like some of the imagery this conjured. I also liked the fact the poem was described as a love poem as this is an important emotion when you have lost someone dear. I think at times this feeling can get lost. Having a little reminder that the person is always with you was so moving and can see how this could help someone cope. I guess it was the spiritual/metaphysical connect that attracts me to this poem. Thanks for sharing this Sophie.

Margaret Batty

There are certain parts of the course so far that I enjoy savouring. This 4 mins of conversation with Sophie Radcliffe is one of them. Paula and she seem inspired by the poem to speak in the most gentle and heartfelt way. This is so congruent with the material. Thank you.

Anne Harding

The notion Sophie Radcliffe put forward that much of what a poem expresses in the line breaks - in what isn't said - fascinates me. It's making me rethink my way of reading poems.

Learner Comments: Sir Ian McKellen

Marie Kenny

I found the video discussion between Sir Ian and Jonathan to be truly, wonderful and thought provoking. I do not know King Lear but Sir Ian certainly gave me a great understanding of this complex man. As such, I can only comment that in giving up his power he began to disintegrate . The loss of his powerful role impacted not only on him But on all the relationships around him. He could not adjust just as his family and followers could not cope with the changes in their former great leader. Old age, the loss of his identity , his failing health and his poor relationships with his daughters all took their toll leaving him confused, angry and very lost. His despair was so distressing for all .

That he became vulnerable and grief stricken when his daughter died made him more humane in my eyes. And that he was loved and cared for by those around him

despite his frailties gave more hope to a very sad story. Thank you Sir Ian for a very wonderful analysis and understanding of this great play. You really knew this man !

Michèle Bethke

Sir Ian McKellen made some very interesting observations about 'King Lear.' I have always understood that Lear "hath ever but slenderly/know himself." However, I never once stopped to think that his daughters might not ever have known themselves very well either. Up until the point that Lear retires from the business of kingship, he has been the one in complete and utter control of everything. Others have had to bend and comply with his wishes. All of a sudden his iron rule is lifted and a vacuum is created into which others try to adapt and fit themselves. Chaos in family relationships is created. So although I have never really had a soft spot for Goneril and Regan, I think I understand their situation a little better.

I was also impressed by Sir Ian McKellen's interpretation of Lear beginning the play as a theocrat ruling his land in the name of all the gods he invokes as though power from the gods is funneled through him. The word 'gods' is used 26 times. But by the end of the play he is no longer the theocrat but just a "poor, bare, forked animal." He knows what it is to be human. With acceptance of one's real situation comes a kind of peace.

Michèle Bethke

Continued:

Finally, thanks to Sir Ian, I no longer view 'King Lear' as such a pessimistic play. As he pointed out, Lear is never alone. He always has people around him to support him. He has their unconditional love. They are willing to look past his behavior and see the human being underneath, an admirable way to care for any loved one.

Roz Cawley

What a wonderful, incredibly detailed, deeply thoughtful deconstruction of the play by Sir Ian. I feel very, very privileged to have had him give this University level lecture to me in the comfort of my own home. I am downloading this video to watch over and over again - there are so many layers to be excavated.

After watching, and listening, and pondering, I get Sir Ian's point entirely - 'I never really think he's a victim of some mental disability'; that this Lear does not seem to be in the state of decline of the mind but rather, I think, the tormented madness of grief for all the losses and unkindness he is experiencing - which can do very terrible things to people.

I also wonder if Shakespeare is suggesting that everyone starts to fall apart because their roles are no longer clearly defined - with the 'fall out' of the decision of Lear to stop being King, ('a bad decision') - they no longer 'know their place'

I could write an essay on this interview, but suffice to say, for me, that the most important statements were that 'old people need us, need their carers, need a

family, and need love'...(IM)

' And they also need the kindness of strangers, don't they?' (JB)

Roisin Newman

This was a fabulous discussion and I really love Sir Ian's slant on Lear as suffering from old age and retirement rather than dementia.

Marian Nelson

A fascinating and insightful interview. I haven't seen Sir Ian's King Lear, but would now love to see it after listening to his comments on getting into the skin and mind of Lear in order to play him. Thank you.

Lesley Terroni

Excellent interview. Was so interesting to hear Sir Ian McKellen's thoughtful & insightful interpretation. With regard to immense strength when Lear, despite his age, carries Cordelia's corpse, I thought how there have been occasions when people with very little physical strength have found an incredible strength far beyond their usual capacity, to help someone they love who perhaps has been injured & needs some help in a physical manner. I feel love can give us a physical strength we didn't know we possessed.

WENDY WILSON

Very interesting perspective of King Lear from the great Shakespearan actor Sir Ian McKellen. I enjoyed it very much.

Barry Anderton

What a spellbinding interview! Sir Ian McKellan was just brilliant.

Miriam Yunis

Thank you Sir Ian McKellen, as interesting as ever, praise! Interesting chat with regards to dementia and growing old. I think Ian makes a few strong points. King Lear is wrestling with giving up his status and retiring. His body and mind are at odds. The un-doing of the button shows his frailty as an elderly man and this could be the course of his anger/frustration too. He must also be struggling with his sense of duty as king. As Ian points out, when you give your life to a job, its difficult to see who can do the job as good as. Many business men struggle to hand over to younger family members as they always seek to find flaws in the young, seeing them as still mere children.

Maureen Cunniff

Absolutely delightful discussion with Sir Ian McKellen. So much wisdom about the play and about Lear, in particular.

Jacqueline Budris

Just brilliant SIR IAN. I could listen to him and Dr. BATES for ever. I have never seen King Lear, but so look forward to it soon. I have been retired almost 15 years and have immersed my self in learning new things and trying new endeavors. Oh the joy of time on your own schedule. I actually have the time to read for enjoyment and not for a required course. Oh the privilege. Also, the joy of THIS COURSE.

Janet Westcott

What a splendid conversation - it should be made available to all students who are grappling with King Lear. I would love to have seen Sir Ian McKellen in that role. I really liked the conversation about Lear having people who loved him around him all the time, and how important this is for all of us. Thank you so much!

Monica King

I can't believe how fortunate we are to be able to feel part of this wonderful conversation - how I wish I'd seen Sir Ian's King Lear! Thank you so much, Future Learn!

Stephanie Williams

I LOVE his discussion and intense character analysis on King Lear's motivation, emotions, and transformation! Such a fabulously in-depth analysis of the character and so eloquently spoken! To put it out there that he goes from being a king to simply being a father, and that love is all that remains and he must be okay with no longer being considered to be among the deities so to speak, was very striking for me and gave me such empathy for the character that I'd never really felt before.

lillian alden

Magnificent viewing. Ian McKellen's insights have highlighted a major difficulty in adjusting to old age and taking on a new role. This is an area of adjustment which is so difficult for many people as they move from one stage of life to another which should have as much focus on providing other meaningful roles to fulfil. (edited)

Ann Ruane

I believe this is The most informative and energising interview ever. Sir Ian's description and background details of King Lear made this subject easy to follow and understood. I look forward to watching the film now. I do not know how to thank you Jonathon, Paula and your guests for making life's complex problem suddenly so well understood and manageable. I find myself equipped with valuable tools for straight forward access to a healthy mental state of mind Thank you all

Robert Jackson

Amazing, as we have come to expect from this wonderful course. Such a thoughtful and measured approach to the subject matter from Sir Ian.

Kay Ridings

Fantastic I could listen to Sir Ian McKellen all day, his view on Lear's state of mind was so thought provoking. What an horrendous way to come to the end of your life and having to deal with the heartache and pain his children caused. I love the quote

by Philip Larkin 'what will survive of us is love', it's love that can break down the barriers and be the key that unlocks whatever torments, worries or troubles that are affecting our lives and the lives of those we love and care for. Wonderful interview thank you.

Jovana Stokic

What an amazing interview – I can't believe thirty minutes flew by so fast! I could literally listen to Ian McKellen and Jonathan Bate discuss Shakespeare for hours, their insight is simply amazing. I loved Sir Ian's approach to Lear, he seems so sensitive to Lear's suffering and full of understanding for one of Shakespeare's most complex (and sometimes rather confusing) character.

Erika Mouttet

I hung on their every word. I don't know much about King Lear and I don't find Shakespeare easy to read or understand but listening to Sir Ian talking about this play was extremely interesting and informative.

Margaret Daunt

Fascinating and moving interview - thank you.

Concluding Learner Testimonials

Jennifer Parsons

I remember my first really bad bout of depression. I'd just finished at Uni and was in my first job - but the PTSD of having attended the Aberfan disaster (PTSD not of course recognised!) had disrupted my mental processes to such an extent that I became unable to function. The incident I best remember, however, was that a friend sat beside me and read one of Thom Gunn's poems out loud. I don't remember which - but it was Achilles speaking about the death of Patroclus, and the way in which the pain of bereavement kept returning - the difficulty of ever achieving healing. Prophetic - Aberfan has haunted my nightmares and preyed on my mental health ever since - especially since someone (my mother, alas!) told me that the best thing for me would be to forget it. I tried - but it lurked - and pounced again and again. I'm retired now, following the last very bad assault when the whole experience relived itself in flashbacks so powerful that I could not see the everyday things around me, but only what I'd seen forty-odd years before. Now I can talk about it, and write about it, and perhaps am beginning to come to terms with it.

Janet Brinsmead

These two quite different weeks have made me realise just how much I have relied on poetry - as distinct from prose - to get me through some of the tough times in life. It was a good discipline, therefore, to try and get my head around Jane Austin although I don't think I'm likely ever to become a fan of her or her style. One of the things this Course, so far, has reinforced for me is just how individual each person is and how, despite life experiences being similar (loss of love, bereavement, etc.), we each feel that experience in a different way and deal with it in a different way. Three cheers for diversity! Thanks to everyone who has introduced me to poetry I'd not yet discovered ... it has been a real "treasure house".

Ana Skinner

Another wonderful week! Many thanks for taking me back to my favourite author! I really enjoyed the discussion about which type of literature is the most helpful in relieving heartache and lifting the mood. I just want to add that I find poetry helpful for healing and prose for preventing the fall and keeping me going in difficult times. I developed at a young age the habit of always having a book started. I don't always have the energy to start a book when I am down but can be pulled along by a story for which I have developed an interest. There have been very dark periods in my life and prose has always prevents me from falling apart.

Robert Jackson

I'm trying to say to myself that I can't spend as much time as I have been looking at the comments and having wonderful discussions with some of the beautiful people sharing this remarkable course with me. I fear that I am fooling myself, and whatever...I truly believe that this course is changing something inside me.

Merrilyn (Merri) McElderry

I read each day in my areas of study, however, other reading at this time is sporadic. I love English Literature and that is my passion and with these Future Learn courses now am reading more and more in them and finding they are helping me with general and serious anxiety because of my financial situation and housing situation and total life situation at this time. So I am a student of your course already saying IT WORKS..!

Gill Keyte

Has it only been a week? So much learnt and so much gained. This is my first on line course and I wasn't sure how I'd cope but it has been brilliant. It's brought me back to education after many years absence and the way the material has been presented and the clarity of explanation and teaching has been wonderful. I am really looking forward to the next topic. Thanks to all the team for the mammoth effort behind the scenes and to my fellow students for their helpful and thought provoking comments. It feels a really safe environment. So onwards and upwards....

Beth Soderstrom

It's about feeling connected, understood, less alone. It's about feelings being captured in words and thereby contained in some way. Alan Bennett said, in the history boys, "the best moments in reading are when you come across something - a thought, a feeling, a way of looking at things - which you had thought special and particular to you. Now here it is, set down by someone else, a person you have never met, someone even who is long dead and it is as if a hand has come out and taken yours" This course is like a hand coming out and I am grateful for that. Thank you.

Don W

It seems like I've spent most of my life without being able to mine those rich veins of 'face to face' communication and companionship that seem so effortlessly embraced and exchanged by my fellow travelers - Almost being a part of life's rich tapestry, but always on the periphery, never really immersed in the sharing of experience.

I was never quite sure what the problem was, shyness was a handle used, but it goes deeper than that. The problem has never dissipated even into old age. Having read a little on the subject I probably have a form of autism. My experience resonates very strongly with those expressed by people with Asperger's syndrome and I can relate to every word written on the subject.

I guess the written word has been a lifeline to me, as through literature and prose I can experience and savor communication with fellow human beings without the intensity of emotion and the inevitable misinterpretation that direct contact engenders. Contact that so often proves to alienate one such as I from the common herd.

Ariel Barns

Loving this course already. Thank you.

Often I can't find the words to express certain feelings in my own vocabulary. The feelings can be too raw too personal and too painful sometimes, I can't voice them. I used to, when I wasn't worried about looking a fool.

I agree with Stephen Fry. I find it amazing though, that I can read a piece of poetry or prose (often words written more than 100's of years ago) and feel them connect and resonate with something deep within my own heart.

So when I read what others write - from across the years, the borders, the countries, the ages, even the comments I read on here even. Sometimes something magical happens. The words speak to me or speak for me or I just find in that verse or line what I need. I find it awe inspiring really.

That somebody else's imagination can capture mine. It doesn't even have to be eloquently written. Just real. I hope this makes sense. It's like 200 years ago, everything is different, we aren't eating the same foods as then, jobs, technology, landscape, hardly anything is the same. Except we have the same emotions then as now. They transcend time.

'The strongest love is the love that can demonstrate its fragility.'

Mariana Casale O'Ryan

Spent the morning leading a poetry workshop about WWI at a local library: having shared a variety of profound and meaningful responses to both traditional and innovative poetry mostly related to loss, the futility of war, the bleak prospect of a society that appears to be reluctant to learn from its mistakes, I still came out with a renewed sense of hope and deep belief in life and the often overlooked power of the shared word. I am profoundly, passionately committed to literature as a means of healing us as individuals but also as communities. This course is therefore of incalculable value: thank you so very much to all those who must have fought hard to get it off the ground.

In the next few weeks, I am hoping for and looking forward to delving deeper into the relationship between literature and well being. I think it is important to discuss how exactly this might be implemented, beyond the placing of poems in waiting rooms - already a fantastic and laudable initiative.

Sandra Gruszynski

I think being lovesick is more painful than anything I've ever experienced. I'd rather go thru childbirth. In my youth, I was a definite Marianne Dashwood and in some ways, I continue to be like her. When I was lovesick and broken-hearted, I imagined that only dying could take the pain away. Now that I'm older, I no longer hold that thought. Back in the day, I grew so dehydrated, so ill after a break-up that I fainted in the street and was subsequently hospitalized. That is an extreme, I know. Reading literature, reading about someone going thru the same torment helped me.

Merrilyn (Merri) McElderry

What a powerful course for us all with such variety, and deep thinking, and fun too all wound into one marvelous healing week for me. I am dealing with high stress right

now, and just reading all the comments, watching the amazing videos and being part of the questions and answers has given me a FAMILY. I LOVE IT as I am alone, and now, I am not!! I feel disconnected in this time of my life at times, and now , I am not. I have only to turn to this course, listen to the poems, read them myself look at the in depth comments here and all of a sudden we all are ONE. Thank you for this blissful course right when I needed it most, and thank you for the time, expense and planning that went into this healing week. I cannot express it adequately. I too found the reading of the poems so relaxing, the joking with Mr Frye fun and yet so deeply part of the explanation of poetry, the lovely talks between Paula and Jonathan clarifying points we had learned..all of it has helped me beyond a poetic fram" If I could tell you all right now, How blissful this filled week was for me, I know that it's impossible somehow, So I'll sign off with simple smiles and healing glee....."

Linda B

This has been a surprisingly relaxing first week of the course for me, despite being in some pain with a minor injury, which has kept me awake at night. It has been my personal refuge from the stresses of the day and has given perspective to the worries and concerns of recent insomnia. I have been soothed and stimulated in equal measure by the often familiar poetry both of the course and of the fascinating responses from readers at the end of each section.

I was rather intimidated at the thought of such a course online, but it has been a real privilege to share in the messages and activities on offer - something I would not have expected, as I am very new to this form of learning, and something of a technophobe. Thank you all for your gentle encouragement and support this week. I look forward to the next weeks with great anticipation and a resolution to participate more actively in this nonthreatening forum.

Peter Bostock

Having not read much poetry since school, I read a newspaper article about the Stressed/Unstressed anthology a couple of weeks ago and, as I am frequently in need of de-stressing, I decided to buy it. I started to read a poem and then reread it several times before going to bed. I found this relaxing and when I then heard about this course a few days after getting the book I immediately signed up for it. I have found the week interesting and helpful particularly as some of the poems featured are ones I had been reading. I was uncertain about Adlestrop when I read it in the book but having listened to the discussion I can see there is more to it than I thought and will be returning to it at bedtime tonight.

Bev Cole

Dear Prof. Bate & Dr. Byrne, I'm taken by this course. In fact, I am causing (my children) stress by being hooked! It is skillful and serious but it is gentle and encompassing too. I think the emotional harmony is balanced well by the intellectual exactness and on the whole the relationship between educators and participants is one of warmth and useful exchange. In summary: 2015 tested my mettle but right now I feel relaxed, happy and hopeful in reading for wellbeing. Thank-you.

Deborah Fyrth

When I was suffering from depression (as a response to my parents' messy divorce) in my early 20s, yes, I received long-term psychotherapy which literally saved my life. I also self-mandated what I called "English Literature therapy", reading or re-reading several classic works - in particular, "Shirley" by Charlotte Bronte, which deals with grief and consequent depression as one of its themes. I found my reading definitely helped me endure this difficult time, and come out on the other side as a more compassionate and resilient person.

Elizabeth Eddy

My youngest son was killed in an MVA on Valentine's Day 2014. He was only 18, and coming home with a group of students from college and university for what we, in Canada call Reading Week. He had only just begun his 2nd semester of college. He was a passenger, seated behind the driver when they vehicle they were in was side-swiped by a transport. The driver and my son were instantly killed. 33 years ago, my father was killed in a transport side-swiping incident also. He was on the same highway as my son, but their accidents were about 850km apart. I am seeking strategies to function in life now. I had the empty nest syndrome when my son left for college, and now it is for as long as I live. He will never come home again. I have 2 other children who are grown and living away from home, and 2 grand-children, whom I love visiting, but I very often rebel against the death of my youngest son. "It can't have happened, it can't be real, he will get home one day"...that sort of thing. I love literature. I have a combined degree in Literature and Music, so I am turning to literature for coping strategies. I have had a terrible depression since my son died. I am better now.

Frances Zapata

Reading is indeed a lifeline. When I was diagnosed with MS, I became depressed. I was so young and deprived of many of the experiences of normal young people because I was always suffering from fatigue. I was too tired to do anything. I've always loved to read but in my depression, there were weeks where I forsook reading. It was then when my dad told me "You know, Luis Muñoz Rivera was a poet. You like reading. Why don't you read some of his stuff." And I did. The first poem of his that I read was "Horas de Fiebre" (Hours with Fever, in English): "Cuando el alma en sí misma se repliega/ con hondo duelo y con letal angustia,/viene a turbar sus tristes soledades/ el ruido intermitente de la lucha." In English it translates to "When your soul folds itself due to constant suffering and lethal agony, such misery is defeated by the roar of your will to fight." I don't think I have ever read anything so true, and now instead of wallowing in my disease I am volunteer at the Fundación Esclerosis Múltiple de Puerto Rico (Puerto Rican MS Society, and help others who were in my situation. I still have my bad days, but I remember that bad days are not equivalent to a bad a life.

Kate Armstrong

In the last few years I've started to be open about my depression and write fiction about it - but I've only been able to do that because I have had the experience of reading the words of those who have gone before me - Sylvia Plath, Jean Rhys,

Gerard Manley Hopkins, Virginia Woolf. They were the people who gave me permission to tackle these subjects in writing. They showed me these emotions were allowed. Yes, literature can be a tool to help people understand they are not alone, or to show a way out - but it is also (at the same time) an opening up of experiences and understanding that widens my appreciation of these aspects of mental and emotional life, that helps me *value* these experiences more as well. I write and read in the way I do because I have experienced various mental oddities over the years. They are often immeasurably painful; but they also give me a kinship with writers of previous centuries and a sense that these writers' words are part of who I am and become part of what my writing is.

Valentina Dimoska

I was interested to hear poetry mentioned so often in this video. As much as I love reading books, when I have been in the middle of an episode of depression, I have had trouble concentrating for long and have at those times turned to poetry. When I read poems I feel like so much sorrow and beauty can be distilled into so few lines or pages and even with my limited concentration I still leave the poem feeling like someone has empathised with me or taken me somewhere beautiful. I would like to read more books however so am really looking forward to this course and to discovering a wider range of literature (books and plays) I can turn to while also finding more poems to add to my collection.

Deborah Fyrth

Depression - any mental illness - is incredibly isolating and literature can be, as it was for me, a way of reconnecting with the world which feels less scary than having to interact with actual, complicated human beings. For anyone with mental health issues, that gentle reconnection is a first step towards feeling less isolated and therefore towards healing. I also appreciate Sophie Ratcliffe's comment that literature and especially poetry give us permission to be still and to care for ourselves (self care isn't selfish - unless you look after yourself, you're not able to care for others).

Prisca Kim

Many thanks for this course and educators. I personally already reaped fruits of learning this course. I have had much interest in mental health and family relationships since my father was a sufferer of depression and bipolar. That led me to take this course. While I was enrolling in this course, one of my close friends confided her emotional state to me. I simply recommended her to be connected with poems, either reciting her favorites or write her own.

A few days later, I got a phone call from her that she didn't know how to thank me enough. She followed my advice, and she said that her emotional stress was decreased by expressing her inner feelings. I, too, felt greater by sharing something I just learned from this course.

Sarah Williams

Thank you to Jonathan and Paula, all the interviewees, and all the 'behind the scenes'

people who have contributed to such an engrossing course.

This course has really changed my life: I am re-reading poems I've not read for 30 years and finding new poems and poets.

Also, I have signed up to many FutureLearn courses before but this is the first I have actually completed - I was fearful that my mental and physical ill-health meant I'd never be able to keep up and was thinking of giving up the whole idea of learning on-line, but this has boosted my confidence.

Finally, huge thanks to my fellow learners for sharing not only their own favourite poems and novels (many of which I am pursuing) but also their own struggles with mental illness in their own lives or those of friends and relatives. Due to disability I am nearly housebound and it's all too easy to become introverted and self-pitying but I've felt that I have engaged with many other people on a profound level.

I shall miss this course very much!

Natalia Polyakova

Six weeks of continuous happiness and enthusiasm - that's the most modest characteristics of participation in this course. An incredibly harmonious blend of brilliant professional knowledge, sensitive approach to the participants, deep understanding of human nature and ease - all these qualities are the authors of the course, the esteemed Jonathan and Paula - have created a very warm atmosphere. Whenever I opened a new lesson, I fell into the company of old and very close friends - presenters, participants, guests and the great poets and writers of the past and present. In Russian language there is an expression - the feast of the spirit. That's exactly it. You have every right to call this course an educational poem. Bravo! I do not want to leave, and to continue to communicate, communicate and enrich each other with new discoveries and emotions. Thank you very much!