From trauma to *thauma*
Biblio/poetry therapy as a source of wonder, empathy, and resilience

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Abstract

This article highlights some of the historical roots and developments of biblio/poetry therapy. It presents a brief conceptual history of trauma, *thauma*, and empathy in relation to the therapeutic use of words. The possibilities of biblio/poetry therapy in the empathic-dialogic processing of personal experiences and interpretations of the human situation are assessed. The goals of biblio/poetry therapy are seen as promoting transformative leaps, peaceful storytelling, coping, and resilience through the interactive exchange of creative, exploratory, and emotionally touching words. The future(s) of biblio/poetry therapy, including in community and cultural contexts, are also considered.

Keywords: biblio/poetry therapy; coping; empathy; resilience; *thauma*; transformation; trauma

Introduction

Philosophy and poetry both embody what the ancient Greeks called *thauma*—a sense of wonder, amazement, and awe. In biblio/poetry therapy, participants explore and contemplate this sense of wonder through the language arts. Central to the process is engaging and surprising oneself, marveling at the unfamiliar, and often transcending lingering traumatic effects by adopting a growth-oriented perspective that can lead to a heightened state of awareness filled with wonder and awe. While biblio/poetry therapy does not promise miraculous cures, it does enrich the personal and social realms through touching expression, narrative exploration, and shared discussion.

The impact of literature on the human mind and mentalization is multifaceted, affecting various levels including neurobiology, bodily functions, emotions, cognition, and socio-cultural issues. Each word has the potential to inspire further writing, reading, speaking, and expression, connecting and resonating with meaningful moments, memories, and the future. Even conflicting narrative voices offer opportunities for shared interpretation and negotiation of our inner and outer worlds.

Stories, like reveries, dreams, and poetic musings, create a playful mental space, an experimental and experiential ground where we explore our coping skills, resources, challenges, losses, hopes, fears, and aspirations. By acknowledging the positive power of our words and reevaluating unproductive strategies with resilience, we can infuse our daily lives with poetic appreciation.

This is not a call to romanticize the past, but rather an invitation to creative dialogues that open up cultural participation and connect the expressive arts to health and well-being. Through reflective, transformative, and developmental biblio/poetry therapy, individuals and groups are given the

freedom to articulate the unspeakable, confront silenced traumas, and embrace the wonders embedded in imaginative exchanges and empathic interactions.

Trauma

The ancient Greek word *trauma* (*τραῦμα*) ("wound") referred primarily to physical injuries, caused by accidents, tragic, violent, or destructive events or atrocities such as wars. Homer's epic poems *Iliad* and *Odyssey* also deal primarily with physical wounds. Hippocratic medicine was somatic; only philosophers, poets, and rare medical practitioners discussed the healing power of words. Only later, with the development of psychiatry and psychology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, did the term come to mean psychological injury.

Trauma has become a diagnostic category in the form of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which was introduced as an official psychiatric category in 1980. Since then, trauma has become a widely and loosely used term that encompasses individual, socio-cultural, and even global traumas associated with catastrophes, disasters, wars, and environmental anxieties. Contemporary discussions of trauma range from issues of the past to everyday problems and anticipations of the future.

Today, trauma studies are included in psychological, psychiatric and psychotherapeutic studies, memory studies, historical, socio-cultural, philosophical, ethical and literary studies.

Constatine Cavafy's poem "Melancholy of Jason Kleander, poet in Kommagini, A.D. 595" (1921) expresses the ancient faith in poetic words that heal, at least for a while:

> "I turn to you, Art of Poetry,
> because you know about drugs:
> attempts to numb the pain, through Imagination [*φαντασία*, fantasía] and Word.
> […]
> Bring your drugs, Art of Poetry –
> they numb the wound at least for a little while."

Word therapy in classical antiquity was based on philosophical and rhetorical concepts. The persuasive power of language in the human mind was discussed in classical antiquity by reflecting on the use of *logos* in rhetoric and therapeutics. The effects of the "beautiful word" (*logos kalos*) on the character (*ethos*) of the hearer, the state of illness (*diathesis*), and the appropriate moment (*kairos*) were seen as crucial in creating harmony (*sophrosyne*) in the human soul (*psykhe*).

For example, reading, music, travel, exercise, and massage were associated with medicine in the first-century medical treatise *De medicina* (On medicine) by the Roman encyclopedist Aulus Cornelius Celsus, who suggested that reading and discussing the sayings of orators would stimulate the critical judgment of patients.

Bibliotherapy and poetry therapy to heal the wounds

Samuel McChord Crothers (1857–1927), an American Unitarian minister, is credited with coining the term "bibliotherapy" (Greek *biblos*: a book or a scroll; or *biblion*: a small book, or a scroll; and *therapeia*: care, healing or service) during World War I to describe the rehabilitative, educational, recreational, and entertaining effects of reading. As early as 1899 and 1900, he had adopted the metaphor of the "gentle reader" to imply an emotionally positive attitude toward reading (Crothers, 1899; 1900).

In his 1914 speech to American librarians, he emphasized the therapeutic value of books and used the word "bibliotherapy" for the first time: "The librarian's science might be termed *bibliotherapy* [italics added]. He should treat people who come to the library as patients who come with various kinds of maladies […]." (Keystone State Library Association, October 1914, 108; see also Ihanus, 2019, 81.)

Samuel McChord Crothers continued his speech: "People need various kinds of books, not only those which stimulate but the sedative books that bring a certain harmony with life, and what is one man's stimulant is another man's sedative." (Ibid., 108.)

In his 1916 article, Crothers has the fictional Dr. Bagster of the "Bibliopathic Institute" speak of "bibliotherapy" as a "new science" (Crothers, 1916, 295). Dr. Bagster proclaims: "I don't care whether a book is ancient or modern, whether it is English or German, whether it is in prose or verse, whether it is a history or a collection of essays, whether it is romantic or realistic. I only ask, 'What is its therapeutic value'?" (Crothers, 1916, 292.)

Among the poets was Walt Whitman, who, as a volunteer in Washington's war hospitals in 1863, had read the Bible and whatever they wanted to wounded soldiers during the American Civil War. He also wrote letters for them, and to relieve his own stress, Whitman wrote dozens of newspaper articles, poems, essays, and books as a result of his work as a volunteer in the hospitals. (Killingsworth 2007, 9–10.)

In 1928, Eli Greifer, a bohemian poet who was also a lawyer and pharmacist, began a campaign to show that the didactic message of poetry had healing power. He founded the Remedy Rhyme Gallery in New York's Greenwich Village. He believed in a healing process that consisted of memorizing therapeutic poems by such luminaries as Keats, Wordsworth, and Blake.

His poetic pharmacy was more shamanistic than pharmaceutical: "a psychograft-by-memorization in the inmost reaches of the brain" was to unite "the soul-staff" of great poets of all ages and "the spirit of the patient" and let the poems "gently enter and transfuse the ailing subconscious, the abraded and suffering personality" (Greifer, 1963, 2).

In the 1950s, Greifer pioneered group "poem therapy" and introduced it to hospitals, first at Creedmore State Hospital and, in 1959, at the Mental Hygiene Clinic of Cumberland Hospital in Brooklyn, New York, with psychiatrists Jack J. Leedy and Sam Spector as his supervisors.

Poiesis **and the fields of biblio/poetry therapy**

Poiesis means to do something (ancient Greek *poiein*), to give existence to something that did not exist before. Poiesis evokes an internally relevant and meaningful world. Poiesis includes various creative activities (handicrafts, verbal, musical and artistic works, etc.).

Poiesis enhances the personal experience of available resources, even in virtual anxiety. It enriches life values and serves mutual social relations. Positive poetic meanings can infuse ordinary life events. New priorities and goals can be set, and even in difficult situations, positive perspectives and benefits can be found by reflecting and remembering through "Imagination and Word."

Today biblio/poetry therapy and its poiesis have expanded into several fields and applications:

- Clinical
- Developmental (personal and professional)
- Educational / Psychoeducational
- Collaboration with other expressive arts therapies
- New virtual interactive methods
- Individual / Group / Community / Culture

All of these areas contribute to therapeutic, expressive, and creative interaction that promotes self-reflective exploration and community-building initiatives, as well as constructive collaboration with other expressive arts therapies.

Thauma

Thauma (*θαῦμα*, awe, amazement, wonder, puppet) is inherent in the language of literature, through which people reflect on their own sense of wonder—a process of being surprised, curious about something greater than the ordinary, or rather, of seeing the ordinary from an amazing perspective, in a heightened and excited state of consciousness.

Such awe has close relatives in amazement, astonishment, and astoundment. Plato's Socrates (in *Theaetetus*, 155d) and Aristotle (in *Metaphysics*, 982b) already saw wonder (*thauma, thaumazein*) as the beginning of philosophy, because it suddenly opens our eyes and perplexes us, making us dizzy with puzzlement. In the ancient Greek world, thauma resonated with the visual arts, architecture, music, and poetry.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1961, Book I, Lesson 3, Commentary 55) continued the same tradition by commenting on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: "Now the reason why the philosopher is compared to the poet is that both are concerned with wonders. For the fables with which the poets deal are composed of wonders, and the philosophers themselves were moved to philosophize as a result of wonder."

***Thauma*, narrative and biblio/poetry therapy**

Effective stories that are surprising and strangely familiar capture our attention and involve us emotionally. Such stories facilitate "transportation" and immersion in the narrative flow.

"Thaumatic" reading and writing juxtaposes and explores texts from previously disparate literary genres and periods, creating "unexpected connections, startling discontinuities and radical new perspectives" (Lightfoot, 2017, 11).

In biblio/poetry therapy, language allows participants to be surprised by *mirabilia* (wonderful things) and moved to share respectful awe. This in turn can heal wounds (and traumas) through retelling and shifting meanings and perspectives, resulting in an expanded sense of human resources.

Wandering and wondering discussions/discourses (Latin *discursus* means "running about") and overlapping expressions circulate in interactive and dialogical biblio/poetry therapy.

Each word can be an invitation to rewrite, reread, speak and discourse the moment, the memory, and the future from a new point of view. Literary texts always have different and conflicting, yet shareable and negotiable interpretations of the minds and worlds in and around us.

***Thauma*, neuroscience and philosophy**

Current cutting-edge neuroscience agrees that our brains are wired to and for wonder.

When we explore and are curious about a new, uncertain but exciting challenge, the striatum in the brain is activated and releases much more dopamine than it does in a boring situation. It releases even more dopamine when the challenge is personally meaningful; and when our excited emotions are aroused, a surge of neurotransmitters called opiates are released. The hippocampal circuitry is activated, bringing up memory details and contexts to enrich exciting moments and providing future scenarios to recalibrate our identities.

Inspiring and compelling stories have also been shown to release the neurochemical oxytocin, which positively affects human empathy and trust (Zak, 2015). (For an exploration of subjective experience through neurophenomenological studies of awe and wonder, see Gallagher et al., 2015.)

Like philosophy, biblio/poetry therapy most likely began out of a sense of awe, out of thauma, not out of trauma it sought to heal. Plato uses the word *thaumatopoios* in his Allegory of the Cave, combining *thauma* with *poiein* ("to make, create, compose," the root of "poet")—literally, "a maker of miracles."

In other ancient Greek texts, *thaumatopoios* refers to such popular performers as jugglers, acrobats, and puppeteers. Thus, in this etymology, there is a "discursive slippage from the magician to the trickster, from veritable wonder to entertainment and legerdemain" that brings "a distinct sense of the socially marginal, a smell of the street and the marketplace" (Shershow, 1995, 17).

Communal and cultural biblio/poetry therapy

Such senses and smells are not alien to the ongoing participatory biblio/poetry therapy processes and performances alongside street artists. The performative and transformative dimensions of language arts and other expressive arts underscore the use of participatory arts practices in the building of both community and well-being.

For example, poetry therapy groups can work from socio-cultural, non-medicalizing points of departure, promoting collective poetry, rap, street art, improvisational works, and works created on socially mediated multi- and cross-arts platforms.

Participatory arts projects and initiatives that build social and cultural capital and improve well-being are often based on a non-pathologizing approach. Socially engaging and empowering activities can help individuals and communities develop their resources and multicultural forms of health and well-being.

Rather than adhering to a static model of thought and action, or to a dogma or idea, biblio/poetry therapy continually examines and develops its theoretical background, methods, and practices. Through this openness to change and in response to the call of communities and cultures, biblio/poetry therapy welcomes creative encounters and further projects for sustainable development (e.g. eco-poetry).

Reading, writing, and performance in biblio/poetry therapy are closely related to subjective cognitive-emotional and intersubjective socio-cultural dimensions of human expressive capacities that support and promote individual and community resilience in the face of difficult challenges.

Empathy

The English word *empathy* is derived from the ancient Greek ἐμπάθεια (*empatheia*, meaning "physical affection or passion"). Schopenhauer, Herder, and Lotze had used *Einfühlung* in philosophy, but in the 1870s Friedrich Theodor and Robert Vischer adapted the term to create the German term *Einfühlung* ("feeling into") for aesthetic research (emotionalist aesthetics).

In the early 20th century, the German philosopher Theodor Lipps (2018) defined *Einfühlung* as the projection of inner bodily feelings of striving and movement into objects, the key to all forms of aesthetic experience and aesthetic resonance. Other suggested English translations included "aesthetic sympathy", "play", "semblance", and "animation."

After the Second World War, the concept became popular—no longer as a projection into objects but as immersion into the experience of another (see Lanzoni, 2018).

Critical questions can be asked: Is there a "cult" of empathy in today's media and therapy markets? Does it promote an indifferent routine, an "empty empathy" (cf. Kaplan, 2005)? Or is it possible to develop an "aesthetics of care" (Saito, 2022) as an ethical everyday practice based on genuine reciprocal caring relationships rather than pseudo-care?

Empathy as a concept has three main dimensions. First, *affective empathy*, also called *emotional empathy*, is the ability to respond to another's mental state with an appropriate emotion, to resonate

with it. Second, *cognitive empathy* has been described as the ability to understand the perspective or mental state of another person. Third, *somatic empathy* is a physical resonant response, probably based on the mirror neurons, in the somatic nervous system.

The terms *social cognition*, *perspective taking*, *Theory of Mind (ToM)*, and *mentalizing* are often used synonymously, but it is unclear whether they are equivalent due to a lack of studies comparing ToM with different types of empathy.

Affective and cognitive empathy are also independent of each other; someone who empathizes strongly emotionally is not necessarily good at understanding another person's perspective.

Cognitive empathy can be further divided into the following scales: 1) *Perspective taking*: the tendency to spontaneously assume the psychological perspective of others. 2) *Fantasy (simulation/reverie)*: the tendency to (partially) identify with fictional characters. 3) *Tactical (or "strategic") empathy*: the deliberate use of perspective taking (often combined with perspective switching) to achieve certain desired ends.

Emotions and literature

Emotions can arise from encountering a work of art (including literary fiction) as if from the outside. Such emotions are *aesthetic emotions*.

When entering the narrative world of a story, the reader is evoked by *narrative emotions.* Mar et al. (2011) have described five narrative emotions that are in complex interaction with each other:

1) *Emotions of sympathy*: You feel sympathy for the fictional characters, but you are more like a witness to their plight, not closely related to them.

2) *Emotions of identification*: Imaginative identification with a fictional character and resulting emotions.

3) *Emotions of empathy*: Not identifying with a fictional character but understanding a character's goals through our imaginative mental model of his or her mind and feeling something similar to what the character feels.

4) *Relived emotions*: Emotions associated with personal memories that are modified and reevaluated through fictional characters and events.

5) *Remembered emotions*: Emotions derived through fiction from evolutionary and cultural kinship with the rest of humanity, not limited to memories of personally experienced events.

I have proposed that "meta-emotions" are also evoked by reading fiction and sharing experiences. Thus, meta-reflection includes metacognition (I know what and how I know) and meta-emotion. Meta-emotion evoked by fiction or by artwork can be summarized as: I judge now how I felt then, how I might have felt centuries and generations ago, how I will feel in the future. (Ihanus, 2007.)

Readers (and viewers) realize and complete a literary (or any other) work of art through their moods, emotions, and psychological/neural processes: subjectivation occurs through virtual simulation, mentalization, and various conscious-unconscious shifts.

Literature can evoke a variety of emotions, not just empathy. The central affects that have been associated with fictional narrative are often curiosity, surprise, and suspense. Readers' emotional experiences of empathy and other emotions have mostly been explored through psychological empirical studies combined with rhetorical theories of narrative. Biblio/poetry therapy research and practice can add to this field insights from real-life situations and interactions among readers of diverse backgrounds and heterogeneous intersectional identities.

As Claudia Breger (2017, 227) summarizes, "the rhetorical processes of narration and reading engage affects, bodily memories, and associations in layered transactions between characters, narrators, implied and actual readers and authors."

The process of biblio/poetry therapy can bridge knowledge and emotion, forge connections between previously separated fields, and lay the groundwork for further co-creative efforts.

Exaggerated expectations that therapeutic reading and writing will automatically lead to empathy, altruistic behavior, and a just culture are too simplistic, whereas multiple creative processes embrace complexity and even chaotic states.

Creative, playful and poetic-empathic approach in biblio/poetry therapy

Creative acts of reading and writing seek and explore the dynamic balance between chaos and order, achieving self-reflection and self-organization. The various ramifications of biblio/poetry therapy are open to experience, which means that they are open to new perceptions and expressions and resist premature closure.

Intuitive abilities and shared meaning-making are activated in biblio/poetry therapy, helping to cope with anxiety and ambiguity. An essential component of biblio/poetry therapy is the courage to wait and listen in the state of unknowing, and to anticipate futures (transformative "leaps").

Poetic playfulness can disrupt given categories. The "precariousness" of play lies "between" inner and outer realities. Poetic players can take risks and even make "nonsense." Poetic-empathic play involves taking on different identities and roles, constructing different selves in changing interactive situations and relationships.

In biblio/poetry therapy, play involves the "freedom" to let go and let be in search of the feeling and meaning of my position: I am, I am alive, I am myself, I am writing and transforming myself, actually my various selves. I am not just a permanent, repetitive story, but a constantly evolving constellation of stories. I will stand by my words, and even between the lines, my meanings are never complete; they materialize and change through dynamic dialogues between the self and others as well as between the reader/writer and the text in its various contexts.

The future(s) of biblio/poetry therapy

When well-being is not forced to bend to the terms of governments, conglomerates and business algorithms, there will be open and free spaces on various stages for emotionally moving ecstatic-poetic performances—and within participatory and interactive media frameworks.

The future of biblio/poetry therapy is certainly not predictable, its idioms and expressions are full of surprise and awe, evolving into insights in an inexhaustible flow of language and mind. Biblio/poetry therapy is constantly in the making, in the workshop of *poiesis*. Metaphorical acts incite us to *poiesis*, which has its goals—to make visible the aspects of the inner meaningful invisible worlds and to work together in the here and now.

Although you cannot change what has happened, you can change what it means to you and how you deal with it. This old wisdom must be restored by re-narrativizing it over and over again. Trauma and traumatization (even vicarious) can be retold. The silence surrounding traumatic experiences and the act of witnessing them can be broken by exposing one symptomatic silence after another.

One must not be silent about what was once silenced.

As the poet Paul Celan (1960/1986, 50) wrote: "The attention which the poem pays to all that it encounters, its more acute sense of detail, outline, structure, colour, but also of the 'tremors and hints'—all this is not, I think, achieved by an eye competing (or concurring) with ever more precise instruments, but, rather, by a kind of concentration mindful of all our dates."

Stories for love & peace

Genuine fiction (*les belles lettres*), with "beautiful" and "sweetened" words (*logos kalos* and *logos hedysmenos*), and even with spicy and rough language, different rhythms and melodies, promotes the exchange and flow of words. Such words contribute to the resolution of traumas and conflicts that are accompanied by grief over loss, shame over humiliation, anger and rage over violence, fear of enemies, and bitter memories of prejudice and injustice.

Storytelling as conflict transformation (not just conflict resolution or management) and as peacebuilding does not resolve our differences, but it can create visions that are richer and larger than our differences. Love stories and peacemaking—peaceful meaning-making—go together. There is ample poetic space for transformative paradoxes in peacemaking, as described by John Paul Lederach (1995). They combine such seemingly irreconcilable ideas or opposites as systemic and personal transformation, justice and mercy, individual independence and individual interdependence, commitment to process and commitment to outcome.

Co-creation and shared storytelling can bridge divides and bring emerging content, qualities, ideas, and emotions into fruitful coexistence, whether in our immediate neighborhoods or in dialogues between cultures and civilizations. By opening our ideational shutters and removing writer's blocks, we see new word views and fresh world views. We can all become "professional" peaceful storytellers.

Storytelling is the central means by which we maintain, transfer and modify our individual and social existence, experience, learning, knowledge, and memory. Stories can provide us with the "vocabulary that enables people to cope with inadequacy, to manage failure and to gain a sense of self-esteem" (Plummer, 1995, 173).

Stories are virtual spaces, playgrounds, and workplaces for testing our various dimensions in moving worlds. The free play of words in biblio/poetry therapy is neither antagonistic nor agonistic,

not between competing winners and losers, but involves the mutual enjoyment of surplus meanings between participants. Stories, like reveries and dreams, are testing grounds on which we explore our strategies, potentials, alternatives, challenges, dangers, hopes and fears, gains and losses, likes and dislikes. Stories are vehicles for carrying reveries, fantasies and dreams into open dia- and polylogic developments, thus expanding one's mutual imaginative space and perspectives of action.

In biblio/poetry therapy, a meaningful approach is not the outward recording and evaluation of behavior, but the creative reading and writing of polyphonic relationship narratives across the lifespan. Through autobiographical narratives, we interpret and reevaluate the history, present, and future of our attachment relationships. Through reflective and dialogic reading and writing, touching memories, emotions, associations, and metaphors can dramatize personal attachments and link them to the construction of narrative identities.

In biblio/poetry therapy, participants meet and share narratives about their preferences and affections. In this way, the poetics of the states of mind can unfold: "a stronger voice and the blue incense of the heart / and words" (Seghers 1945, 72). Nor are attachment narratives ever complete, but temporary and open to a process of retelling and reevaluation, to a surprising word-attraction (cf. the "butterfly effect" when the movement of a butterfly's wings has an effect on the universe).

Coping and biblio/poetry therapy

Research on coping has focused primarily on problem solving and emotional regulation in the past and present stressful situations (harms/losses, challenges, threats) but *meaning-focused* and *future-oriented* coping strategies and the role of positive emotions and appraisals in the stress process have recently received more attention (e.g., Folkman, 2008; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Personal meanings and positive emotions also support problem-solving and emotional equilibrium while enhancing one's personal experience of available resources, enriching life values, and serving reciprocal social relationships.

Moreover, the means to anticipate the challenges and adversities facing humanity are not only individual-centered but require large group negotiation of life-sustaining efforts, mutual reconciliation of conflicts, and constructive planning for future generations (Ihanus, 2011, 56).

Through trauma-informed biblio/poetry therapy methods, post-traumatic growth can follow even from extremely traumatic situations and the sense of coherence can induce a sense of relational compassion and poetic-empathic relationships.

The process of reflective and transformative reading/writing

Different levels can be identified in the process of reflective and transformative reading/writing. I have proposed a theoretical model of the process of (facilitated) reflective and transformative reading/writing as a possible theoretical guide for biblio/poetry therapy practice (Table 1; Ihanus, 2019, 102).

Reading/writing → Selective attention → Emotional conditions → Motivational conditions → Defenses and coping strategies → Working memory and emotional autobiographical memory → Activation of personal themes and metaphors → Feedback → Identification, exploration, comparison, recognition, transference → Creative imagination and language play → Further personal reflection and expressive communication → Dialogic negotiation of meaning → Understanding and insight → Internalizing, relativizing and integrating the past, present, self, others, and environment → Metareflection = metacognition and meta-emotion → Rereading and rewriting → Holding and transforming identity stories and life stories for the future

Table 1. The process of reflective and transformative reading/writing

The arrows do not represent a linear causal chain, but rather "epigenetically" interlocking developmental steps, the order of which may change over time. These steps can be studied as different sequences, and at times some steps may be less important, implicit, or dormant in the ongoing process. Not all steps are functional for all participants. The richness and vitality of the reading/writing experience is reflected in the amount of playful rereading and rewriting. Rereading and rewriting lead to holding and transforming identity stories and life stories into the future.

Personal, self-reflexive, and insightful reading and writing is a complex and dynamic process that requires acceptance, negotiation, and responsibility in relation to multiple voices and identities. Reading and writing not only modify and interpret our perceptions and thinking, but also create our identities and experiential subjectivities.

Benefits of expressive/reflective writing and a "danger zone"

Expressive and reflective writing exercises can increase participants' *self-observation and understanding* of their creative potential and how to use it in their lives. They can increase participants' ability to focus on their *life story* and to arrive at personal ideas, conceptualizations and subjective as well as intersubjective dialogic and living truths.

Moreover, such exercises tend to develop participants' *reflexivity and self-awareness* of their life process, considering the multiple and changing discursive practices and points of view at different socio-cultural and cognitive-affective levels. Participants can *explore and map* their own mindsets, frames, concepts, scripts, and stories.

The development of *metacognitive and self-reflective skills and strategies* ("I know how, when and where I construct knowledge") is one of the outcomes of such writing. Related to this is the development of *meta-emotional appraisals* (Ihanus, 2007) of how, when and where we have felt, might have felt, are feeling, and will probably feel in the future, and how others have felt, might have felt, are feeling, and will probably feel in the future. We also learn to regulate our emotion-based, meaning-oriented, and future-oriented coping strategies and relationships. When facilitated, such exercises tend to have broader and *deeper effects on personality*, producing flexible coping and resilience.

Literature can lead one deeper into the mindscapes of nostalgia. For example, in his *Life on the Mississippi* (1883, Chapter 55), Mark Twain describes how ages, times, and identities are layered:

"During my three days' stay in the town, I woke up every morning with the impression that I was a boy—for in my dreams the faces were all young again, […] but I went to bed a hundred years old, every night—for meantime I had been seeing those faces as they are now."

The therapeutic space of literature is manifested in the present, but it covers the whole lifespan. The places of memory in literature embody nostalgia that extends from the past to the present *vantage points of memory*, while the future is dawning.

Literature is a curious therapist. It can emancipate people from self-deception and break the icy crust of the mind, but in breaking the crust, it leads to a "danger zone" where you "can seriously damage your sadness", be "in danger of achieving your dreams" and finally be in "danger of learning you're alive" (Bolton, n.d.). The treasure of the arts includes dawning light, song, music, visions and words, embracing all life forms and life skills, and growing through the ages. The means of the arts are not weapons of war, but incentives for loving expressions of peace.

Language and the literate mind/brain are not predetermined; they do not constitute a ready-made constellation in human beings but go through multifaceted developments in different interactions and environmental contexts. Literature seeks, transforms, and translates traumatic memories and shameful emotions into growth through inspiring expressions, without neglecting pain, suffering, and loss in the human predicament. While participating in biblio/poetry therapy, people process their moods and other mental states and express them imaginatively and metaphorically, opening themselves to the depths, possibilities and resources of poetic language. Such enthusiastic participation in poetic moments of meaning provides perspectives of hope that make life worth living, with its dreams, desires, and surprises.

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