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Conceptual Metaphors and Symbolic Modeling in Modern Bibliotherapy

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Abstract

Literary bibliotherapy (or reflective bibliotherapy or "just" bibliotherapy) is presented as a potentially different approach to reading literary texts. It builds extensively on the knowledge and practices developed within other bibliotherapeutic traditions worldwide. While it shares many features with established approaches from countries such as Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom, it distinguishes itself through its specific theoretical grounding and methodological structure. Therefore, it may be more accurate to describe it as different rather than innovative, since it conceptually stands on the shoulders of its predecessors.

The terminology itself, whether one prefers the term "just" bibliotherapy, literary bibliotherapy or reflective bibliotherapy, remains open to discussion, inviting further reflection on how best to define this emerging bibliotherapeutic model.

The scientific approach of literary bibliotherapy is based on understanding and using emotions as a form of symbolical generalized communication media. The method focuses on the reflective reading of emotional conceptual metaphors (*conemotional metaphors*) in the text. In this way, readers can connect the events presented in the literary work with emotions they personally experience. At the same time, literary bibliotherapy uses the technique of symbolic modeling. In the process of analyzing conceptual metaphors within the text, the so-called technique of clean language is used. Symbolic modeling connects conceptual metaphors with the reader's emotions, which helps to determine the reader's metaphorical horizon. It functions as the reader's core belief regarding the presented and analyzed text. All of that is implemented in the therapeutic process through the MED cycle — a structured approach specifically developed for engaging with literature and grounded in cognitive psychotherapy.

Keywords: literary bibliotherapy; systems theory; therapeutic reading; conceptual metaphor; conemotional metaphor; symbolic modeling; MED cycle; cognitive psychotherapy

Introduction: What is literary bibliotherapy?

Therapeutic reading encompasses a wide range of approaches that use literature and texts for emotional empowerment, introspection, and encouraging personal development. As the common denominator of bibliotherapy and its contemporary forms, therapeutic reading involves the analysis of stories, poetry, and metaphors to encourage understanding of one's feelings, thoughts, and behavior. Of course, each of these approaches is based on specific methodologies. For example, many forms of the developmental bibliotherapy uses literature to develop empathy, address emotional difficulties, and discover new perspectives.

Various forms of bibliotherapy have been practiced for decades around the world — from Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia to the United Kingdom — and although there are clear similarities among them and the model of "literary bibliotherapy" presented here, seeks to distinguish itself

through its theoretical grounding and methodological structure (Piskač & Marinčić, 2024). So, the question of terminology is entirely justified; while literary bibliotherapy could, in principle, be referred to simply as bibliotherapy, it nevertheless differs in certain essential aspects. Therefore, an alternative term, reflective bibliotherapy, is also proposed and remains open to discussion, leaving the precise differentiation as an open chapter in the ongoing development of this bibliotherapeutic approach. Still, let us assume that, for now, the term literary bibliotherapy will serve well enough, at least temporarily, until further conceptual clarification emerges.

Literary bibliotherapy specific character can be seen in several core components:

- Analysis of conceptual emotional metaphors: a key interpretative tool linking the emotional meanings of literary metaphors with the reader's unconscious emotional patterns, initiating a process of emotional understanding.
- Application of symbolic modelling – a psychotherapeutic technique reinterpreted and adapted to the analysis of literary contexts and characters
- Use of the MED cycle (thought–emotion–event) – a cognitive-therapeutic framework adapted for work with literary texts.

The method relies on a structured interpretive framework known as the MED cycle[1], which corresponds to the recognition of the thought–emotion–event pattern as practiced in cognitive therapy (Piskač & Marinčić, 2024). This pattern is consistently repeated: from one discourse to another, and even from one sentence to the next, using a precisely defined language and a specific type of questioning. In practice, there is no "free conversation," but rather a carefully designed pathway that guides the client toward an understanding of their personal metaphors.

The MED cycle (probably) activates the entire cognitive system in three successive phases. In his book *Mind Magic: The Neuroscience of Manifestation and How It Changes Everything* (2024), James R. Doty describes how focused attention, intentional awareness, and cognitive–emotional integration emerge from the dynamic interplay of large-scale brain networks, particularly the task-positive network (TPN), the dorsal attention network (DAN), and the executive control network (ECN). These networks, as Doty explains, not only enable goal-directed cognition but also facilitate the transformation of inner experience by aligning thought, emotion, and purposeful action.

Although there are notable conceptual parallels between Doty's model of the dynamic interplay of large-scale brain networks and the three-phase structure of the MED cycle (thought–emotion–event), there is currently no empirical evidence or neuroscientific research that directly links the MED cycle with Doty's framework. The MED cycle remains primarily a theoretical and therapeutic construct within the field of literary bibliotherapy, while Doty's model is grounded in neuroscientific inquiry into attentional and executive brain systems. Nevertheless, both approaches share an underlying assumption that conscious regulation of thought and emotion can reshape patterns of perception and behavior. Thus, this connection may be proposed as one of the possible explanatory frameworks for a model that evidently works in practice—supported by substantial evidence of its effectiveness. So, three phases are:

- To evoke the sense of importance in understanding a specific problem presented in the literary work;

[1] Literal translation from Croatian: M for *misao* (thought), E for *emocija* (emotion) and D for *događaj* (event).

- To intentionally and systematically gather evidence for the significance of that problem and its interpretation;
- To enable the comprehension and integration of relationships between all thoughts, emotions, and behaviors analyzed in the literary work and associated with a specific problem.

The insights gained in each of these phases are repeated multiple times throughout a single workshop or session, each time shifting from one discourse to another, until the process itself becomes automatic, and possibly even subconscious. For instance, a client may notice in such analysis that a literary character's thought "my wife didn't make me coffee again" evokes an unpleasant emotion such as anger or resentment, followed by a decision like "then I won't clear the table after myself and load the dishwasher".... Such combinations of thoughts, emotions, and decisions are iterated repeatedly until their causal relationships become clear on both cognitive and emotional levels, until they "sink" into the subconscious and begin to be recognized automatically. In a therapeutic sense, when a client has thoroughly and repeatedly practiced the recognition of these patterns, they will begin to intuitively notice similar situations in their real life and respond in a way that aligns with their current level of awareness.

It is similar to searching for a four-leaf clover: at first it seems impossible to find even one, but after discovering a few, one develops a kind of perceptual sensitivity to recognize them effortlessly. You might simply walk past a patch of grass and suddenly notice one without even looking for it. What follows is a choice, whether to be grateful for that small symbol of luck or not, a matter of personal awareness and life preference (Kikuchi, Y. et al., 2019).

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of this method lies in the interpretation of emotional conceptual metaphors: metaphors that embody the emotional architecture of the text to trace the causality between the thoughts, the elicited emotions, and the unfolding events within the literary narrative. In this sense, literary bibliotherapy offers an interdisciplinary contribution to the field. It aligns with cognitive literary studies and psychonarratology (Bortolussi & Dixon, 2003) while maintaining a therapeutic orientation grounded in the symbolic and emotional power of narrative. It represents a form of emotionally aware reading in which the interpretation of literary metaphors becomes an instrument of self-understanding and emotional regulation.

In essence, literary bibliotherapy offers a distinct and potentially "new" way of reading, analyzing, and interpreting literary texts, which could even serve as an alternative to classical approaches. The ultimate goal of therapeutic reading, supported by conceptual emotional metaphors, symbolic modeling, and the MED cycle (a literary-bibliotherapeutic method grounded in cognitive psychotherapy), is to help readers uncover emotions elicited and encouraged by the process of engaging with literature.

Emotions and the System of Literature

Emotions and literature are connected through the reader's deeply personal, inner experience of a literary text. From a cognitivist perspective, literature stimulates the emergence of emotions by engaging the reader's psyche.[2] Although the literary text is a fictional category, the emotions and feelings it evokes during reading are real to the reader and can genuinely transform them (Žunkovič, 2022, 11).

[2] The cognitivist perspective on the relationship between emotions and feelings, which is also represented in this paper, follows Grant's claim that feelings play a multiple role in our emotional lives, not only that they make up all our emotions, but also in the sense that they structure our entire emotional connection with the world (Grant, 2008, 68).

The challenge is that emotions are processed differently within the psychic systems of consciousness, making it uncertain whether the emotions "found" in the literary work align with those experienced by the reader. This discrepancy arises because psychological systems differ fundamentally from literary systems (Baraldi et al., 2021, 182). When viewing literature and the psychological system as separate entities, emotions can be attributed to three sources: the writer, the text, or the reader. Each instance may encode entirely different emotions depending on the medium—namely, the literary work—that connects them. In other words, the writer may have one emotion in mind while writing, the text's structure and style may convey different possibilities for encoding emotions, and the reader may interpret or experience emotions in yet another way. This lack of emotional consensus is due to the operational closure of the psychological system of the writer, the literary system, and the psychological system of the reader (Piskač & Marinčić, 2024, 91). Each of these autopoietic systems operates as an independent, self-contained unit that cannot be entirely explained by external systems (Baraldi et al., 2021, 235).

In the contemporary world, where disciplinary boundaries are increasingly blurred, there is a growing intuitive need for a synthesis of science and art. This synthesis involves crossing the boundaries between different systems. Niklas Luhmann, in his work *Soziale Systeme* (1984), articulates this need through social systems theory, proposing that systems emit information into their environment, which other systems can use as energy for their autopoiesis (Baraldi et al., 2021, 189).

However, the challenge lies in the fact that autopoietic systems are operationally closed due to their specific codes (Baraldi et al., 2021, 232). This means that operations from one system cannot directly enter another, nor can they leave their system. Nevertheless, systems remain open to their environment because they depend on exchanges of energy and material with it: without which they could not exist. To bridge this gap, systems develop programs containing specific, symbolically generalized communication media. These media allow one operation to be transmitted between two or more systems, although what applies to one operation may not necessarily hold true for others occurring between the same systems (Baraldi et al., 2021, 181).[3]

Interaction between systems is therefore made possible by symbolically generalized communication media, which are specialized structures designed to ensure successful communication between different systems. These media, created within one system, enable the acceptance of information from another (Baraldi et al., 2021, 229). It is both fascinating and important to note that emotions can be understood as symbolically generalized communication media. This understanding opens up the possibility for systems of consciousness, as distinct entities, to utilize the literary system—a completely different system with its own unique codes—as a means to better understand human emotions (Piskač & Marinčić, 2024, 81).

This leads to the question: How can we "decode" emotions in a literary text to establish a "common emotional denominator" between psychological and literary systems? Patrick C. Hogan offers some potential answers. He suggests that literature can be understood as a set of "instructions" or programmatic possibilities that one system (literature) provides to another (the psychic system) if read differently—that is, carefully and slowly (Hogan, 2011, 41).

Hogan argues that literature can simulate emotional experiences for the reader. When it succeeds in doing so, it produces complex and genuine emotional responses that psychological systems can

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accept, psychology as a science can analyze (Hogan, 2011, 22), and psychotherapists can integrate into their therapeutic practices. Such engagement with a literary text can elicit emotions in the reader that are neither necessarily similar to those felt by the author during writing nor fully represented by the text itself. Rather, the reader may develop their own unique emotional responses or even a set of emotions that feel entirely real to them—emotions they believe emerged because of their interaction with the literary text.

Symbolic Modeling

Having established the possibility of a "common denominator in the code," it is now crucial to address how emotions can be "found" in a literary text and encouraged to "transition" from the literary system to our psychological system. Understanding conceptual metaphors is an essential step in this process (Piskač & Marinčić, 2024, 104). However, conceptual metaphors alone are insufficient; they must be applied using the symbolic modeling technique (Piskač & Marinčić, 2024, 119).

The foundational text on symbolic modeling is *Metaphors in Mind: Transformation through Symbolic Modeling* (2000) by James Lawley and Penny Tompkins. They based their method on conceptual metaphor theory, as articulated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). One of the chapters in Lawley and Tompkins' book even shares its title with Lakoff and Johnson's seminal work.[4] Symbolic modeling structures conceptual metaphors within the reader's metaphorical horizon (Piskač & Marinčić, 2024, 129, citing Lawley & Tompkins, 2000, 17). This horizon encompasses a repertoire of metaphors and the reader's associated emotions. By examining this symbolic horizon, it becomes possible to clearly deduce what the reader feels and even thinks.

Symbolic modeling is therefore a psychotherapeutic method that helps individuals participating in reading therapy become aware of their personal symbolic-metaphorical horizon. It enables participants to identify their personal conceptual metaphors, expressed through bodily sensations and their relationship to their environment, and to connect these metaphors to their emotions. Specifically, emotional conceptual metaphors (*conemotional metaphors*)[5] are employed to reveal and explore emotions.[6]

The application of conceptual metaphors in psychotherapy, as a method, was modeled by Lawley and Tompkins after the work of David Grove in the 1980s. Grove was the first to create and successfully use the so-called *clean language* method. Briefly put, symbolic modeling uses the client's emotional (conceptual) metaphors and symbols, as well as their way of speaking about them, to interpret their personal emotions using *clean language* (Lawley & Tompkins, 2000, IX–X).

[4] Lakoff and Johnson explained that metaphor is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but a fundamental aspect of how we think and act. According to their research, our conceptual system, which shapes our thoughts and actions, is largely based on metaphor. In short, according to what they claim, many aspects of our thinking, experience and everyday actions are a matter of conceptual metaphors and their realization (Hajdarević, 2015, 289).

[5] Conemotional metaphors focus on emotional processes, states, and reactions. They are closest to what we can call a "conceptual emotional metaphor" whose target domain is to reveal emotion (Kövecses, 2000, 127).

[6] In his book *Metaphor and Emotion, Language, Culture, and Body in Human Feeling*, published in 2000 (an expanded edition was published in 2003), Zoltán Kövecses revises some of his earlier statements about the relationship between emotions and metaphors and says that some sources of the domain are more suitable for expressing emotions than others, thus opening up the possibility of conceptual emotional metaphors arising from embodied experiences (Kövecses, 2000, 49).

Symbolic Modeling Adapted to Literary Bibliotherapy

Since the process of talking with clients in psychotherapy differs from discussing literary characters with readers (as characters are fictional and cannot be directly questioned), symbolic modeling must be adapted for discussions about the text. In the context of literary-bibliotherapeutic reading, symbolic modeling is modified to meet the unique challenges presented by the literary text (Piskač & Marinčić, 2024, 233).

Although literary characters are fictional, they communicate through verbal expressions of metaphors, which serve as the primary means of conveying emotions to the reader. Since literary characters cannot communicate non-verbally or answer questions, readers must rely on the text to interpret their thoughts and feelings. This interaction requires readers to take an active role in deciphering the conceptual emotional metaphors embedded in the text. In essence, readers "feel" as though they are analyzing and interpreting the emotions of literary characters, but in reality, they are engaging with their personal metaphorical horizon—often without being consciously aware of it (Piskač & Marinčić, 2024, 234). By doing so, they interpret their own emotions through the guise of analyzing the literary characters' emotions.

The aim of therapeutic reading, in this sense, is not to "guess" exactly what literary characters think or feel (which is inherently impossible). Instead, it allows readers to project their emotional experiences onto the literary characters (Piskač & Marinčić, 2024, 237). Readers metaphorically "step into the shoes" of the characters, using their personal life experiences to empathize with the characters' situations. Importantly, this method protects readers from unwanted emotional disclosure—a key advantage of this approach.

In this process, the reader and the text function as both the analyst and the analyzed (Wright, 2003, 17, 130, citing Lacan, 1977). This is achieved because the conceptual emotional metaphors in the text connect the literary world with the reader's world. When mapping the body sensations of literary characters onto possible emotions, readers may experience concrete and real emotions based on their personal perceptions of their body and its interactions with the environment (Piskač & Marinčić, 2024, 113).

Understanding how these emotions arise and influence the reader is the second key aspect of therapeutic reading, a focus of the MED cycle (Piskač & Marinčić, 2024, 223).

MED Cycle, Cognitive Therapy and Reflective Reading

The MED cycle (thought–emotion–event) draws directly from the theoretical foundations of cognitive therapy (Sanders & Wills, 2005), particularly Beck's cognitive model of emotional functioning. Both approaches are based on the premise that emotions do not arise from events themselves but from the interpretations individuals attach to them. The MED cycle operationalizes this insight by structuring the process into three interconnected stages: identifying the thought (M) that interprets the situation, recognizing the emotion (E) it evokes, and relating both to the event (D) that triggered them.[7]

[7] A book about cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and bibliotherapy, *Read Two Books & Let's Talk Next Week: Using Bibliotherapy in Clinical Practice* by Janice Maidman Joshua and Donna DiMenna (2000), is an interesting and useful resource that offers both benefits and limitations. It serves as a practical guide for therapists seeking to incorporate self-

Life events and the narratives built around them often reinforce latent negative patterns, maintaining a vicious cycle of distressing thoughts, unpleasant emotions, and maladaptive behaviors. Cognitive therapy is based on the premise that emotions and behaviors are mutually interactive and reciprocally influential. It emphasizes two key principles: first, emotion serves as information about how the self is affected by and affects the environment; and second, emotion is part of an active tendency that motivates adaptive behavior. When a therapist identifies a patient's so-called "hot thought" — a thought that triggers a specific emotional reaction — they can guide the client toward reformulating or replacing that thought to elicit a different emotional response. Although emotional processes are largely autonomous and cannot be changed directly, they can be influenced indirectly through thoughts that act as emotional triggers (Sanders & Wills, 2005, 167). Beck's well-known dictum captures this idea: "Emotion is where action is, and action lies in thought — in the cognitive layer of human consciousness" (Wills, 2009, 36)

While cognitive therapy explicitly focuses on restructuring dysfunctional thoughts, the MED cycle transfers this process into the symbolic and literary domain, where reflection and emotional learning occur indirectly through engagement with fictional characters. In this way, the reader achieves cognitive–emotional insight and potential transformation by recognizing parallel patterns between the literary narrative and their own inner experience, a process that mirrors the core mechanism of cognitive change but through aesthetic and empathetic mediation. In short, it focuses on observing the causality in meaning[8] between thoughts, emotions, and life choices, as well as the transfer of meaning between these systems (Dryden & Neenan, 2004, 9–10). The first phase of the MED cycle begins with reflective reading.

So, both cognitive therapy and the MED cycle share a structural focus on the interrelation between thought, emotion, and experience, yet the MED model translates this cognitive mechanism into a literary and reflective process. Within the framework of reflective reading, as described by Karyn Sproles (2019), reading becomes a metacognitive act that recognizes the influence of unconscious material and invites introspective engagement with the text. This resonates with the core principles of cognitive therapy, where awareness of the thought–emotion connection leads to transformation and healing. In the context of the MED cycle, reflective reading activates the same mechanism: through the reader's identification with a literary character, unconscious or repressed emotions are brought into awareness and cognitively restructured. Thus, reflective reading functions as a literary analogue of cognitive therapy: a process in which insight, recovery, or the resolution of inner conflict emerges not through direct analysis but through symbolic participation in the narrative experience. Reflective reading is important to the MED cycle for several reasons. First, it recognizes the influence of the unconscious, a network of associations and reactions inaccessible to conscious thought, yet profoundly affecting daily life. The transformative impact of reading

help literature into their clinical work. Its main strength lies in clarity and usability: the summaries of 317 books are well-structured and thematically organized around key areas of clinical practice. The authors, both experienced therapists, successfully provide orientation within the "sea" of self-help titles, making it easier to select suitable books for clients. However, the book quickly becomes outdated due to the rapid publication of new titles, and its selection often feels overly popular and somewhat superficial. Moreover, despite its practical value, the work lacks scientific grounding and theoretical depth, functioning more as a reference guide than as a substantial contribution to bibliotherapy theory.

[8] Namely, the question of meaning is a common denominator, that is, a phenomenon, which both literature and cognitive psychology deal with: it investigates the ways in which thinking leads to the creation of meaning. In this sense, Siegfried Schmidt (1968) and Robert de Beaugrande (1980) deal with literary theory and cognitive sciences. They combine literature and cognitive psychology with terms and keywords such as: meaning, context, evocation, acceptance, image, etc. More precisely, from the perspective of cognitive psychology, they try to answer how literature corresponds with questions of mental language, emotions and meaning (Gavins & Steen, 2003, 168).

typically occurs at this unconscious level, with the conscious realization that reading has changed one's life serving as a reflection of this process.

These moments of realization are akin to the cracks in consciousness provided by dreams, offering (albeit blurred and often overlooked) insights into the unconscious. Such moments, like dreams or free associations, can unlock repressed content (Sproles, 2019, 33). Research indicates that intentionally seeking or recreating a sense of safety during stress can enhance resilience, improve decision-making, and increase well-being. Expanding the range of emotional responses fosters reflection and creative alternatives, enabling individuals to "read" themselves even in something as mundane as a laundry label, should access to literature be unavailable. Reflective reading, in itself, provides a space for evoking positive emotions when they are most needed (Sproles, 2019, 7).

When reflective reading is applied to a text, it emphasizes subjectivity, epiphany, and introspection. In synergy with the MED cycle, it provides a structured framework for observing and explaining the connections between characters' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. When reflective reading is combined with conceptual emotional metaphors (*conemotional metaphors*), it opens up entirely new possibilities for eliciting emotions through literary texts (and, to some extent, other types of texts).

By analyzing what the narrator or literary characters express in conceptual metaphors, the thoughts of these characters can be revealed with clarity. These thoughts are then associated with potential emotions. Finally, the text is examined to determine whether the characters' thoughts and emotions align with their behaviors. Since literary texts typically describe events directly, while emotions are less commonly explicit, analysis often begins with events, connecting them to thoughts, and ultimately linking these thoughts to emotions. So, the MED cycle posits a cyclical movement between thoughts, emotions, and events within a literary text, where one inevitably leads to the other, regardless of the starting point. Typically, however, analysis begins with communication events.[9]

Facilitator of Literary Bibliotherapy

The facilitator of literary bibliotherapy is an individual responsible for guiding readers in creating their metaphorical horizons and interpreting conceptual emotional metaphors. This process often involves using *clean language* (Lawley & Tompkins, 2000, 51). While the facilitator does not necessarily have to be a psychotherapist, this would be desirable. They should have extensive knowledge of literature and an understanding of psychology, particularly with regard to how emotions arise and influence behavior.

As a literary expert, the facilitator can recommend specific texts and identify the relevant conceptual emotional metaphors within them. They must also have a strong grasp of literary in order to recognize and analyze these metaphors effectively. A crucial aspect of the facilitator's role is avoiding overinterpretation: projecting meanings onto the text that are not actually present. Overinterpretation risks distorting the text and imposing unintended emotional responses on participants.[10] The facilitator must remain attuned to the emotions present in the text, develop the

[9] A communication event occurs at the moment when communication formalized in the form of interpretation at a certain point in time permeates language, thought and emotion and gives them meaning (Piskač, 2018, 52–53).
In other words, viewed from the context of communication, a communication event occurs at one moment and is subject to interpretation as something that is exactly as it is. In other words, it cannot be changed, but it can be interpreted again and again, and thus it becomes almost inexhaustibly multi-meaning.

[10] Overinterpretation can easily happen to a hasty reader who has an exaggerated desire to prove something that is not in the text and immediately jumps to a conclusion (Eco, 1990, 67).

ability to communicate about emotions, and create an atmosphere where participants feel safe and comfortable discussing their responses (Piskač & Marinčić, 2024, 167).

In therapeutic reading, participants are both readers and interpreters of literary characters, who function as "fictional clients." Unlike real individuals, literary characters lack authentic psychological development and complexity; their reactions, thoughts, and emotions are often crafted to advance the plot or emphasize specific themes or messages within the work. Consequently, literary characters are confined to the parameters of the text, meaning that interpretations should rely solely on information explicitly presented within the literary work. Paratexts, biographical details about the author, or other extratextual information should not be introduced into therapeutic reading discussions (Piskač & Marinčić, 2024, 91).

Although therapeutic reading is not psychotherapy, it occasionally mirrors its principles. As such, it demands adherence to an ethical code of conduct, including confidentiality, professionalism, and prioritizing the well-being of all participants. While these guidelines do not apply to fictional characters, they are essential for maintaining a respectful and supportive environment for all participants in the reading process.

During therapeutic reading, some participants may strongly identify with certain traits of a literary character, experiencing these traits more personally. For this reason, moderation, discretion, and respect are indispensable in discussions about the text (Piskač & Marinčić, 2024, 253).

One particularly unique feature of literary bibliotherapy, and a key distinction from psychotherapy, is the freedom to offer advice to literary characters (Duan, 2018, 176).[11] Since characters are fictional, they cannot hear or act on such advice, which ensures that no harm is done. This practice allows participants to reflect on better life choices in a safe and imaginative context. However, advice must never be directed at fellow participants in the therapeutic reading session, as this is the domain of trained psychotherapists, who offer advice with great caution and only when necessary.

The advice given to literary characters serves as an imaginative exercise. Participants can safely explore its implications without feeling any pressure to apply it to their own lives. The facilitator must guide these discussions, making it clear that any advice pertains solely to the fictional character and is entirely optional for participants.

The key advantage of literary bibliotherapy lies in the emotional safety it provides. Since discussions focus on reconstructing the experiences of literary characters rather than directly addressing the personal experiences of participants, readers are free to express their feelings and opinions openly while remaining emotionally protected. This method allows participants to explore their emotions and life contexts more freely, fostering deeper self-awareness and personal growth (Piskač & Marinčić, 2024, 175).

[11] In almost every psychotherapy, for very good reasons, advice is not given to living persons, except in exceptional cases and only in some psychotherapy approaches, and even then very cautiously and scrupulously. This is something that leaders of therapeutic reading workshops must be very aware of. In therapeutic reading, advice can be given only and exclusively to literary instances and subjects. Namely, literary characters are not living people, and advice cannot harm them. But even then, with very clear boundaries and rules about respecting the opinions of all participants in the therapeutic reading.

Conclusion

Literature has the potential to serve as a profound tool for emotional awareness and therapeutic intervention. Literary bibliotherapy diverges from traditional approaches to literature by prioritizing the reader's emotional experience. In this context, therapeutic reading uses literature as a medium to explore the reader's emotions, encouraging reflection on personal life situations and emotional responses through interaction with the text and its characters.

The emotional dimensions of reading are explored in relative depth, focusing on how readers interpret and internalize the emotional content of the text. These emotions are not solely reflections of what the text depicts but are also shaped by the reader's personal emotional history and current psychological state. This phenomenon is examined through the lenses of symbolic modeling and cognitive therapy, emphasizing an interdisciplinary approach that integrates literature, psychology, and psychotherapy. This integration suggests that literature can offer therapeutic value beyond the traditional boundaries of literary criticism and theory.

A specific literary text can provide the basis for therapeutic reading, enabling readers to process and engage with profound emotional content. The role of the facilitator of literary bibliotherapy is indispensable in this process. The facilitator not only interprets the text but also guides the reader's emotional interaction with it, managing the entire process with care and expertise. They help readers to articulate their emotions, thereby fostering emotional growth, and encouraging greater self-understanding.

Thus, literary bibliotherapy expands our understanding the potential of literature as a tool for emotional intervention and personal development. It offers a new perspective on therapeutic reading, presenting it as a legitimate and valuable field of study within the humanities and social sciences.

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