Bibliotherapy and Reading Guidance:
A Tentative Approach to Theory

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The literature of therapy is vast. The literature of bibliotherapy is with few exceptions couched in terms of "perhaps" and "maybe." This paper is no less tentative although it takes into account some promising, if slight, evidence.

The writer is not a bibliotherapist, but by experience and affinity one who is interested in the provision of reading guidance to persons who have not sought and who may not need clinical help. This guidance consists of bringing about effective encounters between people and books and is an accepted part of the library’s educational program. That education is not clearly separable from therapy has been recognized by some educators of adults. Benne notes this fact in his statement of reasons for seeking the presidency of the Adult Education Association: “At one end education does seem akin to therapy, and at the other end it seems it must include much more. Many factors contributing to alienation are not rooted in the personality at all but in the disorganization of our communities and societies.”¹ Educators, he holds, must become students of personality. He is recognizing that one of the major tasks of education is the reduction of this alienation in individuals and in society. The librarian is apparently attempting to educate by means of books. It is unlikely that he can ignore the therapeutic aspects of reading.

If he functions as part of a therapeutic team or works within a hospital, the librarian is likely to be concerned primarily with bibliotherapy. The milieu in which he works or, rather, the complex of doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, and others will to some extent govern what he does, even if his only assignment is to provide recreation.

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If the results of reading are therapeutic, the elements by means of which the results are achieved will be the same regardless of whether the reader be a patient or simply a library patron. In either case, if the librarian's knowledge of personality is more than superficial, he will recognize that he has some guiding theories in regard to the developmental process by means of which organism becomes individual.

The interpersonal theory of Harry Stack Sullivan seems a promising context in which to consider the role of reading. The organism which becomes reader brings into the world little more than a bundle of potentialities. To what extent these potentialities are limited by native endowment is uncertain. The organism will seek satisfaction in ways that are determined by the culture. The self which emerges is the result of approval and disapproval by significant others: mothers, fathers, siblings, etc.: "Tendencies of the personality not approved by these others, tendencies strongly disapproved, are disassociated from the awareness of the child." If an individual, and particularly a gifted individual, disassociates a large number of motivational systems, tensions are created by wants of which he is unaware, and he is likely to experience difficulties. One becomes what he is by interaction with the interpersonal situations of which he is a part. Life is a patterned sequence of these.

If significant others were not limited by being human, the possibility of the healing acceptance of books might not be such an important means of transcending these limits. In Sullivan's conception the book itself may be a significant other: "In general, any frame of reference, whether constituted by real people, imaginary people existing only in books, . . . along with one other real person, can make up an interpersonal situation." On this basis one may propose that the variety and richness of books are means of counteracting the meagerness of the environment and the limits of those who are parts of interpersonal situations. This provides a rationale for considering the role of the book in the prevention of alienation both from oneself and from others. Rollo May has stated that, "The common, objective aspect of these neurotic problems [of our times] is that the individual . . . cannot experience himself as a self in his own right." Unless one has
a real and valid attitude toward the self, he will be unable to experience others as valid and real. "It is not that as you judge so shall you judge others, but as you judge yourself so shall you judge others. Strange but true so far as I know and without exception." 6

What elements are involved when bibliotherapy, be it implicit or explicit, preventive or curative, takes place? Alice I. Bryan noted the relevance of the mind-body relationship in 1939. 7 This stresses the unity in the biological world which insures that changes at one level will produce changes at another level. As Whitaker and Malone put it,

physical changes have very clear psychological effects, and presumably the reverse is also true: the interpersonal changes the psychological; the psychological changes the physiological; and the physiological changes the anatomical. . . .

In the human organism, one finds much the same continuity of functional levels. In keeping with recent developments in biological theory, thought and ideation are viewed as highly integrated feeling, feeling as highly integrated emotion, emotion as highly integrated physiological change, and physiological change as simply a highly integrated electro-chemical change. 8

A book which arouses emotion will in turn bring about physical changes.

One analysis of the literature of bibliotherapy is interesting for its critical scrutiny of medical literature. Dewey Carroll, 9 to whom this paper is greatly indebted, has found the mechanisms involved to be insufficiently described to be useful for testing. The majority of those described fall into three categories:

Those through which the reader identifies himself with characters and experiences in the reading materials and abreacts repressed unconscious affects in regard to the material absorbed; those through which the reader integrates the intellectual understandings and emotional experiences contained in the reading material into combined intellectual and emotional insights into his own personality and life situation; and those through which the reader vicariously expresses or sublimates his instinctual impulses in a socially acceptable manner and effects their redirection toward socially acceptable goals. 10

Carroll also concludes that no serious effort toward a conceptual analysis has been made outside of the framework of psychoanalysis,
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Two studies which he suggested for further consideration are interesting.

On the basis of a study by Ericson,\textsuperscript{11} Kaufman and Taylor\textsuperscript{12} propose that a writer creates and resolves a conflict in the reader. By means of this the reader resolves his own conflict. Ericson reports the cure of one neurosis by the resolution of another which he induced hypnotically. The fiction for Kaufman and Taylor constitutes an artificial neurosis. Lee,\textsuperscript{13} in the second of the two studies, attempted to understand the therapeutic effects of reading in both psychological and aesthetic terms. The creativity of the author is the result of his need to make restitution for the destruction of some object toward which he is ambivalent. The reader who experiences the form which the author creates as beautiful identifies himself with the subject matter. The appeal of the subject matter is unconscious and due to his resolution of the Oedipal conflict in some pregenital stage of his development. Since the creation of the artist is beautiful, the reader is able to recognize his unconscious tendency projected upon the work of art. This process involves both recognition of the attitudes of the artist and his ability to impose form upon materials.

Two studies to which Carroll did not have access provide some evidence in regard to dynamics. Caroline Shrodes\textsuperscript{14} has found a unifying rationale for the effects of reading imaginative literature in psychoanalysis, field theory, and aesthetics. In this context it should be remembered that Sullivan may be considered a field theorist. These effects, she holds, are the dynamics. In one case study, and in several less fully reported instances, she found that three processes were present which correspond to phases of psychotherapy: identification, including projection and introjection, catharsis, and insight. Identification is an adaptive mechanism by means of which the reader, largely unconsciously, increases his esteem for himself by affiliating with another person or persons. In projection the reader attributes his own motives and emotions to theirs. Miss Shrodes uses the words \textit{catharsis} and \textit{abreaction} synonymously to denote the "uncensored and spontaneous release of emotion."\textsuperscript{15} Insight is the emotional awareness of motivation. The aesthetic experience facilitates psychodiagnosis while at the same time it provides experiences by means of which the reader grows. While didactic literature may have therapeutic effects, imaginative literature makes possible an emotional experience without which therapy cannot take place. Esther Hartman\textsuperscript{16} offers additional evidence of identification and some evidence of abreaction.
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The reactions of Miss Hartman's subjects with characters and situations in stories tend to correspond with their own experiences in interpersonal situations. The reactions among younger persons tend to be intensified when characters whom they have read about are of their own age level. Parents respond in two ways to the characters in one story, both as parents and as children.

The human tendency toward symbolization which Sullivan recognizes utilizes the Freudian mechanisms of identification, projection, and introjection. The distortion of symbols, which may facilitate psychodiagnosis, is the mechanism which Freud calls transference, "whereby emotion is directed at a given stimulus in terms of a previous affective experience." Apparently in reading one is able to incorporate materials by means of responses in which identification, projection, and insight are involved. The way in which the reader organizes his field, of which the literature under consideration is a part, depends upon that field, but is also structured by what the reader brings to the situation. His use of literature is facilitated by elements that attract him although he may be largely unaware of these elements. What, in this process, has become of the vital presence of the therapist?

Is the book, itself, therapist? Is it possible that a particular book may offer to a particular reader the kind of acceptance that Rogers believes to be necessary in the therapeutic situation? Miss Shrodes, as has been seen, found evidence of effects analogous to early stages of therapy. However, it seems dangerous to substitute books for persons. Sullivan suggests that one other person must be present in the situation when the book becomes the significant other. Perhaps it is in this context that we should consider the role of the librarian.

Only as he functions in his role of bibliotherapist, a particular and limited kind of therapist, may the librarian be considered in that capacity. Yet the relationship between reader and librarian may be a relationship in which the growth of one or both participants is fostered or inhibited. Two kinds of therapy have been recognized—explicit and implicit. For explicit therapy one goes to a psychotherapist. Implicit therapy, however, is a resource of the culture, present under some circumstances for those who can find and make use of it. The hospital librarian is frequently involved in the provision of the first kind. Philosophy, purposes, and techniques are to some extent set by the clinical situation of which he is a part. The reader's adviser may provide guidance in the implicit sense. Neither adviser
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nor reader will always be aware of when such guidance takes place. Under some limited circumstances the adviser may function as a bibliotherapist in the explicit sense. In either case the dynamics are the same, and insofar as personal characteristics are concerned, desirable attitudes on the part of the librarian are similar.

The librarian must, of course, know books and readers as well as the effects of bringing the two together. Possible dynamics have been specified. As yet we know little of effects. The librarian puts his knowledge of books at the disposal of the reader who has sought help for purposes of his own.

Rogers’ discussion of the characteristics of the helping situation might well be digested by all who provide reading guidance. This is a relationship in which one of the participants intends “that there should come about in one or both parties, more appreciation of, more functional use of, the latent inner resources of the individual.” Basic to all such relationships are (1) the ability of the helper to be fully what he is at any moment; (2) his ability to form a helping relationship with himself; that is, to be positively aware of and acceptant of one’s real feelings; and (3) the capacity to experience warmth, interest in and liking for another. An attitude of evaluation will hinder the relationship.

While knowledge of bibliographic sources is indispensable to this librarian, he must have a tremendous first-hand knowledge of books. There is good reason for this knowledge in a situation with therapeutic potentialities. The practice of individual book selection is likely to remain an art although there is no reason that it should not eventually rest upon scientific foundations. This practice, by the way, is also true of the ministration of a doctor to a particular patient. As an art, book selection requires imagination. Titles that occur spontaneously in response to an expressed need may sometimes be the best selections. There are occasions when selections will be based upon careful and serious study.

It will be necessary to know as much as possible of the person because his response to material is determined by his predispositions. In a clinical setting this information may be supplied. When it is not supplied, as in the situation of the reader’s adviser, considerable skill in interviewing may be requisite, along with the ability to respond honestly and warmly to another person. Selections of books should provide a variety of choices among which the reader may make his own decisions. This kind of guidance may take place on
many levels from the most casual to one of considerable depth. The importance of the casual contact as a beginning should not, however, be overlooked. While imaginative literature is promising, there are times when carefully planned courses designed to provide a more formal learning experience will be required. Situations in which the individual reader may interact with others are desirable.

Discussions of books in which the librarian as well as the patron may grow and change are important. In private conversations or in groups, provided that the nonevaluative atmosphere is maintained, the effects may be as therapeutic for the librarian as for the reader.

It is possible that the librarian’s perception of his own need and his desire for these effects may be requisite. An examination of a number of therapies, in particular those of Fromm, Rogers, Whitaker and Malone, and Rollo May reveal the presence of this wish and need on the part of the therapist involved. Librarians who do not wish to participate in these processes may not function as effectively as those who do.

The ends for which bibliotherapy or guidance is exercised will vary. The adviser or bibliotherapist may attempt to show the reader that others have met problems very similar to his own, that more than one solution is possible. The adviser may also attempt to provide insight into motivation, necessary facts of choices among values tending toward those that are human rather than material. These are specific objectives and should be viewed within the context of ordering and guiding conceptions which take into account the purposes of therapy or of guidance. These vary among schools of thought. The therapeutic effects of reading must be viewed as part of a larger question: What are the effects of reading? As yet we know little of these. The fusion of field theory, psychoanalysis, and aesthetics attempted by Miss Shrodes seems promising as an approach. The conception of the book as the field, or as part of the field, points to more studies of content in terms of symbols, situations, characters, and conflicts presented. As yet we lack descriptions of the voluntary reading of different personality types. Does it vary with type? The descriptive survey might be a beginning, but case histories and perhaps depth analyses in which reading can be seen in relation to the organization of personality and within the context of life itself would be most revealing. Experience suggests that a book with the same theme as another will appeal to one reader but not to another. For instance, both Flannery O’Connor and Charles Williams have been
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deeperly concerned with salvation, but the symbol systems of the two writers are so different that those who respond with pleasure to one are often repelled by the other. Although reactions of distaste may tell a physician something, it is doubtful that abreaction and identification occur if the individual refuses to read the book. Fantasy may be more effective with one type of reader or realism with another, but with what kinds? Do neurotic persons tend to prefer fantasy? These questions are among those that need to be answered. Librarians are, it would seem, sufficiently equipped to explore some of them. Depth analyses are, of course, beyond librarians. Students of literature, librarians, and therapists all will be involved if we obtain the kinds of answers that are necessary.

One final question: Are librarians equipped to provide bibliotherapy, either implicit or explicit? Some of them may be good implicit therapists. Some have learned to contribute as bibliotherapists. This is an area now somewhat neglected by library schools. In the future the continuing education of librarians should provide opportunities for students to consider and discuss books in interpersonal situations in which helping relationships are possible. Where are substantial courses available which are devoted to adult reading guidance, let alone a substantial course in bibliotherapy? The education of some librarians should also include advanced courses in psychology and literature.

When one considers the shortage of persons who can provide some kind of help for those who need it, librarians trained to provide help both implicitly and in explicit situations seem to be a resource too valuable to ignore.

References

3. Ibid., p. 22.

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10. Ibid., pp. 30-31.


17. Shrodes, op. cit., p. 111.


APPROACHES TO READING

This introduction to reading skills is best discussed and worked through with two or three colleagues. It aims to generate discussion on the key issues in reading we need to consider as well as giving readers the opportunity to pick one another’s activity closets for those real gems we all have tucked away. It is based on a consideration of schema theory which says that comprehension depends on the activation of schemata. These are pictures or frameworks of a situation which help us to understand the situation. In other words, as soon as we begin to read, we form a schema triggered by the title, format, first sentence etc. and based upon our previous knowledge. This schema will be reinforced, adapted or discarded as we continue to read. Bibliotherapy and reading guidance: A tentative approach to theory. Library Trends, 11(2), 118-126. Jones, J. L. (2006). Application of Dynamic Personality Theory to the Dynamics of Aesthetic Experience. In R. J. Rubin (Ed.), Bibliotherapy Sourcebook (pp. 77-95). Phoenix, AZ: The Oryx Press. Smith, A. G. (1991). Whatever happened to library education for bibliotherapy: A state of the art. Advances in Library Administration and Organization, 9, 29-56. Sullivan, A. K., & Strang, H. R. (2002). Reading approach or reading method was first devised for English learners in India and French or German learners in the United States of America who have not the time to master the active or oral use of the language. It has also been advocated in England for pupils of inferior language-learning ability. Only the grammar necessary for reading comprehension and fluency is taught. But, it was flexible approach as far as the teaching is concerned. Theory of Language. Reading approach is a way to start teaching beginning readers. It is based on cognitive theory originally conceptualized by Albert Bandura. Theory of Learning. Reading Comprehension level of understanding. Round Robin reading following a set order.