

From Witch's Ritual Performance to Writer's Creation of Text— On Discussing How to “Treat Oneself” and “Cure Others” About Literature's Function

GONG Wei-jun, XU Yue
Jiangsu university, Zhenjiang, China

In the post-modernistic movement to seek for the cultural root, literary anthropologists refocus and explore the original therapeutic function of literature, and make great efforts to restore the essence of disciplines' theory that “literature is human science” to the real context of cultural integration. Based on this, the article intends to treat witch's great traditional ritual as a starting point, aiming at building up and enriching the ethnography of literary therapy. However, in order to change roles from witches to writers and promote the primitive return of literary therapy, writers make little traditional creation of text focus on interpretation of “treating themselves” and “curing others” about literature's function.

Keywords: literary therapy, Great Tradition, ethnography, primitive return

Introduction

Cognition, education, and aesthetics remain the universally recognized paradigms of current literary functions. However, the fundamental question of “literature as anthropology” still attracts little scholarly attention and has not received adequate emphasis in the academic community. Attempting to address this issue inevitably involves the overlooked and obscured therapeutic function of literature, which is its most original, authentic, and significant role. Revisiting and reinterpreting this therapeutic function can help reintegrate the cultural context of literary genesis, thereby returning to a primitive cultural perspective. From this standpoint, a traditional literary history can be viewed as a history of literary therapy.

The Ritual Healing of Shamans in the Great Tradition

In the context of the genesis of literature, ritual behaviors, facilitated by physical actions, preceded the emergence of literary texts, which relied on linguistic symbols. Thus, the symbolic world of literature extends the symbolic world of rituals, a natural outcome of the nurturing and fostering of small traditions by great traditions.

From a diachronic perspective, ritual performances (such as shamanic and medical spells) in prehistoric societies were the cradle and soil for the germination of literature. In civilized societies, ritual performances transformed into dramatic arts, ritualistic narrative simulations into mythic formulas, and ritual chants into poetry, with the unique therapeutic functions of

GONG Wei-jun, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Master's Supervisor, Department of Chinese Language and Literature, School of the Liberal Arts, Jiangsu University, Zhenjiang, China.

XU Yue, Graduate Student Pursuing a Master's Degree, School of the Liberal Arts, Jiangsu University, Zhenjiang, China.

shamans naturally inherited by later literary artists. (Ye, 2008, pp. 275-276)

In ancient times, although the roles of shamans and historians were intertwined, and shamanistic medicine was undifferentiated, it is certain that the incantations and divination texts used by shamans were not for aesthetic purposes but were necessary for practical spiritual healing activities. Anthropologist W. H. R. Rivers early noted the healing function of magic and the relationship between cultural forms and human physical and mental healing. He believed that magic, religion, and naturalism each developed a medical system, encompassing concepts of life, body, etiology, and healing. In primitive societies, ritual magic was indispensable for participating in specific treatments for human physical and mental health. In the folk belief system of primitive societies, shamans used incantations, objects, and actions to perform hallucinations, fully mobilizing and exercising the active role of thought. Of course, patients had to maintain absolute trust in the supernatural healing abilities of shamans. Only then could shamans, through sacred ritual behaviors, convey divine will through special forms such as incantations and divination texts, thus demonstrating the magical efficacy of shamanistic healing, dispelling evil spirits, and alleviating pain for people.

The Lhoba People of Tibet

Shamans hold high prestige and authority among the Lhoba people. The tribe believes that shamans can perceive all aspects of human life and see through the existence of spirits, serving as omniscient “communicators” between the human world and the spirit world. Therefore, when tribespeople need to dispel illness or ward off disasters, they must invite the shaman to preside over and conduct shamanistic rituals to quickly punish and expel evil spirits. The Lhoba people believe that the evil spirits causing illness are invariably the targets for the shaman’s exorcism. By chanting incantations, the shaman can drive these spirits away, allowing the patient to recover health.

In the Bogeer tribe’s “*lingyao* (另腰)” clan of the Lhoba people, shamans are generally divided into diviners and priests, each with distinct functions. Before conducting shamanistic rituals to cure the patient, the diviner, called “*Miji* (米劑)” (typically performed by men), first determines the cause of the illness and the source of the disaster through chicken divination. “*Miji* (米劑)”, with disheveled hair and butter smeared on his head, recites chants, kills a chicken to examine its liver, and based on the omens presented by the liver’s color, texture, shape, and markings, decides the appropriate ritual to conduct. During the shamanistic activities for the patient, “*Miji* (米劑)” recites the following divination incantations:

Is it the wuyou (烏佑) from the left?
 Is it the wuyou (烏佑) from the right?
 Is it you, or you, restless spirits,
 who made this unfortunate person ill?
 You greedy spirits,
 I will make the unfortunate person satisfy your desires!
 Quickly, speak out your demands,
 and I will have the unfortunate person make offerings to you!
 Do not hide your faces,
 obey my command and show yourselves in the chicken liver.

The one who tormented the maiden,
 I will offer you crimson blood, raw fresh meat,
 just for you!
 The one who tormented the maiden,

I will offer you creatures with ten eyes and twenty hooves,
just for you!
The one who tormented the maiden,
I will offer you those from the mountains and the courtyards,
just for you!
The one who tormented the maiden,
I will offer you things like mountain peaks, like stacks of firewood,
just for you!
The one who tormented the maiden,
I offer you such abundance,
please let the maiden be rid of illness and at peace! (Yu, 1989, pp. 77-78)

“*Miji* (米劑)” conducts chicken divination until the liver patterns align with the omen associated with the offending spirit. Once the nature of the spirit and the cause of the illness are determined, a ghost-dispelling ritual is conducted for the patient. During the ritual, the priestess, called “*Niubu* (紐布)” (typically performed by female), enters a trance-like state, spinning her body and chanting incantations, reaching a state of ecstasy. At the conclusion of the ritual, the patient’s symptoms disappear. The community then gathers to eat, drink, share sacrifices, and engage in singing and dancing for several days without dispersing. The Lhoba people avoid directly naming the spirits during the ritual, instead using metaphors and indirect references, indicating a belief in the mystical power of language.

The Alangan People of the Philippines

The Alangan, indigenous to the mountainous regions of Mindoro Island, Philippines, is part of the Mangyan ethnolinguistic group. This non-literate tribe adheres to a dualistic worldview of benevolent and malevolent spirits and frequently conducts shamanistic rituals to seek the intervention of spirits, hoping that patients can be healed by benevolent spirits and rid of their encountered misfortunes.

The Alangan believe that malevolent spirits, known as *mamao*, wander through forests, mountains, and villages, omnipresent and ever ready to seize the human soul, known as *abiyan*. If a *mamao* successfully captures a person’s *abiyan*, the victim will fall ill. To cure illnesses caused by *mamao*, it is necessary to rely on shamans to conduct rituals that summon the benevolent spirit *kamuruan* and expel the malevolent spirits. During the shamanistic ritual, the shaman must call upon *ambua*, the supreme god’s messenger, to request divine intervention. Only when *ambua* decrees and sends *kamuruan* to rescue the patient can the *mamao* be defeated, and the patient’s *abiyan* be successfully retrieved, leading to the patient’s recovery.

The most common healing ritual performed by Alangan shamans is called “*agbalaon*”, a chanting ceremony that involves prayers to the spirits for shamanistic healing. The senior shaman, Rambunay, has a prayer that goes as follows during the ritual:

In *kamuruan*, ay *tindagan*, (Kamuruan, the benevolent spirits,
agkasamang *babalingling*, (come to my shaman, wake up quickly,
patubang in *mangyan* sa *latayan*. (come to the shaman’s side, oh malevolent spirits.)

Isag *kamo ngitan* in *tampalasan*, (You will soon see the malevolent spirits,
makalam wa *manimbrang*. (and the patient will recover.)
Madali wa *mabrang*. (The illness will soon be healed.)

In *mangyan* *kamuruan*, (Benevolent spirits Kamuruan,)

babalingling patubang. (awaken and come forth.)

Magirem tayariyan sa langit kagwaraan, (Kamuruan, like stars in the sky.)
 magirem tayariyan in maskit sa bilugan, (come in groups to the patient's body.)
 mauraw makurang. (thus effectively treating (the illness will be healed).)

No ina tampalasan, (If it is a malevolent spirit (causing trouble),)
 sa kuripas pagsimbram, (by the next day's daylight.)
 makalam wa mabrang. (the illness will immediately improve.)

Taga -langit tukuan, (You all come from the ends of the world,)
 sumaray sa ariyman. (passing through the great darkness beyond the sky.)

No atampalasan, (Those afflicted by malevolent spirits.)
 tuloy wa maprang. (quickly recover continuously.) (Shi, 2014, pp. 88-89)

The Alangan people are known for their shamanistic healing rituals that communicate with spirits, playing an irreplaceable therapeutic role in their indigenous society. This dualistic shamanistic belief system, which divides good and evil, is a practical embodiment of the spiritual sustenance of the Aralaan people. This is strikingly similar to the shamanic prayer-poetry healing rituals of the Bunun people in Taiwan (Ye, 2008, p. 28).

Whether it is the “*Miji* (米劑)” and “*Niubu* (紐布)” of the Lhoba people, or the Ambu of the Aralaan, when these shamans conduct healing rituals, they must recite incantations and divinations based on practical principles, supplemented by the patient's devout belief in shamanism. These incantations and divinations effectively work on the patients and also exhibit literary qualities that contribute to the healing effect. Shamans achieve their healing functions by controlling and manipulating supernatural forces, employing literary techniques to treat and exorcise patients in a state of “altered consciousness”. This is especially typical of the Ju/hoansi shamans’ “*namu* (那母)” in the Kalahari Desert and the Yi shamans’ “*lamo* (臘摩)” in China (Wang, 1994, p. 132), showcasing potent healing power for the entire community. When the “*namu* (那母)” within the Ju/hoansi shamans is activated, they enter a trance state, using language to plead with the soul, extracting the invisible arrows of illness, death, or misfortune from the patients. Yi shamans, during their healing rituals, not only recite scriptures and perform symbolic actions but also physically engage with the patients, ultimately relieving their mental pressure and burden, leading to recovery.

If the great traditional shamanic healing of the pre-literate era can be likened to the prelude to literary therapy, we can better understand the process of healing inheritance from shamans to writers. Later writers are the inheritors of the ancient shamans' healing tradition, developing alternative literary visions using the hallucinogenic power of shamanic healing. The difference lies in that shamanic healing mainly targeted the sick within the tribe, i.e., others, because in the theocratic era, shamans, possessing the divine right of discourse, did not need “self-healing”. Today, writers reinterpret this ritual healing, gradually evolving it into a linguistic fictive therapy that can both “self-heal” and “heal others”, forming what is truly literary therapy.

Writers' Small Traditional Textual Therapy

Given the dual therapeutic functions of literary therapy, it is necessary to clarify the meanings of “autotherapy” and “heterotherapy”. “Autotherapy”, in this context, does not refer to the political term but to “self-healing”, primarily referring to writers who, in their literary creations, vent their own negative emotions such as distress, resentment, and anger through textual works, thereby healing their psychological wounds.

"Heterotherapy", on the other hand, does not mean receiving treatment from others but refers to "healing others", whereby readers, through literary reading and criticism, understand the writer's creative intentions and emotional expressions, aiming to achieve a mutual understanding of each other's minds, thus resolving the reader's own psychological barriers and knots, and purifying their inner spiritual world. Of course, in many cases, the boundaries between "autotherapy" and "heterotherapy" are not so clear-cut. Writers, while intentionally engaging in "autotherapy", may unconsciously achieve effective "heterotherapy", and such cases are not uncommon.

Literary Self-healing

Literary artists are regarded as molders of the human soul, but it is undeniable that among the many creators, there is a special class of "molders" that cannot be ignored—the writers who are patients themselves. Their original intention in creating works is to seek a cure for their mental illnesses or psychological disorders caused by physical ailments. By using literary means to channel their emotions, they transfer the troubles and pains caused by their illnesses (both physical and mental) into their creative works, hoping to achieve a successful catharsis, relief, and release through their works. It should be said that the literary function of "self-healing" is essentially in line with Freud's view that literature serves as a substitute satisfaction for the repressed instinctual desires of the writer.

From an academic perspective, we can enumerate a long list of "suffering creators": Franz Kafka, John Keats, and Eugene O'Neill, who suffered from tuberculosis; Fyodor Dostoevsky and Gérard de Nerval, who had epilepsy; Guy de Maupassant, who experienced hallucinations; August Strindberg and Friedrich Hölderlin, who had schizophrenia; Marcel Proust, who had asthma; Sylvia Plath, who suffered from depression, among others. In classical times, mental disorders were seen as divine revelations; later figures like Nietzsche asserted that illness could be a powerful stimulant for a colorful life, recognizing disease as a form of creative potential.

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, who suffered from severe depression, believed that writing was the best way to "self-heal". In his 1847 diary, he wrote that:

Only when I write do I feel well. Then I forget all of life's vexations, all its sufferings, then I am wrapped in thought and am happy. If I stop for a few days, right away I become ill, overwhelmed and troubled; my head feels heavy and burdened. So powerful an urge, so ample, so inexhaustible, one which, having subsisted day after day for five or six years, is still Rowing as richly as ever, such an urge, one would think, must also be a vocation from God. (Kierkegaard, 1960, p. 52)

Depression brought him endless torment and uncontrollable irritability, and only writing served as the deepest spur to himself, a charm that helped him "forget the annoying anger in life". He once recorded this excitement from writing in his diary on November 5, 1846, and even harbored the wish to cure a national "chronic illness" through writing. Clearly, Kierkegaard's focus on "other-healing" was established on the basis of satisfying his own "self-healing" needs. Similarly, Kafka highly valued the beneficial impact of literary writing on his mental and physical health. Thus, the "sweet and wonderful reward" that writing brought contained Kafka's deep satisfaction with the realization of his "self-healing" function.

Among Chinese writers, Lu Xun is well-known as a doctor-turned-writer, and his story of "abandoning medicine for literature" has become a myth of the legitimacy of literary therapy. However, his role as a patient seems to be selectively ignored by researchers. Although Lu Xun claimed that his literary themes "were mostly drawn from the misfortunes of an unhealthy society, with the intention of exposing the suffering and drawing attention to its remedy" (Lu, 2005, p. 526), he also used literature as a means to treat the spiritual malaise of the nation, driven by a practical purpose to awaken the numbed spirit of the populace.

From the patient's perspective, Lu Xun suffered throughout his life from various ailments such as tooth decay, gastric dilatation, intestinal relaxation, pleurisy, asthma, and tuberculosis, living only 56 years. The psychological issues brought by these ailments are indescribable. Works like *Diary of a Madman* (狂人日記) clearly reveal a more genuine side of Lu Xun, showing "his nearly desperate skepticism about the 'therapeutic effect' of literature and, relatedly, his profound doubt about the role of the writer as a 'thought-culture' therapist" (Shi, 2005, p. 61). Although Hsia Tsi-An (1916-1965) noticed the pathological aspect of Lu Xun's genius early on.

To take Lu Hsün as merely an angel who sounded the trumpet for daybreak is to overlook one of the more profound souls of modern Chinese history, and a morbid soul, too. Some trumpet he did sound; but the music he made was sombre and sardonic, expressive of despair as well as hope, a mingling of heavenly and infernal notes. (Hsia, 1968, p. 154)

He failed to consider the influence of the fin-de-siècle movement on Lu Xun. Lu Xun admired Dostoevsky, Baudelaire, Andreiev, and decadent poets like Wilde, and felt "surrounded by despair", which was a spiritual torment. Gao Xudong believes that the "flowers of evil" of the fin-de-siècle decadence were the source of the pathological aspect of Lu Xun's genius (Gao, 1999, p. 167), yet this view is debatable. Lu Xun's pessimistic and despairing emotions stemmed from the dual torment of physical illness and spiritual crisis, with the influence of fin-de-siècle thought acting as a catalyst, pushing him to extend the object of literary "self-healing" from himself to the entire nation.

Writers like Kierkegaard, Kafka, and Lu Xun, who were also patients, chose narrative literature to heal themselves, engaging in a dialogue with their souls. They deconstructed the torment of their physical and psychological illnesses into perceptible characters, venting their negative emotions and sublimating their pathological feelings in their narratives. This common "self-healing" approach significantly demonstrates the metaphorical function of literature. However, due to the subjective and objective limitations of emotions and times, completely restoring the "self-healing" process of a writer is unrealistic. Only by combining the writer's health status and analyzing the emotional expressions in their narrative works can we better understand the alleviation and release of feelings of sorrow, loneliness, and hopelessness, which may inadvertently or intentionally shift toward "other-healing".

Literary "Other-Healing"

In German, "medicine" has an ancient expression called "the art of healing" (Heilkunst), linking medicine and art through language, providing a unique medical basis for the rationality of literary "other-healing". Theoretically, literary "other-healing" aligns with Iser's reception theory, where the reader, as a recipient, constructs a rich, healthy emotional world through a dialogue with the creator.

Throughout history, forms of literary "other-healing" have varied. In biblical stories, David, playing the zither, successfully relieved King Saul's depression, an example of "musical healing". In *Qifa* (七發) by Mei Cheng, Wu Ke uses *yaoyan miaodao* (要言妙道) (eloquent words) to describe pleasures like music, food, car rides, banquets, hunting, and tide watching to the Crown Prince of Chu, ultimately recommending a master of arcane arts who cures the Crown Prince by making him sweat profusely (潏然汗出, 霍然病已). It can be viewed as an example of "rhapsodic healing". Contemporary poet Yu Xiuhua (1976-), known for "Crossing Half of China to Sleep with You", resonated with readers and relieved their negative emotions through her poetry, demonstrating "poetic healing". Regardless of the form, the result is that the target of therapy experiences new feelings and meanings through reading or listening, aiming to heal the soul's maladies.

According to Japanese medical doctor Shigeo Haruyama, when people are joyful and relaxed, their brains naturally secrete an endorphin-like hormone called “brain morphine”, with the most potent being β -endorphin, which improves the brain. Conversely, anger and tension lead to the secretion of a toxic hormone, norepinephrine (Haruyama, 1997, p. 167). When readers enjoy excellent literary works, β -endorphin positively alters their mental and physical state, acting as an internal “pharmacy” that surpasses drugs, achieving good “other-healing” effects through literature.

Indeed, Shigeo Haruyama's theory of “Brain Revolution” was already applicable in the works of the Qing scholar Zhang Chao, albeit in a different form. Zhang ingeniously initiated the concept of literary reading therapy in the form of “prescriptions”. Using *The Four Books* and *The Five Classics* as examples, Zhang described it as follows:

The Four Books consist of four classical works: *the Great Learning*, *the Doctrine of the Mean*, *the Analects of Confucius*, and *Mencius*. These books are characterized by their gentle nature and sweet content, posing no harm. Reading them purifies the mind, enhances wisdom, and reduces desires. Long-term study of these works can make one appear gentle, broad-minded, and physically robust.

The Five Classics consist of five classical works: the Book of Changes, the Book of Songs, the Book of Documents, the Spring and Autumn Annals, and the Book of Rites. These books share the same gentle nature and sweet content as the Four Books, with similar benefits. (Wang, 1992, p. 459)

Zhang believed that *The Four Books* and *The Five Classics* were akin to “non-toxic” herbs, providing therapeutic effects such as clearing the mind and enhancing wisdom, as well as promoting mental tranquility and physical well-being for readers. He elaborated on the therapeutic effects of various literary categories, including *Zhushi* (諸史), *Zhuzi* (諸子), *Zhuji* (諸集), *Shizang* (釋藏), *Daozang* (道藏), *Xiaoshuo* (小說), *Chaunqi* (傳奇). Zhang recognized their specific benefits, such as eliminating worries and depression, releasing inner displeasure, broadening the mind, and improving mood (解煩消鬱、釋滯寬胸) but also emphasized their potential toxicity. He advised readers to select these works based on their unique characteristics, applying the right prescription for the corresponding ailment to grasp the essence of literary “other therapy”. Fortunately, Zhang's theory has been passed down and further developed by scholars into the Three Realms Theory: Top-level medicine for nurturing life—the supreme medicines among books, such as *the Four Books*, *the Five Classics*, *the Bible*, and *the Quran*; Mid-level medicine for nurturing character—the ministerial medicines, including recognized masterpieces like *Water Margin* and *Romance of the Three Kingdom*; Low-level medicine for treating ailments—the adjunctive medicines, including popular psychological self-help series like *The Healing Library Series* and *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, as well as martial arts novels and joke books that can quickly alter one's mood.

Freud believed that writers use deliberate changes and disguises to lessen the nature of daydreams, providing readers with “aesthetic pleasure or enjoyment” through their works, thereby relieving their tense spirits and achieving “other-healing” intentions:

We give the name of an incentive bonus, or a fore-joy/pleasure, to a yield of pleasure such as this, which is offered to us so as to make possible the release of still greater pleasure arising from deeper psychical sources. In my opinion, all the aesthetic pleasure which a creative writer affords us has the character of a fore-pleasure of this kind, and our actual enjoyment of an imaginative work proceeds from a liberation of tensions in our minds. It may even be that not a little of this effect is due to the writer's enabling us thenceforward to enjoy our own day-dreams without self-reproach or shame. (Freud, 1995, p. 13)

Literary therapy is profoundly influenced by psychoanalysis, one of whose important methods is catharsis. Freud fundamentally revolutionized Breuer's method of catharsis through his analysis of transference, positing

that catharsis is not solely achieved through verbal expression. Consequently, he developed his own interpretation method (Freud, 1933, p. 46), which he claimed could illuminate thoughts and impulses repressed in the “inner territories of the patient’s psyche”. This is precisely the content that the “therapeutic” function of literature aims to elucidate and embody.

However, caution is necessary, as some “healing” stages may lead readers to feel tense, shocked, or fearful, worsening their conditions or causing new issues. In the 18th century, during the “Werther Fever”, some youths blindly imitated Werther’s suicide, prompting Goethe to add a preface in the 1775 reprint of “The Sorrows of Young Werther”, advising young people to “be a man and not follow Werther’s footsteps” (Zhu, 1985, p. 238). The safety concerns of literary “other-healing” are warnings that advocates of literary “reading therapy” throughout history strive to address.

Often, the boundaries between “self-healing” and “other-healing” blur or overlap. Many writers resonate with other patients while treating their psychological issues or deliberately engage in therapeutic writing with a humanistic concern, intending to heal readers with soul ailments. Yet, the therapeutic effect often exceeds their expectations, inadvertently healing themselves. This aligns with Jung’s principles of analytical psychology:

The fourth stage of analytical psychology, then, demands not only the transformation of the patient, but also the counter-application to himself by the doctor of the system which he prescribes in any given case. And in dealing with himself the doctor must display as much relentlessness, consistency and perseverance as in dealing with his patients to work upon himself with an equal concentration is truly no small achievement. (Freud, 1933, p. 59)

In literary and psychological history, the principles of “self-healing” and “other-healing” are entirely consistent. American existential psychotherapy master Irvin D. Yalom, in his novel *Lying on the Couch*, creates the protagonist Dr. Ernest Lash, modeled after himself. In treating Carolee Astrid, Ernest boldly tries a candid therapy method, discarding traditional observer therapy to discuss what happens in the blurred doctor-patient relationship. He calls this candid therapy “soul touching” rather than “sole touching” (Yalom, 1996, p. 896). Through various challenges with Carol, Ernest ultimately gains her trust and successfully treats her, also overcoming his doubts about his method. This confidence in the honest assertion of psychotherapy principles is also a successful self-redemption.

Bernie S. Siegel, president of the American Holistic Medical Association, believes there are no incurable diseases, only incurable patients. This aligns with the goals of literary therapy. Literature not only engages the “sense of engagement” in literary studies but also connects to the core of life through disease. The therapeutic effects of various literary works aim to integrate “self-healing” and “other-healing” to explore new principles and visions of literary therapy, providing new methods and wisdom for modern people facing complex physical and mental challenges.

The Primal Return of Literary Therapy

Examining the entire history of human culture, we can infer that the fundamental reason literature has endured and thrived lies in its irreplaceable role in fostering the spiritual ecology. The spiritual and transcendent qualities inherent in humanity lead us to a higher literary (artistic) spiritual homeland (Wu, 2007, p. 151). The most critical step in this journey is to restore the original context of literary therapy, allowing literature to return to its primal cultural soil.

Professor Ye Shuxian is a strong advocate for the primal return of literary therapy. He believes that:

humans, as the most complex and delicate organic life form, require literary activities for the survival ecology of the spirit. If literature is indispensable to human life—spirit, then it inherently encompasses the cultural integration and therapeutic functions, including disease treatment and disaster relief. (Ye, 2010, p. 266)

Based on this premise, we can illustrate with two examples on how the essence of literature, as a form of “human studies”, genuinely cares for individuals within their primal ecological contexts.

The Indigenous Woman Singing “Soul Songs” due to Grief and Fear

Ailing, a 49-year-old North American Indigenous woman with primary education, has experienced two unfortunate marriages, both ending in widowhood. She is now married to her third husband for over 10 years and has 10 children. She suffers from chronic arthritis and relies on significant amounts of painkillers.

One day, after taking her usual dose of painkillers, her hands and feet trembled uncontrollably due to the medication, and she became mentally disoriented, driving erratically. The police, suspecting her of drunk driving, detained her without understanding the situation. In her grief and fear, Ailing sang “soul songs” throughout the night, following her Indigenous customs, to soothe her frightened soul. Misunderstanding her condition, the police sent her to a psychiatric hospital. Eventually, a white psychiatrist, considering her Indigenous background, introduced an Indigenous healer who guided her, and she participated in Native American dance ceremonies with her husband (Zeng, 2002, pp. 114-119). Her husband returned to their life, willing to co-parent their children, and Ailing’s psychological burden and arthritis symptoms improved.

The melody of the “soul songs” of Indigenous peoples is monotonous, and its specific cultural connotations are unknown. However, it is certain that “soul songs” serve as a cultural and ethnic identity bond for Indigenous people, offering Ailing not auditory pleasure but spiritual protection and support. Along with the Indigenous healer’s advice and participation in Native dances, Ailing’s family began living according to Indigenous cultural beliefs. The “soul songs”, dance ceremonies, and other literary artistic forms restored their primal therapeutic functions within their native soil, revealing the true face of literature.

The National Mourning Ethnography in the Wenchuan Earthquake

The 5.12 earthquake in 2008 remains a haunting nightmare for the Chinese people, causing immense loss of life and property in the disaster areas. However, more severe than these losses were the continuous psychological and emotional traumas, especially among school children. As minors with underdeveloped psychological faculties, they struggled to adjust and relieve pressure. In response, numerous teachers and students with expertise in psychology and literary therapy entered the earthquake-stricken areas, introducing psychological crisis intervention methods. Their efforts successfully alleviated and eliminated the psychological stress of the victims. Through their rescue work, they fully utilized psychological counseling and literary therapy functions, effectively restoring the internal spiritual ecological balance of the affected communities. Their research, counseling, and therapeutic actions deeply inscribed the unyielding national mourning ethnography amidst the disaster.

During the Wenchuan earthquake, a little girl named Ren Siyu sang nursery rhymes amidst the kindergarten ruins to comfort anxious rescuers, “Two tigers running fast...” Her statement, “I don’t feel pain when I sing”, vividly showcased the primal therapeutic function of literature. Ren Siyu’s lyrics, similar to the healing lyrics of the Kazakh Albins (Ye, 2008, p. 31), alleviated physical pain while providing psychological comfort and hope. These lyrics, imbued with a certain spiritual quality, transported patients to a sacred healing realm, demonstrating the primal healing power of literature.

On September 21, 1999, Taiwan, China, experienced a once-in-a-century earthquake. Literary therapy became one of the two main directions for post-disaster mental reconstruction work (Zeng, 2009, p. 64). Today, Mainland China is actively learning from Taiwan's literary therapy experience, integrating it into major natural disasters like earthquakes, landslides, mudslides, floods, fires, and traffic accidents. They use increasingly mature psychological rescue and reconstruction methods to promote the primal return of literary therapy.

From shamanic healers conducting ritual healing ceremonies in grand traditions to unlicensed writers in minor traditions practicing "self-healing" and "other-healing" techniques, they all play a role similar to "muses" in the function of literary therapy. Like:

which is commonly known as the stone of Heraclea. This stone not only attracts iron rings, but also imparts to them a similar power of attracting other rings; and sometimes you may see a number of pieces of iron and rings suspended from one another so as to form quite a long chain. (Cooper, 1997, p. 534)

They hope this special healing method is systematically inherited through generations. In the postmodern cultural quest for roots, people actively seek remedies for the diseases of civilization, attempting to restore the sacred healing realm deprived by modern society through literature, music, dance, meditation, tea ceremonies, outings, and various other methods.

As cultural doctors, literary researchers emphasize the significance of literary therapy's return to primal traditions, based on the therapeutic meaning of cultural integration. This return not only supplements the rather monotonous catharsis therapy but also constructively builds the theoretical framework of literary therapy. This reminds us of the necessity to quickly establish a literary therapy ethnography, reacknowledging its spiritual medical principles, and thereby understanding the academic essence of "literature as human studies" and the intricate ecological principles it inherently contains. This will enable a conscious rectification of the chaotic state of literature, allowing for the spiritual self-redemption of humanity.

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