

Therapeutic Reading of Emotional Conceptual Metaphors

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the potential for therapeutic reading through the interdisciplinary integration of the cultural system, namely literature, with the psychological system. Therapeutic reading is examined from the standpoint of cognitive science, primarily through the lens of cognitive narratology and, on the other hand, cognitive therapy as a psychological method. This interdisciplinary approach is feasible because both referenced systems employ the term metaphor, or more specifically, conceptual metaphor, in nearly synonymous ways. Within the realm of conceptual metaphor, a special focus is placed on so-called emotional conceptual metaphors and an examination of their functional applications. Notably, emotional conceptual metaphors as distinct entities do not exist; however, there are certain types of conceptual metaphors that facilitate the description of emotion and its experience. These metaphors could potentially be regarded as a symbolically generalized medium of communication capable of traversing the boundaries between the domains of literature and psychology, thus enabling the translation of the full spectrum of emotions between these two systems.

Keywords: bibliotherapy / therapeutic reading / conceptual metaphor / emotional metaphor / symbolic modeling / cognitive therapy

Emotions as symbolically generalized communication media

We intuitively sense the immanence of overlapping systems within psyche and literature. However, due to their operational closedness, forging connections between them is challenging (Luhmann 47). If we adopt Niklas Luhmann's (1927–1998) theory of social systems, we might also embrace his assertion that the function of social systems is to resolve problems that emerge internally, with each resolution adding to their complexity (Baraldi, Corsi and Esposito 36). Likewise, each system, because of its operational closure, develops its unique codes through this problem-solving process. These codes are designed for and used exclusively by the originating system to foster autopoietic

development (41). Hence, the codes of one system cannot be employed as identical codes in another system.

Autopoiesis, meaning self-creation, is the fundamental concept underpinning social systems theory. Systems that are autopoietic recreate themselves from within, akin to how plants regenerate their cells using their own biological processes. Luhmann extends this concept to encompass social and psychic systems (Luhmann 189). Analogous to biological systems, social systems regenerate their components through communication, thus qualifying as autopoietic entities. By definition, social autopoietic systems are self-contained: they evolve exclusively through their intrinsic elements and are incapable of developing other systems (37).

Communication is not merely a fundamental element and action within social systems but also a product of them. To facilitate autopoiesis, systems engage in internal communication, precluding any direct communicative exchange between the social system and its environment or other systems. Social systems are operationally closed; they generate information through internal communication but cannot directly assimilate information from their environment. Nonetheless, social systems maintain a form of openness to their surroundings by observing other systems. They perceive all non-communicative elements (e.g., consciousness; see Luhmann 190) as information (47), thereby allowing interaction among disparate systems (111). Thus, it is through communication that social systems discern their internal operations from external influences (47).

Since systems cannot directly assimilate information from their environment, they rely on “programs” to mediate exchanges of information between different systems (Luhmann 181). Programs are broadly defined as sets of conditions that ensure the proper operation of a particular system while also facilitating the incorporation of external information, that is, from other systems (181–182). Within this framework, symbolically generalized communication media are pivotal, acting as specialized structures that enhance the likelihood of successful communication. These media originate within one system but establish avenues for receiving information from another system (229). It is critical to note that programs only enable these specific translations through a precisely defined and symbolically generalized medium; they are not universal translators between systems (182). For instance, money is a generalized communicative medium that is intelligible and operative across various social systems. Within the economic system, money as a symbolic medium can fund scientific

research which yields not monetary gain but truth, all governed by a particular program (233).

This suggests that while different systems may interact, such interactions are confined to the scope defined by a specific program and facilitated by a distinct, symbolically generalized communication medium. This leads to an intriguing question: Can emotions also be considered a symbolically generalized communication medium?

It is noteworthy that Niklas Luhmann did not explicitly link emotions with communication, which some critics regard as a “blind spot” in his theory. They argue that Luhmann focused predominantly on the external mechanics of communication processes in social systems, neglecting the intrinsic role of emotions as a fundamental driving force. Instead of emotions, Luhmann prioritizes the concept of trust (see Ciompi 5). But “after a critical review of Luhmann’s considerations on the phenomenon of emotions, a theory is developed that locates emotional processes in a zone of structural coupling of organic, psychic, and social systems. The theory directs attention to a significant historical relationship of (legal or moral) rights and emotions” (Stenner 159).

His subsequent critics contend that emotions are integral to communication (Ciompi 4; Stenner 160) and can be perceived as symbolically generalized media that have the capacity to cross system boundaries. This bridging is feasible through the use of a program (Baraldi, Corsi and Esposito 181), which must specify with precision which codes from which system can be translated. Emotions emerge as essential catalysts, moderators, and organizers of social and psychic dynamics. Their autopoietic influence pervades all forms of communication, collective ascriptions of meaning or value, and social continuities. This is because the social fabric is significantly shaped by emotional “forces” (Ciompi 18). Therefore, despite Luhmann’s limited focus on emotions and the absence of a unanimous view on their role as a symbolically generalized medium, numerous scholars concur that emotions may indeed function as such a medium.

It appears highly plausible that emotions, acting as a symbolically generalized communication medium, can forge a link between social systems such as literary systems and psychic systems. This implies that emotions could be recognized in a more or less uniform manner across both systems, thereby facilitating the transfer of information from one system to another. Specifically, the psychic system processes consciousness by internally monitoring thoughts that recursively reproduce within a closed network, isolated from any external input. While direct insight into another’s stream of consciousness is unattainable (we cannot

know precisely what someone else is thinking), we can externally apprehend the thoughts of another consciousness through the communication of those thoughts. Consequently, two distinct systems of consciousness can only engage in direct interaction via communication. Nevertheless, communication inherently involves double contingency, as what constitutes value for one consciousness might not hold the same significance for another. Hence, regardless of communication's efficacy, systems of consciousness invariably remain opaque to each other, metaphorically keeping each "in the blind" (Baraldi, Corsi and Esposito 189–190).

Consciousness is a system that creates meaning through self-observation, manifesting thought by identifying with the body it inhabits. This mental processing can be externally observed and contemplated (cognition) by another system, which can also communicate about it. From this perspective, thoughts can be encoded as communications pertaining to the body, encompassing self-awareness and the body's environmental context. Language is pivotal in this context; when thoughts are articulated through language, they become more readily observable (Baraldi, Corsi and Esposito 190). A specific system of consciousness is thus perceived as an identity distinguishable from its environment, yet it does not hold a privileged position over another observing consciousness. One system can only observe by language and cognitively interpret the thoughts produced by another psychic system. Based on this interpretation, the observing system may adapt its structure, always conforming to its own code (189–190). For instance, when a child expresses, "I'm very happy now because I ate ice cream," the parent might also experience happiness in response. The ice cream elicited a pleasant sensation in the child, interpreted as happiness within the child's psychic system of consciousness. The parent, observing the child's expression, can empathize with this happiness, translating it into their own system with the comment, "I feel happy too, but one shouldn't overindulge in ice cream." Thus, the parent allows the child's happiness to resonate within themselves, but within the context of their own codes, experiences, and values, they continue to communicate the importance of moderation.

In summary, one (psychic) system of consciousness can convey emotions to another by discussing the body's relationship with its environment, which the other system can cognitively interpret as an emotion and respond to from its own worldly experience.¹ This process

¹ "Consciousness constructs this distinction through identification with the body (*Körper*) it comes in, which it can observe both from the outside and the inside (for instance, as weight or as pain) and which it differentiates from other bodies and from other objects. Based on the distinction self-reference/other-reference, a thought

aligns with the principles of conceptual metaphors, a fundamental concept in linguistics and cognitive science that describes how people comprehend and interpret one idea or domain of experience in terms of another. Conceptual metaphors allow individuals to grasp complex, abstract concepts, such as emotions, by relating them to more familiar and concrete ideas. Given that conceptual metaphors operate similarly to communication between systems, it suggests that emotions could be transmitted between different systems of consciousness through discussions involving conceptual metaphors. However, this communication will always be subject to the interpretive framework applied by the respective systems of consciousness to what is being communicated.

Emotional conceptual metaphors

Conceptual metaphors are a pivotal notion in linguistics and cognitive science, illuminating how individuals comprehend and articulate one concept or experiential domain in terms of another. This framework posits that people frequently employ familiar, oftentimes more tangible concepts to grasp and convey the nuances of more intricate, abstract ideas or experiences. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have been instrumental in advancing this field with their seminal book, *Metaphors We Live By*, first published in 1980.

A conceptual metaphor is one of the cognitive mechanisms through which we construct meaning by associating two conceptual domains: the source and the target. This process enables us to understand one area of experience by utilizing another, essentially mapping the cognitive framework from one domain (the source) onto another (the target). Consequently, a significant portion of the inferential structure from the source domain is transferred onto the target domain's structure. In essence, a conceptual metaphor allows us to comprehend one domain of experience in terms of another. These linkages between domains are known as mappings (Hajdarević and Periša 287). Therefore, different individuals can perceive and interpret the same conceptual metaphor in ways that are more or less similar, influenced by factors such as culture, personal experience, language, context, and cognitive predilections.

is observed as representation-of-something (*Vorstellung-von-etwas*), and the next thought can decide, in a situation of 'bistability,' whether it orients itself to the self-reference (the representation) or to the other-reference (the represented 'something') of the previous thought." (Baraldi, Corsi and Esposito 190)

The pertinent inquiry now arises: Are there specific conceptual metaphors that are adept at conveying emotions?

A mere literal description often falls short in capturing the subjective essence of an emotion; however, metaphors are capable of bridging this gap (Fainsilber and Ortony 249). We typically cannot grasp emotions directly within discourse because, as Lakoff and Johnson note, “our emotional functioning does not give rise to any single, well-defined conceptual structure for emotions” (Lakoff and Johnson 58). Instead, we can approach emotions indirectly through “systemic correlates.” For instance, the emotion of happiness can be metaphorically linked to the sensory-motor experience of standing upright, supporting the metaphorical notion of being “up” with happiness (e.g., “He is standing tall because he is at the peak of his career” can metaphorically imply happiness associated with career success). Such metaphors enable us to define our emotions more precisely and associate them with broader concepts of general well-being, such as health and wealth (59).

In exploring the metaphors used to express emotions, Hungarian linguist Zoltán Kövecses highlights in his book *Metaphor and Emotion: Language, Culture, and Body in Human Feeling* (2000) that emotions often have a metaphorical structure (85). His perspective builds on the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, who argue that metaphors are not mere aesthetic choices in language but are foundational to our conceptual system (Lakoff and Johnson 6). These metaphorical expressions are possible because they are ingrained in our cognitive framework, serving not just as narrative tools for authors but as fundamental (often unconscious) structures of reasoning that the mind utilizes to comprehend complex aspects of experience.

As Lakoff and Johnson contend, metaphors are omnipresent in everyday language, reflecting the pervasive nature of emotions in our daily lives (Lakoff and Johnson 112). However, the emotional content within metaphors is not directly discernible; instead, it is accessed through more concrete concepts that are distinctly and unequivocally shaped by our bodily experiences and the body’s interaction with its environment (6).

Expanding on Lakoff and Johnson’s foundational work, Zoltán Kövecses notes in his book that there are no domain sources dedicated solely to conceptualizing emotions, and consequently, no metaphors that are exclusively used for emotions. We construct the abstract domain of emotions using “conceptual materials” (Kövecses 127) that are also employed elsewhere in our conceptual system. Nevertheless, Kövecses posits that certain source domains are particularly apt for

expressing emotions (49), originating from embodied experiences. While some conceptual metaphors can denote other meanings, they are especially conducive to conveying emotions due to their capacity for clear expression, derived from biological and physiological processes within the human body and its interactions with the external world (86). Thus, although metaphors born from bodily experiences can represent various concepts, those with an inherent ability to articulate emotions are most frequently used to express them, hence the term “emotional” metaphors.

Zoltán Kövecses frequently references “emotional metaphors” throughout his book, a term that is the focal point of considerable discussion, including in the third chapter titled “Emotion Metaphors, Are They Unique to the Emotions” (Kövecses 35). Here, he engages with various scholars on the validity and precision of the term “emotional metaphor” (50), debating its use. Kövecses ultimately suggests that it is difficult to identify “pure” emotional metaphors that solely express emotions, separate from other actualizable concepts. Therefore, when pressed to give a definitive answer on the existence of emotional metaphors, he leans towards “no” (49). However, shortly after, he acknowledges that certain sources of domain emotions may be uniquely aligned with specific emotional concepts and the broader domain of emotions.²

Taking into account the collective insights on emotional metaphors, their existence is quite affirmed. Notably, the term “emotional metaphor” is prevalent across diverse professional and scientific disciplines, attesting to its widespread utility. As highlighted in the article “Conceptual metaphor related to emotion” by Agus Cecep (Cecep 205), emotional metaphors can express emotions across eight distinct levels. Furthermore, Valentina Apresjan, in her article “Emotion Metaphors and Cross-Linguistic Conceptualization of Emotions,” endorses the term “emotional metaphor.” She argues that these metaphors are identifiable across languages by their consistent structural pattern, which typically equates a psychological state (a feeling) with a physiological state (a sensation) or another material phenomenon. Additionally, “emotional metaphors” can be differentiated based on the phenomena that serve as the source domain for metaphorical mapping and the nature of the mapping itself (Apresjan 180).

In summation regarding “emotional metaphors,” given the current scarcity of research and scientific articles from the field of cognitive

² “Some emotion source domains do seem to be specific both to particular emotion concepts and to the emotion domain.” (Kövecses 50)

linguistics and psychology to bolster such a definition, caution is advised against premature conclusions without corroboration from multiple sources. Despite the term's broad and frequent utilization, within the scope of this work, it is recommended that "emotional conceptual metaphor" as a technical term (*terminus technicus*) be specifically applied within the field of therapeutic reading.

Symbolic modeling as a psychotherapeutic technique

Symbolic modeling represents a refined psychotherapeutic method utilized within therapeutic and developmental frameworks, as elucidated by James Lawley and Penny Tompkins in *Metaphors in Mind: Transformation Through Symbolic Modelling*. The core premise is that an individual's internal metaphorical landscape can be navigated and transformed by engaging with the symbols and metaphors present in their personal narratives. This approach is informed by the concept of conceptual metaphor as delineated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. As a tribute to their seminal work, Lawley and Tompkins named the first chapter of their book in echo of Lakoff and Johnson's influential title, *Metaphors We Live By* (Lawley and Tompkins 6).

Symbolic modeling is predicated on the notion that individuals innately reason and communicate via metaphors, which serve as windows into their internal experiences, emotions, and behavioral patterns. Employed across diverse settings such as personal development, coaching, therapy, and education, this method entails astute listening and inquiry to discern and then reshape the client's metaphors into more adaptive or functional forms. This technique also underscores the significance of language—that is, spoken symbols—in sculpting our perception of reality. The book delves into distinguishing between the client's verbal and non-verbal metaphors, fostering pure linguistic communication, providing what is referred to as a "self-model" for clients, and engaging in dialogue that aligns with the logic of the clients' symbolic expressions (Lawley and Tompkins xv).

In the practice of symbolic modeling, Lawley and Tompkins advocate for the deliberate employment of metaphor as a means to facilitate self-exploration and growth within the therapeutic process. They emphasize that the use of metaphors enables individuals to articulate life experiences that precede the creation of the metaphor, referred to as the "original experience" (Lawley and Tompkins 7). It's posited that this original experience informs the metaphor; therefore, a thorough

and precise description of it is crucial for therapeutic understanding and acceptance (9). For instance, if the original life experience entails psychological trauma, the metaphor allows the therapy participant to comprehend and eventually come to terms with it, paving the way for emotional healing (52).

Metaphors reflect the original experience through isomorphism, a kind of resemblance that facilitates “the mapping of one experience onto another” (Lawley and Tompkins 7). This similarity is often manifested through analogous symbols or a parallel organization of symbols. Hence, while an original experience is distinct from the metaphor, it shares certain features—be it elements, organization, or both—enabling its recognition within the metaphor (61).

Within the therapeutic setting, Lawley and Tompkins delineate several types of metaphors for use: verbal, non-verbal, material, and imaginative.³ This discussion, however, is confined to those metaphors that are articulated within narrative discourse. Given the textual nature of this medium, non-verbal communication with fictional entities, literary characters, and/or narrators is not feasible; our engagement is limited to verbal metaphors. These can broadly be categorized into two groups: overt and embedded verbal metaphors (Lawley and Tompkins 10). Our focus here will be solely on these verbal expressions.

Overt verbal metaphors stand out starkly, easily differentiated from the subtler embedded verbal metaphors. The distinction between them isn't absolute but rather hinges on the awareness of the speaker or listener and on the inherently metaphorical nature of language. Often, embedded metaphors go unrecognized as metaphors, despite being a fundamental and ubiquitous element of language (Lawley and Tompkins 10).

Overt metaphors are commonplace expressions consciously employed as metaphors that can intensify an impression or embellish speech, among other similar functions. Take the familiar saying, “I feel butterflies in my stomach,” as an example. It's universally understood that this phrase doesn't literally mean there are butterflies fluttering in one's

³ For the purposes of this work, which deals with therapeutic reading, perhaps it is most important to explain how verbal metaphors function according to their understanding, because they are expressed in a discursive narrative (words). Namely, when the therapist talks to the therapy participant, he can see, hear and even smell him, and all this can tell him something about his emotional state. In a literary text, all this is impossible because it is presented in a narrative in the form of a verbal metaphor, so verbal metaphors are the only ones we can rely on for the purpose of therapeutic reading.

stomach. Rather, it symbolically articulates an underlying emotional experience, such as the fluttery sensations associated with being in love. Overt metaphors, therefore, have the capacity to depict life experiences with precision and vibrancy, delivering the core of a message with an impact that surpasses that of literal, everyday language.

Embedded metaphors are deeply interwoven into everyday language too, but are used more frequently, albeit less consciously, than overt metaphors. Once we become aware of them, we start to recognize embedded metaphors all around us. It's nearly impossible to construct a sentence devoid of an embedded metaphor (Lawley and Tompkins 11). Take the common expression, "I got out of that relationship!" which, at face value, is not perceived as metaphorical (11). This is an embedded metaphor, drawing on the conceptualization of the body exiting a physical space to describe the end of a relational association (11, 32). Most of the embedded metaphors are based on what we as humans are most familiar with about our body and the environment in which the body lives (which includes other people) and how the two interact with each other. For this reason, during symbolic modeling, special attention should be paid to the body and the environment in which the body is displayed, because then we open up the possibility with built-in metaphors to express what emotions can be connected with that specific context and turned into a "more concrete symbolic form" (70).

Symbolic modeling, as a technique focused on identifying and raising awareness of primarily embedded metaphors in the discourse of therapy participants, initiates the development of the participant's consciousness of their personal system of metaphorical horizons (Lawley and Tompkins 18). This internal metaphorical framework evolves like any living autopoietic system: it grows and develops by harnessing energy from its environment for self-sustenance. As a symbolic-metaphorical system embodying our emotions, it draws energy from the symbols and metaphors that represent emotions within its cultural context. This process engenders a "four-dimensional world within and around the therapy participant" (18), forming a metaphorical horizon that encompasses space, time, the body, and emotions. The therapist's ultimate aim is to guide the participant toward an understanding of their role and purpose within this personal metaphorical horizon.

The therapeutic journey unfolds through what is termed "clean language," a distinctive mode of interaction involving questions and answers, drawing from David Groves methodologies (Lawley and

Tompkins xiii).⁴ This approach is designed to minimize the therapist's influence on the client's experiences. By posing specific yet impartial questions, the psychotherapist facilitates the client's exploration of their own thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. An example dialogue might proceed as follows:

Client: "I feel like I'm stuck."

Therapist: "When you say 'stuck', where exactly do you feel that 'stuckness'?"

Client: "In my stomach, like a heavy stone."

Therapist: "When it's like a heavy stone in your stomach, does this stone have a size or shape?"

Client: "Yes, it's big and rough."

Therapist: "And it's big and rough. Is there anything else about this stone?"

Client: "It's heavy, pulling me down."

Therapist: "And as it's pulling you down, where would you like to be going instead?"

Client: "I would like to feel lighter, to breathe freely."

Therapist: "And if you were lighter and could breathe freely, then what might happen?"

Client: "I think I'd feel happier, more in tune with myself."

Therapist: "So, there's a wish for happiness and harmony. And if this stone were not as heavy, what's the first thing you would do with this new lightness?"

Client: "I would take a deep breath, let go."

Therapist: "And as you take that deep breath and let go, what happens to the stone?"

Client: "It might get smaller, less heavy."

Therapist: "Let's focus on that. As you breathe, can you imagine the stone getting smaller?"

The dialogues between the therapist and the client demonstrate the therapist's meticulous approach to crafting questions that bring the client's own metaphors, presumptions, or interpretations to the forefront. It is crucial to note that these questions are designed to prompt the client to delve into their internal world of symbols and experiences. The ultimate intention is for the client to arrive at personal realizations and solutions, drawing upon their intrinsic resources and perceptions for guidance. From the provided example, the client is grappling with discomfort, symbolized by a heavy stone in their stomach that drags them down. The therapist skillfully introduces a juxtaposition to this

⁴ David Grove (1950-2008) was a respected and highly inventive psychologist and psychotherapist who developed numerous methods to help people get to know themselves and heal themselves. Clean language and Clean space are two of his most famous methods.

heavy stone metaphor. Since the therapist does not have a precise alternative, they pose questions that lead the client to construct their own metaphor for what lies beyond the heaviness. The therapist's role is to direct the client towards conscious, deep breathing to shift focus onto the ease of breathing, which in turn serves to metaphorically "lighten" the weight of the "stone" (stuckness).

Foundations of cognitive therapy

Cognitive therapy, with its initial models formulated in the 1960s by Aaron Beck, hinges on the cognitive model. This paradigm posits that thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are intricately connected, and that altering maladaptive or inaccurate thought patterns can assist individuals in overcoming challenges and realizing their objectives (Sanders and Wils x). Life events, coupled with the narratives constructed around them, can activate latent negative schemas, frequently resulting in a self-perpetuating cycle of negative thoughts, distressing emotions, and unwanted behavioral patterns (6). The essential premise of cognitive therapy is the reciprocal interaction between emotions and behavior, underlined by the understanding that our cognitive patterns, emotions, and behaviors are interlinked, with each element capable of influencing the others (31). The central concept is that negative and unhelpful cognitive patterns can give rise to adverse emotions and dysfunctional behaviors, which, in turn, may engender and perpetuate psychological disorders.

In cognitive therapy, the therapist's role is to assist the client in identifying and confronting automatic negative thoughts (Sanders and Wils 6, 22), which often arise from ingrained beliefs and assumptions about oneself, others, and the wider world. These thoughts, referred to as cognitive distortions, have the potential to skew perception and elicit negative emotions. The goal of cognitive therapy is to interrupt and modify these patterns by pinpointing and questioning the validity of automatic negative thoughts (94, 229). Through this process, clients are encouraged to adopt more balanced and constructive beliefs, which can lead to healthier emotions and more adaptive behaviors.

The therapeutic process incorporates a range of strategies, including the maintenance of thought journals (Sanders and Wils 109), cognitive restructuring exercises (133), and techniques for handling situations that trigger negative thoughts and emotional responses (36).

Consider the following scenario: an individual left by a long-term spouse might harbor beliefs leading them to think they cannot be

happy again, potentially spiraling into depression. In contrast, another person in the same situation might feel liberated, having cultivated the belief that the departure represents freedom, not abandonment. A third individual might feel guilty, blaming their own behavior for the partner's exit. This single life event thus elicits three distinct emotional responses, suggesting that by altering one's perception of the event, it's possible to replace one emotional reaction with another (Sanders and Wils 171–172). In cognitive therapy, the goal is to reshape the structure of thought, potentially substituting feelings of guilt or depression with a sense of liberation, which can have a positive impact on various aspects of life.

Cognitive therapy operates on the principle that each emotional reaction is influenced by an individual's personal cognitive perspective (Sanders and Wils 229), which shapes their emotional response to any given life situation (61). Therefore, it posits that to alter an emotion linked to a particular event, one must change their thought patterns concerning that event. While cognitive therapy acknowledges that not all emotional difficulties are self-generated and that external factors do play a role, it emphasizes that the emotional impact of adverse life events (such as job loss) can be significantly mitigated or exacerbated by a person's thoughts and core beliefs about themselves and the world (200).

An individual cannot alter the events that have occurred but can change their perception of those events. For instance, while one person may view job loss as a downfall, another might see it as an opportunity for new, possibly more fulfilling ventures. Cognitive therapy aids clients in developing alternative perspectives, such as "I've only lost my job, not my self-worth, which does not hinge on my employment." By fostering awareness of different viewpoints (Sanders and Wils 114), cognitive therapy encourages the realization that multiple ways exist to interpret reality, thereby opening up various possibilities for changing one's attitude and emotional responses to it (98).

Cognitive therapy maintains that thoughts, emotions, and behavior are interdependent, forming a dynamic cycle where each element can reciprocally influence the others (Sanders and Wils 6). When applied to therapeutic reading, the identification of a conceptual metaphor within the narrative that resonates emotionally allows for its transformation into a tangible emotional experience through symbolic modeling. Drawing on cognitive therapy's framework, this emotional experience can be linked to the thoughts that typically precede emotions. Therapeutic reading leverages the cause-and-effect relationship between thoughts and emotions, intertwining this connection with events

described in the narrative. This process facilitates a detailed explanation of the underlying issues and can propose alternatives for altering or modifying thoughts to foster better life outcomes. The distinctive aspect of therapeutic reading is that it is directed at literary characters and scenarios within the narrative, rather than real-life individuals.

Defining therapeutic reading

Therapeutic reading may be characterized as a form of “hybrid therapy” tailored to the individual—be it the client or reader (Sales and Paula Alves 117). Its essence lies in an interdisciplinary method that integrates principles of cognitive therapy and symbolic modeling with bibliotherapy, alongside discourse analysis and interpretation. This necessitates a highly personalized approach. Therapeutic reading has the potential for psychotherapeutic application, though it is not limited to such. It encompasses elements of symbolic modeling and cognitive therapy aimed at transforming negative cognitive patterns. This is fused with humanistic approaches to discourse analysis and interpretation, which also consider the reader’s past experiences to elucidate the behavior and emotions of characters within literature. In essence, it merges various therapeutic modalities with the act of reading.

The integrative approach of therapeutic reading allows its practitioners to be both flexible and inventive, tailoring the material to meet the unique needs of each reader. As a result, therapeutic reading becomes particularly effective in addressing complex or multi-faceted emotional issues. It employs a variety of methods, including the reading of primarily artistic literature, as well as engaging in writing and extensive discussions about the material that has been read.

When implemented by certified psychotherapists, therapeutic reading can offer substantial support to individuals grappling with a range of emotional and mental health issues, particularly those dealing with trauma, anxiety, depression, or significant life losses. The efficacy of bibliotherapy, especially as a group therapy intervention, has been supported by research like the 2017 study “The long-term effects of bibliotherapy in depression treatment.” This study highlights that bibliotherapy can have enduring impacts on the adult population, alleviating symptoms over long-term follow-up periods and, in certain instances, yielding results on par with individual psychotherapy. Bibliotherapy is recognized for its sustained effectiveness in diminishing depressive symptoms in adults, providing an accessible and expedited form of

treatment that may also reduce dependency on medication. According to the findings of this review, bibliotherapy could be instrumental in addressing severe mental health conditions (Gualano et al. 40).

Therapeutic reading is not only a tool in professional psychotherapy; it also plays a significant role in education and personal development. It aids young individuals in comprehending their emotions, thus acting as a preventative measure against emotional maladjustment and behavioral disorders. Furthermore, therapeutic reading can be beneficial when facilitated by non-professionals, such as educators and librarians. In these cases, the focus is on leveraging literature's capacity to enhance empathy and emotional understanding. This approach is particularly advocated for those involved in teaching and similar professions. The value of therapeutic reading extends to schools and other educational institutions engaged in the upbringing and instruction of young people. In these settings, bibliotherapy is acknowledged to have a "small to moderate effect" on children (Montgomery and Maunders 44), reinforcing its significance as an educational and developmental aid.

Therapeutic reading in the manner of literary-bibliotherapy (Piskač 62) unfolds in four distinct phases. The initial phase involves identifying conceptual metaphors within the discourse and determining which can be regarded as emotional conceptual metaphors. In the second phase, these identified emotional metaphors are interpreted through symbolic modeling, a psychotherapeutic technique focused on working with metaphors. Given the textual nature of the medium, this phase concentrates solely on verbal metaphors present within the discourse, both overt and embedded. These metaphors are functionalized as emotional metaphors when there is a clear indication that they resonate emotionally. Subsequently, they are utilized to construct the emotional characterization of literary characters.

During the third phase of therapeutic reading, the MED cycle⁵ (Piskač 51), a component of literary-bibliotherapy technique, is employed to examine the connections between the events depicted in the narrative and the emotions and thoughts of the literary characters, whether they be narrators, lyrical subjects, or dramatic personae,

⁵ The method of literary bibliotherapy differs from traditional bibliotherapy practices because it is based on cognitive therapy and symbolic modeling, and the participants discuss the entire literary work only at the end, in synthesis. The analysis of a literary work takes place discourse by discourse, and the insights gained are accumulated. Only at the end, after the entire literary work has been analyzed, are conclusions drawn and possibly given "advice" to the literary characters.

contingent on the literary genre. This phase builds upon the emotional characterizations developed through symbolic modeling. By applying the MED cycle, the focus shifts to the causal relationships between the thoughts, emotions, and actions of the literary figures.

During the phase that involves the analysis of the communication event (Piskač 54) within a given discourse using the MED cycle (Piskač 62), the process is marked by a high degree of subjectivity among the participants in therapeutic reading. This stage often relies on assumptions that may not be substantiated by concrete evidence or facts within the context of the discourse. The approach entails exploring possibilities or hypothetical scenarios, sometimes in the absence of sufficient information to draw definitive conclusions.

To achieve a nuanced understanding, the entire discourse of the literary work is meticulously reviewed and analyzed. Knowledge is consolidated and synthesized with a focus on the causality of the relationships between thoughts, emotions, and events. This in-depth examination proceeds step by step, conducting a thorough analysis of the entire literary work, such as the approach demonstrated with Poe's *The Black Cat* in the book *On Literature and Life* (Piskač 64-67). The objective is not for readers to precisely "guess" the feelings of literary characters—which is fundamentally unknowable—but rather to infer, through discourse about metaphors, how characters might feel in relation to the narrative and their personal life experiences. In this process, all readers adopt a quasi-therapeutic role, with the facilitator steering the conversation toward one of the potential interpretations that the discourse allows.

In the concluding phase of therapeutic reading—the synthesis phase—"advice" is offered to the literary characters, be they narrators, lyrical subjects, or dramatic personae. This advice often speculates on how the character might alter their thought patterns to experience more positive emotions and, as a consequence, potentially achieve better outcomes in their fictional lives. This speculative exercise is permissible within the realm of therapeutic reading because it involves fictional characters, who cannot be affected by such interventions.

In contrast, in actual psychotherapy, offering direct advice to living individuals is typically avoided for sound reasons, except in rare instances and within certain psychotherapeutic modalities, where it is approached with great care and consideration (Duan, Knox and Hill 6). Facilitators of therapeutic reading workshops must be acutely aware of this distinction, recognizing the significant difference in handling real-life situations versus literary analysis.

The facilitator of therapeutic reading must possess a nuanced understanding of the themes and motifs within literary discourse to explore potential insights without succumbing to excessive interpretation, or overinterpretation (Eco 167).⁶ It is essential for the facilitator to identify and understand the full spectrum of emotional metaphors within the text, steering the discussion in meaningful and relevant ways. Embedded metaphors, which are prevalent and often hold significant emotional weight within the discourse, require particular attention. Moreover, a comprehensive grasp of the genesis of emotions, their linguistic expression, and the emotions that specific metaphors can suggest is crucial for analyzing and facilitating therapeutic reading effectively.

Therapeutic reading should be recognized as a non-exacting process, where the objective is not to find a “correct” answer but to foster an understanding of how emotional metaphors within a narrative correlate with possible emotions. This practice enhances readers emotional literacy, allowing them to connect emotions with empathy and various life situations while recognizing patterns in their manifestation. Fiction, as the name implies, is not considered to be real; however, the emotions and feelings that are elicited within us while reading are indeed real to us. We experience, feel, and are shaped by them (Žunkovič 13). As a result, readers may (or may not) identify similar causative patterns in their own thought processes. In a therapeutic context, it is also possible that the cognitive insights gained from the discourse may have a cumulative effect on the reader over time, potentially enhancing the transfer of understanding from text to personal experience. Although the cumulative effect was not separately investigated for literary bibliotherapy, it was investigated for cognitive-behavioral therapy in cases of treated depression. It was shown that the treatment of depression with drugs after 6 months resulted in 52% remission compared to the initial value, while with cognitive-behavioral therapy it was 40% (Georgiades et al. 45). This is supported by the study conducted by Bruneau and Pehrsson (Bruneau and Pehrsson 346) on the influence of continuous therapeutic reading, where bibliotherapy was used as a method, on a

⁶ Overinterpretation can easily happen to a hasty reader who has an overemphasized desire to prove something that is not in the text and immediately jumps to a conclusion. An excellent example of this is given by Umberto Eco in his lecture *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, which was later published as a book *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, 1990, Paraphrasing Eco's example, if a doctor notices that all his patients suffer from cirrhosis of the liver because they regularly drink whiskey and soda, cognac and soda, or gin and soda, and from this he concludes that soda causes cirrhosis of the liver, that doctor is wrong, that is, he misinterpreted the data he has.

group of students, future counselors/psychotherapists. The study indicates that their ability to gain insight increased over time.⁷

A key benefit of well-conducted therapeutic reading is that it allows readers to remain within their own emotional comfort zones. In discussing the emotions of literary characters, readers indirectly explore their own feelings without the vulnerability of direct personal disclosure. This process provides a secure space for more honest self-expression. Although readers may believe they are interpreting the emotions of a fictional character, they are often gaining insights into their own emotional state from a position of safety.

The theoretical model discussed here suggests that therapeutic reading can facilitate a process of concentrated interpretation, understanding emotional metaphors through meticulous analysis and interpretation of narrative discourse. This approach enables a profound emotional characterization of literary figures. In this context, narrative discourse that conveys thought processes—whether from a literary character or the narrator—is interpreted as an emotional metaphor. The emotional profiling of literary characters is then crafted according to the tenets of symbolic modeling. Subsequently, aligning with the principles of cognitive therapy, the relationship between emotions and events can be delineated.

Conclusion

Therapeutic reading endeavors to harness emotional experiences depicted in fiction for the reader's personal growth. It utilizes cognitive-emotional metaphors, which distill profound emotions into more tangible and less abstract bodily concepts, facilitating an understanding and reconstitution of the emotional landscapes we navigate. Symbolic modeling adopts such metaphors to broaden the scope of how we can utilize conceptual emotional metaphors, equipping us with the means to uncover personal symbols and metaphors that propel our emotional experiences through the precision of clean language.

This reflective practice serves as a metaphorical mirror, allowing readers to introspect, reshape their narratives, discover meaning, and devise new strategies to confront life's challenges. Cognitive therapy introduces a systematic approach, illustrating the interconnectedness of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, and demonstrating how altering

⁷ This means that the cognitive-behavioral approach to treating depression was more successful. Given that the fundamental principles of cognitive therapy are also used in literary bibliotherapy, it may be possible to draw certain parallels.

our cognitive patterns can lead to more positive life outcomes. Literary bibliotherapy weaves these elements into a coherent process, utilizing thoughtfully selected narratives and characters to identify and interpret conceptual emotional metaphors.

The ultimate aim of therapeutic reading, conducted in manner of the literary bibliotherapy, is for readers to appreciate the complexity and variability of emotional existence and to attain insights into how their thoughts can precipitate more gratifying emotional states. Thus conceived, therapeutic reading emerges as a novel (psycho)therapeutic modality grounded in established and validated theories. It offers a completely safe environment for all participants, as everyone remains within the secure confines of their emotional comfort zone while engaging with the text. This approach may represent one of the most sincere avenues for discussing emotions (Hogan 30).

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Terapevtsko branje čustvenih konceptualnih metafor

Ključne besede: biblioterapija / terapevtsko branje / konceptualna metafora / čustvena metafora / simbolno modeliranje / kognitivna terapija

Namen razprave je raziskati možnosti terapevtskega branja z interdisciplinarnim povezovanjem kulturnega sistema, in sicer literature, s psihološkim sistemom. Terapevtsko branje je obravnavano z vidika kognitivne znanosti, predvsem skozi prizmo kognitivne naratologije, na drugi strani pa kognitivne terapije kot psihološke metode. Ta interdisciplinarni pristop je izvedljiv, ker oba navedena sistema uporabljata izraz metafora, natančneje konceptualna metafora, na skoraj sinonimen način. Na področju konceptualne metafore je poseben poudarek namenjen tako imenovanim čustvenim konceptualnim metaforam in preučitvi njihove funkcionalne uporabe. Čustvene konceptualne metafore kot ločene entitete sicer ne obstajajo, vendar pa obstajajo določene vrste konceptualnih metafor, ki olajšujejo opisovanje čustev in njihovega

doživljanja. Te metafore bi potencialno lahko obravnavali kot simbolično posplošeno komunikacijsko sredstvo, ki lahko prestopi meje med področji literature in psihologije ter tako omogoči prenos celotnega spektra čustev med tema dvema sistemoma.

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