

**Mariana Palashevska**  
National and University Library  
“St. Clement of Ohrid”,  
Skopje, North Macedonia  
marianapalashvska@gmail.com

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## **BIBLIOTHERAPY OR BOOKS ON PRESCRIPTION**

### **Libraries, more important than ever!**

**Summary:** This paper provides an overview of the bibliotherapy process and discusses some of the basic implementation techniques. The paper emphasizes and explains the difference between institutional, clinical, and developmental bibliotherapy, giving a brief overview of the historical development of this discipline. This paper emphasizes also the importance of bibliotherapy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lately, developmental bibliotherapy has been considered a novelty among the activities offered by libraries. Bibliotherapeutic workshops (group or individual) dealing with certain life issues are organized and conceptualized differently, depending on the age, interest, and problems of the participants.

**Keywords:** bibliotherapy, book, developmental bibliotherapy, clinical bibliotherapy, library, book treatment.

### **Introduction**

In a crisis, people mobilize to deliver services and resources where they are needed most. That is exactly what happened in the library world. From pandemic virtual programs to compiling booklists, librarians around the globe sought to educate adults and children during a time of uncertainty. This paper emphasizes the importance of bibliotherapy during the COVID-19 crisis. Bibliotherapy is a systematic intervention regarding the use of carefully selected reading materials in order to help persons to cope with stress and personal problems.

So much is tried today to help people with mental or psychosomatic disorders. In addition to the established methods of psychotherapy, behavior therapy, and psychoanalysis, alternative forms of assistance such as laughter,

painting, dance, and music therapy are increasingly being used. Recently, another form of therapy has gained a foothold in the world in which the patients' reading and writing exercises should be promoted – poetry and bibliotherapy.

Healing with art has unusually gained momentum in modern societies, and especially the use of fiction for bibliotherapeutic purposes. Reading a book causes different feelings: sadness and grief, happiness and joy, and it helps to overcome unpleasant situations and stresses.

Because of all this, life itself has imposed a new role on librarianship – therapeutic, more precisely bibliotherapeutic. Libraries can offer a cure for the soul. Numerous studies conducted in libraries show that readers are increasingly turning to books to solve their mental problems and seek help from librarians.

### **Definition of bibliotherapy<sup>1</sup>**

A distinction should be made between bibliotherapy applied in health care institutions in modern psychotherapeutic practice and reading for the soul, which is discussed in this paper. There are several divisions of bibliotherapy, but the division into institutional and developmental is generally accepted. Institutional (clinical) bibliotherapy is conducted in medical institutions, while developmental therapy is usually performed in libraries.

There are many definitions of bibliotherapy in the literature today, and almost all who have studied it have their own definition of it. One of them is: “The interaction that develops between literature and the reader encourages identification and emotional reactions that lead to a cathartic experience. Bibliotherapy is an old healing skill in a new guise.”

### **History of bibliotherapy**

The idea of healing with the help of books is not new. Although the term *bibliotherapy* originated in the early twentieth century, the therapeutic effect of books was known much earlier. The power of the book was known in ancient civilizations. This is evidenced by the inscriptions: *A place for healing of the soul* at the entrance of the library in Thebes, Ancient Greece, and *A cure for the*

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<sup>1</sup> American Library Association, “Bibliotherapy”, <http://www.ala.org/tools/atoz/bibliotherapy> (accessed August 21, 2021) Document ID: 5c057e6a-0cfe-2e64-7d10-96ae5f18b6ff

*soul* found in the library of Pharaoh Ramses II.<sup>2</sup> The great minds of antiquity also debated the significance of literature and its influence on readers. In their opinion, literature is a way of cognition, a means of education, and an object of aesthetic enjoyment. Plato says that art brings man to a complete inner balance, but it can also cause unrest. Aristotle, on the other hand, pointed to the relationship between reading and health, where reading is a process for purifying emotions – catharsis. Analyzing the tragedy, he finds that poetry can remove feelings of fear and suffering. According to him, literature is a kind of therapeutic tool. Avicenna, a scientist, philosopher, and doctor, in his *Book of Healing* writes about three means in the hands of healers, the first of which is the word.

Bibliotherapy<sup>3</sup> flourished during the First World War when libraries were opened in military hospitals and therapeutic readings were conducted among wounded soldiers to more easily overcome the traumatic events of the war. It was found that those soldiers who read recovered much faster. Thus, bibliotherapy received another confirmation. In 1939, the American Library Association was formed, within which a special Committee on Bibliotherapy was formed, which gave bibliotherapy official status in the United States. After World War II, bibliotherapy spread to educational, training, and psychosocial areas. In 1949, Carolyn Schrods defended her doctoral dissertation entitled *Bibliotherapy – Theoretical and Clinical Experimental Study*, which laid the foundations of a scientific approach to bibliotherapy. This work was a pioneering study and the starting point for the study of bibliotherapy. Since then, bibliotherapy has been involved in various types of rehabilitation therapies.

### Poetry therapy and bibliotherapy

In bibliotherapy, literature or literary ideas and cultural means are recorded by the reader, listener, or viewer. In poetic therapy, the texts are written and designed by oneself. The origins of the two therapies come from different sources and cannot always be clearly distinguished from each other historically or in practical terms.

Writing and reading one's own and other people's texts can open new intellectual horizons and open new worlds, making new "paths to oneself".

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<sup>2</sup> Emmanuel Stip, Linda Östlundh, Karim Abdel: "Bibliotherapy: Reading OVID During COVID", *Front. Psychiatry* (December 7, 2020), doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2020.567539

<sup>3</sup> Anett Grest, *Bibliotherapie in Bibliotheken* (2020), [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343140507\\_Bibliotherapie\\_in\\_Bibliotheken](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343140507_Bibliotherapie_in_Bibliotheken), DOI: 10.18452/21618,

Thus, the poetic medium enables the subject to understand himself through self-experience, and then to understand the processes in his life, as well as in the outside world.

### Poetry therapy<sup>4</sup>

The word *poiesis* comes from Greek and means to create, make and shape, to shape language and poetry with words. Poetry therapy works with texts that you have written and designed yourself. Writing works by actively shaping something. With designed language, poetry therapy is associated with one of the oldest therapeutic media.

Libraries in the past were seen as places that, in addition to knowledge, promised rest and healing. The Library of Alexandria, built in the 3rd century BC, which kept the most important scrolls of all subjects of science and literature, was called the *sanctuary of the soul*. In ancient times, exercise books were of great importance. They were called hypnomes. The term comes from ancient Greek and means *left brain*.

Hypnomes were once mainly used as aids in memory and self-reflection. The French philosopher Michel Foucault recalls the hypnomes and states that the records of the read texts, conversations, reflections, as well as impressive details can be read occasionally and thus be considered new. Integrative therapy has been committed to the *culture of diaries* since its inception.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle, on the other hand, developed the doctrine of catharsis. The viewer could empathize with the characters portrayed in the tragedy, identify with the suffering of the protagonists and, in the meantime, witness new strategies. This should serve to clear the stressful feelings and thus bring relief. This example clearly shows that the boundaries between poetry therapy and bibliotherapy are intertwined.

### History of modern poetry therapy

In the 18th and 19th centuries, writing therapy appeared sporadically among writers and other scholars. Theodor Fontane, for example, on the advice of his doctor wrote down his childhood memories during his worst life crisis and

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<sup>4</sup> National Association for Poetry Therapy, <https://poetrytherapy.org/>

illness (1892). Writing the book *Meine Kinderjahre* (My Childhood), he returned to the time when he was a young boy. In doing so, he gained new strength and completed the novel *Effie Brist* and wrote two other novels.

As early as 1751, Benjamin Franklin established the first psychiatric clinic in the United States – the Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia. The clinic had a “pioneering role” because of the particularly humane treatment of the mentally ill and the first occupational therapies developed there, including the creation of texts. Patients’ songs have been published in the domestic magazine *The Illuminator*.

### **How does the bibliotherapy process affect the reader?**

#### **Affective changes** (attitudes, values, emotions):

- Empathy is developed;
- Positive attitudes are formed;
- Social adjustment is achieved;
- A positive self-image is formed;
- Emotional pressure is released;
- New interests are encouraged;
- Tolerance, respect, and acceptance of others and their differences are promoted;
- Moral values are stimulated and re-examined, resulting in character development.

#### **Cognitive changes** (intellect, thinking):

- Critical thinking, analysis, inference, decision making, problem solving, court formation are stimulated;
- The problem is put into perspective to get an adequate proportion; the reader understands the universality of the problem;
- Knowledge is gained through indirect experiences;
- The insight into human behavior and its motives is provided;
- The reader’s ability to evaluate is developed;
- The reader is encouraged to think at a higher level;
- The reader is motivated to think before making a decision;
- The ability to think abstractly is developed;
- It is revealed that the problem can have several solutions and that individuals themselves choose how to deal with it.

## Developmental bibliotherapy in libraries

Developmental bibliotherapy (interactive, creative, educational) treats everyday problems that people face throughout life. It is intended for healthy people who are involved in it voluntarily, are looking for a solution to their problems, and strive to get to know themselves better. It does not require a psychiatrist or any other medical person, but can be conducted by professors, educators, pedagogues, social workers, as well as librarians in schools, libraries, kindergartens, and nursing homes.

Fiction and didactic literature are most often used. Apart from solving the existing problems, it often has a role in preventing the side effects and procedures, especially in children.

The purpose of the library and the work of the librarian can be viewed from different angles. It is not the same if we are talking, for example, about the content of general science, specialized, public, or school libraries. Depending on the field of activity, different requirements and goals are set before the profession. What libraries have in common, however, is the importance of providing information, relevant literature, and expanding activities and programs for users, including fostering reading and literacy habits. Librarians directly influence the community through their work. If we look, for example, at the profile of school libraries in Skopje – the results will show a wide range of content and we cannot say that all school libraries offer identical services. The reason for this is the different affinities and levels of knowledge and skills of librarians. The background of their education is also very different.

Liz Brewster, a British librarian and author of numerous researches and articles on library therapy, points out three ways to do librarianship – through:

- providing availability and recommendation for self-help literature
- developing creative methods (for example, writing a diary, changing a story)
- informal implementation of bibliotherapy (these are cases when the librarian works with users individually or in groups resulting in spontaneous problem solving or emotional/psychological support).

## Successful implementation of bibliotherapy – examples from English libraries

In further analysis, examples of good practice will be presented. The project *Books on Prescription*<sup>5</sup> is implemented in the English public libraries. It is about quality cooperation between doctors, librarians, and counseling psychologists who jointly made a list of checked books for self-help. The project is based on cognitive-behavioral psychology and allows users to come to the family doctor or visit the library to look for recommended literature. The aim is to provide alternative knowledge for proper behavior in problematic situations.

The English model of “enhanced care” essentially follows two guidelines for health care. Treatment should be tailored to the patient at varying degrees of intensity. Continuous monitoring of progress and decisions allows intensifying measures in the absence of significant health improvement. The potential clinical and economic benefits of such step-by-step intensification of care services stem from the possibility and acceptance of “minimal interventions” by the patient and therapist. Therefore, only treatments that can be offered in different degrees of intensity, which is the case with psychological therapies, correspond to this model.

### Cardiff model

In the UK, bibliotherapy began in Cardiff, where a scheme was developed linking the city libraries and medical practices. This scheme is now known as *Book Prescription Wales* and is used throughout the health service in Wales.<sup>6</sup>

Bibliotherapy represents here a “minimal intervention” and various special forms of this therapy have been developed in the United Kingdom. One specialty offered in England in connection with “enhanced care” and librarianship, and where public librarians now come into play, is the so-called Cardiff model. This model currently offers most of the more than 20 programs in the UK using self-help books. Patients who come with mild to moderate mental illness are “prescribed” an appropriate book title from a standardized

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<sup>5</sup> “Reading Well Booklists”, *Reading Well*, <https://reading-well.org.uk/books/books-on-prescription>

<sup>6</sup> *Health in Wales*, <https://www.wales.nhs.uk/>

list. In Cardiff, patients with book “prescriptions” then go to the local public library, where these self-help books are kept, and obtain them in a similar way as a conventional loan.

This model does not provide additional assistance in using the book. However, some studies show that even a small amount of help can bring benefits. Because patients often do not have a clear idea of the application and theory of self-help. There is also an initial difficulty in using this literature, such as a lack of energy to perform tasks. The overall contradictory results regarding the benefits of supported versus unsupported self-help stem in large part from the fact that support was insufficiently defined and often not properly explored.

### **Devon project**

The so-called service model two plus one has proved to be very acceptable to patients giving good results in terms of the number of patients treated and clinical efficacy. A 30-minute consultation is offered as support at the start and additional 15-minute sessions with reduced frequency. Before starting treatment, patients are explained the nature of self-help books, as well as tips on how to use them and how to take psychological problems into their own hands. If patients decide to help themselves, they will receive a prescription for a self-help book. Prescriptions can be purchased at most Devon public libraries.

The following sessions will then address questions about motivation and support in acquiring the skills described in the books. If the client initially has difficulty with the concept of self-help, the clinic has supervisors who offer additional sessions. Primary Health Care Mental Health Graduates (GMHW) are trained within the Devon program, as part of a postgraduate university certificate specifically for “helping people help themselves”.

The GMHW concept has been introduced in England in response to the need to increase the supply and accessibility of psychiatric care in primary care. Their role is not precisely defined, so they can adapt to different circumstances. The Devon self-help booklist<sup>7</sup> is the same as the one used in the Cardiff project, with minor changes. The list was developed with the intensive participation of psychiatric specialists. The list includes 20 psychiatric health problems, with over 80% of the headings using an approach to cognitive behavior, and many of

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<sup>7</sup> *Book Prescription Scheme Devon - Self Help Book List*, <https://www.fiveareas.com/bookprescriptionschemes/devon.htm>



them have been the subject of clinical trials. The books are suitable for almost any level of reading and are specially designed for the supported method of work. In order to update the list, a Review Panel has been set up, consisting of psychiatric professionals and user representatives.

As in the Cardiff model, public libraries play an important role in the Devon project (Devon, Plymouth, and Torbay). Library services have been involved in program development from the beginning. Self-help books are available in major libraries, as well as in smaller libraries. They are kept there just like other books, though in larger numbers. If users are clients of the self-help clinic, they can submit their prescriptions in exchange for a self-help book. These books can be borrowed like any other library book. Additional library services can also be used.

This possibility and the widespread promotion of the program in libraries play important role in reducing the stigma associated with its use. The model of supported self-help using books is becoming more widespread in the UK.

### **How a book a day can keep pandemic stress away**

In epidemics and during the COVID-19 pandemic, when information outbreak is enormous, society should be reminded of the importance of libraries and the role of librarians in organizing and disseminating information. Accurate information is the key to handling a chaotic situation.

After more than a year of virtual school and pandemic stress bearing down on them, reading has become a much-needed escape for families. Reading stories, especially fantasy, is a “social vaccination” against all the restrictions because they help people find a way to exit what COVID-19 put into play. Studies have shown that fictitious worlds can help us deal with real-life problems and promote wellbeing.<sup>8</sup>

One of the available non-pharmacological treatments in the psychological literature is bibliotherapy. This is defined as guided reading to therapeutic change. Bibliotherapy has been studied by mental health scientists in recent years as a tool, different from traditional interventions, that improves the readers’ lives. Though several definitions have been created to conceptualize bibliotherapy,

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<sup>8</sup> “Read, Talk, Share – our new campaign tackling loneliness and supporting mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic”, *Reading Well*, <https://reading-well.org.uk/news/read-talk-share-our-new-campaign-tackling-loneliness-and-supporting-mental-health-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

they all focus on three essential elements: reading material for inside- or outside-session use, a therapeutic and achievable goal, and personal improvement.

A library is the best resource to save people from rumors and misinformation in a pandemic. With physical libraries being shut, librarians are active in providing online information services to the general public. Many libraries are conducting information literacy programs alerting people about COVID-19. It is suggested that during the lockdown period, people can do leisure reading and writing. Moreover, through directed reading, bibliotherapy can be provided as therapeutic adjuvants in medicine and psychiatry in the solution of personal problems. Librarians can provide reader advisory services via electronic media which may help in relieving the agony due to the pandemic and the lockdown situation.

During the pandemic, we have inadvertently become people locked in our loneliness. The coronavirus has stopped the rhythm of our lives. So we all rediscovered books. These are some of the potential titles covering topics relevant to times of the COVID-19 pandemic offered by Macedonian libraries:<sup>9</sup>

- *Love in the time of cholera*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez: Cholera epidemic forms the background to a doomed love story, with an analogy being made between the epidemic and amorous passion;
- *The Perfume*, Patrick Süskind: loss of smell can be the first symptom of COVID;
- *The Plague*, Albert Camus: Camus reminds us that it is important to have moments when you recharge your batteries and regain your strength at the heart of the plague;
- and of course fairy tales for children.

## Conclusion

The development of interactive space for bibliotherapy is intended for librarians, teachers, professors, social workers, and all others who have the desire and sensitivity to combine artistic texts and everyday topics that cause different psychological processes in people. Today, bibliotherapy (reading therapy) is attracting the increasing attention of scientists and practitioners, who are trying to make the most of the “healing” properties of the book.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://plus.si.cobiss.net/most-read-web/rest/v1/mk/mk/books/search-public/?maxResult=100&periodFrom=202001&periodTo=202109&pubType=1&targetGroups=4>

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the diverse field of bibliotherapy. Furthermore, the question of the timeliness of bibliotherapy, its popularity, and possible additional applications through new media, especially the internet, has to be answered. The development of bibliotherapy should also be a good opportunity for cooperation between medical experts and public libraries. Models already used in the United Kingdom are presented in the paper. A large amount of literature on self-help and life support in the book market confirms the needs of consumers. However, it is often helpful to have help on hand. Perhaps this paper can help make a more critical view of the advisory literature, where and for whom it is appropriate, and at the same time provide options for dealing with this problem.

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**Мариана Палашевска**

Национална и универзитетска библиотека

„Св. Климент Охридски”, Скопје, Северна Македонија

marianapalashavska@gmail.com

**БИБЛИОТЕРАПИЈА ИЛИ КЊИГЕ НА РЕЦЕПТ****Библиотеке, важније него икад!**

**Сажетак:** Овај рад даје преглед процеса библиотерапије и разматра неке од основних техника које се користе у имплементацији. Наглашава се и објашњава разлика између институционалне, клиничке и развојне библиотерапије, и даје кратак осврт на историјски развој ове дисциплине. У раду је истакнута и важност библиотерапије за време пандемије ковид-19. У последње време, развојна библиотерапија сматра се новином међу активностима које нуде библиотеке. Библиотерапеутске радионице (групне или индивидуалне) организују се у складу са одређеном животном темом, конципираној у зависности од старости, интересовања, проблема полазника.

**Кључне речи:** библиотерапија, књига, развојна библиотерапија, клиничка библиотерапија, библиотека, лечење књигом.

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