

Whimsically, I decided that this book could be an even better seller, as well as more compelling and enjoyable, if the word “death” were replaced throughout with the word “sex”, or even “plants” or “spiders”. These words, as I discovered via some entertaining experimentation, fit easily into the simple grammar and syntax of this mass-market hardback and would convert this book into an engaging, provocative, and even elucidating Existential Psychological endeavour.

On the other hand, perhaps we would be better to leave revelations and reflections about death to the novelists, poets, and playwrights.

Jan McGiffin

The Therapeutic Potential of Creative Writing, Writing Myself

Gillie Bolton. (2005). Jessica Kingsley. £17.95.

Do you feel emotionally or creatively blocked? Do you want to develop new approaches to life? Have some fresh insights? Perhaps you need to come to terms with loss or illness? Or are suffering from old wounds caused by past events? Then why not try the powerful and therapeutic aspects of creative writing? We can all write. But sometimes we lack confidence, don't know where to start, or have a voice that has been silenced. Gillie Bolton can help.

I was interested in hearing more about the therapeutic potential of creative writing from Gillie Bolton as she is extremely well qualified on the subject. She is Literature and Medicine Editor of the *Journal of Medical Ethics Humanities*, Arts and Health Editor to *Progress in Palliative Care*, and Associate Editor of the *Journal of Poetry Therapy*. Not only has she trained healthcare professionals to offer therapeutic writing to their patients, she is also a researcher, and an award winning poet.

Writing Myself is a practical handbook of exercises which form the basis of a non-confrontational and sensitively designed approach to therapeutic writing. These exercises are intended to promote emotional healing, physical well-being, and boost personal development. In the foreword to the book, Sir Kenneth Calman (a former Chief Medical Officer of Health), is advocating the use of creative writing as a new initiative that will increase the well-being of patients and practitioners alike.

There is a lot in this book, with useful contact addresses of creative writing organizations and therapists, as well as a detailed bibliography and subject index. Bolton says it is suitable for both healthcare professionals who wish to implement therapeutic writing with their patients, and those wishing to start writing creatively in order to help themselves. If you fancy trying this for yourself, she recommends chucking writing out of the

window and beginning with what she calls a '*mind dump*'. Just write whatever comes into your head without editing or worrying about spelling. Focusing on specific themes comes later.

She says that writing is not just a form of communication; it is also a means to make sense of experience and arrive at a deeper understanding of the self. Bolton says that it can leave '*footsteps*' which can be an aid to progressive thought – something that can be worked on straightaway, or a decade later. The combination of the creativity of the process, with the achievement of something tangible, increases feelings of self-confidence and self-value. Bolton combines her poetic gift with a very open and rich introduction explaining the part that creative writing has played in her own life, her work with clients, and in running workshops.

There does seem to be something of a revival of interest in how writing creatively can enlarge our experiences and self-perception. And there are no shortages of creative writing training courses on the web, as well as books that will teach us these skills. Having said this, the act of writing can be an intensely private and personal experience, and it is not always necessary or desirable to have an audience or a listener. The writer can be both author and reader. You can personally experience the powerful and therapeutic aspects of writing without assistance.

In chapter ten of Bolton's book, we are given a glimpse of what it is like to attend a creative writing workshop. The facilitator uses a big bag of hats as a stimulus for writing. We meet Janice, a psychiatric nurse, who wants to use creative writing in her work with patients. Janice soon finds herself writing freely, opening-up insights that parallel free association in the therapy room. She found herself tapping into thoughts and feelings that had previously only been on the edge of awareness. Reading her writing to the group Janice is soon in deep despair, '*I'm sorry, I can't carry on. He died, you see – meningitis. He had a little bobble hat, just like this, smaller of course*'.

We follow subsequent entries in Janice's diary, '*Why did you have to bring all this up? Everything was all right until you came along with your stupid writing idea, and the bobble hat. Barry says I need help, I need more than you diary*'. Bolton says writing can be invaluable in supporting sufferers of extreme trauma, whether at the time or on reflection later. She also stresses the importance of being supported by a therapist in the writing process. Writing her diary helped Janice find the voice that had been silenced with her baby son's death, '*Funny though to think of the way it led me to see things differently – just writing them down as they came to me – in their red hot heat*'. Janice's story was fictional but intended to show the use of writing as a lifeline through tragedy.

What I appreciated most about this book is Bolton's use of simple techniques. However, I do think that you need a direction and focus to get the most out of creative writing. This is where the input of a therapist or

writing group can be very helpful. As we saw from Janice's experience, creative writing can uncover tricky thoughts, feelings, and memories that you might want to share with others. Others can also help to clarify issues and discover new possibilities not thought of before. I hope it will not intrude if I offer my own thoughts on creative writing. In difficult times, I tend towards reading rather than writing and like the poetry of Adrienne Rich. Her poetic language can and does keep body and soul together.

Maureen Cavill

Life and Death in Freud and Heidegger

Havi Carel. (2006). Rodopi. £34.29.

Havi Carel's book...

...provides a framework for understanding death as an active force within life. It presents an account of death as a non-pathological moment structuring life and shows that constructing a reflexive attitude to death is central to understanding life. This view rejects the dichotomy detaching the two and proposes to re-introduce death into life to create a unified view of life and death.

(p. xix)

Carel accomplishes this goal, but only by doing exegetical damage to both Freud and Heidegger. What emerges is therefore not a proper interpretation of either author, but instead a wholesale restructuring of both bodies of work into something that is fairly original. In the end, we thus cannot look to Carel as providing a pair of faithful interpretations. We can, however, attempt to understand Carel's work as an original contribution to the role of death within life.

As such a work, it boils down to some fairly unoriginal theses argued in a fairly original way: death has a role to play within life; death structures life; life and death are not dichotomous, but are inextricably connected. All of this can be easily granted by a reader steeped in Freud and/or Heidegger. Indeed, both authors clearly argue for likeminded theses. In Freud's case the thesis is presented in the form of the death drive. In Heidegger's case it is presented in the context of being-towards-death.

In this review I will support my claim that Carel's exegeses are at best incomplete and at worst incorrect. I will also argue that the exegetical failures are of little relevance to the contribution made by the work's third part, which is – on my reading – the best part of the book. I'll take these tasks in the above order.

A useful starting point in evaluating the present pair of exegeses lies in understanding the radical differences in motivation between the two authors. Freud is interested in understanding man and his putative