



Bibliotherapy in teaching of children's literature (On the example of Ahmet Hromadžić's story „the white nightingale“)

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Abstract: Bibliotherapy in classroom teaching should be a mandatory model in planning, systematizing, and conducting lessons in children's literature. For this reason, bibliotherapy requires clear and elaborated methodological models and principles, especially when it comes to the subject of Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian language, and literature, where issues of bibliotherapy have hardly been investigated at all. To change this situation, it is necessary to deal with this problem and present possible proposals for its solution. Namely, the situation of still insufficiently researched possibilities of bibliotherapy in elementary schools, and in the teaching processes of children's literature, i.e. this poorly defined and still insufficiently researched aspect is reflected daily in the teaching and in general the implementation of quality frameworks of the educational process in children's literature. Therefore, through Ahmet Hromadžić's story „The White Nightingale“, which talks about stigmatization, the importance, and role of socialization, but also about the importance of self-acceptance, friendship, understanding, and accepting difference, this paper offers possible bibliotherapy models for work in teaching children's literature. The paper includes the results of the bibliotherapy workshop based on the example of the aforementioned story by Ahmet Hromadžić, as well as possible suggestions within which the teaching processes of bibliotherapy in the teaching of children's literature could take a better place.

In this regard, precisely through greater knowledge about the importance of bibliotherapy workshops within the framework of teaching children's literature, all pupils, as well as teachers, would better adopt an awareness of the nature of the various stigmas that surround them, as well as in general the processes of acceptance of a series of Differences in the world that daily we testify.

Keywords: Bibliotherapy, stigma, socialization, difference, self-acceptance

Primarily through the different forms of oral literature, then written literature, strongly evidenced by the genre of children's lullabies, bibliotherapy is as old as humans. Bibliotherapy is an important part of art therapy and many publications regarding bibliotherapy have been published in the past (Xu et al., 2022). Namely, art therapy and bibliotherapy are both subfields in the creative/expressive arts world of therapeutic practice (Wright, 2023) and as such, through different realizations, have existed since time immemorial. Bibliotherapy is related to emotional problems, mental illness, or changes in people's lives (Pardeck, 1994) and it's quite clear that, in addition to educating, literary texts can soothe, but also irritate, heal, and nurture different types of psychological, emotional, and social states. So, since ancient times, books have been utilized as a therapeutic aid (Nazi et al., 2023) and today, especially in education, the application of Gestalt Therapy in bibliotherapy has proven to be very interesting and extremely useful. It's a therapy by which, in the process of reading or listening to a literary text, the emotions and states of characters from literary works are temporarily and briefly "borrowed", all with the aim of building and nurturing general positive personality traits, as well as with the aim of solving various mental and emotional states and difficulties.

Gestalt Therapy is considered to serve as a foundation of interactive bibliotherapy because it's obvious that fiction books can be a significant stimulant of personality transformation (Girčienė & Žukauskienė, 2022). However, the possibilities of bibliotherapy and its methodology in the teaching of children's literature have been insufficiently researched to date, and almost not at all in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There are many unfathomable reasons for this situation and this paper, uses the example of the children's story "The White Nightingale" by the Bosnian and Bosniak children's writer Ahmet Hromadžić (who is one of the most representative authors of Bosnian and Bosnian children's literature from the 1950s to the 1980s, i.e. the period of the completion of socialist realism and the beginning of post-war pre-modernism, and during the entire period of post-war modernism). His stories represent a rich treasury in literary animal studies (Pašić Kodrić, 2022), and his literary work is an integral part of education in primary schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina. One of the primary focuses of literary animal studies today is a special understanding of how the history of literary studies about animals was formed and shaped, while advocating for a different approach to issues in the future (McHugh, et al. 2021), through different images of animals, animal life and humans.

This paper wants to show that bibliotherapy can and should be a mandatory model in planning, systematizing, and conducting lessons in children's literature. This is particularly important because children should be taught bibliotherapy possibilities from an early age, especially from school age, so that the bibliotherapy effects remain an integral part of improving and nurturing their mental health. This way in adult age bibliotherapy can be applied as a self-help method to address psychological distress, boredom, and isolation (Sharma, 2023).

So, this work wants to show that bibliotherapy can and should be used not only by psychologists, literature professors, librarians, etc. Its original place should be in kindergartens among educators of children of the earliest age, and especially among teachers in primary schools when children know how to read and write precisely for the reason that psychology established a long time ago the importance of nurturing mental health, especially in childhood, but also the negative impact of traumas from the period of childhood, which does not need to be particularly emphasized since it's well known how much childhood shapes the future individual human development. It is precisely because of all this that children's literature is defined as literature for the most vulnerable readership (Pašić Kodrić & Pečenković, 2021).

This paper uses the story "White Nightingale" by Ahmet Hromadžić as a model for the possible application of children's literature in general through bibliotherapy in primary schools. Since bibliotherapy gives the best results in smaller groups, even with only one participant, and the paper wanted to examine the possibility of bibliotherapy in schools, due to its better effectiveness, in this paper Gestalt Therapy as a main bibliotherapy method on the example of a single case study, through homework from the mandatory course in Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian language and literature.

In order to better understand the application of Gestalt Therapy as a basic bibliotherapy method in this paper, it is first necessary to briefly explain what the story "The White Nightingale" by Ahmet Hromadžić is actually about, and which, within the reading-collection of stories "The dwarf tells you" is a mandatory reading book in all schools in the Sarajevo Canton, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The mother nightingale got five little nightingales, but one nightingale was completely different. He began to sing beautifully earlier than the other nightingales and the color of his feathers was different – he was white, which is not the „color of a nightingale“. So, from the very beginning, the nightingale is rejected from the environment because of his physical difference in relation to the community he belongs to, regardless of his abilities – he sang extremely beautifully, but his physical difference – the different color of his feathers – was the reason for him to be completely rejected from the environment.

“Since when are white nightingales born? – many voices are heard. – We have never seen a white nightingale. We do not accept him into our family. Let him go to the pigeons.” (Hromadžić, 1990: 118)

Through the stigma that could be attached to identification with a particular race, ethnicity, religion, or ideology (Goffman, 1986) the white nightingale is completely rejected and unhappy. He still goes to the pigeons, but even the pigeons do not accept him, because even though he is a bird, he "does not even belong to their family".

“Little one, find the company you belong to – said the old pigeon instructively. – You would always be a stranger among us and you would never find what you want.” (Hromadžić, 1990: 119)

The nightingale continues to wander the world and experiences many mishaps on his way to searching for acceptance. In the most difficult moments of loneliness, rejection, and sadness, he heals himself with his song. He barely survives the cruel winter and cold outside, but still, even alone, continues to sing. His magical song is heard by a boy who opens his window and accepts him not to die from the cold. The white nightingale finally finds the only true friend, love, and acceptance in the boy. Through true friendship, he heals and forgets all his sorrows and misfortunes, and with the arrival of spring, strong, healed, and restored by love, he returns to nature to sing. The nightingales hear his beautiful song and finally, they accept him. “You are the nightingale that sings the most beautifully of all the nightingales in the world. Stay with us and forget what happened. You will be our friend and we will be your friend.” (Hromadžić, 1990: 124)

Although he is finally accepted by „his birds“ – other nightingales who are not white like him – the white nightingale still does not forget his true friend – the boy who saved him in the most difficult times of rejection

and sadness. He flies to the boy's room every day to sing to him, but also introduces other nightingales to them so that they all remain friends together. At the end of the story, the white nightingale is finally accepted, free, and happy, because he is finally surrounded by those who understand, respect, accept and love him. And they value him because „he is who he is“and for his abilities – the ability to sing beautifully – and not for the color of his feathers.

In the example of the story "The White Nightingale" by Ahmet Hromadžić, as part of the research in this paper, a single case study was made – a bibliotherapy written task – for a twelve-year-old boy to answer a few questions.: Instructions are also given in which order the essay must be written to follow the four basic steps in bibliotherapy: identification, selection, presentation, and follow-up (Pardeck, 1993). The basic questions with some sub-questions are also conceptualized through the context of Gestalt Therapy in order to convince the bibliotherapy effect.

Question Number 1: If you have decided that you want to be a part of this research, does that mean that you can briefly identify with the white nightingale from Ahmet Hromadžić's story? Did you manage to borrow his emotions for a while and imagine that you were him?

Answer Number 1: “The story of the white nightingale is very sad, although it ends happily, which I am especially glad about. The whole time I was reading the story, I thought I was the white nightingale. I hadn't thought about it much before, but when I read stories, I always imagine that I am the main character who is saying something in the story.”

Question Number 2: How did you feel when the nightingale's family decided to expel him and he asked to be accepted by the pigeons who also rejected him? Can you remember now if you were once not accepted by your friends or family?

Answer Number 2: “It's terrible that the white nightingale was banished just because he had white feathers. That's just not fair. He sang beautifully. He didn't bother anyone. I think the other nightingales were jealous because they can't sing like him. Everyone is rejected sometimes. In my case, I always feel that way in sports classes. I'm not good at sports. Everyone often laughs at me because I can't run fast.”

Question Number 3: After everyone rejected him, the white nightingale was left alone in the cold winter, he suffered a lot, but still he continued to do what he knows best – he continued to sing. What do you do when you're having a hard time and do you believe you are doing something great? Can you imagine at this moment that something is very difficult for you like the white nightingale from this story? What would you do if you were in his place?

Answer Number 3: “That is the saddest part of this story. I don't know what I would do if I were in his place. I don't know what I can do well.”

Question Number 4: After many sufferings and misfortunes, the white nightingale still finds someone who accepted him, and that is a boy who offers him refuge from the cold and sadness in his warm room. Now imagine that it is very difficult for you: do you have a friend to whom you can tell this? Do you believe in true friendship?

Answer Number 4: “I have a friend, but I don't tell anyone when I'm having a hard time. I believe in friendship, but I don't know how to talk about it when I'm having a hard time.”

Question Number 5: When the winter he spent with the boy in his warm room is over, the white nightingale finally returns to nature in the spring, but this time all the birds accept him. What do you think, what is the reason why the white nightingale is suddenly accepted by everyone, and that was not the case earlier?

Answer Number 5: “The end of the story made me very happy. The white nightingale deserved to be happy. I'm glad he finally found friends. I don't know why the other birds suddenly accepted him, while earlier they pushed him away. I'd love to talk about it. I don't really understand that.”

Question Number 6: Can you imagine what would have happened to the white nightingale if he had not found a friend – the boy who saved him?

Answer Number 6: “He almost died in the cold winter alone. I'm sure he would die.”

Question Number 7: What do you think is the lesson of this story, what did you learn from this story that will be useful to you later in your life?

Answer Number 7: “You should trust your friends. Every problem can be solved.”

After looking at the responses of the twelve-year-old participant in this single-case study, it could be concluded:

– Based on the answer to the first question the participant shows that he is ready to identify himself with the white nightingale, and although the story as a whole is very sad, the happy ending of the story makes him happy which is very positive. The fact that the participant can identify with the sad fate of the white nightingale speaks of the importance of empathy that the participant expresses, which is certainly an extremely positive trait of the human personality. Children's literature can very well arouse empathy, especially in young readers, but it can also teach them how it's possible to recognize the abuse of empathy and the manipulation in general (Pašić Kodrić & Pečenković, 2021).

– Based on the participant's answer to the second question it can be concluded that the participant's story led him to think about his own problems and difficulties and to face them, which is encouraging in his answer, because solving every problem starts with facing the problem and own fears.

– In the third answer the participant does not give a satisfactory answer, because he does not know how to approach a situation that only seems hopeless. Also, the downside of this answer is that the participant does not show confidence that he is able to do something quite well. At the same time, answer no. 3 is extremely useful because it could be a guide for the teacher on what to do in the future in children's literature classes – through targeted texts from children's literature, build the idea that there are no hopeless situations and that everyone is extremely useful and capable in something and that it is very important to discover all talents (which every person has), and nurture them.

– In the answer to the fourth question it can be concluded that the participant is still not aware of the importance of socialization for the mental health of the individual, but this can be attributed to the age of the participant, who is twelve years old. This can also be a guideline for the teacher in which direction he/she could continue the lessons and homework in children's literature.

– The answer of the participant in the fifth question shows the same dynamics of the problem as in the previous, fourth question, and the misunderstanding of the importance of socialization in society can be attributed to the age of the participant. It is positive that the participant shows willingness for the teacher to explain the idea of this part of the story, which is that positive emotions provided by others in difficult moments always heal the individual and that positive thoughts evoke positive later outcomes.

– In the sixth answer, the participant gives an extremely positive answer and, although in the previous two questions, he did not show sufficient awareness of the importance of socialization, in this question he confirms that he is still partially aware of its importance, as well as the importance of faith in friendship and the positive outcome of things even when the situation seems hopeless – the way out is in the hope and positive emotions, asking for help and talking to those who can understand us in hard times, etc.

– In the last, seventh question, the participant again confirms that he is partially aware (quite satisfactorily within the framework of the age of a twelve-year-old) of the importance of self-acceptance, socialization, destigmatization, the beauty of Difference, and all extremely useful parts of this story, which is encouraging and confirms that the participant in this research was able to identify with the main actor of the story "The White Nightingale" by Ahmet Hromadžić and that in the reading process he was able to "borrow the emotions and states" of the main actor of this story „here and now“.

So, this paper, through a single case study and a somewhat simpler application of Gestalt Therapy, wanted to show that bibliotherapy as a practice must be present not only among certified bibliotherapists but through children's

literature and among educators in kindergartens, especially among teachers in primary schools. The story "The White Nightingale" by Ahmet Hromadžić is just a tool in the endless number of such and similar texts that every national children's literature offers and whose rich possibilities can certainly be used in teaching in a similar way as it is presented in this paper. Namely, bibliotherapy does not only help in solving various mental illnesses and various problematic emotional states, (which is the primary task of certified bibliotherapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists), it is often an important tool for encouraging everyday changes in the life of an individual, important changes that can significantly nurture mental health.

Understood in this way, bibliotherapy can become not only a practice in kindergartens and elementary schools, but also a self-healing tool for every person who simply wants to feel better through reading books, or just thinking a little more about how he/she feels. It is very important to build children's awareness of the importance of self-discovery through the fiction of children's literature and through familiarization with the bibliotherapeutic features of children's literature because children's literature, and literature in general, not only educates and nurtures, it also heals (Pašić Kodrić, 2023). Namely, although children's literature is not a servant or an assistant of pedagogy, it is clear that it still contributes to education and a wider educational goal (Crnković & Težak, 2002). Good literature simply leaves us with no choice but to be better because of it (Landy 2008).

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