

Anne Fine's Goggle-Eyes: A Bibliotherapy Session in Progress

Maryam Karaminezhaad Ranjbar

Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Vali_e_Asr University of Rafsanjan,
Main Administrative building, 22 Bahman Square, Rafsanjan, Kerman, Iran.

Soheila Faghfori

Ph.D., Professor, Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Vali_e_Asr
University of Rafsanjan, Main Administrative building, 22 Bahman Square, Rafsanjan, Kerman,
Iran.

Abstract:

Etymologically, the term bibliotherapy being made of the words "biblio" which means books in Greek and, "therapeia" meaning to help medically, refers to the use of books and stories with the intention of psychological treatment. Clearly not all books have therapeutic qualities and not all clients can be prescribed the same book. Therefore a proper book selection is one of the most subtle jobs of a therapist or whoever takes the role of a facilitator in the process. One of such books which seem suitable for therapy is Anne Fine's novel, Goggle-eyes written for children. What makes this story interestingly more appropriate for this purpose is that the story, having a character who tries to help sooth her friend by recounting her own life story, is itself a bibliotherapy session in progress. Throughout the paper besides clarifying the notion of bibliotherapy, according to Shrodes and a number of other scholars, the novel Goggle-eyes is examined regarding all the elements of bibliotherapy, making it easier for therapist to conduct a healing process through books.

Key words: *Caroline Shrodes, Anne Fine, Goggle-Eyes, Bibliotherapy, divorce*

Introduction to Bibliotherapy:

Life is a continual adjustment to many different types of problems and these problems can cause times of sadness, uncertainty and stress. ((Ouzts, 1991)). Although this is a bitter truth in the everyday life of all people, the issue is much more serious when it comes to children. They just like adults face life changing catastrophes and experience loss without having developed coping skills. So a need for help is very much felt whenever a child becomes involved in a disaster and what better remedy can be suggested than books?

Bibliotherapy, as many argue, is an ancient concept that belongs to the time when libraries were called "healing place for the soul" by the Greeks. Literary critics of the past concerned themselves with various purposes of literature and different roles that it can play. Ideas ranging from literature with didactic features, to its main function being merely beauty and

aesthetic qualities formed among them. But not many critics have taken their time to introduce the therapeutic ability of literature. Therefore although the notion seems to be around for a long time, bibliotherapy as a type of psychological treatment is rather new.

In 1949 Shrodes made the effort of applying a theory to the concept and wrote the first doctoral dissertation on bibliotherapy. Her work titled, *Bibliotherapy: A Theoretical and Clinical-Experimental Study* is considered a great source of information in the field. She defined bibliotherapy by making a comparison between psychiatric and artistic experiences and claimed that "The dynamic processes of the aesthetic experience correspond in both substance and function to the major phases of psychotherapy. This similarity of response to books and psychotherapy permits the two techniques to interact with and facilitate each other to the mutual advantage of patient and therapist." Bibliotherapy according to Shrodes is, "a process of dynamic interaction between the personality of the reader and literature as a psychological field which may be utilized for personality assessment, adjustment and growth." (Shrodes, 1949)

As the technique of using books for the purpose of treatment became more and more popular, various ideas about the process through which it functions formed among its practitioners and advocators. As the pioneer of the bibliotherapeutic process, Caroline Shrodes has come to the conclusion that by the act of reading, the reader will become involved in three main psychotherapeutic phases: identification; catharsis; insight. (as cited in Rubin, 1978b, p. 36) Accordingly, "bibliotherapy becomes a process of identifying with another character or group so that feelings are released and the individual develops a great awareness of his own motivations and rationalizations for his behavior." (Russell & Shrodes, 1950a, p. 336-337).

Therefore one of the characteristics of a bibliotherapeutic book is that it should succeed in helping the reader move through the three phases and this factor should be taken to consideration in a proper book selection. Needless to say that in dealing with children who have experienced a loss or any other type of trauma, the problem is much bigger than just making them read a given material. Choosing suitable stories is harder for kids due to their different levels of reading abilities. Not only the story should be analyzed to find out whether the content matches the crisis that the child is experiencing or not, it should also be suitable and understandable for the child's age group. According to Coleman & Ganong, "adolescent fiction can provide insight into the passions, problems, and concerns of children undergoing change" (p. 330), but only if readers can "identify with a culture of peers," and that the stories meet with their expectations of probability (Gauthier, 2002, p. 73). Thus the stories should be realistic and acceptable by the children and yet remain at their level of understanding and cognitive ability. In order to clarify the psychological phases that any reader with bibliotherapeutic intentions go through, it is best to first introduce the story of Goggle-eyes written for children and young adults, and then get familiar with the different stages and also other qualifications that a story should possess to be considered bibliotherapeutic while it is being analyzed.

Introduction to the Plot

The novel *Goggle-Eyes* was written in 1989 with its main theme being divorce and the threat of an unwanted stepfather for the children of the broken family. The story starts when Helen Johnson runs out of the classroom in tears. Mrs Lupey who is perfectly aware of her student's problems sends Kitty Killin after her even though Liz is Helen's close friend. The fact that she is sent to look for Helen is even surprising for Kitty herself but after finding out the problem, it becomes quite clear why the teacher has made this choice. Just like Helen, Kitty has experienced having to deal with a mother's unwanted friend who might actually turn into an unwanted step father one day.

The two of them spend the morning hiding in the Lost Property Cupboard and Kitty relates her own life story about how she used to hate her mother's friend since she is an expert in telling stories about it. Her disapproval of this man's presence in her life is even shown through the nickname that she chose for him, *Goggle-Eyes* because of the way he looks at her mother. Eventually, although Kitty does not claim that anything has really changed in *Goggle-eyes'* behavior, she admits that just by being fair and looking at the situation from a different angle the initial hatred has changed into mutual understanding and acceptance.

What makes this story amazingly suited for bibliotherapeutic analysis is that this story can itself be considered a recount of a bibliotherapeutic session in progress with the therapist (Kitty) and the client (Helen) both present in the story. At the beginning of the story Mrs. Lupey takes up the role of a therapist and by sending kitty after Helen, she actually does the book selection part of the process. Having read Kitty's writings for the class such as, a collection of sixteen century limericks entitled *Go Home, Old Man*, from *Whence Thou Camest* or the essay *Will She, Won't She Marry Him?... (49)*, she is perfectly aware that Helen will empathize with Kitty's story and will identify with her as she tells the story of *Goggle-eyes*. After that it is Kitty's turn to act as the therapist and use her story as effectively as possible in order to make her friend feel better about her situation and perhaps suggest some solutions to her problems.

Bibliotherapist working with children should be cautious to take the steps one by one when the time is right (Pardeck1998). One of the things they have to analyze and become sure of, is the child's readiness to cooperate in the process. This part was perfectly done by Kitty at the beginning of the story when she understands that Helen is reluctant to talk or to listen to her, "Fine!" I scuttled backwards to my place on the bench opposite. 'Fine by me! I won't come near you again. I'll just sit here quietly and count the coats!'" (7) After that in various other occasions she tries to test whether Helen is willing to talk or not and each time she retreats feeling that the so called client is not ready yet.

Then as any efficient bibliotherapist needs to do, she starts building trust and a closer friendship with Helen. An example of such attempt was when the second bell rings and everyone come out of their classes, Kitty helps Helen to hide in the lost property cupboard to save her the embarrassment of being seen looking so dreadful. "I pushed Helen down on the softest looking

mound of stuff, and stood guard at the door till I heard the burbling of the first people going through to their classes. ...” (12)

Believing that the desirable amount of trust is formed, it is now time to select the suitable story for therapy’s sake. Although it was quite clear to Mrs. Lupey what the problem was, Kitty was still completely in the dark as which of her life stories would help Helen. She starts thinking deep and hard to find out why she was sent to the mission of soothing Helen.

I couldn’t understand why I’d been chosen...Why me? But Mrs. Lupey must have had her reasons. Helen and I must have *something* in common,...’I know!’ I cried. ‘I know why you are so upset! I know why you are crying your eyes out! I know why you don’t want to be sent home!’(14)

And so right there and then the suitable story for Helen was chosen from among Kitty’s life stories, the story of Goggle-eyes.

When looking into a story for bibliotherapeutic qualities, it is important to make sure that the story is a well-written piece of literature and then check whether or not the story is capable of making the reader experience all the phases of therapy, identification, catharsis, insight, and as some scholars believe universalization. Other than that, since the whole process is based on the identification of the client with a character in the story in the hope to find solace and solution to the problems, the main character must be a positive model who knows how to deal with a specific problem and displays good coping skills. Finally in order to achieve effective bibliotherapy it is essential for the solutions introduced in the story to be rather realistic and not to give false hope to the readers. (Heath, et al., 2005; Pardeck, 1994; Roberts & Crawford, 2008). Being the great writer that Anne Fine is with all the prestigious awards that she has won, there is no question that her works are of literary merit and so other elements should only be analyzed, starting with the three psychotherapeutic phases of identification, catharsis and insight.

1. Identification

identification is the first psychological phase that the readers go through as they imagine themselves in the place of the character. When the story is chosen correctly for a client with somewhat similar types of life problems, this phase makes them experience the sufferings and the happiness of the character at a level close to an experience of their own. The story of Goggle-eyes or better to say Kitty’s life story about how she hates her future stepfather definitely mirrors Helen’s situation as well as many other children who may be advised to read this story. The fact that the story is written from the first person point of view makes it even easier for the readers to see the events as their own experience and identify with the character. In this form of storytelling, the reader experiences, feels, and thinks as the narrative of the story does (Luken, 2003, p 168). Even the way that Kitty tells her story, the chatty style, and the informal, simple sentence structure encourages identification making the readers see her as a friend who is confiding to them as she uncovers her most private emotions.

The hatred Kitty expresses towards Gerald, the Goggle-eyes, makes it hard to think there would be any reader who would feel worse about the similar person in his real life than she does.

I hated having Goggle-eyes about. I hated the whole house whenever he was in it... I hated Mum for being happy and relaxed, and nice to him. I hated Jude simply for answering whenever he asked her a trivial little question or said something casual and friendly. And sometimes I even hated sweet furry Floss....

But most of all, of course, I hated him. (p. 32)

Then if her hatred of the new person does not exactly mirror the readers' situation, they are probably in a better condition than Kitty's.

2. Catharsis

The second psychotherapeutic phase in bibliotherapy, as identified by Shrodes, is catharsis. She uses this word which means spontaneous release of emotion, synonymously with the word abreaction. Catharsis or relief at the recognition of fears or behavioral habits from childhood releases person to a new sky view to see their lives anew. The healing process releases neurochemicals of joy and pleasure (Gold, 1990, p. 288). Therapeutic reading provides a feeling of relief for readers, this experience of catharsis gives the readers a sense as if burdens had been lifted from their shoulders. The main reason that the clients need something such as a story to help them release their emotions is the fact that people very likely lose touch with their inner feelings as they are struggling to cope with a crisis. They use different defense mechanisms to save themselves from the pain of such thoughts and feelings, such as repression. This disconnection from their emotions disables them to find a solution to their troubles.

Traces of catharsis are also found in Goggle-Eyes through Helen (the presumed client) even though she remains silent most of the time. She does show signs that at some points she gets equally sad, or angry, and in cases happy along with the main character of the story, Kitty. Moving along the story, sharing the feelings that Kitty describes, Helen becomes relieved of her unvoiced emotions through Kitty and eventually feels better. While Kitty pours out her heart, verbalizes all her hatred and anger, Helen or whoever reads the story and identifies with the character feels as if someone has spoke their mind and those disturbing feelings are released. A clear example of it is when Helen admits to hate the new addition to the family for the first time when she feels safe with Kitty who has experienced the same situation.

...You think he is a proper creep! You've thought he was a creep all along, but, being the sweet Helly that you are, you have been too gentle and polite to say so. And now she's talking about your happy future together, and it's too late to explain that you don't like him.'

She twisted her fingers so tightly I thought they would snap.

‘Don’t like him? She repeated in a cold, low voice.

‘I can’t *stand* him.’

As the story unwinds with an interesting turn of events, the enmity Kitty once felt toward Gerald gives way to respect for him and she even ends up being afraid of losing him. Helen along with Kitty feels the same way and as she expresses her concern it becomes quite clear that she is on the way to recovery even though she insists the situation is different with her stepfather to be or as she refers to him, Toad-shoes.

... Did your mum forgive him, or did the poor old sausage get the Big Freeze?

... So Goggle-eyes had been transmuted into ‘Poor Old Sausage’ now, had he? Honestly! If her sweet nature could, in the space of a morning, turn Gerald Faulkner into an object of tender sympathy, it probably wouldn’t be more than a couple of weeks before Toad-shoes, creeping warily through the back door, found Hell’s arms wrapped round him in cheerful welcome. My mission, clearly, was all accomplished. (p. 131)

3. Insight

Throughout the last phase “It is assumed that while the character works through a problem, readers are emotionally involved in the struggle and ultimately achieve insight into their own situation” (Shrodes, 1957). Thus insight is the ability to achieve an awareness of one's own motivation and needs of finding solutions to one's problems through identification. In a successful bibliotherapy as “... the reader’s emotions are engaged when he reads a novel or play, energy that has been serving a repressive function may be liberated for productive use.” (Shrodes, *Bibliotherapy: an Application of Psychoanalytic theory* p.313) When the character is able to work out a practical solution to the problem, the readers can incorporate the same solution or the same way of behavior in solving their own similar problems. (David H. Russell and Caroline Shrodes, p. 336)

Reading Goggle-eyes as the readers follow Kitty through her situation with Gerald Faulkner, those who identify with her and share her bitter feelings towards Goggle-eyes do also identify with her as she admits she might have been unfair to Gerald at times and, very likely, find their views of an unwanted addition to the family changed. Throughout the story little by little she comes to the understanding that being as responsible and stable as Gerald is, he can be very trustworthy and dependable.

... later, lying in bed waiting for Mum, I wondered if I hadn’t been a bit unfair on poor old Gerald Faulkner, deciding so early on that he was the worst thing to have happened to our household since Dad packed his boxes and went off.... (p. 123)

Other than just suggesting ways to accept the situation through various coping skills, or possible solutions, the story of Goggle-eyes does also have a number of lessons that it teaches the readers indirectly giving them insight in a range of other issues as well. One of such lessons is the value of books and reading. Before Helen decides to let Kitty in on the issue that was

bothering her so badly, Kitty had to sit quietly in the cloakroom, “desperately wishing I’d had the sense to bring down my school bag. At least that way I’d have had something to read. I hate sitting anywhere without a book.” (7) In another part of the story it is very cleverly brought to the readers’ attention that school books are not enough and they should have other reading materials to accompany them. “The bag was open and my books were showing- not just *France Aujourd’ hui* and *Modern Mathematics*, but also the things I’m reading on the bus and at bedtime...” (24) Other small bits of insight about life skills in general range from, being careful not to waste electricity, the importance of taking part in the household chores, not being afraid of making a change for the better, and most notably the significance of keeping the earth we live on a safer place for everyone.

4. universalization

Although Shrodes only discerns three stages in a bibliotherapeutic process, there are scholars such as Pardeck and Stamp who believe the patient to experience four psychotherapeutic phases on their way to recovery, the last being universalization. Going through the fourth stage, readers come to realize that just like them, along with the character in the story, many other people struggle with the same problems that they are facing. This gives them the ability to process the story in a more universal way (Stamp, 2003). Having their perspective broadened, their world becomes bigger and so their problem does not seem as big as they used to see it anymore. As Douglas claims, “Reading is paradoxically a personal act and a global activity.” (Douglas, 2007). On the other hand knowing that there are other people struggling with closely similar types of problems gives them comfort that they are not alone in this world and coping becomes easier for them as they realize that other people have succeeded in doing so.

Having studied politics and history, Anne Fine is equipped with other tools to bring much bigger universal issues to the attention of the reader and automatically make them conclude that their problems are not that significant in comparison. By merely mentioning the history, as Kitty’s mother encourages her not to give up while trying to make a change, the readers get the universal sense that some things are the same for all, and not just in the time being but all throughout history.

‘Don’t let them bother you.’...’that’s the way History goes. All change takes time. Everyone who ever tried to change anything important got sneered at by those who wanted things left the same. Look at the people who fought for the end of slavery! ... Look at the women who fought for their right to the vote! ... All it proves is that we’re getting somewhere.’... ‘I’ll tell you one thing I earned from studying History, Kitty. As soon as you see your opponents are reduced to insulting you personally, you know you’re on the way to victory.’

Something that turns up occasionally in Fines writings is the importance of nuclear disarmament. As the readers get the knowledge about the destructive capability of nuclear bombs, although they might share Gerald’s ideas in believing that having access to such

artilleries is a necessity for defensive aims, they do find themselves realizing that there are much bigger and important issues happening around them, in comparison to which their problems seem relatively small. Kitty herself feels the same way as she lies down on the Ministry of Defense land in an act of protest, pretending to be dead as a result of a nuclear explosion.

Suddenly, with everyone lying there pretending, just for a few minutes, that the worst has actually happened- It's too late now- it's all over- the world seems larger, somehow, and more serious and more precious. And the police walkie-talkies suddenly sound so cheap and tinny and unimportant...

5. Positive model

To achieve a desirable effect from a bibliotherapy, the character with whom the readers identify should present a positive role model. Kitty presents many positive characteristics which come to help her as she tries to cope with the situation. One of her best traits is that she admits to her mistakes and tries to be fair to the people around her. It is not only her own well being that she cares about, she quite contrary believes that everyone deserve to be happy even if it means that the others need to compromise. Her being insightful and fair helps her get to know Gerald better and to realize personality traits in him that were at many times positive. As much as she hates having Goggle-eyes around, it does not stop her from realizing how happy he has made her mother feel and how much it means to her to see her Mum cheerful.

And it seemed *ages* since we'd had a really silly scene like that, with her half-way serious and half-way foolish, and not caring for a moment how everything turned out. And maybe it had helped, having Goggle-eyes there watching everything, laughing. Maybe Mum just felt far more cheerful when she had company... Maybe there were advantages to having someone else around the place. (61)

Kitty is grateful to Gerald Falkner for all the things he did for her and Jude, her sister while their mother was at the police station arrested for the protest against nuclear weapons. As a positive model for the readers of the book, Kitty does not let her dislike of Gerald Falkner make a biased person out of her and blind her to the fact that he should actually be given credit for many good qualities. She even sees the difference that is made by the way Goggle-eyes talks to her Mum and she also feels that it is changing her mother for the better, in comparison to the time before her Dad left the house. In one of their serious talks, Gerald tells Rosalind,

'Do you know what you are, Rosalind?' he said. 'You are almost *unbelievably bossy*.'

... If Dad said anything like that, the fur would fly so fast, so furious, you'd hit the floor for safety...Somehow Gerald Faulkner managed to say it in an affectionate kind of way that made you think the fact that Mum was so bossy filled him with loving admiration.

And, astonishingly, that's the way she took it.

'I'm bossy, aren't I?' she said. 'Yes, I really am bossy.' (92)

6. Realistic solutions

Anne Fine, having experienced a divorce herself, perfectly depicts a realistic account of the situation in broken families. In an interview done by Valerie Bierman she says, "If I'm writing about divorce, I know what parents say in anger in front of the children. I know children know what's going on. I don't kid myself that everyone lives in cotton wool." This is why the novel *Goggle-eyes* also presents a realistic and believable story. It is perfectly natural for anyone who experiences divorce to be willing to start another relationship afterwards. And children reluctant to accept a change in their lives usually have difficulty accepting the relationship at first. Kitty not being an exception, hates everything about the new possible addition to the family, Gerald Faulkner. As the readers move on through the story with Kitty They also find their views changed as she depicts her coping and problem solving skills.

As the story disentangles the readers learn through Kitty's behavior that they should be more accepting of the changes that are inevitable in broken families. By not letting their anger of unwanted changes get on the way of their judgment, their view of the situation might change drastically. Taking these steps, Kitty evolves from absolutely hating the new person into ultimately understanding and accepting him as a reliable man who can add comfort to the family and specially her mother. As she herself admits,

It suddenly occurred to me that part of the reason I couldn't stand Goggle-eyes was because he was so different from me and Mum, and suddenly I thought, if I could only understand, I might be able to get along with him better. (122)

The very practical coping skill, suggested more vividly than any other in the story, is talking about emotions and ideas to others. As children read about Kitty the main character in the novel, telling her life story to a friend, it becomes easier for them to build community among their own friends at school from which they can all benefit. Or if they do not feel comfortable talking about their problems to anyone, as Helen probably did not, Kitty demonstrates yet another good way of coping with the problems and that is writing about them in forms of diaries, essays or poems if possible.

Works Cited

- Coleman, M., & Ganong, L. H. . (1990). The uses of juvenile fiction and self-help books with step families. *Jurnal of counseling & Development* , 327-331.
- Crothers, S. M. (1916). A Literary Clinic. *Athlantic Monthly* , 291-301.
- Fine, A. (2000). *Goggle- Eyes*. London: Puffin Books.
- Gauthier, G. (2002). Whose community? *English journal* , 70-76.
- Gold, J. (2002). The Storie Species: Our Life-Literature Connection. *Fitzhenry and Whiteside* , 273.

- Heath, M. A., Sheen, D., Leavy, D., Young, E. & Money, K. . (2005). Bibliotherapy: A resource to facilitate emotional healing and growth. *School Psychology International* , 563-80.
- Ouzts, D. T. (1991). The Emergence of Bibliotherapy as a Discipline. *Reading Horizons* , 198-206.
- Pardeck J. A & Pardeck J. T. (1985). Bibliotherapy using a neo-Freudian approach for children of divorced parents. *School Counselor* , 313-318.
- Pardeck, J. T. (1984). Bibliotherapy: An approach to helping young people with problems. *Journal of Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama, & Sociometry* , 41-43.
- Pardeck, J. T. (1998). *Using books in clinical social work practice: A guide to bibliotherapy*. New York: Haworth.
- Pardeck, J. T. (1994). Using literature to help adolescents cope with problems. *Adolescence* , 421-427.
- Pardeck, J. T. (1991). Using reading materials with childhood problems. *Psychology: A Journal of Human Behavior* , 58-65.
- Pardeck, J. (2005). Using bibliotherapy in family health social work practice with children of divorce. *Social work practice with youngsters and families: A family health approach* , 45- 56.
- Pardeck, T. J. (1998). An exploration of the uses of children's books as an approach for enhancing cultural diversity. *Early Child Development and Care* , 25-31.
- Robert, S. Crawford, P. (2008). Real life calls for real books: Literature to help children cope with family stressors. *Young Children* , 12-17.
- Rubin, R. (1978). *Using bibliotherapy: A guide to theory and practice*. Phoenix: AZ: Oryx Press.
- Russell, D. Shrodes, C. (1950). Contributions of research in bibliotherapy to the language arts program. *The School Review* , 335- 342.
- Shrodes, C. (1949). *Bibliotherapy: A Theoretical and Clinical-experimental Study*. California: University of Calif.
- Shrodes, C. (1960). Bibliotherapy: An Application of Psychoanalytic Theory. *American Imago; a Psychoanalytic Journal for the Arts and Sciences* , 311.
- Stamps, L. S. (n.d.). Bibliotherapy: How books can help students cope with concerns and conflicts. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin* , 25-29.