

READING GOLDBLOCKS: INTERROGATING THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THERAPEUTIC LIFE NARRATIVE
AND FIRST AND THIRD PERSON NARRATIVE VOICE

PHD THESIS FOR CREATIVE ARTS: CREATIVE WRITING

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1990s a comprehensive body of research has confirmed that writing, in the form of either confession or catharsis, can be therapeutic. Recent research indicates that editing, shaping and crafting therapeutic writing can also be beneficial, particularly when the therapeutic writer is given the guidelines, support and encouragement to help develop his or her therapeutic writing skills. The goal of this study is to assess the technique of writing a therapeutic life narrative using both first and third person narrative point of view. It aims to articulate the lived experience of shifting between two different narrative perspectives. It also explores whether or not therapeutic writing is more effective when accompanied by a critical stance that reflects on, and is reflective about, the lived experience of shifting between first and third narrative voice and narrative point of point of view.

This study was conducted using practice-led, phenomenological, descriptive, qualitative research methodology. It is composed of two parts. 'Reading Goldilocks' is a deliberately crafted therapeutic narrative employing both first and third person narrative point of view and narrative voice. 'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'' describes and analyses research conducted into therapeutic writing, the character of Goldilocks, the difference between autodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrative voice and the potential for an intersubjective 'relationship' between a therapeutic writer and his or her third person narrator. This study also proposes that, for therapeutic writing to be accepted as a legitimate therapeutic tool, a more nuanced understanding of therapeutic writing as an emerging genre is required.

The experience of writing a dual (or split) narrative and the potential inherent in making the shift between the two is the main focus of the study. The third person narrator of 'Reading Goldilocks' is a reimagined and reconfigured mature age version of Goldilocks from the children's fairy tale *The Three Bears*. Goldilocks' search for a 'just right' bowl of porridge, chair and bed is a metaphor that underpins the nature and consequence of choice, a central theme of the memoir.

'Writing 'Reading Goldilocks'' describes and analyses how research into women's life narratives, fairy tales, the character of Goldilocks, narrative point of view and narrative voice shapes and informs the production of 'Reading Goldilocks'. The

relationship between narrative voice and therapeutic writing is described as one of imaginatively experiencing the world of another. The nature of the relationship between the two different narrative voices, and between the therapeutic writer and the third person narrative voice, is explained through reference to the concept of the threshold. It is proposed that shifting, or 'crossing', from one voice to another is the same as experiencing a void or caesura, a space *between* different narrative perspectives that represents a potent site of change.

Writing strategies and practices that name and access the therapeutic writer's personal strengths and help develop resilience, all require further study. Academic inquiry into new ways of thinking about, and supporting, the process of therapeutic writing is required. Theories based on rigorous research into the role of the therapeutic writer and the counsellor/writer are also essential.

Keywords: Therapeutic writing, therapeutic writer, memoir, narrative point of view, narrative voice, Goldilocks, reflectivity, reflexivity, phenomenology, intersubjectivity, writer/counsellor.

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READING GOLDBLOCKS



A MEMOIR

Epigraphs appearing at the beginning of alternate chapters are from:

Simone de Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (London: Andre Deutsch & Weidenfeld Nicolson, 1959)

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For Matt, Larri and A.R.