



A Historical Review of Bibliotherapy

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THIS PAPER WILL SURVEY the major currents that make up the present river of bibliotherapeutic practice and philosophy. In addition, it will touch lightly upon some pertinent tributaries. Several historical reviews and bibliographies have appeared during the past thirty years. These will be discussed in their proper chronological position.

Practitioners and philosophers of bibliotherapy have usually assumed that reading is a worthwhile and effective method of treatment. Some of these writers have occasionally suffered from a narrowness of vision and a paucity of humor. Reading is important and helpful—few will deny the truth of this statement, but how many have looked at an article entitled “How To Not Read”¹ by Gelett Burgess? Here the bibliotherapist with an imagination can find some provocative ideas.

Three articles that deserve comment appeared during the first world war. Samuel McChord Crothers was one of the first to use the term *bibliotherapy*.² He described the “Bibliopathic Institute” of his friend Bagster. Bagster, overflowing with enthusiasm, relates several case histories, in one of which he prescribed reading of the *Congressional Record*. Bagster states, “Bibliotherapy is such a new science that it is no wonder that there are many erroneous opinions as to the actual effect which any particular book may have.”³ This comment will certainly not sound unusual to modern bibliotherapists—nor will some of the perceptive comments made in other parts of this paper. In the same year G. S. Robinson, formerly the Chairman of the Board of Control of State Institutions of Iowa, quotes Miss Carey, a pioneer in hospital libraries, as saying that books are “tools to be used with intelligent expectation of getting results.”⁴ The third article, by Elizabeth Green, a librarian, and Dr. Sidney Q. Schwab, Mr. Beatty is Librarian and Professor of Medical Bibliography, Northwestern University Medical School, Chicago.

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a professor of clinical neurology, described "The Therapeutic Use of a Hospital Library."⁵ The authors present a fascinating mixture of the library's obligation to improve its readers and protect its books, and some of the present-day concepts of bibliotherapy.

In the 1920's several strands in the development of bibliotherapy either appear for the first time or find effective spokesmen. John Kendrick Bangs, according to Linda Eastman, wrote, "If I were a doctor I should make books a part of the materia medica, and prescribe them for my patients, according to their need."⁶ Many writers have expressed similar thoughts. At a meeting of the Library Association in 1930,⁷ Kathleen Jones quoted E. F. Garesché, "The books in a well-chosen hospital library stand row upon row like phials in a pharmacy." At the same meeting Miss Perrie Jones advocated one of her customarily sensible ideas by pointing out that the use of books as a therapeutic agent is strictly an individual matter.

The basic division in the history of bibliotherapy might be entitled "enthusiasm," "art," and "science." Typical of the first group is the article, "The Cheering Stimulus of Poetry in Veterans' Bureau Hospitals," by Annie L. Craigie.⁸ Followers of the "art" find justification and assistance in, for example, articles by Elizabeth R. Creglow, "Therapeutic Value of Properly Selected Reading Matter"⁹ (for both the patient and the librarian); Sadie Peterson-Delaney, "The Library—A Factor in Veterans' Bureau Hospitals,"¹⁰ and Dr. Gerald B. Webb, "The Prescription of Literature."¹¹ All three offer specific titles and methods. The paper by Dr. Webb goes into the matter in a pleasant style and at some length.

In the division of the "science" of bibliotherapy the need for case histories and records was ably put forth by Sir Bruce Bruce-Porter¹² and Dr. G. O. Ireland.¹³ Views about the required personality for the bibliotherapist were discussed by Dr. Josephine A. Jackson.¹⁴

By the 1930's many bibliotherapists were in evidence. Among them were Isabel Du Bois, who cited¹⁵ as the only actually therapeutic use of books she knew of the patient who used two volumes of the encyclopedia to straighten his arm, and Emma T. Foreman, who remarked, "a patient's friends and his family should not bring books to him any more than they should bring his dinner to him."¹⁶ Miss Foreman concluded her paper with a statement that bibliotherapy should be studied scientifically. An attempt in this direction was reported by Elizabeth Pomeroy, a frequent contributor to the subject, in her paper discussing 1,538 case reports.¹⁷ Dr. Frank Leslie gave a

rather superficial study of twenty-five patients suffering from dementia praecox.¹⁸

In 1931 William J. Bishop¹⁹ compiled a list of references for hospital libraries. His list contained several bibliotherapeutic items. The first such list in this country appeared in the literature two years later. Adeline M. Macrum,²⁰ the compiler, had been the librarian of the Tuberculosis League of Pittsburgh. The 1930's closed with an excellent volume, *Hospital Libraries*, by E. Kathleen Jones.²¹ Its importance here comes from a list of references which form Appendix F of her book.

Effective contributions appeared in this decade from some of the "regulars." Mrs. Peterson-Delaney wrote on "The Place of Bibliotherapy in a Hospital" and emphasized the need for adequate records.²² Perrie Jones continued her sensible and helpful work with such comments as, "Unfortunately, however, no foolproof lists or rules have yet been discovered to be handed over to the amateur, no matter how much she may be impressed with the possibilities of administering to the sick."²³ She stresses the need for sufficient training and staff so that useful records of reading may be kept. In an article entitled "Mental Patients Can Read,"²⁴ Miss Jones devoted three bristling paragraphs to "What We Don't Know." She pointed out that she had deliberately avoided the word "bibliotherapy" because there was not a sufficient methodology available to justify the use of the term.

Some of the most interesting work in the period 1931-1940 was done by Dr. Gordon R. Kamman, at the University of Minnesota. Dr. Kamman called for the cooperation of the physician and librarian and envisioned a bright future for bibliotherapy.²⁵ He stressed the importance of records of reading.²⁶

Another writer in Minnesota, Dr. Magnus C. Petersen, commented, "If we get one or two patients interested in reading and we see them improve, we are apt to conclude that this improvement is due to the reading. As a matter of fact, the improvement may be because of, or in spite of, the reading."²⁷ Dr. Petersen outlined some of the possibilities for future research in bibliotherapy.

Two names which were later to become important in bibliotherapy made their first appearance dealing with this subject in the late 1930's. Dr. William C. Menninger discussed a five-year program in bibliotherapy at the Menninger Clinic.²⁸ Alice I. Bryan wrote a paper entitled "Can There Be a Science of Bibliotherapy?"²⁹ Because this aspect of the subject has been commented upon by so many authors, there is no need to do more than mention it.

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During the first half of the 1940's several writers began to examine some of the premises upon which bibliotherapy rested. Lou Davie, from the Recreational Therapy Department of the Menninger Clinic, wrote an article entitled "The Function of a Patients' Library in a Psychiatric Hospital."³⁰ The author commented logically upon the qualifications and background needed by a competent bibliotherapist and upon what bibliotherapy needed to make it a really scientific discipline. Also in 1940 Eleanor Mascarino, a librarian, and Dr. Delmar Goode, a physician, reported one of the first attempts to use bibliotherapy in conjunction with shock treatment for a specific disease.³¹ This paper emphasized the importance of close cooperation among the physician, librarian, and family of the patient, and of comprehensive reading records.

Dr. Salomon Gagnon, Chief Executive Officer at the Boston Psychopathic Hospital, published two articles on bibliotherapy in 1942.^{32, 33} In the first he illustrates the importance of keeping reading records and the ways in which the librarian and physician could put them to effective use. The second article, entitled "Is Reading Therapy?" summarized data taken from the reading records of 529 patients. He made a major point regarding the effectiveness of bibliotherapy by quoting Julius Sohon, "Of all the remedies applied to the sick man, reading is the only one he accepts naturally."³⁴

In 1942 Ilse Bry wrote a stimulating paper, "Medical Aspects of Literature: A Bibliographical Outline."³⁵ Miss Bry, who has degrees in philosophy, psychology, and library science, divided her outline into four sections: medical application of literature, medicine in literature, medical analysis of literature, and studies of response to literature. This paper is of considerable value to anyone interested in the bases upon which bibliotherapy rests.

In 1944 Perrie Jones³⁶ wrote a review of the present and future of hospital libraries. In a section on bibliotherapy she returned once more to the pressing needs for improvement in the training of bibliotherapists, for studies to improve the scientific effectiveness of the subject, and for accurate records. During the 1940's this almost annual plea for records and studies was being answered more frequently. Ruth Tews reported, in some detail, three case histories.³⁷ Dr. William Sadler, in his book, *Modern Psychiatry*,³⁸ devoted a whole chapter to "Therapeutic Reading and Study." He discussed in detail his methods, which centered around diaries kept by his patients, interviews, and a "graduation thesis." Some of these ideas merit further study.

Dr. Jerome M. Schneck has written several important papers. Two of these appeared in 1945.^{39, 40} At the time, Dr. Schneck was engaged in a bibliotherapy research project at the Menninger Clinic. The first article has a general list of 350 references. The second, a selection from the larger list, is designed for use in mental hospitals.

The five years from 1946 to 1950 saw a continued increase in the number of articles touching upon bibliotherapy. Margaret M. Kinney turned out a good "State of the Art" paper in 1946.⁴¹ Dr. Edward B. Allen, a psychiatrist who had been active in the field for many years, wrote a thoughtful and practical paper that emphasized close cooperation among all members of what some might call the bibliotherapy team.⁴² He had some excellent suggestions for starting a bibliotherapeutic interview. His comments upon research methods were also valuable. One of the members of the bibliotherapy team is often the student nurse. Minette Condon, a student nurse in Saskatchewan at the time she prepared her paper, made some occasionally naïve but usually interesting comments.⁴³ Prism spectacles, projectors, and similar instruments can sometimes be an important part of therapy through reading. Norman Hillson, a British journalist, mentioned some reading "helps" in his article.⁴⁴

Bibliotherapy ranges over many fields, and a paper by Dr. Melba H. Duncan, "Clinical Use of Fiction and Biography Featuring Stuttering,"⁴⁵ touched one area not often mentioned in the regular literature. Sofie Lazarsfeld was one of the first to use the "fiction test."⁴⁶ By studying the reactions of patients to what was in the text and between the lines of the prescribed book she was able to draw many helpful conclusions. She found this method helpful to both her patients and herself.

The case approach forms the basis of three valuable articles by Schneck,⁴⁷ Gottschalk,⁴⁸ and Hirsch.⁴⁹ Schneck described two cases where he dealt in detail with neuropsychiatric patients. He carefully reported upon his methods. Gottschalk went over some of the earlier work in the field and made some useful general comments before outlining several cases. He compiled a number of helpful references in a subject arrangement. Dr. Hirsch emphasized the importance of discussing the book with the patient after both have read it. She discussed her own experience with specific books and situations.

Rumblings about the lack of a scientific framework for bibliotherapy had been heard for several years, when a major effort to put the subject into the proper perspective reached completion in 1949

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in the form of a Ph.D. dissertation, "Bibliotherapy: A Theoretical and Clinical-Experimental Study," by Caroline Shrodes.⁵⁰ In the following year two master's papers appeared. Isabelle H. Rust dealt logically and at times wittily with "Bibliotherapy in Mental Hospitals and Tuberculosis Sanatoria,"⁵¹ and Elizabeth A. Stein wrote on "Bibliotherapy: A Discussion of the Literature and an Annotated Bibliography for the Librarian."⁵² Miss Stein devoted most of her paper to the years 1940-1949.

A second Ph.D. dissertation, "Imaginative Literature as a Projective Technique: A Study in Bibliotherapy," appeared in 1951.⁵³ The author, Esther A. Hartman, placed a few more solid stones in the foundation for the "science" of bibliotherapy—as opposed to the "art" and "enthusiasm" branches of the subject.

In 1950 Suzanne Connell rose to a "professional challenge" that librarians are not readers and prescribed bibliotherapy for herself. This brief article, "Bibliotherapy for Librarians,"⁵⁴ packs a strong punch. Dorothy Long commented effectively upon one danger in bibliotherapy: "the librarian is [not] a 'ministering angel to the unfortunate sick.' She is, or should be, a responsible, mature, professional worker, competently doing an important task."⁵⁵ Miss Long also suggested the need for research studies.

One of the most valuable papers to appear in the period 1951-1955 was undoubtedly "Books and Mental Patients" by Melvin C. Oathout.⁵⁶ Mr. Oathout writes in a refreshingly clean-cut and straightforward style. He describes three levels of sophistication in regard to bibliotherapy. A major part of his article deals with what bibliotherapy needs if it is to become a science. This paper is a classic in its field.

One of the best outlines of bibliotherapy as applied to children is given by Vera Flandorf.⁵⁷ Dr. Thomas V. Moore deserves attention not only for being one of the few writers to give an early Greek version of the Theban inscription well-known to all bibliotherapists, but also for his helpful general comments, and for a minutely detailed case history of a young boy.⁵⁸ Dr. Ralph G. Ball's paper is of interest because he gives the thoughts of a general practitioner.⁵⁹

Bibliotherapy lends itself to group as well as individual use. Helpful papers appeared in this area in 1954 by Margaret C. Hannigan⁶⁰ and in 1955 by Ruby Hannah.⁶¹ The paper by Miss Hannigan covers many varieties of patients and gives considerable practical advice.

There are few guides to the use of specific books and magazines

in bibliotherapeutic treatment. Roger C. Chaney and Gladys A. Ingalls compiled a four-page list as a result of their work with a group bibliotherapy program.⁶²

The more philosophic practitioners occasionally frown upon methods, but they are undeniably important. In 1952 John H. McFarland wrote one of the most complete and practical articles on this matter.⁶³

Because the Veterans Administration has done so much useful work in bibliotherapy, it is convenient to discuss its efforts in one place. "Planning Letter" No. 55-85⁶⁴ announces the desirability of undertaking bibliotherapy research projects at Veterans Administration Hospitals. The justification for this move is found in the report of a survey of the Veterans Administration library service made in 1946, in which it is recommended "that the Veterans Administration undertake one or more controlled experiments in the therapeutic use of books as a means of gathering exact evidence regarding the usefulness and value of bibliotherapy."⁶⁴ The letter contains a good basic list of articles for those interested in such a project. "Planning Letter" No. 56-124⁶⁵ reports at considerable length on some of the projects in operation and on likely subjects for additional research. "Planning Letter" No. 57-4⁶⁶ reports a lecture by Dr. Michael Kasak and some useful discussion that occurred at an in-service training program. "Planning Letter" No. 58-48⁶⁷ gives summaries of projects carried out or in operation at six stations. Much of this material deserves further study both for itself and for the suggestions it gives for new approaches. Over the years many Veterans Administration librarians and staff members have written on various aspects of bibliotherapy. A long list of references produced in 1952 was succeeded in 1958 by a major annotated bibliography, compiled by Rosemary Dolan, June Donnelly, and June Mitchell.⁶⁸ A revised version of this bibliography will probably be out in 1962 or 1963.

A major historical review of bibliotherapy was based upon a paper presented to the ALA Hospital Libraries Division at the 1955 conference.⁶⁹ In it W. B. McDaniel, II, discussed some historical and contemporary aspects of bibliotherapy. This article will serve for some years to come as the primary introduction to the subject.

In 1957, Mary Jane Ryan could truthfully write that "Bibliotherapy is not yet a science; it is an art."⁷⁰ This assertion does not mean that the status of bibliotherapy had remained unchanged during the preceding fifty years. Miss Ryan's article defines carefully, and with

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imagination, the duties of the members of the bibliotherapy team. Ruth Darrin⁷¹ edited the proceedings of a workshop held the same year, in which bibliotherapy was defined quite broadly and in which the participants suggested many practical ideas and methods. Ruth Tews,⁷² in her chapter in Key's *Applied Medical Library Practice*, pinpoints the major needs in bibliotherapy as courses for training the bibliotherapists and the planning and completion of research studies.

Any discipline advances when it is the subject of constructive criticism. Papers by Darling,⁷³ Elliott,⁷⁴ and the Fiermans⁷⁵ made substantial contributions along these lines. Darling points out that bibliotherapy may be used both as a curative and as a preventive. He comments tersely that there is still little concrete evidence to support many of the claims made by overly optimistic bibliotherapists. He cites several worthwhile articles. Mrs. Elliott deals primarily with children. She has some pertinent remarks about several aspects of bibliotherapy that are often overlooked. Her paper gives a level-headed view of the subject. The Fiermans summarize much of the work that has been done with bibliotherapy in psychiatry. They note that "articles on bibliotherapy vary a great deal in content and principle, and frequently the element of therapy is obscure."⁷⁶ Their section entitled "The Practice of Bibliotherapy" is a useful guide.

Mr. Morrow and Miss Kinney report the results of a controlled study on "The Attitudes of Patients Regarding the Efficacy of Reading Popular Psychiatric and Psychological Articles and Books."⁷⁷ The same authors point out the gaps in their work and the steps needing coverage in future studies.

For those who enjoy statistics combined with a sensible outlook, the master's thesis by Artemisia J. Junier, "A Subject Index to the Literature of Bibliotherapy, 1900-1958,"⁷⁸ will be a welcome piece of work. Mrs. Junier made an analysis of 601 references by date, type of publication, author, and subject. The author is presently at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Tuskegee, Alabama, where one of the founders and long-time promoters of bibliotherapy, Sadie Peterson-Delaney, served for many years.

Bibliotherapy, while most frequently evoking a hospital picture, can also be of value in prisons. Maurice Floch describes some of his work at the Detroit House of Correction.⁷⁹ He stresses the need for suitable education for the bibliotherapist.

The most significant step of the last year or so is the establishment by the Association of Hospital and Institution Libraries of a Biblio-

therapy Clearing House, under the supervision of William E. Ticknor. Activities of this type could stimulate the exchange of useful information and the development of research studies.

Reading is important regardless of its identification as an "art" or a "science." If the bibliotherapists of the future will practice the profession of librarianship, make careful and detailed studies of their readers, and make use of their imagination and sense of humor, bibliotherapy will prosper to the advantage of all concerned.

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