



When Memory, clad in words, heals

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The world of psychiatry and psychology belongs to those of that profession, or vocation as I would prefer to put it.

Being a psychiatrist or a psychologist, is a vocation. I have been led to this conclusion by personal experiences: in difficult turning points of my life, with no hesitation I reached out to a psychologist and a psychoanalyst. The fact that there were these kinds of professionals in my personal friendships and relationships, definitely helped. And conversations with them provided invaluable support during hard times, beautiful times, and also in writing.

I will make a short reference to words. Memory for instance. And Mnemosyne (derived from the same source as the word mnemonic the Greek word *mnēmē*, which means remembrance, memory). A first generation Muse – worshipped along with Melete (Practice) and Aoide (Song). Mnemosyne gave birth to the nine Muses and is of course the daughter of Uranus and Gaia. (In Delphi there are two known fountains, that of Lethe (Oblivion, Forgetfulness) and that of Mnemosyne). Memory is imprinting, engraving, preserving impressions in the mind. The recollection of impressions, therefore, of experiences. Bringing back into memory all these things, it is therefore, also a narration when memory becomes clad in words. And the words? Sounds, one next to the other that create speech (*logos* in Greek from the verb *lego*, which means to “to speak”). They express concepts - always within the framework of a specific linguistic community – that describe and explain to the other person what we see, hear, taste and of course feel. Thus words make up everyday stories, our everyday story, **they are a story**, our story. Words were created by man, when the world was created by Nature and its evolution, and this formidablemultifaceted being needed words to name its food, its descendants, to address others, to walk through life and to create. And it seems that soon it would find out that words may also heal and sooth. How else could one interpret the fact that in the healing temples of Asclepius they would tell their stories at night, or that the wake of the dead is common in almost all religions, or the lullabies for children, or the unbelievable development of ancient Greek theatre, or the Sagas found



in other cultures that should not be underestimated. It is not necessary here to stress the healing efficiency of reading or enacting the ancient Greek tragedies. It could be said that the journey of discovering ourselves, in our course to rid ourselves of difficulties, heavy loads that generate difficult emotions, communication with the person next to us, our need to communicate thoughts, feelings, worries, fears, nightmares, hidden secrets and sometimes painful lies, that accompany us from birth, the lack of acceptance, our need to be with others but also alone, standing, self-sufficient but also compassionate, the painful and persistent search of even more "things" – is ultimately our therapy, using words and being guided by memory. Memory seems (to me) to be the thin scalpel we use to surgically clean the wounds, to overcome pain and worries.

For me literature is exactly that. I do not bear laurels in saying that. It is memory that directs the orchestra in the author's mind, for we are ourselves when we write but at the same time we become the others, very often without knowing it or other times absolutely consciously. Madame Bovaire c' est moi. Passions and dreams, ours and those of others, become text. Maybe that is why it is agreed upon that "writers" are thieves. Yes, but thieves that want or/and have to go beyond the surface, deeper in their thoughts and emotions. It is our self that meets the many, as the great literary scholar Bakhtin said, "we find our polyphonic self". It took me years to realise that the heroine from my writings was myself, and her, and somebody else, and, and... The writer's creative use of Memory will pass the torch on to the reader. And he in turn will retrieve his own precious valuables. Because words have worn the roar of meaning, the buzz of the air on a hard night, the echo the mother's voice, the grandfather's story by the stove, with winter writing its own images, wherever we are, in the desert or in the modern 21st century home, literature generously offers the consolation of memory recollection. And it is this way that the words of a literary text also become an account, become therapy. Is empathy the consciousness that permeates the literary text? And is it transmitted while performing a kind of therapy? When saying therapy, I do not mean healing because not everyone is sick, but we all need to move on.

Does the word, ultimately, become the key that unlocks? All the things that the mind has conceived, restrained, arranged, and even those that are buried deep



within, those everyday things we passed-by like they were immaterial, the well-hidden fears, they all acquire a name, a face, a meaning through words. A small twig of rosemary, the deep blue, the sound of the cicadas, the fragment of a word coming from afar – so as in time things that have hurt us will become our friends. That is for me the miracle of literature, even if it has not always been called that. Associations were usually the vehicle. Isn't it the same with psychoanalysis? (what a beautiful word!). And the things that might make us better will come to the surface, if we think and place things in their rightful place. With an important footnote to what has already been said. The power of words, the aesthetic aspect of writing plays an important role. That is to say that Anna Karenina by Tolstoy is not the same as a novel about a woman cheating on her husband in Mykonos.

I wrote literature in a mature age, without having dreamt of it or planned it. I found myself there, here, in a time where a lot of things, almost all things, were falling apart around me. My father's death... Recantation? Loss? Of ideas that had nurtured and fed me in my youth, skeletons in my closet -that like it or not we all have – relationships and unforeseen difficulties that the new landscape, the new framework set in front of me and around me. I held on to the words, I got hold of Memory, and I leaned on them. And that brought me closer to other people, to myself and to others.