

Audiobook Bibliotherapy: reading for wellbeing as an aspect of audiobook research

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Bibliotherapy, broadly defined as ‘the idea that reading can have a beneficial effect on mental health’ (King, Haslam and Campbell, 2018), has become an established wellbeing practice and the basis of formal programmes in institutions including hospitals, schools, libraries, and prisons (King, Haslam and Campbell, 2025; Partington, 2023). The widespread adoption of digital audiobooks has transformed reading for wellbeing, bringing new readers to the practice of bibliotherapy (such as people early in their literacy journeys) and bringing reading into previously off-limits settings (such as lying motionless in an MRI machine.) But as with other aspects of digital bibliotherapy, the study of reading for wellbeing with audiobooks is in its infancy. Examining audiobooks through this lens, and considering the role of wellbeing in aspects such as habit stacking, boundary setting, and customisation (including narrator choice), especially where readers contend with disability and/or over-work, can yield insights into the experiences, values, and motivations of readers. This paper will present original qualitative data from the Co-Creating Digital Bibliotherapy project, an interdisciplinary collaboration between The Reading Agency, the UK’s leading national reading charity, and researchers in Education, English Literature, Creative Writing, and Information Studies at the Open University and UCL, funded by UCL Grand Challenges.

We would be happy to be included in the special issue proposal submission.

Works cited:

King, E., Haslam, S. and Campbell, S. (2018) ‘Bibliotherapy: how reading and writing have been healing trauma since World War I’, *The Conversation*, 15 November. Available at: <http://theconversation.com/bibliotherapy-how-reading-and-writing-have-been-healing-traumasince-world-war-i-106626> (Accessed: 28 February 2024).

Partington, G. (2023) *Bibliotherapy: a survey of literature*. Working Papers 2022/23: 03. Exeter: Wellcome Centre for Cultures and Environments of Health. ISSN: 2754-530X

Brief biographical notes:

Dr Siobhan Campbell is a poet at the Open University and specialises in the poetics of Social Literary Practice (Campbell, 2021). Her work in Creative Writing praxis has widened the remit of Scriptotherapy interventions in the UK and elsewhere. Emerging from her practice, she has developed Expressive Creative Writing (ECW) workshops to provide an adaptable, humanities-based resource for survivors of conflict and contested situations. She works with frontline healthworkers and human rights defenders to co-research the impact of creative and life-writing practice with digital and interactive applications. The methodology is now the basis for training programmes in several countries including Iraq and Lebanon and is in use with NHS frontline health workers in end-of-life-care. Publications include ‘Negotiated Truths and Iterative Practice: The Women in Conflict Expressive Writing Project’ which establishes that certain applications of life-story collection can increase justice outcomes; ‘Writing-based interventions: from Communities of Practice to Life Stories’ analyses how replicable frameworks operate for NGOs in unstable situations. Most recently, ‘Expressive Writing and Telling and Participatory Arts Research: Relational Ethics for Story-based Interventions in Crisis’ argues for a Creative-Writing inflected scriptotherapeutic approach, showing how valuing individual experience can enable agency and challenge power structures in sustainable ways.

Dr Nenna Orie Chuku is a Research Assistant in the Department of Information Studies at UCL. Her research examines information, knowledge and communication design in migration and journalling culture contexts.

Dr Laura Dietz researches reading, digital publishing, and contemporary authorship, with a particular focus on how reputation and legitimacy (including the book-status of digital books) affect reading experiences. Recent projects have drawn on qualitative and quantitative data to explore how readers use e-books and audiobooks to address health-related barriers. She edits the Digital Literary Culture strand of the Cambridge Elements in Publishing and Book Culture series (Cambridge University Press). She co-convenes, with Prof Rayner, the IAS/ UCL/A&H Reading for Wellbeing Group, publishes on digital bibliotherapy, and organises bibliotherapy events including conference roundtables and festival panels. She serves on the Editorial Boards of *The Journal of Electronic Publishing* and *Short Fiction in Theory and Practice*, and on the Board of Directors of the Society

for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP). Her monograph *E-books and 'Real Books': Digital Reading and the Experience of Bookness* was published by Cambridge University Press in 2025.

Professor Sam Duncan is an adult literacy specialist, with a specific interest in the roles that literacy plays in different adult lives, and how this relates to the teaching and learning of literacy. Her writing, research and teaching focus on experiences of readers and conceptualisations of reading. Sam has researched reading circles, novel reading and adult reading development (published as *Reading Circles, Novels and Adult Reading Development*, Continuum/Bloomsbury 2012, and *Reading for Pleasure and Reading Circles for Adult Emergent Readers*, NIACE, 2014) and was the recipient of an AHRC Early Careers Research Leaders Fellowship for project examining contemporary adult reading aloud practices, published in 2021 as *Oral Literacies: When Adults Read Aloud*. She is the Director of the Institute of Education's International Literacy Centre and Co-Editor of the journal *Literacy*. Sam is currently working with Give a Book/Prison Reading Groups on *Reading the Way*, a project developing reading groups for adult emergent readers in prison.

Professor Sara Haslam is Professor of Twentieth-Century Literature at the Open University, UK. She has published widely on the novelist Ford Madox Ford (1873-1939), on modernism and on the literature of the First World War; as textual editor she is Co-General Editor of *The Complete Works of Ford Madox Ford* (Oxford University Press), has published scholarly editions of Ford's work and her edition of Evelyn Waugh's *Helena* was published in 2020 (OUP). Since 2017 her war-related research has focused on what she has called 'literary caregiving', therapeutic, largely voluntary, practices associated with the donation and deployment of books to wounded and sick soldiers 1914-1918. Related publications include 'Reading, Trauma and Literary Caregiving 1914-1918: Helen Mary Gaskell and the War Library' (2020), *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 41, 305-321 and, with Edmund King, "'Medicinal Literature': Bibliotherapy, Literary Caregiving, and the First World War' (2021), *Literature and Medicine*, 39, 2, 296-318. She is at work on a co-edited collection, *A Hundred Years of Bibliotherapy: Healing Through Books* and a book, *Biography of a Wartime 'Miracle': Women's Literary Caregiving 1914-1918*.

Gemma Jolly is Head of Health and Wellbeing at The Reading Agency. She oversees the organisation's reading and health work, including Reading Well. Reading Well is a national books on prescription programme that uses recommended reading to help people understand and manage their health and wellbeing, with all books chosen and endorsed by health professionals and people with lived experience. She is currently leading on an Arts Council England funded Reading Well activation programme which aims to embed Reading Well and increase engagement with the Public Library Universal Health and Wellbeing offer, with a particular focus on non-library users and people experiencing health inequalities. Prior to working at The Reading Agency, Gemma has led and delivered a range of health information and support services for national charities including Alzheimer's Society and The Migraine Trust. She is passionate about the importance of health literacy and advocates for the power of reading to help people manage their health and wellbeing.

Professor Samantha Rayner is UCL's first Vice Dean (Wellbeing) for the Faculty of Arts & Humanities. She works closely with the Dean as a member of the Faculty Management Team and is responsible for leading the development and implementation of the Faculty's student and staff wellbeing agenda, to align with UCL's Wellbeing Strategy, Student Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the UCL 2034 key enablers of giving our students the best support, facilities and opportunities, and valuing our staff. She is also the co-convenor of the IAS/ UCL/A&H Reading for Wellbeing Reading Group, which has been meeting regularly since 2020. Samantha is also Professor of Publishing and Book Cultures in the Dept of Information Studies, and has wellbeing-related research interests, particularly around bibliotherapy. She has a career which has always involved a split role encompassing some sort of staff/ student wellbeing elements, and has a track-record of facilitating collaborative work in HE contexts. She was the PI on the AHRC/ British Library Academic Book of the Future Project (2015-2017).

Dr Katharine Smales is a Research Fellow in the Department of Information Studies at UCL. She recently completed her PhD on a fully funded AHRC London Arts and Humanities Partnership (LAHP) Research Studentship. Her PhD qualitatively explores how children aged four- to eight-years-old and their families experienced information literacy practices relating to shared digital reading in their homes during social distancing. She recently undertook a placement in the UK Government's Open Innovation team, a cross government unit which works between government policy-makers and academics to generate analysis and ideas. During her time there she worked on a project relating to provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Prior to her PhD she taught on the Children's Literature MA at Goldsmiths and worked in the children's publishing industry, including as Communications Director at Macmillan Children's Books and the UK Sales Director at Walker Books. She is also the volunteer librarian at Grange Primary School and runs the UCL Grange Primary school volunteer reading programme.

Dr Carina Spaulding is Head of Research & Evaluation at The Reading Agency, a UK-wide charity working to empower people of all ages to transform their lives through reading. Carina leads The Reading Agency's research portfolio and reading strategy development activity, undertaking original and commissioned research and evaluation projects and speaking to people across the UK to understand the barriers and enablers to reading and the mechanisms for reading as a tool for social and personal change. Together with colleagues,

she has published articles on the interrelationship between reading enjoyment, motivation and comprehension; as well as numerous pieces of 'grey literature' for Reading Agency projects and evaluation funders such as the National Lottery; Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS); Welsh Government; Arts Council England; Science and Technology Facilities Council; Paul Hamlyn Foundation; Mercers' Foundation; and the Wellcome Trust. Prior to working at The Reading Agency, Carina held roles at Higher Education institutions including UCL, Royal Holloway University, Canterbury Christ Church University, and The University of Manchester. She was awarded a PhD in English and American Studies from The University of Manchester in 2013.

Dr Shafquat Towheed is Director of Research for the School of Arts and Humanities at The Open University. He is also the director of the History of Books and Reading research collaboration. He has published extensively on 19th and 20th century literature, with a particular focus on the history and practice of reading. His most recent publication (with Corinna Norrick-Rühl) is *Bookshelves in the Age of the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Palgrave, 2022). He was UK Lead Investigator for the pan-European Reading Europe Advanced Data Investigation Tool (READIT) project (2018-2022). He is Vice President of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP).

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Sitzung Einordnung: Audiobook Bibliotherapy: Reading for Wellbeing as an Aspect of Audiobook Research