



Therapy through Theatre: Duncan Macmillan's *Every Brilliant Thing* Tiyatro Yoluyla Terapi: Duncan Macmillan'ın *Every Brilliant Thing* Adlı Oyunu

Yavuz PALA*

Öz

Bu çalışmada çağdaş İngiliz oyun yazarı Duncan Macmillan'ın *Every Brilliant Thing* (2013) adlı oyunu keder ve yas teorileri ışığında analiz edilmektedir. Çalışmadaki ana odak, Sigmund Freud, William Worden, Dennis Klass ve Robert A. Neimeyer gibi psikiyatristlerin fikirleri ışığında keder ve yas döneminde anlamın yeniden yapılandırılmasıdır. Bu çalışma bir yandan, annesi intihar eden baş karakterin anlam kaybını, varoluşsal sorgulamasını ve intihar depresyonunu, diğer yandan, yas döneminde anlam ve benliğin interaktif stand-up komedi aracılığıyla yeniden yapılandırılmasını incelemektedir. İfade sanatları yoluyla trajik bir kayıptan sonra keder ve yas döneminde yeniden anlam yapılandırılması ve bunun başarılı sonuçlarıyla ilgili klinik çalışmalarda son gelişmelere odaklanan bu çalışmada, dışavurumcu bir sanat olan tiyatronun çağdaş sosyal ve bireysel sorunların çözümünde bir laboratuvar veya klinik olarak kullanılıp kullanılmayacağı tartışılmaktadır. Bu açıdan bakıldığında Macmillan'ın oyununun, çağdaş tiyatronun yeni eğilimler hakkında yararlı bilgiler sunduğu görülmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı çağdaş tiyatronun ortak eğilimi olan sosyal sorumlulukla ilişkili olarak modern yaşamla ilgili hastalıkların iyileşme sürecinde tiyatronun rolünü tartışmaktır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Keder, yas, tiyatro, Duncan Macmillan, terapi.

Abstract

This paper analyses *Every Brilliant Thing* (2013) by the contemporary British playwright Duncan Macmillan with regard to grief and bereavement theories. The main focus here is the meaning reconstruction during grief and bereavement period in the light of the ideas of psychiatrists such as Sigmund Freud, William Worden, Dennis Klass and Robert A. Neimeyer. The study examines, on the one hand, the loss of meaning, existential questioning and suicidal depression of the chief character in the play whose mother commits suicide; on the other, reconstruction of meaning and self in bereavement period through interactive stand-up comedy. Focusing on the latest developments in clinical studies about meaning reconstruction and their successful outcomes in grief and bereavement period after a tragic loss through expressive arts, the paper discusses whether theatre, an expressive art, can be used as a laboratory or a clinic in solving contemporary social and individual problems. In this sense, Macmillan's play provides us with fruitful information about new trends of the contemporary theatre. The purpose of the paper is to discuss the role of theatre in the healing process of diseases that are related to modern life respecting social responsibility that is a common tendency of contemporary theatre.

Keywords: Grief, bereavement, theatre, Duncan Macmillan, therapy.

* Arş. Gör. Atatürk Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, E-posta: yavuzpala@hotmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-2691-6706

Introduction

Duncan Macmillan is one of the most experimental and innovative representatives of new writing in the twenty-first-century British theatre. With each play he writes, he seems to reinvent theatrical composition in an attempt to find a form that best suits the issues he deals with in his plays. Therefore, the formal challenges of his plays appear to be designed in accordance with the subject matters which are, in their turn, determined by an urge “to say something that isn’t being said” (Love, 2019, “Duncan”). Such an attitude, which is undoubtedly not an easy task in today’s world of communication where every individual with an internet connection and a device can announce their opinions through different means of media, might be somewhat assertive. Macmillan’s claim, however, is not about being completely original in choosing the topics and themes of his plays, if that is at all possible. With a rather bold attitude, he seems to challenge canonised ideas on contemporary social and political issues such as parenthood, climate change, addiction, depression, suicide, and grief, viewing them through a fresh perspective and asking his spectators to shake off any pre-conceived ideas.

Every Brilliant Thing (2013), which is one of Macmillan’s most critically-acclaimed plays, exemplifies quite well the way the playwright takes a fresh look at the issues of suicide and grief. The first performance of *Every Brilliant Thing* took place in 2013 at Ludlow Fringe Festival, and later in 2016 HBO filmed it during its run in New York. The discussion in this essay is based on the version of the play filmed by HBO. Both in a contextual and technical sense, Macmillan shapes the play innovatively. Most importantly, his efforts to locate the grim issues of suicide and depression in the form of stand-up comedy are unorthodox, as suicide or suicidal depression is usually put into a negative context and commonly stigmatised, ignored or fetishised in narratives delivered by mass media. He expresses his thoughts about the presentation of suicide on mass media:

I read up on social contagions; obesity, divorce, suicide. We’re all subconsciously affected by the behaviour of our peers. In the month after Marilyn Monroe’s death by overdose, the number of suicides in the US increased by twelve percent. Every time suicide is front-page news, every time a celebrity or a character on prime-time television takes their own life there is a spike in the number of suicides... Discovering this fact really scared me. Then it made me angry. I thought about the way suicide was presented in films and on TV, how it was reported in the news. (Macmillan, 2013, pp. 305-306)

That being the case, examining such a serious issue through comedy opens a new perspective in developing a new understanding of the issue by moving beyond the limits of what mass media delivers. In line with Macmillan’s attitude towards suicide, my discussion of *Every Brilliant Thing* will focus on how the play underlines meaning reconstruction and life-affirmation after the suicide of a loved one by utilising grief and bereavement theories as well as drawing on some psychological theories of humour.

For Macmillan, “the things we talk about suicide have a deep impact on people because of the way we talk about it” (2015, “Every”). Instead of fetishising and promoting the negative aspects of suicide as mass media does, Macmillan converts a story of suicide into a life-affirming narrative in *Every Brilliant Thing* by utilising humour, which will then help the spectators to see life beyond the dark circle of suicide. As Henri Bergson asserts, “A comic effect is always obtainable by transposing the natural expression of an idea into another key” (2005, pp. 60-61). Based on this approach, talking about suicide, which is usually associated with unfavourable images, through stand-up comedy helps people to transform their fixed views about suicide survivors into a more life-affirming one. This attitude can, indeed, be observed in Jonny Donahoe’s (the narrator in the version of HBO recording) entire performance where he talks about his mother’s suicide in a light-hearted tone to encourage survivors to continue their lives without the deceased.

Another innovative approach of the playwright is the staging of the play which is remarkably designed to enable inclusion and acknowledgement for the spectators as the whole action of the play takes place in an auditorium where the audience is seated in the round. This seating plan allows everyone in the audience to hear and see one another as well as the narrator during the interactive performance, which is vital in the

sense of following and attending to the play. The narrator is already in the auditorium where jazz music plays and as the audience enters, he talks to them delivering them some papers with numbers. He explains to them that when he says a number, he wants the person having that number to shout it out. The purpose of the playwright in staging his play in this way is to transform the theatre stage into a therapy space where the audience becomes the co-creator of the play and a part of the rehabilitation process, which goes against the negative handling of the issue in mass media.

As it is indicated in the instructions of the play, the narrator can be played by a woman or man of any age or ethnicity because the theme of the play, suicide, is not just a problem of a specific group, ethnicity or gender. Anyone can relate to it at varying levels. In this article, the narrator is accepted as a male character because in the recording by HBO it is a man, Jonny Donahoe, who plays the leading character.

Grief, Bereavement and Meaning Reconstruction in *Every Brilliant Thing*

In *Every Brilliant Thing*, the story of the (adult) narrator, which focuses on his mother's suicide, saliently reveals the grief and mourning that he has suffered from early childhood until today. Having understood the fact that one can suffer from an existential crisis and end her/his life, it becomes harder for the narrator to continue his life. He starts perceiving the world around him through the fear of loss, which then makes his life unbearable. After having a concept of 'finality' because of the death of his dog and his mother's suicide, the narrator drifts into a grief period. By paying special attention to the theatrical form and the staging of the play, the grief and bereavement period of the narrator would be examined by focusing on meaning reconstruction and affirmation of life in the light of grief and bereavement theories.

Theories on grief and bereavement put emphasis on a process in which bereaved person is thought to release themselves from the deceased by dealing with memories of the deceased and searching for alternative ways to reconstruct meaning. Sigmund Freud comes up with the term 'griefwork' to emphasise the importance of meaning reconstruction after the loss of a loved one. In his work *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud explains the term suggesting that grief is necessary to work through loss to detach oneself from the deceased and to adjust to the new environment during the mourning period (1955, p. 245). As in Freud's definition of grief work, the narrator also works through his loss by utilising stand-up comedy to detach himself from his mother. Through his grief, he attempts to create a new space by enacting his memories about his mother so that he can change his negative fixed ideas about his mother's suicide and get a chance to adapt to a new environment. In this space where the narrator interacts with the audience, he tells and re-enacts how he suffers from his mother's suicidal depression. Suddenly, he interrupts his suicide narration and tells the story of how he started flirting with a girl named Sam whom he met in the library. Through his re-enacting of his love story, he seems to be stunned, shy and also happy and he makes fun of himself about being flattered by this meeting, which raises laughter among the audience. Through this attitude, he attempts to transform the suicidal tone of his narration into a funny and life-affirming atmosphere with his love story as the play's title would suggest. That is, the narrator seems to be precipitated into a search for meaning rather than focusing on suicidal issues through the shift in his narration.

His shift, in the occupation of humour, seems to provide the narrator with a mechanism to struggle against his grief. In his essay, *Humour*, Freud also states: "Humour is not resigned; it is rebellious. It signifies not only the triumph of the ego but also of the pleasure principle, which is able here to assert itself against the unkindness of the real circumstances" (2016, p. 354). The pleasure principle is a driving force through which ego looks for in an instant satisfaction of all needs and wishes. That is, it struggles to fulfil basic instincts such as hunger, thirst, and sex. The way pleasure principle works and the role of humour in this play seem to be parallel since both concepts motivate ego to meet needs and urge and change the unwelcomed situation. Thus, humour plays a significant role in the reconstruction of self in an unwelcomed and traumatic situation; that is, it opens up a new space for recovery, where the narrator uses the stage to make life more meaningful both for himself and the audience by trying to share and deal with the things that he has difficulty coping with.

Following the ideas of Freud on grief and bereavement, several grief theorists and psychiatrists such as Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and Colin Murray Parkes conceptualised grief as a dynamic emotion that goes

through a series of predictable stages, phases and tasks such as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, shock, yearning and pining, disorganisation, acceptance and recovery. Despite that the steps of these models may overlap, occur non-sequentially or prove too limited to address the personal differences of patients, they still provide some information about the general outcomes of grief, which enable psychiatrists to diagnose the symptoms. Outcomes of bereavement may vary depending on its type. In their essay, *Is Suicide Bereavement Different? Perspectives from Research and Practice*, John R. Jordan and John L. McIntosh clarify features of suicide bereavement according to qualitative and quantitative empirical research and clinical experience: Anger, shame, stigma, guilt, increased self-destructiveness or suicidality, search for an explanation, meaning-making, social isolation, vulnerability are some basic features and themes that suicide survivors are likely to manifest in their reaction to grief (2011, p. 225). In *Every Brilliant Thing*, the narrator also manifests some of these reactions after the death of his dog and his mother's suicide. "The real risk that I'd felt my whole life was that I would one day feel as low as my Mum had and take the same action" (Macmillan, 2016, p. 316). The narrator's speeches reveal that he has also contemplated committing suicide. Besides suicidal depression, the narrator manifests anxiety, vulnerability, social isolation, guilt, anger, and shame, which seem to be parallel to the basic characteristics of suicide bereavement.

One of the emotional outbursts that narrator manifests during his bereavement is shame. He unveils his shame with these words "I was mortified. I'd never told anyone about my Mum" (Macmillan, 2016, p. 310). He feels ashamed to mention his mother's suicide attempts, which forces him to isolate himself from society because suicide is socially associated with negative terms such as weakness and shame. The feeling of guilt is also stressed frequently in the play "It's common for the children of suicides to blame themselves. It's natural... However much you know that you're not to blame, you can't help feeling like you failed them. It's not fair to feel this way. But it's natural" (Macmillan, 2016, p. 302). It seems that the narrator blames himself for not being able to stop his mother's suicide despite the fact that he tries to convince her mother that life is worth living by making a list of every brilliant thing. This list includes many things that make the narrator happy, or what the narrator thinks would make people happy such as ice cream, the colour yellow, rollercoasters, chocolate, songs and so on. Yet the death of his dog and his mother's suicide lead him to experience the concept of finality and a sense of loss, which then brings out the reactions such as guilt, anger and shock.

Once grief studies gained some momentum, it was suggested that the stage models were too strict and incapable of supplying enough information in understanding and managing grief. Hence, new models such as Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut's 'Dual-Process Model' (1999) and William Worden's 'Task-Based Model' (2008) were proposed as more successful models in identifying definite patterns of the grief experience. Stroebe and Schut describe grief "as a process of oscillation between two contrasting modes of functioning" (Hall, 2017, p. 9). These two contrasting modes are 'loss orientation' in which the bereaved person engages with emotional responses related to the loss and 'restoration orientation' in which the bereaved deals with ongoing life demands and try to adjust her/his environment to detach herself/himself from the deceased. That is, the bereaved oscillates between these modes to balance life's ongoing demands and her/his grief. In Worden's Task-Based Model, on the other hand, grieving is considered as an active process which requires some tasks: "to accept the reality of the loss, to process the pain of grief, to adjust to a world without the deceased and to find an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life" (Hall, 2017, p. 9). These models provide a more personal and flexible approach in understanding and management of grief and encourage the bereaved to have self-awareness during the grief experience.

In parallel with these models, Macmillan seems to create more personal space for his narrator in *Every Brilliant Thing* which enables the narrator to take an active role and have self-awareness during his grief by creating a narrative. Through his narrative, he retells the story of how he started making a list of every brilliant thing after his mother's first suicide attempt to prove her that life is worth living. The narrator develops his narration and re-enacts his memories with the participation of the audience by inviting them to play some roles such as mother, father or girlfriend throughout the performance or asks the audience to shout out the words he delivered before the play starts. The audience, thus, becomes a co-creator of the play by attending and acting out their roles throughout the performance. The narrator, with the help of the

audience, builds a space where he can deal with ongoing life demands and try to adjust to his environment to detach himself from the deceased.

As Robert A. Neimeyer and Diana C. Sands say, “Mourners often replay and ‘re-search’ their experiences for a greater understanding of their relationship with the deceased, while learning how to live with their absence and create a new life with the living” (2011, p. 11). Since human beings are able to develop innate self-capacities to manage strong feelings and maintain a self of sense (Pearlman, 2016, pp. 179-182), it will not be surprising that they search for meaning to sustain life after a significant loss. In addition to losing his dog, the narrator, who has heard about his mother's suicide attempt, tries to make his life meaningful because of the sense of loss by making a list of every brilliant thing. His attempt to make a list of every brilliant thing seems to be the backbone of the play in the sense of meaning reconstruction. Regarding immersive characteristics of the play, *Every Brilliant Thing*, the narrator re-examines and reconstructs his own story about his mother's suicide and the death of his dog and other suffering issues by interacting with the audience. The narrator creates a sort of new identity by telling his story, that is, in Neimeyer's words “a sense of self is established through the stories that we tell about ourselves and relevant others” (Neimeyer and Sands, 2011, p.10). One of the purposes of creating a sort of new sense of self is to make life more meaningful during the grief and bereavement period. Creating a new sense of self can be associated with a survival instinct to continue living in the aftermath of a life-altering loss. Neimeyer and Sands state the phases through which the bereaved go after during the trauma of the loss of beloved:

In the aftermath of life-altering loss, the bereaved are commonly precipitated into a search for meaning at levels that range from the practical (How did my loved one die?) through relational (Who am I, that I am no longer a spouse?) to spiritual or existential (Why did God allow this to happen?). (2011, p. 11)

This questioning helps the bereaved understand and analyse his position in the aftermath of a significant loss. Then bereaved person tries to accommodate the loss and questions his position in life. In *Every Brilliant Thing*, this questioning leads to re-examining memories about the deceased or reconstruction of memory to understand the change after the loss. That is, the narrator arranges the stage as a place where he re-lives his memories with the help of the audience. The participation of the audience leads to an experimental experience for both the audience and the narrator himself. Even though Macmillan writes a text for the actor and audience to follow, the actor's interaction with the audience transports the play to another dimension; that is, the audience becomes a kind of co-creator of the play.

The models mentioned until now focus on breaking the bonds with one's loss because it is believed that grief is finite and linear and requires detachment and acceptance from the deceased to be able to continue a new life. While these models (usually associated with modernist or positivist views) come up with the strategies to determine and to cope with grief to some extent and try to leave the deceased behind to negotiate a meaningful life, the postmodern social constructionists such as Robert A. Neimeyer, Dennis Klass and Phyllis R. Silverman view continuing bonds as a primary source for engaging with grief work (Hall, 2017, p. 10). In their work, *Continuing Bonds: new understandings of grief* (1996), Klass and et al. claim that the bonds with the deceased do not have to be diminished or totally removed after death. On the contrary, they claim the continuing bonds with the deceased can have positive effects on the bereaved because death does not necessarily mean the end of a relationship.

Regarding the idea of continuing bonds, it seems there is no way to escape from the haunted past and forget the deceased completely: memories and physical absence of the deceased manifest themselves through acts of remembrance. Edward K. Rynearson and Alison Salloum explain this phenomenon:

[T]he human mental representation of self and attachment relationship is primarily conveyed through narrative memory expressed in storied form. After death, the living presentation of an attachment figure (a part of self “dismembered” rather than a part of the body amputated) is predictably “remembered” and experienced as a “phantom” presence. The psychological representation of the attachment figure in the cortex and subcortex continues to signal his or her presence as mental projections produced by our brain in an involuntary effort to remain psychologically connected with someone we love. Similar to the process of reorganization of an arm, the presence of the “dismembered” loved one would be “remembered” as a narrative of revitalization- recontextualized over time to diminish but never disappear. (2011, p. 179)

In this quotation, Rynearson and Salloum discuss the concept of ‘phantom limb’ to relate how bereaved people are not able to forget the deceased completely by associating the trauma after the loss with amputation of an arm. Just like the feeling of the presence of an arm mentally in the damaged area when a person loses his arm as a result of an accident, the same feeling arises in those, who have lost their beloved after a tragic event. Just as the sense of the presence of the lost arm can be reduced by plastic surgery, the same feeling that occurs in the person who has lost a loved one can be treated to some extent by retelling the story of the loss. In the play, the narrator also experiences this phantom presence:

And I thought about the walk we’d had that morning. And about the smell of him in my room. His toys in the garden. The recently opened packet of dry food. His bed under the stairs. All the things that could now be thrown away. (Macmillan, 2016, p. 288)

Feeling a continuing attachment to his dog, the narrator’s recalling of his memories of his dog years later reveals that he could not forget his loved ones for years; he has been mourning. And this act of retelling has a vital role in the sense of meaning-making throughout the play. Rynearson and Salloum define this act as restorative retelling which aims to “revise, the narrative memory of re-enactment through a collaborative, corrective retelling so that in its modified form the memory remains but no longer demands re-enactment and restitution” (2011, p. 182). Restorative retelling helps the bereaved adapt to a new life in the absence of the deceased and reduce the sense of grief. This retelling can be realised by means of speaking, drawing, acting or any appropriate way through which one can express oneself, which is commonly used as a therapeutic intervention in the treatment of prolonged grief. This therapeutic intervention also takes place in *Every Brilliant Thing*; the narrator tells his story by talking to the audience directly and re-enacting the story that he tells. The narrator states through the end of the play: “I now realise that it’s important to talk about things. Particularly the things that are the hardest to talk about” (Macmillan, 2016, p. 325). The narrator’s retelling seems to be restorative and has a therapeutic effect on him, which reinforces the resilience of the bereaved and lets him re-engage with living.

Restorative retelling also helps the bereaved change the negative ideas and images related to the deceased through the reconstructive narrative. Restorative retelling can be identified in Macmillan’s arrangement of the play as a comedy which allows the narrator to transform his suicide narration into a life-affirming one. While the narrator offers us some pieces of his life story from early childhood to adulthood, we get all the story through the eyes of the (adult) narrator. Therefore, it may be argued that the narrator re-creates or re-evaluates the events to get rid of negative images of suicide through comedy. His retelling and acting, for example, of his conversation with the school counsellor about his depression turn into a comic interaction. At the performance, the narrator asks one of the audiences to take off her sock and pretend to be his school counsellor (Mrs Patterson) who uses her sock as a sock-dog to talk to the narrator as a pedagogical approach. The member of the audience says she has a bad toe because of skydiving accident and refuses at first then the narrator makes the audience laugh by adding “Mrs Patterson and her extreme sports hobbies” to his list of every brilliant thing (Macmillan, 2016, p. 296). This act raises laughter among the audience, and she accepts to perform. In order to support this positive atmosphere, he also takes a childish attitude during the re-enacting and attempts to turn his (and the audience’s) suffering into a funny conversation to get rid of the negativity of the situations. The retelling of suicide through comedy

emphasises the idea that life is worth living despite all loss and pain. Retelling aims to reconcile with the past by means of revising as well as to create a new living space without the deceased. That is why the narrator re-enacts memories with the help of the audience to reconcile with his past, and the list that the narrator makes can be regarded as a psychological response to make life more meaningful in the aftermath of the traumatic sense of loss which disrupts the usual course of life. Neimeyer and Sands highlight the importance of encouraging the reconstruction of meaning:

Fostering the reconstruction of a world of meaning would, therefore, seem to be a therapeutic priority for many bereaved clients, one that could carry benefits not only in alleviating complicated grief symptomatology but also in renewing a sense of hope and self-efficacy in their changed lives. (2011, p. 13)

In recent bereavement studies, clinicians suggest that the reconstruction of meaning in the aftermath of the loss has therapeutic effects on the bereaved. There are many clinical methods that clinicians apply to patients to encourage them to affirm life. Arts therapy which includes drama, psychodrama, music, art, and dance, is also one of the main methods used in the treatment of people who suffer from grief and bereavement as Thompson and Berger claim:

For example, therapeutic theatre using approaches drawn from expressive art therapies and psychodrama provides structured support for participants to express and experience the truth of their stories through the primary medium of body. Through role-playing, dramatization and empathic witnessing, participants “discover the deep meaning of his/her own history of experiences and their influence upon his/her decisions and acts in life. The expressive arts offer ways to literally and metaphorically transform experiences of grief and loss so that they can be borne differently. (2011, p. 305-306)

The interactive characteristic of *Every Brilliant Thing* turns the theatre into a therapy area for the narrator and the audience to discover the deep meaning as Thompson and Berger suggest. The narrator’s expression of mourning, grief, and pain through art transforms the story into a new, refreshed, and shared experience. Both the narrator and the audience discover the hidden meanings in their life stories by means of acting, reviving, empathic listening and witnessing the event. In this way, expressive arts reveal grief and loss differently. That is, with the help of expressive arts therapies, both the narrator and the audience get a chance to transform their negative issues into positive and affirming ones. This attitude provides a kind of treatment or catharsis.

Narrator: I did talk to someone

A group. A support group.

Hello everyone.

The NARRATOR indicates for everyone to respond.

Audience: Hello

Narrator: This is my first session. I’ve resisted doing this. (Macmillan, 2016, p. 325)

As it is indicated in the quotation above, the narrator sees the audience as a support group with whom he can talk about the things that he could not talk about before. He talks to the audience and re-enacts these issues and events with the help of the audience, which seems to be encouraging both for the narrator and the audience in terms of revealing hidden feelings. Even if the narrator talks about serious things such as his dog’s death and mother’s suicide, the interaction between the audience and the narrator helps address this serious issue more positively.

In expressive art therapies, many activities can be utilised through the treatment of mental sufferings. In her article, Gail Noppe-Brandon explains the importance of some activities such as interaction and listening in the healing process:

People across the lifespan who are grappling with a loss of self or other will benefit from therapist's use of this form of interaction. Secure attachment to one's own authentic story, and to a listener who can listen without distortion, is the best medicine for healing of any kind, although consolidation of a new story often benefits from supplementation with other written and spoken method. (2016, p. 197)

The narrator's conversation with the school counsellor in the absence of his mother is also an excellent example of an interaction that includes deep empathetic listening. The counsellor's pedagogical approach turns into an interaction that arouses trust and affection between them. The narrator emphasises that "I kept speaking with Mrs Patterson and Mostyn once a week..." (Macmillan, 2016, p. 297), which seems to have a therapeutic effect on him. As indicated in this essay before, human beings have some innate self-capacities to manage strong feelings, maintain their life, but these self-capacities may be interrupted after a sudden and unexpected loss.

Conclusion

The purpose of expressive arts therapy is to help people rebuild their self-capacities in the aftermath of unexpected death to provide them with a reconstruction of a meaningful life. Self-capacities can be rebuilt by using expressive arts therapy methods for the bereaved who have difficulty in making sense of life.

Therapist can help clients build these capacities by, for example, 1- treating them with compassion, respect, and mutuality in the relationship, which helps to instill self-worth and provides a foundation for inner connection; 2- helping them to develop coping skills that give them a sense of mastery over their symptoms, contributing to both affect tolerance and self-worth; and 3- helping them locate or develop, internalize, and draw upon internalized relationships with caring others... (Pearlman, 2016, pp. 179-80)

Contrary to media's fetishising and glorifying suicide narrative, which arguably encourages more suicides or leads the survivor to grieve and suffer, Macmillan believes that theatre has a responsibility to provide people with more vivid and fresh ways to see the world around them. He, thus, aims to encourage the audience to view life more positively by creating a therapeutic space in theatre.

I have some advice for anyone who has been contemplating suicide. It's really simple advice. It's this: Don't do it. Things get better. They might not always get brilliant. But they get better." (Macmillan, 2016, p. 311)

Bearing in his mind that theatre has a social responsibility, Macmillan seems to arrange the audience as a therapist and the narrator as the patient to create a space where the narrator has a chance to see the aspects of life worth living and affirm life rather than focusing on stigmatised and fetishised sides of suicide presented by the media. By doing so, Macmillan converts the theatre into a therapy clinic where the narrator rebuilds his self-capacities. Theatre, because of its capacity to engage people on both a corporeal and emotional level, facilitates both the narrator and the audience to rebuild their self-capacities by transforming and revising his life in the aftermath of a traumatic loss.

Despite all of the sufferings, the narrator shares his memories with the audience in a sympathetic and funny way since the initial purpose of the play is to encourage the audience to see life beyond the dark circles of any negative situation that they may face through their lifespan. Thus, after the narration ends, the narrator shakes hands with or hugs the members of the audience who play the principal characters to encourage and leave a good memory behind as he is about to leave the stage. Meanwhile, Ella Fitzgerald and Ink Spots' song "Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall" plays emanating a hopeful tone. Macmillan ends *Every Brilliant Thing* with a hopeful and cheerful way with the message the song delivers "Into each heart some tears must fall but some day the sun will shine" (Macmillan, 2016, p. 329).

Keeping in mind the capacity of theatre to induce emotional change to the extent that it may take on a healing function, it seems like by composing an interactive play, Macmillan emphasises that theatre, by being a part of expressive arts, can be used as a laboratory or a clinic in looking for a way to solve our social, individual or even existential problems through such close interaction. The chief problem experienced by the modern individual seems to be that they, despite all the developed means of communication and welfare, still do not have space to fully express themselves or share their innermost problems. Considering that expressive arts have been successfully used in the treatment of many diseases such as cancer, psychological disorders, and complicated grief in clinical studies and that disease narratives have gained momentum in today's world, Macmillan's approach is likely to be one of the main tendencies of contemporary theatre in the near future.

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