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Falling into Glăveanu's Gap: A lyric essay searching for resilience through creativity

Helen Noble and Beverly Cole

University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Wales *Email:* hnoble.151031@student.uwtsd.ac.uk

Abstract:

This paper is in two parts comprising a literature review and a creative, non-fiction, lyric essay format to explore interplay between ambivalent emotions, creativity, and resilience. The context is my own state affect between client sessions, as a psychotherapist and researcher. The lyric essay, "Falling into Glăveanu's Gap," that comprises the second part of this paper covers a period of great disquiet in my personal and professional life, when adverse life experiences impacted my research, and, as such, formed an integral part of the research itself.

My self-search heuristic exploration forms part of a larger, doctoral enquiry into the interplay between ambivalence, creativity, and resilience amongst therapists, examining whether those engaged in creativity experience a greater sense of resilience. Resilience is the antithesis of burnout, a condition which disproportionately affects practicing therapists. This research argues that therapist education, training and continuing professional development provision, would benefit from a stronger focus on therapist emotion and affect, outside of the therapy room. Opportunities for engagement with creativity are recommended to aid the development of therapist resilience and to combat therapist burn-out.

Keywords: Lyric essay; heuristics; creativity; therapist resilience

sessions helped open up the therapeutic space and unconscious processes, enriching the sessions with a new depth of understanding and meaning making.

I would go even further. I believe that engaging in creative pursuits outside of the therapy room can create and maintain

"Does creativity unlock the unconscious, or does the unconscious unlock creativity," asks Haynes (2022, p. 136). Her position is that the use of creative methods within client

therapist resilience. My interest and commitment to this idea has fueled my doctoral research where I am seeking to explore the relationship (if any) between emotional ambivalence, creativity, and resilience of psychotherapists (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Clough & Halley, 2007). My methodology involves three strands: i. self-search heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990; Sela Smith 2001); ii. an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, et al., 2022) of the experience of four therapists; and iii. a focus group of trainee therapists to evaluate the benefits of receiving more education around regulating their state affect outside of client sessions and being offered greater opportunities to engage with creativity over the course of their training.

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David's (2024) Ethics Committee for the heuristic research. I considered its possible impact on myself, now, and in the future, and obtained express permission from the other person possibly identifiable in this research, in accordance with the university research ethics code and the BACP ethical framework for research (2018).

However, as I commenced my doctoral research, an avalanche of adverse life experiences collapsed in on me. I moved house, city, and jobs in one day, and my partner, of twenty-seven years, collapsed, having spent only three hours in the new house. He spent two months in hospital, leaving me alone to finalise the move, furnish the house, and take on his workload, in addition to my own. At the same time, my professional supervisor of two years died, unexpectedly. I was informed by a friend who read the news on Facebook. Tossed and challenged by these adverse experiences, I sought to find a way through intertwining my research and healing creative writing activities.

This paper is part of the result where I have tried to make sense of my experience while retaining a scholarly intent. I begin with a more scholarly **literature review**, where I attempt to contextualise the use of the lyric essay format and also to intertwine linked ideas around emotional ambivalence, creativity, and resilience. Then I offer my **lyric essay**, with its raw, evocative personal voice. In essence, the lyric essay is both an example of the impact of real life on qualitative research and vice versa. As Tudor (2022) states: "Heuristic research is, arguably, the method of psychological research closely to the practice of therapy (cited in Bager-Charleson & McBeath, 2022, p. 57).

Literature review

This literature review starts by contextualizing my use of the lyric essay format. Then I seek to define and describe the interplay of the phenomena of ambivalence, creativity, and resilience, with a focus on their potential impact on the wellbeing of therapists. For the purposes of this review, I have selectively chosen some pieces of writing/research to provide an understanding for each phenomenon. Also explored, is the notion of writing as a therapeutic process, in itself. The review ends with further consideration of the work of Glăveanu (2010, 2020a/b, 2021a/b, 2023).

The Lyric Essay format

I have previously published research in this format in this journal explaining that the lyric essay is a "radical, creative, literary, and experimental, qualitative research approach ... (which) parallels ... phenomenological research and the psychotherapeutic process" (Noble & Cole, 2020, p. 16). In this previous article, I explored the definition of a lyric essay, and its functions which I suggest is congruent with phenomenological philosophy (Husserl, 1913/2001; Heidegger 1927/2008) and methods of research. Phenomenological research demands the immersion of the researcher within the phenomenon/a they are studying. The course of the research project is not seen as somehow separate from the normal or everyday life of the researcher. As such, the subject matter is brought within the realm of the researcher's contextualised existence. It is processed through the fullness of the researcher's life, as opposed to being a task which is afforded separate or designated time and attention. This includes incorporating any challenging experiences, troubling thoughts and realisations, and uncomfortable emotions as they arise. The heuristic research, engaged via this lyric essay, seeks to explore the three phenomena of ambivalence, creativity, and resilience within my state affect - as therapist and researcher - during the ordinary course of my days, incorporating my embodied experiences. The lyric essay is also congruent with therapeutic process, which provides for an intuitive "indwelling" within the "tacit dimension" (Polyani, 1966, 2009) and parallels with the practice of emotion-focused therapy (Greenberg, 2011), where the client's emotions and affect unfold within the exploration of their narrative.

Originally titled in a 1997 issue of the *Seneca Review*, by American writers D'Agata and Tall, the lyric essay became recognised as a new writing genre as a response to "increasingly

blurred boundaries between poetry and prose, fact and fiction, lyric and essay," amongst leading US writers (Askew, 2021, p. 8). Askew names the identifying features of the lyric essay as: "a polyphony of voices, a dissolving centre, quick cuts and juxtapositions, the coexistence of contradictions, and close attention to the sound of language itself" (2021, p. 9). Whereas in heuristic study there are defined, linear stages through which the researcher is said to "pass" when engaging with the research (Moustakas, 1990), the lyric essay offers up a less constraining and more engaging format to explore the interior world of human experiences, through the research process. Although heuristics allows for creative expression, on the fulfilment of the research process, the lyric essay allows for the expression of creativity from the outset. The rules of linear time do not apply. The narrative follows thoughts, conscious awareness, memories, and in doing so allows the opportunity to reflect, to be reflexive, and to conceptualise experiences, in the present. It is another form of therapeutic writing. It allows for the natural flow of language and in doing so offers insight into the unconscious. It also allows the reader to understand how the researcher makes meaning from their experiences. It offers insight into the process of the researcher, which contains both individual and global human relevancies.

Davies (2016) states that the point of a lyric essay is to reveal the disquiet of its author. The lyric essay that comprises part of this paper, "Falling into Glăveanu's Gap," covers a period of great disquiet in my personal and professional lives, when adverse life experiences impacted my heuristic research, and, as such, formed an integral part of the research itself.

Church (2012, p. 179) states that a lyric essay "sounds like a poem and acts like an essay ... imagines like a short story, argues like a manifesto, performs like drama and dances its dangerous dance," thereby illustrating the flexible and creative nature of the form. The language is often poetic, alliterative, yet it states facts. It is dynamic, can make conceptual leaps and also circle back to a previous paragraph, or an earlier time, to continue a theme or a narrative. It is edgy, unusual, and thought-provoking.

Kuntz & Adam St Pierre (2021, p. 475) describe emergent methods of qualitative inquiry as "burst of intensities that have not yet been rendered ordinary" and a "force of pure difference pushing through what has been normalised." An example of another such emergent method is Penwarden & Richardson's (2020) narrative therapeutic method of poetic representation. This qualitative research method uses clients' own words, which are then turned into poetry. I believe that

the lyric essay format engages similar process while bringing authentic, embodied affect into consciousness. Creative writing requires the processing of emotion, in addition to cognition, and yet the facts are accurately presented. As a therapist, in addition to active listening, I have been trained to repeat the words of clients verbatim, to paraphrase their sentences and to summarise their experiences as verbalised in a session. As such, the flow of the conversation may easily take on a new direction. Fully present, we don't engage in a logical, linear discussion, we both make leaps of understanding and changes of perspective in a search for meaning. The client revisits the past and imagines a future and I recall them to the present by way of focusing on their current emotions or bodily felt sense. The lyric essay exposes aspects of this process for the reader.

Ambivalence

Research into ambivalence over the past twenty years has directly linked ambivalent emotions to resilience and creativity. Larsen et al. (2003), for instance, linked emotional ambivalence directly to well-being, and ultimately to resilience. Later, Hershfield et al. (2012) explained that the existence of mixed emotions in human affect serves to lessen the physiological impact of stress, with Moss & Couchman (2012), stating that the holding of ambivalent emotions can help prevent burnout. Branieka et al. (2014) concluded that their studies offered support for the theory that a specific pattern of secondary, mixed emotions may provide individuals with a higher capacity to handle adversity and a higher threshold with which to handle stress. Positive psychologist and researcher Lomas (2017) explained how simultaneously, co-activated emotions could be more easily absorbed into meaningful narrative, thereby lessening the impact of negative experiences on the individual.

In relation to ambivalence and creativity, Fong (2006) linked ambivalent emotions to expressions of creativity, as he said that they facilitated the identification and processing of seemingly unrelated concepts, to create a new phenomenon. Rees et al. (2013) observed that the levels of judgement accuracy of individuals increased, when they were experiencing emotional ambivalence, explaining that the act of consideration of a situation from opposing perspectives, can result in a greater understanding of a problem. Further, Moss & Wilson (2014, p. 75) state their belief that ambivalent emotions are the "underlying source of all creativity," linking them to the ability not only to reconcile contradictory perspectives, but also demonstrating an increased sensitivity to macro-patterns, and

perhaps even more importantly, a willingness to challenge established norms and ideas (Lomas, 2017, p. 7). Additionally, Taruffi & Koelsch (2014) assert that the ability to respond emotionally to art has been directly linked with the regulation of negative emotions through the process of “catharsis, retrieving valued memories and inducing connectedness” (Lomas, 2017, p. 19).

Coates (2023) offers an invitation to psychological theorists to ‘reorient’ theories on ambivalence. He states that: “fragmentation in one’s volitional commitments is often intrinsically important” and asserts that: “the properly ambivalent agent ... has a healthy and appropriate grasp on the axiological complexity that faces us” (2023, p. 8). Historically, ambivalence has been regarded as a negative phenomenon and unification of thoughts and feelings has been seen as a desirable goal. However, Coates challenges the views of Plato, Augustine, and Korsgaard, amongst others, to offer a positive philosophical perspective on ambivalence, explaining that to negotiate ambivalence necessitates the three qualities of sensitivity, attunement, and responsiveness. These constitute a “normative competence” (2023, p. 143) which requires us to be, on times, ambivalent, because we care about living a moral and a meaningful life. Coates coins the phrase “A Wise Inconsistency” as his conceptualisation of ambivalence, which he presents as a state of being, a natural, valuable, and integral part of the human condition (2023).

Harris (2006) conducted an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis on the lived experience of ambivalence. He asserted that ambivalence is experienced in psychotherapeutic change, and that a phenomenological understanding of ambivalence could provide insight into the functioning of the affective aspects of the experience. Noting a paucity of such research in contemporary, mainstream psychological literature, he chose eight undergraduates, individuals of an age that he believed would be experiencing the individuation process, and as such would be necessarily experiencing ambivalence. He posed the research question: “Can you describe a time when you experienced more than one feeling?” (2006, p. 94). He identified four themes which he claimed characterised the state of ambivalence: Hesitation; disjointedness; conflict; and emotional intensity. Positing a more positive viewpoint on the phenomenon of ambivalence generally, he stated that: “fully experiencing the full spectrum of contradictory feelings ... may open the way to a richer emotional life” (2006, p. 109). Thus, Harris’s research offers us an insight into the dynamics of ambivalence as a lived experience. However, his research sample was small and from a specific group - students only.

Therefore, his work presents a limited exploration.

Mazetti (2019) explored the nature and functioning of ambivalence through a case study of himself and a client. He offers a five-step model of processing ambivalence:

1. Recognising and legitimising the ambivalent feelings.
2. Differentiating between feelings of confusion and uncertainty.
3. Accepting the feeling of ambivalence - sitting with it and not rushing to resolve it.
4. Respectfully analysing both, polarized feelings.
5. Arriving at a realisation that each of the ambivalent feelings is in fact, “two side of the same coin” (2019, p. 184).

I personally contest the assertion that ambivalent feelings are always two sides of the same problem. Some choices offer very different resolutions. For example, throughout my life I have oscillated between a career in law or in psychotherapy, always choosing one over the other, at a particular point in time. My motivation for working in law has usually been financial, whereas my work in psychotherapy has always related to my sense of job satisfaction. For me, law requires employing analytical skills, focusing more on tasks than people and concerned largely with judgement. Whereas working in psychotherapy is person centred and utilises active listening, empathy, and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 2003). I do not see these two choices or motivations as “two sides of the same coin” (Mazetti, 2019, p. 184).

That said, Mazetti’s (2019) five-step, therapeutic model resembles Moustakas’ (1990) first, three, heuristic stages, concerned with the engagement/familiarisation with ambivalence, and a degree of immersion within the phenomenon. Step four of respectful analysis (Mazetti, 2019) resembles stage four (Moustakas, 1990) appearing akin to the processes of illumination and explication. However, Mazetti’s (2019) fifth stage does not share any similarities with Moustakas’ (1990) sixth stage of creative synthesis. Therefore, whilst Mazetti’s (2019) staged model is more focused on problem solving (regarded as a form of creativity), Moustakas’ (1990) staged model is more concerned with exploration in a search for meaning, and a linguistic or artistic, creative outcome.

Qualitative research methods have been successfully applied to explore the phenomenon of emotional ambivalence, which is

clearly still a current interest in research (Coates, 2023). My research seeks to further explore, and, hopefully, reveal greater insight into the nature of ambivalence and its apparent interplay with creativity and resilience, through an experiential exploration of the phenomenon, in a lyric essay, to add, perhaps, another insight into the phenomenon.

Creativity

Glăveanu (2010, p. 483) asserts that creativity occurs when energy and ideas from a “personal” representational space meets the “common” representational space. That is, when thoughts and feelings from individuals are communicated to and merge in a mutually occupied space, a place of mutual understanding. This is also a main feature of person-centred therapy (Rogers, 2003), where the therapist and client enter into a mutual space, to create the therapeutic encounter. It is in this space that minds meet, emotions are shared, questions are asked and, hopefully, shifts occur as a deeper or fuller meaning of experience is gleaned.

In an interview with Glăveanu, Keenan-Lechel et al. (2019), note his understanding of the creative process as “co-existing in dialogue” (2019, p. 653) and he introduces “emotions, empathy and trust” as factors in the creative process (2019, p. 653). This is parallel with the core conditions of the personcentred therapeutic approach, introduced by Rogers (2003) of congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard, and the fourth, presence, added by Mearns & Cooper (2015, pp. 35-51).

Glăveanu’s theory is that creativity occurs when we hold two perspectives at one time, and in doing so, are inspired to imagine, or investigate for, possible, other perspectives. This is termed the “metaposition,” which necessitates experiencing a sense of “wonder” (Keenan-Lechel et al., 2019, p. 654). Glăveanu also talks of a sense of dialectical tension existing within the process, mediating the perspectives, which could, perhaps be construed as a sense of ambivalence between the differing thoughts, feeling and ideas, before a reckoning occurs in some way and a new perspective, or product, is created. He describes his interest in the process of creativity: “That’s really what captivates me about creativity. The way in which people can become agents and turn some of these possibilities into actuality” (Keenan-Lechel et al., 2019, p. 654). This process also appears as creativity impacting on or facilitating resilience. Human agency is necessary for the

recognition of choices and the ability to make decisions and take steps in a therapeutic context. However, it could also appear from Glăveanu’s words that an existing sense of agency, or resilience, could serve to facilitate the creative process. Thus, these processes appear closely interrelated.

The interview with Glăveanu largely constitutes the article published by Keenan-Lechel et al., (2019, p. 652), which explains that its aim is to “conceptualise creativity in a diverse range of scholarly and practical ways, but also to use it to examine many different social and structural issues.” Thus, it seems that the creative process is regarded as a phenomenon present in many instances of human activity, and as a process through which such activity can be understood.

However, some people claim to have no sense of creativity, or demonstrate a resistance to engaging with it. Zhu, Bauman and Young (2023) offer a cognitive process of emotional reappraisal, which, they claim, fosters cognitive flexibility. They believe that “priming different mindsets influences performance in creative tasks” (2023, p. 2). They propose that the reappraisal experience fosters flexibility, which then facilitates creativity by compensating for low-openness individuals’ natural tendency to rely on conventional perspectives (which lack creativity). The authors claim that the cognitive reappraisal process differs from other cognitive methods, such as distraction and suppression, which do not give way to greater openness, or creativity. Therefore, cognitive reappraisal is a technique to consider, including within the framework of the education, training and continuing professional development of therapists, to develop and enhance the practice of creativity. It would be insightful to explore through research, the feelings/affect associated with cognitive reappraisal, to perhaps establish the affective change (if any) which takes place alongside the cognitive process of emotion reappraisal. Set within a societal context, there may be a link between being given the message that ambivalence is undesirable and unproductive, and emotions are better repressed than processed, and therefore to stick to traditional methods of thinking and acting are more desirable and productive.

Resilience

Resilience is a complex phenomenon, a dynamic interplay of an individual’s biology, environment, history, culture, personality, and psychology. In specific regard to therapists, the factors which we already know to impact resilience are: emotional

exhaustion; self-doubt; cynicism; and disconnection, (Maslach, 1982, cited in Simionato & Simpson, 2018). Simionato and Simpson (2018) identified personal factors for burnout using a quantitative, cross-sectional, self-report survey. They reviewed forty articles published between 1986 and 2016, totaling a pool of 8,808 therapist participants. They researched demographics, socio-economic factors; aspects of personality; gender; age, and details of personal coping strategies. They conclude that a mixture of personality factors, such as rigid thinking; perfectionism; emotional avoidance, or an extreme emotional focus; being of a younger age; being female; and becoming overly involved in the life of clients, are the main predisposing factors for professional burnout. They assert that future research should utilise longitudinal studies and include measures of physical health. They also advocate education/training for therapists in relation to the personal risk factors and suggest that “building resilience” can be achieved by learning how to cope by adapting, and “cultivating beliefs that promote self-care and work life balance” (Maslach, 1982, cited in Simionato & Simpson, 2018, p. 1451). I propose that engagement with creativity would also serve to help develop and enhance resilience.

Kotera et al. (2021) researched the experience of the Covid 19 pandemic on the burnout in psychotherapists. Their participants consisted of 126 professional psychotherapists located in the East Midlands region of the UK. They introduce the concept of “telepressure,” which they define as “a fixation with checking and responding to messages quickly” (2021, p. 2), as contributing to burnout as a consequence of the high incidence of home working that has arisen in response to the Covid 19 pandemic. They also explored the relationship between self-compassion and burnout and the interplay between work-life balance and burnout.

Kotera et al. (2021) found that telepressure positively correlated with burnout, and that emotional exhaustion occurred as a result of long working hours, and that the variable of work-life balance was a predictor of exhaustion, and of the phenomenon of depersonalisation amongst therapists. Depersonalisation, a cognitive change, is further defined thus: “impaired and distorted perception of oneself, others and environment” (2021, p. 8). Self-compassion was seen to partly mediate the relationship between work-life balance and exhaustion. Therefore, to combat burnout they recommend support for therapists to improve their work-life balance, and encouragement to cultivate greater levels of self-compassion. Preferably, this would be implemented at the education and training stage for trainee therapists, and as a

format for the continuing professional development of practicing therapists. Engaging with creative pursuits affords the individual time and head space away from daily concerns, and often results in a sense of accomplishment. Therefore, it could be construed as a valuable component of self-care, a way of balancing work and home lives.

Roebuck and Reid (2019) studied resilience in four female trainees employing Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

They noted three themes:

1. Reframing resilience - trainee therapists develop resilience by accepting a greater sense of vulnerability. To achieve this, rigid ideas of invulnerability must be released, and replaced with a willingness to be more open to uncomfortable experiences.
2. Locating resilience - it is experienced as something that is universal, or as something that is inherent, and merely waiting to be uncovered.
3. Finding the right path - this is about finding meaning and purpose through the work. (2019, pp. 548-550)

Roebuck and Reid (2019) concluded that an understanding of how resilience is developed is integral to trainee development. Trainees need to develop competence, confidence, and resilience as they train. The findings in their study demonstrate that becoming resilient includes developing a greater capacity for vulnerability. This could be achieved by engagement with creative pursuits which also requires an acceptance of feeling vulnerable at the outset, and of developing an open mind. This is also an integral part of the therapeutic process. Both therapist and client need to engage with their own vulnerability to render themselves open to possibilities of change. Trainee’s feelings of empowerment, self-efficacy and control may be fostered through a positive relationship with the experience of vulnerability. Confidence springs from the acceptance of vulnerability. Creative work requires such openness to vulnerability from the outset. Creative engagement involves the risk of exposure of the self, to responses from others. Shame is probably one of the stronger and more debilitating emotions that can surface during the process, as parts of the self are revealed for the scrutiny of others. However, repeated exposure to such risk can result in a more balanced view of the self, a stronger ability to get past the emotional block and to create something new, something unique. Thus, creativity

either enhances resilience or is, in itself, a form, or aspect, of the resilience response.

Therapeutic writing

For me, the heuristic research process cannot be separated from the act of writing. The two are necessarily intertwined. Experiences can be conveyed to others through visual art, film, music, movement, and dance; however, both the speaker and the writer need words. As such, the writing process in itself, becomes a method of processing affect, within the research process.

Clark (2017, p. 710) notes both the “therapeutic and creative value of acquaintance with negative affect,” asserting that writers and psychotherapists write, as a way of processing negative affect, through the therapeutic and creative channels, albeit from an unconscious motivation. Writing a heuristics study, from a therapeutic perspective, is therefore a process by which this unconscious drive may be made conscious.

Clark (2017) asserts that both writers and psychotherapists are driven to their chosen careers as a way through which to access their unknown selves. She bases her assertions on the reflective writings of several novelists, such as JM Coetzee, Anna Funder and Patrick White, all of whom describe the agony and yet utterly compelling nature of writing (Clark, 2017,

p. 712). She quotes from Toller (2011, cited in Clark, 2017, p. 712), who claims that creative work requires “a state where you are least sure of your boundaries and therefore open to everything and everyone outside of you.”

Clark further explains her belief that both writers and therapist are engaged in a: “struggle for the emotional truth of identity” (2017, p. 713). From the perspective of a therapist, this is often part of the endeavour of the therapeutic relationship, and, also, an integral aspect of the heuristic research process. As with memories and traumatic experiences, personal truths, secrets, and desires are often shrouded in a conflict of emotions.

Writing from a psychodynamic perspective Clark (2017) further explains that the writer’s indomitable spirit or “*animus*”, functions as a “creative agent” and interprets the writer’s actions as “a need felt as an obligation ... to represent the truth of their experience without compromise” (2017, p. 713). This could be a description of a creative process, powered by innate resilience, a survival instinct, designed with

the intention to connect with others at a deeply meaningful level. Additionally, Clark believes that: “the writer’s unconscious access to the emotional reality of suffering...lifts their writing beyond the ego’s more restricted purposes” (2017, p. 717). In psychodynamic terms she refers to this process as “the creative unconscious as manifest in the Psychology of Transference” (2017, p. 716). Metaphorically, she refers to the “original (psychological) wound” as “the crack that lets the light in” (2017, p. 710).

In phenomenological terms, and within the language of heuristics, the study aimed to reveal the interplay of emotional ambivalence, within the complexity of emotions, amidst visceral processes of creativity and resilience. It also searched for the revelation of the writer’s experience of participation in the research, adding insight and context to the research process, and adding understanding through which the reader could experience a fuller understanding. However, as noted, this search was not created in a wholly positive, research vacuum, it was contextualised within a crescendo of challenging real-life events and circumstances, which this lyric essay now further explores.

Glăveanu

Social psychologist and creativity researcher Glăveanu (2021b) takes us back to the time of antiquity for a metaphor of creativity, the spark of fire created by Prometheus, and given to humans. He provides a historical outline of the many interpretations of creativity, through the renaissance and up to the present day. What was originally regarded as the work of God, became embodied in the figure of the human genius, before taking on an embedded reality as a work or product of co-creation within a community. Thus, creativity is seen as an intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989) phenomenon, something that results in a creation, a product, or solves a problem, due to the interplay between people located in a certain time or place together, or somehow otherwise connected, such as via the internet. With the rapid development of technology, and notably, Artificial Intelligence, Glăveanu believes that the continuation to cultivate creativity is crucial for humankind. He refers to creativity as “our most distinguishing feature and asset” (2021b, p. 98).

Glăveanu’s (2020a) formula notes that a “Reflective Distance” is crucial to the process of Wonder, and the process of Wonder is itself a bridge to the Possible. The concepts of Wonder and Possible function to open our minds to alternatives, to what

could be. As such, the processes they describe offer a way to think ourselves out of “impossible” situations. Glăveanu (2021a) says that the

Impossible, paradoxically, is both the antonym to the Possible and a source for the Possible. By addressing the Impossible, we work out a way to make something Possible. Explaining that the Possible is a “process” and a “lived experienced” (2021a, p. 3)

He explains “what opens up the Possible in our existence is adopting ... more than one perspective on the world and ...putting these perspectives in a reflective dialogue with each other” (2021, p. 3). This process of, “Wondering” contains many other cognitive processes, all of which contribute to the “Gap” where we find ourselves, encountering and enabling conversations, which can render the impossible, possible.

When clients come to therapy, they often state that they feel stuck and unable to see a way out of their situation. With further conversation, their ambivalences can be noted and worked with creatively, while vulnerability (Roebuck & Reid, 2019) can be introduced, and encouraged, thus enhancing resilience. Therapists also struggle with feeling stuck, in a professional sense, and, as a result, are at a greater risk of experiencing burn out. If they can engage in creativity, as part of their self-care, and experience the processes of Wonder, they may develop a greater sense of resilience and be able to discern the Possible, from a seemingly impossible situation (Glăveanu, 2020a/b; 2021a).

Wonder for myself, fuels my creativity and is woven with resilience. Both lead me to act, to create what is Possible in a situation.

Lyric Essay: Falling into Glăveanu’s Gap

I am a Welsh, white woman, a middle-aged, mother of three, who has trained in psychotherapy as a second career. As part of my doctoral research, I have engaged in reflexive, self-search heuristic enquiry. What follows is a glimpse into part of the story of a challenging period of life presented in the form of a lyric essay.

Don’t look into your mind for creativity; don’t scan your brain or prize apart your DNA. Glăveanu says that creativity is a tumbleweed in time, blown through the years, gathering seeds and planting ideas.

Caught up in the search for creativity, as a craftsperson; somewhere between the artist and the scientist, I delved deep within the divergence, chasing the differences, when I fell, headfirst, into a canyon, a vast, white, featureless space.

A pneumothorax stole the breath of my partner, on Boxing Day.

My new house has white walls, with white, shuttered windows. At first, there was only a hard, wooden chair at the kitchen table. Here I sat, with my eyes closed, listening to the relentless email notifications. Each time I lifted the laptop screen, I drew a blank. Names and numbers fluttered in front of me, meaningless, yet malevolent. These were not my matters, my cases, my clients, except, that now, they were. So many questions I couldn’t answer, so many people crowding out the light.

It wasn’t my idea to move on this day. It was a second Covid-19 Christmas. The extended family were holed up in their respective houses, either with the virus, or waiting to see if they would develop it. New viral variations had everyone running scared. After Christmas Day celebrations were done, we looked at each other, wondering what to do with the remaining holiday. We had been advised to socialise within only small groups as the virus was once more on the rampage. I was six months post a second spinal surgery, and my left hip joint in need of replacing. I couldn’t lift heavy items and I was in considerable pain. However, he decided we should use the time to move house, and thinking that, longer term, it would make life easier, I acquiesced.

For the next two months, mid-winter, I was alone, in this barely furnished house, and first in line for his

terrifying workload. Covid claimed yet more time, as the hospital closed its doors to visitors, and forced me to work from home, alone. Numb from the soles up, I logged in to just sit and stare for hours at the screen.

A new job, a new house, a new city. I was trapped in the gap, in a whiteout.

At night, the light retreated, I lay alone in my bed, inching my way across to the middle, feeling ambivalent as to the space. Was it better to stay on my side and feel the space, or should I take the middle ground and make it my own now... just in case? Was this an ending, or a beginning?

I am spinning.

When I fell asleep, I dreamt he was beside me, struggling to breathe. When I woke, he was gone. Night melded into daylight, dreams into doubting. I can't unhear the sound of choking, un-feel the sense of panic, or quell the overwhelming fear that gripped me as I relived that moment. It echoed off the walls of the canyon, a sinister rattle, amongst the rocks.

Glăveanu (2021b, p. 2) states that there is deep connection between fielding differing perspectives and exploring the Possible. This "gap" between the views is the source of the transformation. It is here where singularity becomes multiplicity, where the differences enter into a reflective dialogue, creating something novel. This is exactly where I was meant to be, in the midst of a heuristic inquiry, however, the chase for the tumbleweed had ceased; creativity, now just a word in a halted conversation. Without a sound, the space around me tightened its grip. I lay awake all night watching the flicker of streetlights.

Just as snow falls softly and silently, so I'd failed to see the whiteness condensing around me. Just before dawn, a trickle of car lights would steady into a stream, on the road travelling towards me. It reminded me that I was alive and had to act, somehow, in this strange new world.

Glăveanu's formula for Wonder: *Immersion into Experience + Reflective Distance = Creating Understanding and Meaning.*

Glăveanu's definition of Wonder: "To be in a state of unknowing, emotionally unsettled by a phenomenon, to explore it and to create meaning from it."

He clarifies: "A clear sense of self and one's own involvement are necessary preconditions for wondering." (Glăveanu, 2020b, p. 2).

If Wonder couldn't save me from this frozen state, what could?

My own ambivalence showed up in the gap. I had to make judgement calls, and yet I had to accept my uncertainty, of everything. The entire landscape of my life had shifted. I inhabited the unknown, embodied uncertainty, now an integral part of my personal experience. I considered many outcomes and their consequences, whilst circling around in the fishbowl of my home, unable to choose one. I had no control over anything, except myself. My self-awareness grew in the silence, and I pondered just being with myself. I asked myself what I needed, but I still couldn't answer.

Glăveanu says that Wonder needs a "spark of motivation and emotion" (2020b, pp. 174-175). So, I was not going to be able to just think myself out of this.

A single image permeated the membrane of my dreamless sleep; his bronze-rimmed spectacles, small and round, left behind by the paramedics, as they rushed him, barefoot, into the ambulance, before driving away, under blue lights. I had put them safe, on the bedside table, waiting for the lockdown to lift, for when I could next visit him in hospital. Now my unconscious anxiety was telling me that they were lost.

I woke with a gasp. Anxiety lied to me. They were still there, on his bedside table, along with his watch.

Glăveanu says that we co-exist in dialogue, embedded in a visceral web of emotion, empathy, and trust, so what happens when one of our fellow conversationalists drops off the radar?

I messaged my supervisor, of two years, to check that our pencilled-in session was still convenient. Unusually, there was no reply. When he failed to call, I called him. Leaving a voicemail, somehow, I knew I was talking to a ghost.

Two weeks later, a friend on Facebook, read the notice:

"(He) died, unexpectedly, at home, sometime in December."

How long had he lain there, undiscovered? Why didn't someone contact me? Surely, he left instructions ... this time of Covid 19, with so many people shielding, we became ghosts to each other. I hoped his cat and dog kept him company, kept him warm, when they knew that he was dying. I revisit the ninety-seven WhatsApp messages we exchanged. I hear his voice, his frequent phrases, the philosophical musing. I feel the warmth of his laughter and the palpable silence of his unspoken care. Supervision over the telephone took a more personal tone as we were both negotiating the unknown, the pandemic lockdown. His voice a direct line to my interior, I sensed every hesitation, his deep laughter resonated in my chest. His words of warning still echo around my head: "Do you want to be your partner's nurse?" Had he some inkling, a premonition?

I had to accept that I would never know anymore about him. The book had ended and for some reason I did not have access to the final pages. His final hours, minutes, are simply not available for public consumption - even for me, his supervisee. Such finality is hard to accept when we live in uncertainty, juggling change.

Did my paralysing numbness signify the fact that part of me had died too? Had the lost connections

withered away, leaving me adrift, alone, in the whiteout of this gap?

My heuristic inquiry, suspended in time, was at risk of succumbing to frostbite.

My entry into Glăveanu's gap was intended to be an elegant dive, with synchrony of movement, like gliding through clear waters, searching for the pearls, surfacing only for fresh oxygen.

In search of creativity, I had yet to find any clues he might have left. I was stuck in the whiteout, not knowing which way to turn.

I pondered Glăveanu's idea of Wonder as a type of bridge we can find in the gap, which can take us towards another possibility. Where could I find this bridge? Where to start looking? I'm heading in the direction of the future, as the present holds only pain and discomfort for me.

The tension of ambivalence can be harnessed. It causes traction, movement. As I swayed between engagement and disengagement, the unfamiliar became the known. The hard softened; the loud hushed. Excited, yet reluctant, I opened my eyes. Glăveanu states that: "creative people can not only tolerate ambiguity and contradictions well, they actually thrive on them" (2020b, p. 4). This resonates with me. Ambiguity, uncertainty, I usually float about around these concepts, these visceral experiences, and I recoil from certainty, which almost always is not how it seems.

Orange was the first colour to warm me, followed quickly by fluttering heart, reviving, Mediterranean Blue. Yellow and Red came together, playfully, energetically, as velvet cushions, and Green leaves graced the white, window sills. Once again, I noticed life's nuances. A shadow on the wall, a gentle grey, where once there had been ice white. I affixed some black-framed, art prints to the lounge walls.

Kandinsky's "Circles" sat alongside Klee's "Goldfish"; Klee's "Senecio" flanked by Kandinsky's "Upwards".

Matisse's "Parrot and Mermaid" remains rolled up, awaiting framing. I bought matching crockery and kitchenware which gave the impression that the space was inhabited. The house had no mirrors, and until this point I hadn't even noticed. When I took delivery of the first mirror, I felt an initial resistance to looking in it. I was fearful of what I would see. Six weeks alone, waiting for news, expecting the worst at every turn, and without sleep - I did not expect a pretty sight. Grateful that I still recognised the face in the mirror, I started to look outwards, and sketched some designs for the small garden.

Still the river of words failed to flow, blocked somehow, at the estuary, the source.

Stooped and sinewy, he shuffled from the side door of the hospital, toward the waiting car.

"We've done all we can..." said the unspoken look on the nurse's face.

I heard it, loud and clear.

Later, he lay beside me, the shadow man, sleepbreathing.

Vigilant for the slightest aberration, I held my own breath.

This life story needed a new chapter.

When people escape death, they start to live their dreams.

The camper van took us from East to West, with a short dip into the South, visiting friends we had not seen since before the pandemic, and looking for beauty in new, and familiar places. We sat in a field in the midsummer sunshine, playing with the puppy, newly arrived, to keep me company. Nature woke us at dawn and drew us to the Cornish seaside, where we listened to fishermen's shanties. Connemara called, in jigs and reels, and we immersed ourselves in Celtic culture. We

sailed to the island of Jersey where joy came in the form of a smile on an old friend's face.

For me, the bridge of Wonder was a rope ladder, one that helped me climb out of the gap; to reclaim the colours and shapes which give my life meaning. For him, the bridge had four wheels and a back seat, that folded out into a bed, making travel Possible.

Discussion

Deepening the reflection

Given the impact of unexpected, adverse, life experiences on my heuristic research, I initially struggled to complete the study. In retrospect I was still struggling with overwhelming shock and fear. I was not ready to revisit my painful experiences, to risk feeling those emotions again for the sake of research evaluation. Neither could I conceptualise them in a visual art form. I was still living through the events and their consequences. It took a period of some three months to process my emotions and experiences to a level where I could make meaning from them and conclude the heuristic research.

Writing this lyric essay has afforded me an additional opportunity to process my experiences and begin to work through my grief and the shock and fear, with the benefit of the passage of time. It has allowed me to dwell a little longer on the loss of my supervisor, and to reflect on my initial reaction to his death, no doubt impacted upon by the freeze of fear that had already gripped me, with the traumatic collapse of my partner. It is in itself, an example of writing as a therapeutic process (Clark, 2017).

The experience of writing this lyric essay allowed me to not only engage more meaningfully with the theories and concepts surrounding ambivalent emotion, creativity, and resilience, but also to reflect, at a distance, on how they interplayed in a personal, real-life situation, where resilience was required. In my personal experience, when I was immersed in shock, and fear, I couldn't gain a greater perspective on my situation. Creativity acted as a bridge offering me a way out from the fear and freeze. Engagement with creative activities such as choosing colours, designing rooms and painting with

watercolours brought me relief from my immersion in problems. Eventually the research functioned as a therapy for me, as writing about my experience served to help me process negative emotion and affect. Writing this lyric essay further served to support my emotional processing and to reveal further, deeper insights.

Wider application

Zhu, Bauman and Young (2023) claim that by reappraising emotional events, creativity can be unlocked, even for what they term “conventional thinkers”, people who believe they are not creative. Therefore, both the engagement with creativity and an increase in the level of emotional education for trainee therapists or continuing professional education for experienced practitioners, could lead to enhanced resilience amongst therapists. Engaging creativity in this way could help combat the process of practitioner burn out. Haynes (2022) provides an example of how creativity proved effective with clients and suggested its application to therapist supervision.

In more general terms, resilience researcher Masten (2015) reviewed almost forty years of research and concluded with a shortlist of “recurring correlates of psychosocial resilience” (2015, p. 148), conditions, which she believes are necessary for young people who have experienced adverse life experiences, to develop and maintain resilience throughout life (2015, p. 148). These range from receiving “effective parenting” to “intelligence and problem-solving skills”; “self-efficacy” and “effective schools” and “collective efficacy of neighbourhoods/communities” (2015, p. 148). Masten (2015) notes that this list reflects the initial years of work on resilience by social scientists, which has not substantially changed over a period of twenty years, and anticipates that more contemporary research, such as neurobiology, may add or change the entries on the list (2015, p. 150). Resilience in Masten’s view is not a trait, but a state, and a common state that can easily arise in younger people, when they have access to, and the support of, an adaptive system/network, characterised by the shortlist of contributing factors (2015, p. 286). I propose that engagement with creativity, or creative pursuits, is added to the list, and with further research, will evidence its own efficacy for developing, supporting and maintaining, resilience in individuals, families, groups, communities and societies.

The lyric essay is a creative way to express non-fiction, akin to heuristic process and self-inquiry research. As noted by Kuntz and Adams St. Pierre (2021, p. 476) in an attempt to harness novel ideas around qualitative research methodology, new approaches to inquiry needed to afford “the time and space for authors to think.” The lyric essay is flexible in that it has no rules of specific length or specified format, so affords the author more time and space. However, there are widely accepted set of principles in relation to quality of writing, techniques applied and the idea that the subject matter should disquiet the reader in some way.

The format lends itself to storytelling and as such it is easier for the reader to follow and understand. This usually results in a higher incidence of reader identification or deeper resonance of the reader, with the writer and their situation. Thus, the content may appeal to a larger number of people, or a wider audience than traditional research formats as result of its accessibility.

As with the reading of novels, where readers are shown to develop empathy with the characters in a book, so the lyric essay may also serve to help generate greater empathy.

The process of creative writing, which includes the processing of emotion, and the intention to find some meaning from a situation, event, or experience, is, in itself, therapeutic, and as such may unearth greater insight in any field of social study, and not just be limited to therapy, where there is that intention. Also, Bossier (in Bossier & Trabold, 2023, pp. 2-4), a self-identified, gender fluid writer, regards the lyric essay as a “a literary beacon amidst turbulent narrative waves” which affords writers from the ‘margins’ of society, a “blueprint ... to name their experiences ... to speak their truth.” They state that writing from the margins affords a writer - and the reader - a perspective of the whole. In effect, it is to see the world from “both the margins and the centre” (2023, p. 5). Thus, the lyric essay, as a recognised qualitative research method, could serve to facilitate a greater, wider, deeper intersection of writers from all cultures, thereby offering a much richer, diverse, and inclusive research base.

Increasingly, doctoral students (of social research) are being urged to keep a reflexive diary of their research experience. As such, qualitative methods - which often consist of diary keeping - are becoming increasingly legitimised in the wider field of research (Allan & Arber, 2017). As Lyotard (1979; translated in 1984 as “*The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*”) claims, science is a fiction, communicated by the narrative

Strengths and limitations

consensus of scientists, and in doing so presents its own story of legitimacy (cited in Adams St. Pierre & Kuecker, 2023, p. 3).

Future qualitative research contains “new approaches to inquiry” (Kuntz & Adams St. Pierre, 2021, p. 475). For example, these authors refer to the work of Hein (2021) who claims that an ontology of immanence is inconsistent with current social science qualitative research methodologies. Other approaches include the application of philosophy, art and music (Eakle & Bailey, 2021) as inquiry, and Vandermeer’s (2014) novel features in de Freitas and Truman’s (2021) article on speculative fiction as a new form of empiricism. As such, with its elements of phenomenology, immanence, and embodiment, it’s not such a conceptual leap to view the lyric essay as an emergent form of qualitative research.

The limitations of lyric essay are that this is another form of reflexive self-report, and its rigour can be questioned, given that its format is so flexible, and there is no fact checking procedure for the writer’s personal experiences. As such, there cannot be said to include any process of triangulation. There is, by definition, only one voice speaking, and its personal reflections being read. Denzin (2011, cited in Fusch, Fusch & Ness, 2018, p. 20) described the triangulation process as one of “crystal refraction” to represent the depth and complexity and depth that it is possible to extract from qualitative research, which may not be applicable to self-report studies. However, as part of wider research, they can offer a unique and personal insight into human experience, with which readers may resonate.

Its ability to share any information, or offer any insights, depends on the scope of its readership (in this case, colleagues, researchers, practitioners, or students, as opposed to the general public.)

It may also be regarded as an autobiographical case study and, as such, open to moral and ethical considerations. The anonymity of anyone else named in the essay is essential, unless they have waived it. There is also the time consideration that such personal information, once published, will stay in the public domain, and as such, in the future will be outside of the control of the original author (Mcleod, 2010, 2015).

Conclusion

This lyric essay draws together the impact of the three phenomena of ambivalence, creativity and resilience, on my state affect as a therapist/researcher. It illustrates a positive example of my experience of the interplay between the three phenomena. I hope that by sharing this work with psychotherapy colleagues, they may also be inspired to consider using such forms of creative writing in their therapy practice and personal development.

At a more profound level, the lyric essay offered a way for me to begin to work through my shock and grief in response to adverse life experiences. The process of writing it arose out of pain and was, itself, a labour of love and, through it, I found some resilience.

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About the Authors

Helen Noble is a doctoral student at University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Wales, where her research interests include engagement with creativity as a resilience enhancing process for trainees and qualified therapists. Helen works as a primary care mental health therapist in the Welsh valleys at Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board, Wales, and as a sessional lecturer on the BSc Humanistic Counselling at Metanoia Institute, in Ealing, West London. *Emails:*
hnoble.151031@student.uwtsd.ac.uk;
helen.noble3@wales.nhs.uk; helen.noble@metanoia.ac.uk

Dr Beverly Cole is a lecturer and PhD/MA research supervisor within the Academic Discipline of Psychology and Counselling at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. In addition to her academic roles, she is an accredited member of the BACP and a practicing counsellor/counselling supervisor working within the NHS, private practice, and the voluntary sector. Her research interests include Heuristic Self-search Inquiry, Auto-ethnography, and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. She has a particular interest in research into the training and supervision of psychotherapists.
Email: beverly.cole@uwtsd.ac.uk