

**ESSAYS ON THE CREATIVE ARTS  
THERAPIES**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**David Read Johnson**, Ph.D., RDT-BCT is an Associate Clinical Professor in the Department of Psychiatry, Yale University School of Medicine, and the Director of the *Institutes for the Arts in Psychotherapy*, New York City, a multidisciplinary training center. From 1985-1991 he was the Chairperson of the National Coalition of Arts Therapy Associations as well as the Editor-in-Chief of the *Arts in Psychotherapy*, positions through which he worked toward greater collaboration among the creative arts therapy disciplines. He was a founder of the field of drama therapy and was President of the National Association for Drama Therapy. In addition to his passionate involvement in the creative arts therapies, Dr. Johnson has contributed to the field of posttraumatic stress disorder, and with his wife, Hadar Lubin, MD, codirects the Post Traumatic Stress Center in New Haven, Connecticut. They have two children, Corinda and Adam.

# ESSAYS ON THE CREATIVE ARTS

Imaging the Birth of a Profession

*By*

**DAVID READ JOHNSON, PH.D.**



**Charles C Thomas**  
PUBLISHER • LTD.  
SPRINGFIELD • ILLINOIS • U.S.A.

*Published and Distributed Throughout the World by*  
CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.  
2600 South First Street  
Springfield, Illinois 62794-9265

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ISBN 0-398-06973-5 (cloth)  
ISBN 0-398-06974-3 (paper)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 99-23247

*With THOMAS BOOKS careful attention is given to all details of manufacturing  
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*Printed in the United States of America*  
*CR-R-3*

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Johnson, David Read.

Essays on the creative arts therapies : imaging the birth of a  
profession / by David Read Johnson.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-398-06973-5 (cloth). -- ISBN 0-398-06974-3 (paper)

1. Arts--Therapeutic use. 2. Creative ability. 3. Psychotherapy.

I. Title.

RC489.A72J64 1999

616.89'165--dc21

99-23247  
CIP

## FOREWORD

David Read Johnson's *Essays on the Creative Arts Therapies* takes us on a twenty-year journey through the sometimes treacherous seas of the creative arts therapies field. Homer's Odysseus wanders from peril to peril for twenty years on the way home from the wars, while Penelope never gives up hope even while fending off the pack of suitors consuming the hogs, crops, and winestores. In this modern-day odyssey of an arts therapist, David relates the perils of being an arts therapist in a professional world that poses many threats. Like Odysseus, he never surrenders his passion for the field, like Penelope, his hope that the several arts therapies disciplines comprising it will work more in concert, less in isolation from one another, never dims.

I doubt there is a corner of the field David does not address in this collection of two decades worth of essays. Rather than producing a disjointed effect, they assemble into a mosaic. The collection begins with an examination of why a person opts to be a member of this minority professional community—he discovers it is both an election and a sacrifice.

David looks at the profession from the inside and out, beginning with history ancient and modern. He states we can incorporate, but not rely upon, or origin as shamans. To survive and thrive in the therapy world it is necessary to claim a theoretical base and to speak the lingua franca. In this connection, David highlights the principal theoretical schools from which the arts therapies have borrowed, and he writes a complex chapter using the most current of those tongues—object relations theory—in discussing our profession(s).

It is also crucial to survival to understand how our profession(s) are impacted by current trends in the health and mental health fields—such as managed care, brief treatment, or claims for biological primacy. It is said that when standing on the edge of the sword one has to keep dancing, and David creatively envisions a place for the creative arts therapies on the cutting edge of theory and practice in educational and therapeutic settings. He sees new opportunities for the field, especially in the treatment of trauma and substance abuse.

One unifying theme of David's explorations is that the arts will stand stronger together than separately. If we speak only separate languages in a house of Babel, we are likely to be gobbled up by larger entities.

Unrecognized shame dynamics, he posits, are a force keeping us down and apart. So he amplifies the numerous links amongst us and encourages cooperation. David explores interesting hypotheses, ranging from gender differences to tribalism to object relations theory, to explain why the boards of the professional associations have resisted a closer union, and he proposes forming the National Creative Arts Therapy Association, a model of cooperation based on the approach of the framers of our Constitution.

This is a book of wide-ranging experience. The writing is strong, clear and eloquent. It is immediate and intimate, as in the accounts of a mentoring relationship, a religious conversion, or a letter to his patient. It is urgent, as it surveys the many mundane challenges confronting the field (such as licensure, insurance, salary scales), and offers workable solutions. It captures the quiet essence of “being with” the client in the therapeutic encounter. It is bold in its proposals to secure a future for the arts therapies. It is imaginative in envisioning the growth in theory, practice, and influence the therapeutic arts can offer to our hurting world.

I will require my students to read these *Essays on the Creative Arts Therapies*. I wish a benefactor would place it in the hands of every member of the creative arts therapies associations. Everyone interested in the intersection of the arts and the psychotherapies will be enriched by this important volume.

*Kenneth Gorelick, MD, RPT*  
*Past President, National Association for Poetry Therapy*  
*Co-Director, Wordsworth Center for Poetry Therapy Training*  
*Washington, DC*

## PREFACE

This book is a compilation of my essays, both published and unpublished, concerning the integration of the creative arts therapy disciplines (art, dance, drama, music, and poetry) into one larger organization representing their clinical, scholarly, and public policy activities. These essays span 25 years of my immersion in the practice, study, and politics of the creative arts therapies: treating clients every day as a drama therapist, serving for six years as the Editor-in-Chief of the *Arts in Psychotherapy*, and for six years as the Chairperson of the *National Coalition of Arts Therapy Associations*.

This is a book about rites of passage, about naivete and maturity, about growing up, both my own and my profession's. It is about poetics and politics, about our tremendous potential to contribute to the public welfare and our deep fears of collaboration and dialogue. Throughout this book I take the position that joining together clinically, academically, and organizationally will be beneficial to the health of our field as well as that of our clients; that we are divided only by the nature of our different artistic media, not by fundamental theoretical or political agendas. I speak not only as a creative arts therapist, but as a member of several other professional groups for whom diversity, debate, and dialogue are accepted and productive norms.

Readers outside of the creative arts therapy field may wonder what all the fuss is about, for the "together we stand, divided we fall" position reiterated here has proven its worthiness during many diverse times and situations. However, creative arts therapists have yet to heed this message and, in my opinion, remain ensconced in relative isolation from each other as well as from the wider mental health fields. This is very unfortunate, for the creative arts therapies have much to contribute to mental health in general, and even more to each other's disciplines.

This book's criticisms of my own profession are embedded within a deep respect for the work and for the creative arts therapists with whom I have been fortunate to collaborate. Many of these essays attempt to highlight the power and poignancy that are reliably evoked by the use of the arts in healing. I remain profoundly aware of my own journey, for I entered college as a student of advanced physics, and there is not a day now that I do not thank God for my stumbling into drama therapy, where spontaneity and beauty combine with service and the intellect.

I hope these essays stir you; they variously offer personal meditation, polemical argument, practical advice, serious theorizing, and some comic relief. Throughout, you will sense my struggle to express simultaneously my love for and impatience with this, my dear profession, being too quietly born.

D.R.J.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Who is responsible for a passion? Certainly those who believe in you, who see the nascent vision inside and encourage it. Foremost among these is Susan Sandel, a highly talented dance therapist who directed the creative arts therapy department I began my career in, and who, through the many years of our partnership, was always my guide and greatest supporter. Many others deserve mention: Ken Bruscia, my “older brother” who by sheer strength of character managed to carry us through the successful 1985 NCATA conference. Peter Jampel, Renee Emunah, Arlynn Stark, Sandra Graves, Ken Gorelick, Art Lerner, Judy Bunney, Dale Buchanan, Paul Fink, and Sylvia Halpern in particular advised and nurtured me through many a difficult time. Sally Kondziolka, Lynn Temple, Cindy Briggs, Robin Gabriels, Peggy Heller, Connor Kelly, Susan Kleinman, Cay Drachnik, Linda Gantt, Richard Scalenghe, Peter Rowan, Vivien Marcow, Cheryl Maranto, and Stephanie Katz were among many colleagues who worked with me in the interests of the creative arts therapies. Eleanor Irwin, Art Robbins, Bob Siroka, Shaun McNiff, Penny Lewis, Robert Landy, Myra Levick, Adam Blatner, Claire Schmais, and Joan Chodorow all have made significant contributions to my understanding of the creative arts therapies. I have had the opportunity to meet so many wonderful creative arts therapists, dedicated clinicians and spirited people, who made the time spent on their behalf seem so worthwhile. Thank you.

Yet there would be no need for passion if there was no resistance! And yes, there have been many who have served this crucial function and have kept my will keen with passion. To all those who have stood in the way of the creative arts therapies becoming a stronger unity, I thank you, for by pressing up against your intellect, political talent, and deep fears, I have learned much indeed.

Finally, to Hadar, my wife and partner in work and love, for your encouragement and advice, and to Corinda and Adam, who have given me a new and welcoming course for my passions.



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**Section 1**  
**PROLOGUE**

