Narractivating Conversations with the Internalised-Other: A Therapy with a Little Bit of Fairy Dust

Adriana Müller[1]

A resposta certa, não importa nada:

o essencial é que as perguntas estejam certas[2]

Mario Quintana

In 2018, David Epston was in Argentina with Tom Carlson to present the *Insider Witnessing Practices*, and on the first day of the gathering, David spoke about the art of asking questions. Although it may seem trivial, questioning is the foundation of therapeutic work; therefore, it is crucial to be aware of *the how* and *the why* of every question. He introduced us to 'questions with Duendes'[3]: those that surprise, brighten the atmosphere, and reveal wonderful stories. I was fascinated by this perspective—questions that invite people to perceive *beautifulness*[4] in their lives.

Beautifulness is a word redefined by Paulo Freire that invites a gaze beyond appearance, condensing love, ethics, aesthetics, politics, and education, unveiling the poetic dimension of life and a belief in a fairer world (Nita Freire, 2021). Bringing *beautifulness* to our praxis is a constant invitation from Michael White, David Epston, and Paulo Freire. In the paper *Re-imagining Narrative Therapy* (Epston, 2019), while honoring his friend, David Epston mentions the 'spirit of adventure' that has always been present in the practice of both (Epston & White, 1990, p. 9). He also recognizes his partner's poetics and creativity, and invites us to keep the maverick spirit alive in an era when trademarks and franchises curb creativity and push people to copy rather than create. He warns us against letting narrative therapy become yet another "McDonaldization"; instead, it should reveal its potential through the faces and colors of every people, the beauty of

[1]Narrative therapist, with clinical experience since 1993, teaching narrative therapy since 2005, and collective narr ative practices since 2009. Also created the Rhythms of Life methodology in 2010.
[2] Translation: The right answer does not matter at all: what is essential is that the questions are the right ones.
[3] Elves.
[4] Boniteza, in Portuguese.

each culture, and the diversity of every corner of the world. In Freirean terms, may it always be an experience of *beautifulness*.

These reflections brought up some questions. What is new, creative, and interesting in our daily practice? How much Duende, spirit of adventure, and fairy dust[5] are we putting into our sessions? How are we bringing our soul, our way of being, our uniqueness into action in each therapeutic encounter? How are we contributing to the stories to reveal every lived experience's *beautifulness*? These are questions that have resonated within me ever since I translated David Epston's paper (2019) – and they have guided my steps throughout my current journey in narrative therapy.

In 2020, I began the *Artistry of Narrative Therapy* course with Tom Carlson, Kay Ingamells, and David Epston. The course's proposal is continuous learning about the art of asking questions within the context of narrative therapy; after all, questioning requires focus, dedication, and practice. Michael would say, "practice, practice, practice" (Epston, 2016, p. 85). During one of the meetings, David asked us to share our experience with the apprenticeship. I mentioned my amazement with the effects both the consultants and I noticed every time the conversation was guided by internalised-other questions (Epston, 1998). He listened carefully to my most recent experience: a special moving conversation with a woman's internalised grandfather. At the end, she told me she would keep this conversation in a sacred place inside her, so that it could be remembered forever and ever. When I finished telling the story, David asked me if I had written it down, for a conversation that ended with someone saying it will be kept forever in one's memory is something that deserves to be honored.

I perceived the *beautifulness* of that idea and decided to go a little further: I asked this person to write what she remembered of that moment. And I did the same with another person who also had a similar experience. This paper is about those stories and my thoughts about them.

[5] In Brasil there is a special fairy dust named Pirlimpimpim dust. It's a quintessentially Brazilian magical element, created by Monteiro Lobato in the Sítio do Picapau Amarelo books, and it is as a make-believe trigger.

The gift of gifted words

As palavras sabem muito mais longe [6]

Bartolomeu Campos Queirós

The therapeutic process unfolds through conversations, interweaving questions and answers in an ever-weaving loom whose threads are words. I admit my fascination with them: I relish the careful way people choose each word, the gift they carry, the horizons they open within the dialogue. Clients' words are both precise and precious, and I honor them as such. Yet I also delight in playing with words, turning them into poetry, joining them so they reveal something new. With words, I become a playful Duende (or a Fairy), crafting *beautifulness*.

When Michael White (2008) presents the concept of outsider witnesses, he outlines four guiding questions for the conversations that unfold after a story is told. While re-telling what they have heard, these witnesses speak about: 1) the word or phrase that caught their attention the most, 2) the image that that came to their mind, 3) the personal resonance of these words and images in their own history, and 4) the ways in which they have been moved while witnessing these stories (transport). As an outsider witness to the stories people bring to therapy, I listen not only with my mind, but, above all, with my heart. I glimpse *beautifulness* in their speech, and it is enchanting.

It thrills me when someone says, "I'm feeling more comfortable in my own skin," "the road ahead is no longer so foggy," "everything can be overcome," "I have claimed my strength," "the breeze is blowing in my life". The poetry is already there, evoking instant images that give rise to questions, and play-with-words. In this chain of cha(i)nge, problems can be dis-SOLVED (Anderson & Goolishian, 2018), and preferred identities can be and become in all their *beautifulness.*

Resonance is like a compass guiding me: wherever my enchantment settles, wherever words invite me, wherever images cheer me up, there I seek an oasis of meaning. I share these perceptions by making my ideas public within the session, by composing letters or poems that highlight such moments (Ingamells, 2018; Muller, 2024; White & Epston, 1990), or by creating collective documents –

[6] Translation: Words know far beyond...

whether multi-vocal, lived, or musical – woven from words rescued from the conversation (Denborough, 2008, 2018; Müller, 2012, 2013, 2015; Newman, 2008).

In all these instances, words are chosen with attentive affection, as though the therapeutic process helps people reclaim the grace of their words and the power of their voices. As Queirós (1986) suggests, we must help awaken certain words, so they live and breathe in daily experience. Words steer every moment of the therapeutic encounter. After all, as White (1988) writes: "… we could investigate the benefit of defining a therapy of literary 'merit' in which the therapist's greatest gift to persons seeking therapy is to help them become their own writers." (p. 10). He continues: "This approach establishes therapy as a context of curiosity and takes the form of a collaborative endeavour and an enquiry into new possibilities" (p. 13).

An enquiry in which questions are doors to alternative stories – or, as David Epston says, an invitation to "go down the rabbit-hole" (Marsten, Epston & Markham, 2016). According to White (1988), there are two main conversational perspectives: asking about people's experience and producing new knowledge – which appears through stories that fascinate both teller and listener. Paying attention to conversation, we may realize that most of our questions arise from resonance with the stories we listen to. They are a way to broaden our understanding about some aspects of the narrative that touched us in some way. Therefore, it is important that questions arise from genuine curiosity, a wish to broaden the narratives beyond what is expected or already known, and a search for versions that reveal the preferred identity of the person before us.

The metaphor of building alternative stories, seeking the preferred story, helps therapists contribute to a storytelling that reveals the person's best version. It is not about replacing a problem-saturated story with another deemed 'better' – a common misconception and an unfounded critique of narrative therapy. Rather, it's about finding ways to *storylive* (Müller, 2024) what happened; to understand the stances the person stands for and against; to make clear the person's life aims; and to highlight each one's aspired legacies. It is about *narractivating*[7] a

[7] I use this play-with-words to highlight the narrative possibility to activate preferred storylines through storytelling and storyliving.

story the person deems worthy of inhabiting in body and mind. A story collectively supported by significant others in the person's circle of affection, or, in White's words, in each one's 'association of life' (2008).

Considering the art and craft of questioning, it demands disciplined practice. After all, there are many types of questions, and each one opens different narratives and reveals specific storylines. Within this frame, David Epston (1998) brought the internalised-other question:

> Such paradigmatic questions can inquire about anything but always invite the respondent to answer from his or her experience of the other's experience. This has the effect of undermining cultural practices that affirm an objective reality. (p. 68)

Through such questions, we invite the person to answer 'as if' they were a significant other. This path grants us access to the *beautifulness* that lies in *tríbio time*[8] (Freyre, 2001): that simultaneous interweaving of past-present-future into the fabric of our narratives. In the *tríbio time*, we retrieve memories, update stories, and anticipate narratives. By braiding the three moments of Life – *tri-bio*[9] – we can 'say hullo again' (White, 1989) and fashion a story that represents us, honors significant people, and unveils our best. In *tríbio time*, we leave the known and familiar behind and pursue an expanded version, something singular and unique, our *untested-feasibility* (Freire, 1987).

Here, I introduce Sílvia, Ayla, and other important individuals I met. Then, we will see the stories that were *storylived* when they engaged in conversations about the internalised-other.

Catching a rise in a turquoise Vemaguet

Sílvia is a woman in her early fifties who is striving to rise above the end of an abusive relationship. Her feelings conflict – at times tinged with nostalgia ("I feel sorry for us"), at others anchored in the certainty that the ending was providential. Amid this search for meaning, Sílvia mentions her paternal

[8] Tribio as in latim: tri, for three, and bio, for life. Therefore, a time that encompasses simultaneously past, present, and future.
[9] Tri, from Latin: three; and Bio, from Latin: Life.

grandfather, Grandpa Álvaro, with whom she had a true-life partnership. He was a humanist who taught her about politics and culture in an incredibly unique way. She was eighteen when he died of emphysema, which made her feel "angry at him for leaving me." But, as time went by, Love came back to replace that anger, and today, Grandpa Álvaro is a sweet and comforting memory.

That day, Sílvia listed several guides she is putting into action to feel better with herself: the cultural projects at *Palavra Mágica* (her language improvement course), her determination to have healthy relationships, and the certainty that she needs to be clear about what she looks for in a relationship. Here is an excerpt from our conversation:

Adriana: Who wouldn't be surprised by this firm and determined stance of yours? Who knows you so well that would not be surprised about these attitudes and dreams of yours and would say this is "pretty much like you"?

Sílvia: Wow! My friends…

Adriana: Which friends? Shall we make a long list?

Sílvia: Rosa, Cecília, Hannah, Lívia, the students' mothers, my parents, my son, my brother Maurício…

Adriana: Is there someone who's no longer here among us, but who would certainly know about that resolute spirit of yours?

Sílvia: My grandma Gabriela and, of course, my grandpa Álvaro. I miss them so much! …

Then, she began introducing her grandfather. She told many stories about him, filled with details and deep emotion. She told me how much he valued friendships and how his wife (Sílvia's grandmother) mistreated him all the time. She mentioned everyday facts: her grandmother leaving only the leftover chicken for him during Sunday lunch, making it clear that she didn't honor him; the rides to

and from school with Sílvia and her siblings in the turquoise Vemaguet that puffed smoke and smelled of fuel – and how she loved being with him all the same. She told me about his humble origins, which never hindered her admiration, as well as their long, joyful conversations about politics, poetry, and life. Knowing Sílvia, it was clear to me how relevant this grandfather was in forming her preferred identity – this very identity she seeks to strengthen in this unfolding alternative story. So, I asked her:

Adriana: Sílvia, would you like to play a little game? It is like a 'make-believe'… You *pretend* to be your grandfather, and I'll talk with him about you. How does that sound?

Sílvia *(laughing brightly)*: Oh, why not!

Adriana: Okay. I'll ask you to stay connected with your grandfather – his memories, your shared stories, the sound of his voice, the range of his gestures, the sparkle in his eyes… and, before starting the conversation with him, I need you to tell me how he would like to be addressed. After all, it will be my first time speaking with him, and I wouldn't want to make a poor first impression! *(laughter)*

Sílvia: Oh, you can call him Álvaro, or Mr. Álvaro. As you wish. He was not formal about those things…

Adriana: All right. So, Mr. Álvaro, I am Adriana, a psychologist, and a friend of your beloved granddaughter Sílvia. She has been telling me so much about you that I got curious and asked if we could have a chat. Is that okay?

Sílvia's Álvaro: Yes, of course!

Adriana: I imagine you know all about what she's going through these days… and I wonder, what would you say to your dear granddaughter at this moment in her life?

Sílvia's Álvaro *(with a puzzled expression)*: I don't know…

According to Michael White (2012), it is important for the conversation to be structured like a scaffold: moving on, step by step, helping the person to move from what is already known and familiar to what is possible to be known. It is a way to put into practice, in the therapeutic context, what Vygotsky called the 'zone of proximal development'. Looking from this theoretical point of view, this first question was a big leap, at a point in the internalised-other conversation when Sílvia was still adjusting to its dynamic. So, I stepped back and began asking more familiar questions about stories I already knew. I asked Mr. Álvaro about his wife, his friends, the rides to school in the blue Vemaguet, and other shared moments with her granddaughter. Little by little, Mr. Álvaro found his voice, and the conversation got into a much better flow.

Adriana: Mr. Álvaro, could you tell me about taking your grandchildren back and forth in that turquoise Vemaguet? Did it really give off so much smoke?

Sílvia's Álvaro *(laughing)*: Oh! It sure did…

Adriana: And what about Sílvia? How did she deal with that?

Sílvia's Álvaro: She laughed with me… she stood there. She was not ashamed of me.

Adriana: When you look back and see little Sílvia, a young Sílvia, what stands out the most?

Sílvia's Álvaro: She was always joyful. She used to shine so bright! I was so proud of her! I still am. When she was 16, she loved to listen to my poems' recital. And our conversations about politics were amazing!

When I asked Sílvia's Álvaro if he had any advice for his granddaughter about how to manage romantic relationships, he became puzzled again. I told him not to worry, that Sílvia and I would figure it out, and he would learn it too. I thanked him for such a lively conversation and all the good stories, and we said goodbye.

Then, I spoke with Sílvia again and asked what she thought of the experience. Her

answer fascinated me: “When the conversation began, I realized it would be something special. Something I would have to listen to carefully and keep in a special place in my mind. A place that even if I get old and have Alzheimer’s, it will be there forever... “

The next session began with Sílvia still enchanted with the conversation with her grandfather. She mentioned the importance of realizing how much he admired and was proud of her doings and her being. This shows the importance of internalised-other conversations in thickening the alternative story.

She also mentioned that her grandfather probably didn’t manage to explain how to solve the relationship issue because he, too, never found answers for that question in his own marriage. Nevertheless, she could feel, during the conversation, that he was proud of her for trying to live a better life.

Sílvia’s account

“I was with my grandfather during this pandemic. We hadn’t seen each other for about 35 years. I had always missed him, but I didn’t know where to find him. He always understood me. He was the one who explained the ways of the world to me, from politics to poetry. He was the one who looked at everything I did and said: It’s beautiful!

On my birthdays, he would pick flowers — himself — and decorate my house so I’d wake up to see it all adorned. On the mornings, when visiting us, he’d say to me: good morning, flower! It’s been so long since I last saw you![10]

He was the one I really needed to talk to, but I didn’t know it. I never imagined how deep that longing was, and how much he still had to teach me.

Adriana Muller gave me this opportunity. In a narrative therapy session, she asked whether we could invite my grandfather to share what he made of everything I was living through.

I was ending my second marriage, an intense 16-year relationship. I was shattered, devastated. I had been disrespected in every sphere of my life: family,

[10] That’s a special poetical greeting, quite common in Brasil.

financial, professional, sexual, and emotional. I felt like nothing at all. One day, I told Adriana about my grandfather, who had died when I was 20.

He knew who I was; he admired me; he cared about me. He was sensitive and intelligent, but he too had troubles in love. He married a woman – my grandmother – who was an unwell, very unstable, taunting, angry woman. I still remember her humiliating him, treating him as if he were nothing. But, to me, he was everything.

He had to sleep with his head at the foot of the bed because she didn't like the smell of his head. At the Sunday family lunch table, he got the last piece of chicken. And I saw it, I noticed it, I knew it. I was only a child, but I knew it all.

Adriana asked me if we could invite my grandfather to a conversation. She asked if I could pretend to be my grandfather for a few moments. I would think like him, I would remember how he used to see me, and I would use the words he would say. She would be the interviewer. She would speak with him, and I would reply.

The conversation began. She addressed me as Mr. Álvaro, and I eased into it little by little. The first question – I no longer remember which – seemed deep, profound, difficult. I tried to answer, but I was still me. Adriana noticed, stepped back a few paces, and began talking to him about situations she already knew. That allowed me to slowly get my role in the play.

We spoke about the blue Vemaguet he loved and with which he sometimes took me and my brothers to school. She asked him about his granddaughter—what she thought of going to school in an old, noisy, smoke-belching car. And he replied that she liked it, that she didn't care about such things.

We talked about the flowers, the birthdays, the porcelain exhibitions, the teachings he passed on to me, and, moment by moment, I was more him than me. I knew what he would say, how he felt, what he thought about life, how he treasured our grandfather-granddaughter story, and how much he knew about me.

Then Adriana let the questions get deeper, and, eventually, these questions touched my moment of pain. She asked my grandfather about relationships and what he could tell me about what I was going through. He knew he didn't have

the chance to teach me about it...

He asked my forgiveness for not having been able to teach me to choose a love that would be good for me. He apologized that we never spoke about it and for not warning me as much as he wished. He spoke to me of longing, of admiration, and of his certainty that I would clear this karma of unfaithful relationships and step into a new phase. He said he believed in me and that he didn't want me to suffer like this anymore.

I really needed to remember how much I had already been loved. I needed to remember how good it was when people laughed with me and rejoiced in my presence. The meeting with my grandfather filled my heart with love, confidence, and hope.

I will never, ever forget that day. I lived it knowing it was a moment that would take up residence in my memory forever.

I ended the session both crying and smiling, with a tight longing for my grandfather, but with the certainty that it will be up to me to change the course of these incomplete, hostile stories. I belong to Love, and I will find someone gentle, steady, loving, left-wing, a dreamer. Someone who loves music, poetry, and cherishes the best values in the world.

Thank you, Adriana, for this healing, restorative, deeply respectful, creative, and affectionate experience. Thank you, Grandpa, for being so alive in my heart! I love you, my economist, my poet, my friend. You saved me once again, Grandpa. I will make you proud of me."

Not giving up in the face of challenge

"Quem me chamou? Quem vai querer voltar pro ninho?

Redescobrir seu lugar...

Você verá que é mesmo assim, que história não tem fim.

Continua sempre que você responde 'Sim'"[11]

(Brincar de Viver – Guilherme Arantes)

Ayla is a 54-year-old woman who chose to leave her job to care for her parents, Dona Luzia and Seu Gabriel. They were gaúchos[12] and left Rio Grande do Sul in 1969 with their seven children. Even far from home, they never gave up their *cuia* of *chimarrão*[13] – the famous *mate* – or the tradition of a good *Brazilian barbecue*.

At first, the plan was to take care of her mother, Dona Luzia, whose three-year prognosis stretched to fifteen. However, circumstances changed, and Ayla also began caring for her father, Seu Gabriel, who developed Alzheimer's. He died on March 13th, 2019. From then on, her mother's condition worsened, which required staying in the hospital more often and increasingly stronger medication at home. The onset of the pandemic made the whole situation quite cumbersome, and Ayla often spoke about everything she was going through with Dona Luzia.

A year after her father's death, Ayla began to speak of him a lot, recalling her memories and her admiration for him. She mentioned the way he managed his family life, always intending to protect them and leaving them prepared to deal with challenges. She told me that he had been a constant example of honesty, courage, faith, integrity, and so many other values that shaped her and her siblings' lives. On April 8th, during therapy, she said that her father "never gave up in the face of challenge." On April 20th, she was taken to the hospital with Covid-19 and lived out her father's teachings: she had faith and did not give up. She overcame the illness.

[11] Translation: "Who has called me? Who is willing to return to the nest? / Rediscover one's place…/ You will find out / stories are endless / and continue every time you say 'Yes'."
[12] Those who are born in Rio Grande do Sul.
[13] The gourd where they drink chimarrão (also known as mate).

On May 14th, after she had recovered, we resumed our sessions. From the very beginning, she talked about her father with pride and joy. So, I suggested that she do the internalised-other conversation. I called this experience a “make-believe game” in which she would be ‘Seu Gabriel’, and I would talk to him. She agreed, and we began. I do not have a record of the questions. I took some notes of the answers that reached my heart, and these are the guidelines for my account of that conversation.

I began by asking her to remember her father: his voice, his look, his scent, his way of walking and talking. Then I told Ayla that I did not want to be disrespectful to her father. So, I asked her to guide me on how he would like to be addressed and how I should refer to him. We agreed that I would call him ‘Seu Gabriel’ and that I could address him in an informal way. Once he had already met me, he would not feel disrespected by that.

I always start the conversation right after this agreement, to establish the distinction between the person and the internalised-other. So, I said: “Seu Gabriel, shall we begin our conversation? It’s been a while since I last saw you – how are you?” The intention, at this moment, is to create a relaxed, playful atmosphere so the person can feel at ease. I tend to ask questions whose answers I already know – and the person is aware of that. That is my way of building a scaffold from what is already known and familiar towards what is yet to be known.

To that end, I asked questions that focused on family relationships, as I knew it was an important theme for him. I also wandered around his thoughts on how his sons and daughter were managing his absence. Then, I moved on to another level of questions, and we talked about Ayla, and we spoke about how he perceived the care she was providing for Dona Luzia. As we went along, I could see she was increasingly connected with the internalised-other: her body posture, the way she spoke, a different way of looking at me. At that moment, I knew I was in conversation with Ayla’s Gabriel. Then, I started asking more subjective questions, such as: “Seu Gabriel, what do you admire in Ayla?”, “What have you long admired in your daughter?”, “What has always caught your attention?”, “Has she always been like that, or is it something that she has refined over the course of her life?”. I also asked what tips he might offer his daughter now that he had the opportunity to see life in perspective – or at least from another perspective.

My notes referred to these questions. And, as I mentioned earlier, these notes are driven by resonances, by the sense that these are precious words that deserve to be rescued, gathered with care, and honoured. Here is what I rescued about the admiration:

Ayla's Gabriel: I admire that Ay[14] never spares any effort to care for her family and friends and to maintain what needs to be. I don't know how she manages that!

Adriana: Ah, but the apple doesn't fall far from the tree! (We laughed out loud together.)

Ayla's Gabriel: She has so much love. She's always been good at taking care of others. I admire that love. And her never-ending will to care for others.

Here are the tips he had for her:

Adriana: What advice would you offer her now that you are in a different standpoint in a privileged place? I imagine you have a broader view of it all and that you are keen to give a few words of counsel to your daughter, who's so committed to caring for your Luzinha[15]...

Ayla's Gabriel: Maturity is unfolding, and she'll learn. When she becomes more mature, she'll learn to ignore some things. She needs to learn to leave things aside, to feel at ease. And she needs to do the things she likes: sports, traveling, seeing her friends again. She's been taking care of us for such a long time… She needs to take better care of herself.

Adriana: Do you think she can do that, Seu Gabriel?!

[14]Ayla's nickname.
[15] Dona Luzia's nickname.

Ayla's Gabriel: *Yes, she can! She really can.*

Adriana: Great! Let's have a toast with a mate! *(We laughed together.)*

I brought the conversation to a close, thanking him for his special contribution to our session. I also invited Ayla to reconnect with herself, giving her some random options such as stretching and moving her body a little (feet, legs, arms), taking a deep breath, even drinking some water. She said she enjoyed the experience and had not imagined it would feel so real: *"I could feel like my dad: his words, his accent, his way of sitting and looking, his caution when talking to someone he didn't know so well."*

Ayla's account

"I want to share a lovely, very special experience I had during my therapy with Adriana. She asked whether I'd like to have an experience with my father. I agreed, and she invited me to think of him and to recover my memories of him. Then she began asking questions to my father – and I answered as if I were him.

At first, I found it a bit strange, but soon I began to feel as though it was really him responding: his accent, the words he used to choose, the way he got emotional – he'd breathe in to hold his tears so he could keep talking… I had it all, so it was incredibly special. It was such a warm experience!

It was profoundly important. It did me so much good because I remember I was going through a very hard time. I had lost my dad a year before – it had just been a year – and my mom was extremely sick, bedridden. She was already in palliative care. And that conversation did me a lot of good because I felt as if he was there with us. I felt like he was answering those questions, and that feeling filled my heart with joy. I was at peace.

He talked about me, about how he saw me, about our relationship, and how it became especially precious after he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. I could feel the importance I had for my father, the trust he had in me, and the peaceful moments I was able to give him at the end of his life.

That experience made me feel in harmony with him. It felt so good! I felt a fierce longing, a wish to hug him! The last three years of his life were very special because we lived them with all our hearts, unconditionally. It was so good to restore that. That experience gave me the chance to be with him again, and it made me really happy. When I woke up the next morning, I was feeling good, and I was happy!

So, it was something really beautiful. At first, I thought it wouldn't work because I'm far too much of a realist, and it was something which depends on imagination. And yet, it worked! I felt those were his answers, as if he were inside me, there, replying with great tenderness.

I can't clearly recall the questions, but I remember the feeling of peace and joy."

Reflections on 'what happened here?'

É perguntando que se aprende a perguntar[16]

Paulo Freire

Right at the beginnings of narrative therapy, whenever David Epston and Michael White met, they had a kind of ritual: they would watch each other's consultations and talk about what was new and different in their practices. David Epston (2016) presents it this way:

> And I also recall that at the end of my visits, he would devote some time to asking me: "What did you see me doing differently?" That was my clue to review not only his practice but my own. And I became just as dedicated and diligent about 're-seeing' (or researching) my practice, not by way of some sort of assessment but rather by asking myself the questions I believe Michael was asking of himself: "How did what happened here happen?" "What did I do that was implicated in what happened? (p. 85)

Therefore, to close these reflections, I invite you to come with me along Brazilian by-ways as I seek to answer the question: what did I do that was implicated in what happened? Along this path, I introduce a few Brazilian authors who have

[16] Translation: "One learns to ask by asking".

guided me on my theoretical journey.

Let's begin by saying that I have embraced the *tríbio time* proposed by Gilberto Freyre (2001). By that I mean my understanding is informed by a non-linear time, an ancestral-wisdom time that flows like a river, intertwining what was, what is, and what will be into a single flow of existence. It is from this understanding that I perceive that both the conversation with the internalised-other and the conversation of 'saying hullo again' can be built and inhabited. If the ones we love – the significant person – live within us beyond the bounds of time and space, they can be accessed and evoked. Their voices can be heard, their stories can be honored, and their legacies can be inhabited by us.

What Sílvia and Ayla share about their experiences during the internalised-other conversations shows that those who have died remain present in our lives, just waiting for us to say "hullo again" to reveal treasured stories.

I also dared to move beyond the known and familiar. I accepted Paulo Freyre's invitation (1987) and walked toward the *untested-feasibility*: that which is not yet (hence untested) but may come to be (hence feasible). Such a path requires patience and trust, care and respect, joy and lightness. Talking with the internalised-other requires patience to build a scaffolding conversation that interweaves questions and answers, trusting these moves may reveal what matters. When the stories surface, we handle them with the care and respect of an archaeologist handling a newly unearthed piece: brushing gently, lingering over details, holding the discovery in wonder, and trusting in all the potential it carries. We go on *narractivating* these stories, asking duende-like questions that bring joy and ease, and contributing so that each person keeps *storyliving* their life with lightness.

I also searched for the *precious particle* that Bernadete Lyra (2018) so often mentions. It may be a word, an idea, a feeling, a sensation, some memory, or any image that touches our heart and awakens in us the urgent curiosity to craft a narrative. A *unique outcome*, in Michael White's words (2012). It may be a turquoise Vemaguet, a tender remembrance of someone who has gone… These *precious particles* bring forward deep and mighty questions. Questions that make all the difference in therapeutic encounters.

Shall we go down the rabbit hole?

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field.

I'll meet you there."

Jalal-ad-Din Rumi

I have presented in this paper a few accounts of conversations with the internalised-other to show how this form of interaction creates a different – and special – connection between a person and his/her own story. However, it is important to point out that this is only one moment in the therapeutic process. As it has been mentioned, we spent some time "panning for gold" (Wylie, 1994) as some important aspects of the alternative story came along in earlier sessions. Each one of them needed to rest and wait for the questions that would invite them to take part in a storyline. As Pablo Neruda (1973) put it poetically:

If each day falls

inside each night,

there exists a well

where clarity is imprisoned.

We need to sit on the rim

of the well of darkness

and fish for fallen light

with patience.

That is what we do: we 'fish' those narratives that bring light and life to the alternative story.

During the conversation with the internalised-other, we invite the person to engage in a "make-believe play" and speak *as if* s/he was a loved one. This disrupts the individualist logic of "I am me, and you are you". Once the person agrees to "go down the rabbit hole" and steps into the dynamics of being both the one who speaks and the one who listens to what is said, s/he becomes, at once, performer and audience. The person becomes an outsider witness to a conversation that proceeds from them and emerges from within —in that magic world of affections and narratives about to be born. This way of listening "from within" makes possible a distinctive reflection between the person and his/her life story. As one woman told me after such a conversation: *"*How lovely to speak as if I were my aunt*! It gave me such peace, such joy… How much she loves me! And how many things we have in common!"*

In this way, the conversation with the internalised-other reveals elements that become the raw material for subsequent sessions. It is not the therapy itself, but part of a wider context, entering the therapeutic flow as a way to "awake memories" (Benites, 2023) and to activate precious stories in which I, he/she, we… everyone inhabits the same narrative time, giving voice to possible futures and creating untested-feasible paths.

After wandering through these stories and ideas, I keep wondering what you might experience during these magical and powerful encounters that happen when we go down the rabbit hole and let questions become the *pirlimpimpim* dust (the pixie dust) that brings wonderfulness to life.

References

Anderson, H, & Goolishian, H. A. (2018). Sistemas humanos como sistemas linguísticos: implicações para a teoria clínica e a terapia familiar. (Trad. Adriana Müller) In: *Colaboração e diálogo: aportes teóricos e possibilidades práticas*. Marilene A. Grandesso (org). CRV.

Benites, S. (2023). Arte para fazer acordar a memória. In: *Povos Indígenas no Brasil 2017/2022*. Instituto Socioambiental.

Denborough, D. (2008). Práticas narrativas coletivas: trabalhando com indivíduos,

grupos e comunidades que vivenciaram traumas. (Trad. e Rev. Adriana Müller). Dulwich Centre Publications.

Denborough, D. (2018). Você quer ouvir uma história? Aventuras em práticas narrativas coletivas. (Trad. Adriana Müller). Dulwich Centre Publications.

Epston, D. (1998). Internalised other questioning with couples: the New Zealand version. In: *'Catching up' with David Epston: a collection of Narrative Practice-based papers*. Dulwich Centre Publications.

Epston, D. (2016). Re-imagining narrative therapy: A history for the future. *Journal of Systemic Therapies*, 35*(1)*, 79-87.

Epston, D. (2019). Re-imagining narrative therapy: An ecology of magic and mystery for the maverick in the age of branding. *Journal of Narrative Family Therapy*, 3, 1-18.

Freire, A.M.A. (2021). *A palavra boniteza na leitura de mundo de Paulo Freire*. 1ª edição. Editora Terra e Paz.

Freire, P. (1987) *Pedagogia do Oprimido*. 17ª edição. Editora Terra e Paz.

Freyre, G. (2001). *Além do apenas moderno*. Topbooks Editora.

Ingamells, K. (2018). My romance with narrative letters: Counter-storying through letter writing. *Journal of Narrative Family Therapy*, 3-19.

Lyra, B. (2018). Vitória está cheia de minotauros. Acesso em: https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/vit%C3%B3ria-est%C3%A1-cheia-de-minotauros-bernadette-lyra/

Marsten, D., Epston, D., & Markham, L. (2016). *Narrative therapy in wonderland: Connecting with children's imaginative know-how*. WW Norton & Company.

Müller, A. (2012). *Ritmos da Vida*. [Vídeo]. Acesso em: Vimeo. https://vimeo.com/36736596

Müller, A. (2013). Ritmos da Vida: ajudando crianças na superação da separação. *Nova Perspectiva Sistêmica, 22*(45), 34–46.

Müller, A. (2015). Ritmos da Vida: a música ajudando a construir histórias preferidas. In: F. H. F. Miranda & A. dos S. Nascimento (Orgs.), *Da Psicologia Social à Psicologia do Desenvolvimento: pesquisas e temáticas no século XXI* (pp. 235-259). Paco Editorial.

Müller, A. (2024). Jardinando narrativas e escrevivendo histórias. *Journal of Contemporary Narrative Therapy*, February 2024 Release, 38- 59.

Neruda, P. (1973). *El mar y las campanas*. Losada.

Newman, D. (2008). 'Rescuing the said from the saying of it': Living documentation in narrative therapy. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work, 3*, 24-34.

Queirós, B. C. (1986). *Correspondência*. Miguilim.

White, M. (1988). The process of questioning: a therapy of literary merit? *Dulwich Centre Newsletter*, 8-14.

White, M. (1989). Saying hullo again: The incorporation of the lost relationship in the resolution of grief. *Dulwich Centre Newsletter, 2* (Spring), 29–36.

White, M. (2008). *Maps of narrative practice.* WW Norton & Company.

White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). Narrative means to therapeutic ends. WW Norton & Company.

Wylie, M. S. (1994). Panning for gold. *Family Therapy Networker, 18* (6), 40–48.