

The Poetics of Hydrotherapy as an Art, Science and Mindfulness in Roethke's *Meditation in Hydrotherapy*

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Abstract

Hydrotherapy, a treatment for mental illness, has emerged into a multidisciplinary field integrating art, science, and mindfulness in a broader way. Medical humanities own the credits for having ushered in a new trend in the arts by exploring the afflicted minds through creative and scientific pursuits. Roethke's 'Meditation in Hydrotherapy' explores the science behind the therapeutic practice through artistic poetics, unveiling the burden of mind and fostering relaxation and comfort in individuals. It delineates the role of water as a property in treating mental and physical health in a wholesome way with a creative intellect, originality of vision, and aesthetic representation. This paper attempts to examine the symbiotic relationship between art, science, and hydrotherapy in enhancing mental and physical health through the metaphorical references in the poem. It serves as a powerful tool and throws light on how therapies can create new perspectives and insights in poetry and human questions of existence in a logical manner. The observer uses a qualitative approach to enhance the understanding of human experience and the rejuvenating power of water in a holistic way. By integrating the scientific principles of hydrotherapy with the innovative expression of art and contemplative practices of mindfulness, this paper promotes a profound equilibrium of balance, relaxation, and well-being. Keywords: Mindfulness, Health, Art, Balance

Introduction

The convergence of art and science is revolutionizing the field of health, with arts emerging as a vital tool for therapy and wellness. A range of art forms, including music therapy and painting, have been successfully implemented to promote health and cognitive function. One prominent example is hydrotherapy or aquatic therapy which leverages the unique properties of water to address various mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and mood swings. By considering the physical attributes of water -temperature, hydrostatic pressure, buoyancy, viscosity, and electrical conductivity - hydrotherapy provides a chemical and drug free solution for recovery. Techniques like sitting baths, irrigation, and aqua therapy have been shown to be highly effective in calming the mind and body. The simple applications of plain water in a cold or warm temperature, internally or externally, can induce instant relaxation

and comfort. Hydrotherapy practice in physiotherapy has developed from a scientific basis of hydrodynamic theory. An understanding of the physical properties of water and the physiology of human immersion, coupled with skills to analyze human movement, have helped physiotherapists in using hydrotherapy as a tool for facilitating movement and restoring function (Geytenbeek, 2002). It is considered as one of the therapies that were universally used in many ancient civilizations such as Greek, Romanian, Indian, Egyptian, and Chinese. Both Vincent Priessnitz and Sebastian Kneipp have a great role in establishing and developing modern hydrotherapy (Carere and Orr, 2016). Theodore Roethke's poem "Meditation in Hydrotherapy" delineates the effect of hydrotherapy as an art in reducing stress and promoting mindfulness for individuals seeking relaxation.

The Healing art of Hydrotherapy

The art of using water as a confessional and remedial tool for wellness is observed in Theodore Roethke's poetry through metaphorical reference and powerful imageries. Theodore Roethke's "Meditation in Hydrotherapy" is a distressing exploration of the poet's inner world, depicting art as a cathartic medium for confession, self-expression, introspection, and healing. Roethke delves into the therapeutic ability of aquatic therapy, unveiling its capacity to smooth the progress of emotional rebirth, rejuvenation, and transformation. By intertwining the scientific principles of hydrotherapy with his personal experiences, Roethke creates a thoughtful meditation on the human condition, enlightening the complex role between physical and emotional rehabilitation, and the quest for hope, healing, and self-actualization.

Theodore Roethke utilizes the imagery of a tub and a drain to consider the possibility of transcending his present sensual state.

'Six hours a day I lay me down

Within this tub but cannot drown' (Roethke, 1966)

The narrator describes his treatment for suicidal depression in the poem in a painful way. Though he spends six hours a day submerged in his tub, his turbulent mind is too consumed by its own chaos to allow him to find solace, let alone succumb to the water's embrace. He considers the ice cap at his rigid neck as quite distressing way. The water heats like his blood and his flesh is willing to repent. In a state of emotional limbo, the speaker is paralyzed by the conflicting desires to weep and to laugh. He's allowing his sorrow to drain away, a liberating release of the emotional chaos that's been suffocating him. Furthermore, the poem highlights the importance of self-reflection and self-awareness in achieving good mental health. The speaker's experience in the tank allows them to access their subliminal belief and emotions, and to gain a deeper understanding of themselves. Theodore Roethke's poem emphasizes mental health linked to creativity and inspiration. The speaker's experience in the tank sparks their imagination and creativity, highlighting the importance of taking time to relax and recharge.

Materials and Methods

The study analyses the dual effect of hydrotherapy as an art and science in treating health ailments. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology as an approach to hydrotherapy focuses on the sensory experiences such as the feeling of buoyancy, sound of water and the effect of warmth in improvising the mental illness. Phenomenology's concept of intentionality refers to the way individuals respond or direct their attention and consciousness towards objects and experiences (Merleau - Ponty's et al., 2013). With reference to Theodore Roethke's poem that explores the subjective experience of the speaker by using therapy in an artistic and scientific way to treat the mental illness of the speaker investigates on the emotional experience intertwined with physiological experience in water. The speaker finds a positive energy after getting his body treated in warm water with mental stability.

Descartes 'Mind-Body Dualism' posits mind and body as different non physical and physical entities which respond to external forces in a different way. According to Descartes (2024) widespread conception, is seen as having set a distinctive stamp on the mind-body problem. In hydrotherapy, the mind is seen as an entity that perceives and responses to the reactions in the water. An individual's mind with wavering thoughts, mental pain and agony reacts to the biochemical property of water in a holistic way creating a permanent relief from physical and mental pain (Cottingham, 2012). The speaker in the poem relates to the warmth of water with her inner turmoil that is sliding down the drain in his room. The physical property of water reacts with his body and gives heat to his body that is sweating as pain.

Findings and Results

Hydrotherapy is not just viewed as a scientific treatment in the field of medicine and health, but is considered as an artistic tool that paves the way for an individual to vent one's emotional upheaval. It facilitates a multidisciplinary approach by forming a synergy of art, science and mindfulness. Hydrotherapy can be a form of creative expression through poetry expressing the close connection between emotions and the biochemical effect of water. Hydrotherapy is linked with technological factors that utilize virtual reality technology to create an immersive aquatic therapy experience for patients undergoing severe mental pressure and trauma. It can also be used as a remedy for neurological, muscular and cardio vascular problems. Hydrotherapy has become an art by fostering a multisensory experience through colors, therapeutic storytelling, water bath therapy, poetry and other forms of literature. It forms a creative expression of the mind and emotions in an aesthetic manner. Hydrotherapy as a science provides treatment for mental and physical health in a simpler way without using medicine. Investigating the potential benefits of how water-based intervention can provide a solution for illness and stress, hydrotherapy has become an art and science and enhances mindfulness.

Hydrotherapy Creates Wide Opportunities for Innovation and Development in the Following Ways:

1. Interdisciplinary Collaborations

Hydrotherapy facilitates interdisciplinary collaboration for artist, scientists, psychologists and medical practitioners to develop innovative programmes that integrate art, design and technology in a broader scale. Further researches can be conducted to find the positive outcome of hydrotherapy in handling stress levels of an individual in a simpler way.

2. Biomedical Usages

In the field of medicine and health, hydrotherapy finds its best source in diagnosis, treatment and cure for mental and physical illness. Hydrotherapy can be reviewed from a biomedical perspective examining the effects of water on joint movement, muscle strength and cardiovascular function. As hydrotherapy utilizes the hydrodynamic properties of water to promote relaxation and decrease pain perception, physiotherapist suggests hydrotherapy to decrease the health burden of musculoskeletal conditions (Bender et al., 2005).

3. Art of Wellness

Hydrotherapy has a potential scope in the field of arts through paintings, stories, writings and photography's that depict the themes of wellness and stability of health. Artists can create sculptures that reflect the fluid dynamics and sensory experience of hydrotherapy. It can inspire environmental art projects that highlight the importance of water conservation and sustainability. Hydrotherapy

can be used as a tool for narrative medicine and health humanities by offering unique opportunities for patients to share their emotional, mental problems and experiences thereby promoting an in depth understanding of the complexities of human experiences (Fleming and Gutknecht, 2010).

Conclusion

This paper delved into the multifaceted realm of health humanities in literature, exploring the intricate connection of arts, science and health with creative expression and scientific enquiry. The integration of art and science in hydrotherapy emphasizes the importance of unlocking the aquatic medium as a confessional and creative tool. Furthermore, this research underscores the importance of therapeutic practices as an art and science in fostering a deeper understanding of one's own mental and physical state. As individuals continue to grapple with increased stress levels, depression and anxiety, the insights learned from the paper can enrich our efforts to navigate pain towards a more hopeful and resilient future. This research creates a potential space for the future studies to explore the intersection of art and science in hydrotherapy, examining its applications in diverse areas. Thus, the research has provided ideas to promote health, wellness and human flourishing through literary and scientific inputs.

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