

**With a small 'f': An exploration of the therapist's
experience and understanding of faith
A hermeneutic literature review**

Charri Russell

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Abstract

Small 'f' faith is a crucial yet intangible aspect of psychotherapeutic praxis, which may invisibly complement and contribute to the common healing factors of psychotherapy, alongside hope. However, bringing faith into the open is challenged by the task of communicating its numinous qualities in words and the ever-present conflation of small 'f' faith with its religious guise.

This research asks, "What is the trainee psychotherapist's understanding and experience of small 'f' faith?" A hermeneutic interpretative approach uses the philosophical ideas of Gadamer (2013) and Heidegger (1996) to guide and frame how the psychotherapy literature was reviewed, where fore-understandings shape and guide the interpretation of the literature to provide a unique understanding of the topic. Aspects of Romanyshyn's alchemical hermeneutics also invite the researcher's unconscious engagement in the process of asking questions of the literature.

The review reveals how small 'f' faith has been overshadowed by a focus on big 'F' Faith, understood as theological thought and religious practice. The findings offer a meaningful understanding of small 'f' faith as being innate and numinous, conveying qualities of openness and steadfastness, and being abiding and facilitative. How faith underpins psychotherapeutic work with clients—and could underpin development of trust and hope—highlights the need for psychotherapy training to creatively engage with small 'f' faith.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signature:

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Chapter 1. Introduction

My experience and understanding of small 'f' faith

Commonly, the word 'faith' serves as a synonym for theological thought and religious practice. However, an understanding of faith as a notion relevant to psychotherapy may also be conceived and explored. In this dissertation, I research psychotherapy literature to develop a response to my research question, *"What is the trainee psychotherapist's experience and understanding of small 'f' faith?"*. As such, this dissertation offers personal and expanding understandings of small 'f' faith as possessing qualities of relevance to psychotherapy.

Firstly, a note on the phrase "small 'f' faith". I draw on Abinader's (2015) use of upper or lower-case 'f' to delineate theological and secular understandings of the experience of faith. Coltart (1992/2020) also used 'small f' faith, to distinguish from Big F Faith which she interprets as a "credulous attitude toward theory or doctrine" (p. 119). She viewed small 'f' faith as underpinning the skills and qualities required of a therapist, stating, "'faith' is necessary to learning to be a therapist, navigating 'not knowing' daily whilst clients navigate dire passages" (p. 167).

Small 'f' faith captured my attention following experiences of despair, which shaped my view of faith (in contrast to hope) and fostered my curiosity about how psychotherapy understood faith as a secular notion. However, definitions are idiosyncratic, and need to be viewed alongside the more 'rigorous' dictionary definitions of key terms, such as:

Faith: is a mass noun and is "the belief, confidence, trust, reliance upon something, for example, in a set of principles, ideals or beliefs in credence or efficacy or worth of a thing." (OUP, 2022, para 7)

Faithful: describes a state of "constant allegiance or affection; loyal, true to." (OUP, 2022, para 1)

Hope: is both noun and verb which is to "desire and expect or mentally hold an expectation." (OUP, 2022, para 1)

For parsimony, I refer to small 'f' faith, simply as faith. 'Psychotherapy' is used throughout to encompass psychodynamic and psychoanalytic praxis and 'trainee' refers to my status as a beginner psychotherapist.

Setting the scene

In this section, I explore some views about faith's presence in the psychotherapy literature that shaped my research question, prior to the full literature review.

Freud (1927, as cited in LaMothe, 2002) critiqued religion as an illusory way of defending oneself from fearing one's instincts. It is possible his critique of Big 'F' faith, combined with his desire to have psychoanalysis accepted as scientific, obscured the presence of small 'f' faith within psychotherapy. Domash (2010) argues faith was further obscured during the McCarthy era where psychotherapy theory escaped censorship by becoming "tepid, rigid, unreflective and most of all neutral" (p. 85)-

More recently Lev (2018) argues "with increased medicalisation, psychoanalysis lost touch with the edge, the marginal, where the imaginal or numinous was split from the scientific, Jung receiving the former, Freud the latter" (p. 85). Civitarese (2019) also suggests faith hovers on the edges of the discipline because it is discussed in a roundabout way or abstracted, using terms like hope, trust, negative capability, receptivity, loyalty, constancy, and truth. Faith seems dissolved or absorbed by other terms. Faith's obscurity or invisibility may illustrate how Winnicott (1989, as cited in Hopkins, 1997) says we become "dulled to the useage of words, and how it is necessary to study each one and determine how it came to being and how a word is used now" (p. 486).

Reflecting on faith's dimmed and marginal presence as a notion of relevance to psychotherapy drew my curiosity. As a trainee, having faith in my capacity to be with another in despair, and in the client's capacity to heal, when uncertainty is a constant, led me to question the nature of faith within psychotherapy.

My fore-understanding

As a self who is interpreting and understanding, Gadamer (2013) suggests that lived experience, and the socio-cultural contexts we inhabit, shape our fore-understandings, as we are selves who interpret and understand. Consequently, my research question and how I identify and interpret relevant texts are moulded by these fore-understandings. In addition, my exploration of faith also claims me through my complexes (Romanyshyn, 2007), which foster curiosity about how my experiences might be understood through the psychotherapy literature. Therefore, my question emerges from my fore-understandings which are born from my experiences of loss and despair, backgrounded by familial experiences of 'carrying-on'.

Maroda (2003) advises trainees on the judicious use of self-disclosure. Yet, as a qualitative hermeneutic interpretive researcher, my subjectivity is a tool of the research methodology. I

interpret my fore-understanding as an aid to explore common meaning in the texts I select and interpret. Acknowledging my fore-understandings means I occupy a stance of goodwill to see the other's view or, as Gadamer (2013) expressed it, a horizon of understanding, which I may not have considered.

My experiences of 'carrying-on' generated a stratigraphy of experiences of personal and intergenerational despair, where my fore-understandings originated from experiencing hope as a dangerous notion. A lineage of gambling addicts, hoping for chance's favour, led family members in and out of poverty. My grandmother singing 'Que sera, sera' (Livingstone & Evans, 1956) offered resigned comfort to the precariousness of economic insecurity.

In despair, I sought psychological support where cognitive behavioural therapy diagnosed my despairing thoughts as impediments. A failure to reframe my thoughts and adhere to cognitive treatment goals led to my first experience of psychotherapy. Then, after experiencing a miscarriage - a lost baby (Poppy) – I learnt I might never biologically become a mother. Consequently, hope became too terrifying to hold. At the time, I was studying psychotherapy in London with a tightknit peer-group¹. After holding onto my loss, I shared it. Speaking to a classmate's back as she navigated the narrow pavement ahead of me, she spun to embrace me. Her raw cry of "How awful" held my pain. Over a year, the group silently meeting me in my despair helped to me feel settled inside. Slowly, I could be with the terror of not-knowing if I would become a mother. My experience was not soothed away, or prematurely ameliorated with advice to stay positive. These women embodied the phrase on my favourite mug, "It is what it is". They did not saturate me with their certitude and were faithful to my experience.

As I wrote into my fore-understandings for this research, Safran's (1999) article drew my attention to Eliot's (1944/2019) poem 'East Coker':

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
So, the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.
(p. 171, lines 301 – 307)

¹ Consent was sought from group members and identifying details removed as per AUT ethics advisor's guidance.

Eliot's phrasing captured my experience of how the group's embrace helped me be with my despair and return to being able to keep going. I experienced hope in reverie of frightening attempts to climb unscalable walls and break down barred doors. Gibran's (2007) comment, "Doubt is a pain too lonely to know that faith is its twin" (p. 299), captures the pain of this time.

Over time, as Eliot's lines convey, "waiting without hope, yet there is faith", my capacity to be with an absence of certitude grew. I went into my pain; it did not end me, nor did I try to escape it. Ghent's (1999) description of how we long "to achieve a capacity to feel real to surrender" (p. 346) resonates with my experience of this time, where holding expectation was terrifying.

Being with the group in my despair helped me to step toward motherhood with faith, despite doubt and the bleak statistics. I experienced hope as "but a timid friend" (Brontë et al., 1846, pp.82–83), and faith as helping me arrive at a place where I could begin to risk the terror of trying somehow to become a mother.

Emily Brontë's poetic line voiced my fore-understanding of how hope could only arrive once I had enough faith to settle and release defending against uncertainty. This emerging sense of settled-ness supported me when the fraught expectancies were acute. I make sense of this experience as being able to face my situation, it was as though the havoc of my despair had not destroyed me and somehow experiencing my pain provisioned me with enough faith to go-on-being (Winnicott, 1956/2018).

Another experience which drew my curiosity toward faith was when, in my first clinical psychotherapy lecture, key parameters of practice were presented. These parameters stated, 'foster and communicate hope' and 'aim to have the client leave the first session with a sense of hope' were emphasised. These points underscored the literature's (particularly the World Health Organization) view that hope is a common healing factor essential to emotional wellbeing (Pedersen et al., 2020). Writing my concerns in the margins voiced my experience of hope's terrifying potential: 'Who on earth am I to offer hope?', 'Doesn't this run roughshod over where the client is, isn't fostering hope prescriptive?'. Reading Pocock's (1995, as cited in Llorens, 2020) cautioning about how the therapist's omniscient tendencies, via scientific discourse, can enter praxis, and the therapist's voice is received as gospel, articulated my concerns. Similarly, my supervisor suggested my notes highlighted my fear of "being instructed to impart a trite certitude which my group in London avoided burdening me with" (Green, 2022, personal communication).

Whilst I understood the ethos of fostering hope or cultivating the capacity for agentic thinking as a way of fostering insight and motivation to change (as Snyder, 2000, puts it), I feared impinging on my client's experience.

These concerns also derived from hope's role as a psychological concept which is quantified to offer tangibility (and accountability), which Snyder (2000) says comprises: 1) having purposeful thoughts, 2) developing strategies to achieve goals, and 3) building motivation to expend effort to meet goals. Combined, these points illustrate how hope offers a tangible model for psychological change.

Furthermore, this hopeful framework provides quantifiability and utility to clients and funding agencies. Although, Cooper (2000) cautions hope's quantifiability risks being used progressively and defensively, because "therapists may have enormous ambition regarding theory of technique which enacts their hopes" (p. xv). Bazzano echoes Cooper, highlighting the risks of neo-positivism, where "friendly facts" (p. 4), like fostering hope, are how ready-made, seemingly objective theories are presented as ways to create conditions for change. Harris (2017) suggests the therapist's and client's focus on hope might act as an alternative to the fear of committing themselves to having faith. She argues this is a central dilemma of psychotherapy, where the therapeutic couple wrestle with "choosing between memory, hope, desire and prudence, which keep the therapeutic couple safeguarded from the alternative of the painful reality of unknown experience" (p. 235).

I understand hope as something we grasp with anxious expectancies of positive outcomes. I also interpret hope as holding the implicit idea that if you are motivated or 'willing', hoping 'produces' a greater sense of wellbeing. My interpretations might also find resonance with Hopkins' (1997) development and articulation of Winnicott's ideas about the capacity to believe in, wherein fostering hope may reinforce the false, compliant self at the expense of the true self (Winnicott, 1990a). Thus, the brightness of goals, and plans that provide a map and security toward wellbeing, might also cognitively suppress doubt. Therefore, I wonder about hope supplanting faith's place like a pīpīwharau². Hope's capacity to usher out doubt is referred to by Renik as the repressed positivistic, where there is a "belief that we can analyse away these feelings" (1995, as cited in Cooper, 2000, p. xii).

My wrestling with hope also resonated with Hesiod's (1988) account of the Greek myth of Pandora's Box, which contained faith and hope. Unable to contain her curiosity, Pandora opened the box where faith – Pistis – fled humanity to hide in the heavens. Trapped, hope

² An endemic migratory bird which is a brood parasite, laying eggs in another's nest.

remained in its varying guises of tormenting or uplifting, leading to my interpretation that perhaps hope is difficult to hold, and faith is hard to find.

As my studies continued, peers evaluated my musings about hope as counter-cultural, citing Wampold (2015) whose research interprets hope as an integral common healing factor. The utility of hope is also reflected in the burgeoning field of the 'science' of hope (Gallagher & Lopez, 2018). I muted my misgivings. I was not anti-hope but concerned about the singularity of hope in the absence of faith.

Reflecting on how my London group helped me to go on, called to mind Winnicott's (1968/2010b) plea, "if only we can wait, the patient arrives at understanding creatively and with immense joy. Now I enjoy this joy more than I enjoyed the sense of having been clever" (p. 219). Their waiting helped me with emotionally and physically trying to become a mother. Bronheim (1994) also describes "an unknown factor in the patient's mind or in the relationship with the analyst" (p. 682), leading me to consider whether reaching a creative understanding, or perhaps a capacity to risk change might be evidence of faith – that 'unknown factor' - in the therapist and client.

This led me finally to exploring faith: where it appears, and how it is perceived and understood with the discipline of psychotherapy, and my research question: "What is the trainee psychotherapist's understanding and experience of small 'f' faith?"

Chapter summary and outline

This chapter has introduced my research topic. It explains how individual experiences of despair sculpted my fore-understandings of faith and hope and how these contributed to the development of my research question. In Chapter 2, I review relevant literature. Chapter 3 presents the methodology and methods I used to explore faith in the literature. Chapter 4 details findings which unfurled and crystallised during conversations with the literature as my engagement with faith expanded. In Chapter 5, I discuss my findings, present strengths, limitations, and areas of future research and suggest implications of my research for psychotherapy.

Chapter 2. Literature review

In this chapter, I review relevant literature which provided doorways into exploring faith and my research question (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010). As my familiarity with the hermeneutic process grew, I visualised this chapter as a foyer of a grand hotel. Foyer also means fireplace or hearth, all images of a welcoming place to - as Smythe and Spence (2012) suggest - “spark thinking” (p. 23) about faith.

Tracing faith

An initial scan of the literature suggested a pattern of faith coming in and out of focus as a topic within psychotherapy since Freud. For example, in 2017, Harris argued talking about faith was a new and integral aspect of praxis and offered the phrase “psychoanalytic faith” (p. 233). More than a decade prior, McWilliams (2004) identified a sense of scarcity around developing the notion in psychotherapy writing, commenting, “there are fewer scholarly opinions around psychoanalytic sensibilities of faith” (p. 95). What was evident in the literature at that time was that faith was important. For example, Charles (2003) proposed “faith may create the possibility of profound growth and transformation” (p. 687) echoing Safran’s (1999) view that faith was “at the heart of the analytic process” (p. 6).

Currently, faith is again topical. For example, Shapira-Berman (2022) argues faith is a given and vital source within psychotherapy, stating, “it is complex because faith is an abstract notion and difficult to scientifically measure or conceptualise” (p. 128). Similarly, Vargas (2019) noted a societal shift where clients sought understanding of numinous, existential-based approaches. However, as publications lag real time, it is difficult to suggest a link between the focus on faith increasing and socio-cultural events such as climate change, Covid-19 and greater news coverage of geo-political instability as conclusively stimulating an increased focus on faith.

Faith’s oscillation in the literature drew my curiosity and I wondered if faith performed a type of background role where, when hope weakens, faith becomes more figural. My wondering grew when I noticed the studies on common factors in psychotherapy did not mention faith, yet the literature I was reading stated faith was crucial.

Sampolahti and Laitila (2020) suggest the notion of faith within psychotherapy is undeveloped because, in the wider mental health community, theory and treatment must be tangible to receive professional credence. Faith is a mass noun, meaning it cannot be ‘fitted into’ or quantified using a behavioural scale (as trust or hope are, as evidenced in the work of Synder et al., 1996).

Whole and parts

Initially, I noticed that, as faith came in and out of focus, it was referred to as a whole, reflective of its nature as a mass noun and described as: a sensibility (Allen, 2021; McWilliams, 2004; Metzler, 1978), being at the heart of praxis (Bion, 1970), and a crucial quality for a therapist and client in facilitating healing (Coltart, 1992/2020; Neri, 2005). Overall, it seems faith is understood as underpinning a therapeutic stance, which Ogden (2019) says is founded on the ontological view that the most fundamental need is becoming oneself.

Faith as innate

Indeed, McWilliams (2004) describes faith as an experience of drawing on or possessing intentional energy, linked to a "natural self-actualising growth process" (p. 96). Neri (2005) echoes McWilliams' view, suggesting "faith is founded on making choices linked to a sense-of-self where one has divested of restricting internal objects and seeks a happier and spontaneous life" (p. 89). Kierkegaard (1990) also conceptualised faith as innate, being "an organic force concerned with a person's quest for identity – to 'become oneself'" (p. 71).

I interpret these writers as linking faith to an underlying philosophical stance that human beings have an innate need toward realising their potential. Furthermore, McWilliams use of the phrase 'self-actualising' echoes Rogers' (1995) belief that we have inherent tendencies to know what we need to fulfil our potential, an innate need that writer George Bernard Shaw (as cited in Henderson, 1911) describes:

I believe my life belongs to the community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. Life is no 'brief candle' to me. It is a splendid torch which I have got hold of for a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it to future generations. (p. 512)

To me, Shaw's quote coalesces with Winnicott's (1956/2018) notion of going-on-being, an innate sense of faith in a person's capacity to reach their potential, which connects with my experience of moving through my doubts to find faith to try to become a mother and enabled me to begin to trust and hope.

Faith as going-on-being

Building on this view of faith as an innate capacity which might provision or enable us to then go-on-being during times of despair, Gellman (2001) suggests a client's faith becomes visible when they become open to the possibility of the future being different from the past. A client remarked in their last session, "Things won't be all easy, but it's different, like I can go it's not freaking me out like before, it's like... like no matter what, I can manage it, it's not great and that's okay."³

My client's developing sense of being open to life's uncertainties recalls Donnel Stern's (1997) idea of an attitude of intentionally lacking expectancy. Stern says this capacity within the therapist opens the therapeutic couple to the possibility of something 'unformulated' and negative or positive arising (p. 236). Stern's notion of unformulated experience surprising the client and therapist complements Stern et al.'s (1998) concept of "moments of meeting" (p. 906). I recognise, too, some correspondence with Bion's view of a client moving toward insight and change via "fleeting experiences of security, a sense of aesthetic harmony gained after a sustained period of patience" (1970, p. 124).

In contrast to the energy of these potent yet 'unexpected, and 'momentary' relational experiences between client and therapist, Bronheim (1994) suggests faith "overlaps with consistent psychoanalytic practice to effect healing" (p. 680), thereby acknowledging the healing power of consistency in working the transference. I suggest this could also be interpreted as a faithful therapeutic stance.

Two decades prior, Meltzer (1978, as cited in Harris, 2017) also advocated for the power of faith as a therapeutic agent, stating, "Faith is not an optional extra in the armoury of the psyche, and [is] essential to truth seeking. The alternative to faith is fiend, to succumb to lies, invented by the ego, the narcissistic infant-self, ending in being a lie" (p. 107). This capacity for faith was accomplished by "overcoming the envy of growth stimulating objects and developing the capacity to think" (Harris, 2017, p. 228).

I link Meltzer's fiendish alternative to faith to Winnicott's (1971) notion of unproductive fantasy, where a client's growth is impeded because they pursue destructive hopes. Charles (2003) says unproductive fantasy involves a client creating "ostensible realities, imagined fulfilment to avoid painful circumstances, keeping a client from striving toward something that

³ Client consent was received to include this quote and all identifying details have been removed as per instruction from AUT ethics advisor.

is real, which facilitates development” (pp. 687–688). Charles argues a client’s unproductive fantasy prevents them seeing the gap, between their desires and their reality.

Meltzer’s and Charles’s positions make faith’s role in healing and insight more specific – suggesting faith aids a client’s capacity to begin to experience the reality of their situation. I wonder if that sense of faith germinates a client’s courage to risk to let go, mourn their protective (albeit obstructive) hopes and perhaps even their terrifying yet familiar internal objects, leading to insight and growth.

More recently, Allen (2021) agrees faith is elusive, blending into the background, yet he believes it is feasible to conceptually understand faith. He suggests faith can be comprehended because it shares the ground of ‘not knowing’ with hope. However, he distinguishes faith from hope, suggesting faith is defined by “its state of not knowing because the outcome is unimaginable” (p. 146), whereas with hope, an imaginable outcome is expected and linked to a positive or desired position.

Despite Allen acknowledging how necessary faith is to psychotherapeutic practice - echoing previous writers - he is, by contrast, tentative in his reasoning for why faith is so crucial. He chooses to caveat his view as offering “food for thoughts” (p. 146). His mixture of confidence and reticence captured the tension within psychotherapy about making faith explicit in practice and delineating it from hope. Equally, his stance may show the difficulties in speaking about an abstract notion.

Coltart (1992/2020) acknowledged that the abstract quality of faith underpins and is fundamental to psychotherapy practice. Coltart says faith aids the psychotherapist with how to balance “not know what we are doing, yet there is always something we more or less know” (p. 3). She tempers her radical statement by suggesting faith is evident in how therapist and client slouch toward insight and growth and that faith in the unknown (or what might be unthinkable for the client) helps therapists to practise psychotherapy.

I interpret Coltart’s view as articulating a sense of faith being embodied along with Eigen’s (1981) description of embracing the unknown of psychotherapy “with all one’s heart, with all one’s soul, and with all one’s might” (p. 431). Here, Coltart’s and Eigen’s embodied descriptions of faith – doggedly and wholeheartedly – suggest faith is an embodied experience. It also suggests a therapist’s faith performs a bonding function that helps hold the unknowingness, the need to be with uncertainty of psychotherapy together as a whole.

Del's (2020) elegant description of being faithful to her client's experience echoes such loyal faith:

Sitting together weekly in the painful presence of what I came to consider her depression – which she managed to describe, and I managed to bear, we eventually managed to name as such. The sessions took on a timeless tranquil quality. Crucially I bore the difficulty and left behind prescriptive ideas about trying to work things out and make conscious connections, surrendering instead to something like reverie to being fundamentally receptive and waiting in patient unknowing. (p. 322)

Del's "timeless tranquil quality ... waiting in patient unknowing" echoes TS Eliot's (1944/2019) line, "for the stillness in the waiting" captures a sense of faith being linked with waiting, and the simplicity of being with another without the need to do something.

Bion and faith

Bion's conceptualisation of faith is central to his theorising. As an attitude, faith was understood by Bion as a way of "actively refraining" (p. 31) from leaping ahead and knowing a client, expressed in his instruction to listen 'without memory or desire' and drawing on Keats' (1817/2002) notion of negative capability to not irritably reach for certainty. Bion saw reaching toward knowing as contaminating a therapist's ability to receive the client's unformulated thoughts faithfully.

Safran (1999) builds on Bion's requirement that to possess a "sufficient openness of mind, a therapist would, like a scientist, be able to perceive the emergence of emotional truth in a session" (p. 5). Similarly, Eigen (2016) sees faith as evidenced in openness and generative of therapeutic humility, where "the terror of not knowing might become a place of curiosity, exploration" (p. 19). He provocatively adds that "because we know little of ourselves, it pays to be open" (p. 20).

Furthermore, Safran (1999) says, while the therapist is never an "empty container cleansed of memory or desire" (p. 7), keeping Bion's concept in mind is a way to provide some protective distance from a client's terror or despair, a way to be with, but not collapse into or join with, the client's terror. I interpret Safran's stance (encouraging the therapist to adopt a faithful distance) is essential to a client's change process, which captures Safran's view that faith "provides the therapist with a way of being faithful to their own experience of despair without needing to defend against the client's feelings of despair" (p. 10). Safran says learning to

notice a client's conscious or unconscious terror, and then await the client's communication of this despair, requires faith and courage, as change can be a slow process or never eventuate.

Similarly, while Symington and Symington (1996) do not explicitly use the word faith, their description of the analyst being "bombarded with intolerable material" (p. 67), and "being able to go on waiting, watching and thinking until meaning will eventually dawn" (p. 105), speaks into the therapist's faithful stance of being with a client, wrestling with often terrifying change. I also identify Klein's (1935) view of the therapist's need to bear the pain and terror of ambivalence as a faithful stance toward uncertainty.

Winnicott and faith

Winnicott's concepts of transitional space (1945), objects and phenomena (1953/2018) and going-on-being (1956/2018) suggest faith is an internal experience. While Winnicott uses the term faith sparingly, Eigen (1981; 1998) and Groake (2010) highlight the role of faith in his theories.

Winnicott (1956/2018) proposes the experience of being or going-on-being is the result of living authentically, fully alive to the pain and joy of life, reflecting a person's sense of continuity. Continuity is understood as where the environment has not impinged to cause a discontinuity in a person's sense-of-self. These impingements can be incremental or, in the case of trauma, significant. Winnicott (1954, as cited in Groake, 2010) described experiences of discontinuity as a "freezing of the failure situation where the underlying sense of continuity is pushed out of awareness on this side of chaos" (p. 402). This leads to the development of the compliant false-self and fear of breakdown, where Winnicott believed we inhabit a state of reacting, and which I interpret as adapting to the needs of a hostile or impinging environment or other. In Winnicott's view, therefore, psychotherapy's task was to return the client to an experience they had already had (e.g., breakdown), after which they could reconnect to a sense of continuity or going-on-being, where life is experienced as vital, alive and authentic.

Winnicott believed that a client waited in unconscious hope for this frozen experience to reoccur to thaw their vitality and restore the energy of going-on-being; therefore, Groake (2010) suggests Winnicott held faith as an "'unconscious assumption' in the context of disaster and hope, where the promise of renewal is combined with the paradox of unthinkable experience" (p. 407). This suggests Winnicott saw faith and hope as complementary, which is a view Eigen (1998) also proposes, where psychoanalytic work was about the client's slow recovery of faith, enabling them to tolerate the anxiety of living.

Chapter summary

This chapter has identified and explored understandings of faith in a range of relevant psychotherapy literature. Overall, the literature conveys faith as a necessary yet enigmatic concept within psychotherapy. In Chapter 3, the methodology and method used to answer my research question is outlined.

Chapter 3. Methodology and method

Which methodology?

This chapter describes hermeneutic interpretative methodology and the method developed to review the literature. Ferrara (1995) says deciding to use a hermeneutic rather than a heuristic methodology is a blurry process as it draws on the researcher as the research 'tool' and explores how subjective experience links to universal experience. A hermeneutic interpretative methodology was chosen because the hermeneutic manner of engaging with texts – the to-and-fro play between text and reader - resonated with the relational rhythm of how my group in London supported me to grow my understanding of my experience. I wanted to explore how reading psychotherapy texts might help me understand how the discipline understood faith.

The hermeneutic methodological approach is premised on interpreting and understanding human experience, and the nature of being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1996). In this chapter I explain how I was mainly guided by Gadamer's hermeneutics, while also drawing on Ricoeur's (1984) approach to balancing the hermeneutics of faith and suspicion and Romanyshyn's (2007) alchemical hermeneutic approaches. I also address how hermeneutics offers a trustworthy and transparent approach to answering my research question.

Hermeneutics

Broadly, hermeneutics is a theory of human understanding, predicated on the process of interpreting language. The etymology offers a doorway into understanding the Greek term; 'herm' describes a boundary point and Hermes is the god of gaps and bridges (Harper, 2020). Hermes traversed the invisible world of the gods and the visible world of humanity "transmuting what is beyond human understanding into a form that human intelligence can grasp. The various forms of the word suggest the process of bringing a thing or situation from unintelligibility to understanding" (Palmer, 1969, p. 13). In this research, I strive like Hermes to traverse the context of the texts I read and my current socio-cultural context.

Interpretative stance

Heidegger (1996) stated how we make sense of our world is an act of being or 'being-in-the-world'. He proposed the concept of 'Dasein', which I interpret as a way of being-in-the-world as a human – where our existence aims toward growth and the underlying assumption that, as beings, we each have a unique destiny to fulfil. I see this as corresponding with the humanistic vision of the self, where we strive to fulfil our potential, as voiced by Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow (1957 and 1968 respectively, as cited in Hansen, 2006). These assumptions are timeless and universal; therefore, exploring through interpreting and understanding the

essence of our being-in-the-world moves us toward our destiny. This also means that, even though I read a text published 50 years ago, an underlying essence relevant to my experience in the here-and-now exists.

A recent example of this was in clinical supervision. While exploring ways Winnicott's theories helped me consider an experience with a client, I reflected on how his theories were part of a tradition shared with not just my peers and supervisor but with psychotherapeutic communities across the world over time. Winnicott's thinking ebbed and flowed between my individual self and being in a wider experience or tradition. 'Dasein' provides a philosophical touchstone, inviting me to be "authentically myself" (Heidegger, 1996, p. 323), including my complexes and unconscious responses, as Romanyshyn (2007) encourages.

Gadamer (2013) further developed hermeneutics, proposing text interpretation is dialogic, between the reader and the text. As a reader, there is a continuous process of reflecting on how my experience relates to my interpretations of texts. What makes hermeneutics valid and ethically sensitive is the "rigour of uninterrupted listening, rather than trying to direct the conversation" (Gadamer, 2013, pp. 383–384). For instance, as I spiralled deeper into a text, it led me to Orange's (2008) text on radical hope. As I had not initially searched for hope, I weighed up whether to follow this tendril. However, Orange's interpretation of Lear's notion of radical hope (2006, as cited in Orange, 2008) recalled my understanding of faith. This nudged me toward a new view of faith and hope as being connected but also able to be distinguished. This text also helped me to wrestle with my concern about conflating faith and hope. Such an insight is an example of how hermeneutics is linked to the practice of *aletheia*, the ongoing process of the "emergence of things from concealment to unconcealment" (Caputo, 1987, as cited in Moules, 2002, pp.3–4).

In this way, a hermeneutic sensibility seeks to broaden understanding of what may have been overlooked and gives voice to "illuminate forgotten dimensions of experience" (Crowther et al., 2017, p. 827), rather than to critique or destroy other traditions. In doing so, hermeneutic interpretation uncovers new meanings, not new facts (Eaton, 1998).

Hermeneutic circle

Heidegger conceptualised the process of interpretation as a circular, to-and-fro process. A hermeneutic focus means that understanding and meaning are dynamic, fluid, and changeable processes (Caputo, 1987); like how in a murmuration of birds, there is rise and fall, concentration then diffusion, as each bird flies together as a flock. Similarly, Dilthey (1957, as cited in Palmer, 1969) spoke of successively encircling texts. I am constantly – like a murmuration – moving in and out, adjusting to my smaller understandings of sentences (like

individual birds). The words shift how I understand what I read and how I engage (as with the shifting flock of birds). This constant, iterative reading and reinterpreting of the text means that there is no final understanding, only a constant re-interpretation (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010). This process speaks to the hermeneutic researcher being open to engaging in the play between concealment and unconcealment as they read a text. Schuster (2013) says it also emphasises needing to be aware of projecting myself into a text to affirm my fore-understanding. With my strong fore-understanding toward hope, Schuster's cautions were a reminder to hold openness or an attitude of hospitality to the range of voices in the texts.

Maddox (1983) notes the hermeneutic circle is critiqued as being closed or vicious, and argues the circle is opened by the ongoing or "radical historical nature of experience because new data is constantly being presented to us" (p. 73). This corresponds to both my experience of slowly expanding my understanding of ways I could become a mother, and how clients often cycle through the same ways of seeing then slowly take a risk, to shift into responding, perceiving new 'data' differently. Rashotte and Jensen (2007) also argue that because Gadamer proposed there are an infinite number of interpretations, all potentially contribute to expanding or enriching a tradition's knowledge. I interpret Gadamer's view of infinite interpretations as trustworthy because it corresponds with there being an infinite number of points on a circle or spiral (Rucker, 2022). Yet, I also hold in mind that not all interpretations are equal. The soundness of interpretations connects to how well interpretations are explained. Sass (1988) suggests an interpretation's soundness is linked to how open the reader is to their biases being challenged, rather than treating a different interpretation as "an interesting self-enclosed exotic artifact" (p. 254) which needs to be refuted or challenged.

Opening to the unconscious

Hermeneutics traditionally focuses on the conscious nature-of-being, but psychotherapy attends to conscious and unconscious process. Therefore, Romanyshyn's (2007) alchemical hermeneutics expands to accommodate the unconscious and my dialogic engagement encompasses "the introspective and imaginal, a move which takes seriously the 'unconscious factor'" (p. 200), which I interpret as an inseparable and ethical aspect of research. In receiving something back from the text, alchemical hermeneutics proposes it is the "thing said in the text back to the researcher [which] calls their horizon into question" (Palmer, 1969, p. 234). Smythe and Spence (2012) perceive the thing as also having the power to surprise the reader, leading to spontaneous insights.

Jung (1935/1976, as cited in Butler, 2013) saw this research stance as a form of “subjective confession” (p. 309), which Gadamer (2013) says facilitates deeper exploration and growth of the researcher’s fore-understandings and, therein, self-knowledge and scholarship. Furthermore, Guggenbulh-Craig (2008, as cited in Butler, 2013) suggests the inclusion of the reader’s unconscious process offers space for academically avoided experiences of vulnerability, envy, shadow, or narcissistic, despondent feelings, which consciously or unconsciously influence the reader’s interpretation. For those reasons, my imaginal or intuitive responses to the texts, reverie, dreams, feelings, and synchronicity, are included in my dialogic conversations with texts. Doing so also provides transparency, which contributes to the trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013) of my study. Additionally, Butler (2013) says incorporating unconscious responses to hermeneutic research evidences a “profound shift” (p. 309) toward Heidegger’s intention that hermeneutics disclose the nature of how I am ‘being-in-the world’.

Method

This section outlines how I developed a hermeneutic approach to reviewing the literature.

Searching

Initially, I followed Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic’s (2010) recommendation to conduct a limited database search to establish an impression of faith’s presence in the psychotherapeutic literature. As a modest exploratory research project, I was mindful of possibly being overwhelmed with texts. Therefore, I limited my database search to PEP database and the AUT library catalogue. Within PEP title and keyword searches of: ‘faith’, ‘trainee’, ‘experience’, and ‘psychotherapy’, less than 200 articles were identified. I used Boolean operators of “and”, “or” and “not” (Coughland & Cronin 2013, p. 58) to combine search terms. However, this did not delineate big ‘F’ from small ‘f’ faith texts.

I tracked my database searches in a journal, which over time also ‘held’ images, drawings, lyrics, poems, and reveries and reflections, which edged into my everyday awareness. My journal was a touchstone, keeping my research question in mind while dwelling in the literature, and illustrates my commitment to dependability and transparency (Creswell, 2013).

I read the first 25 abstracts from PEP searches and followed Bond and Acheson’s (2017)⁴ selection criteria. However, in the located articles faith seemed to be a concept that acted as a compound word, where it contributed some of its meaning and essence to other terms.

⁴ Criteria are: 1. Important – directly relevant; 2. Relevant – useful for background; 3. Borderline –possibly useful depending on findings; 4. Irrelevant – not of use.

This diffuse quality concerned me because being unable to find faith in a structured and traceable manner threatened the transparency and therein the rigour of my research.

Newson et al. (2021) suggests using a search of 'grey' citations and references when the conflation or abstraction of keywords clouds computerised searches; hence, I found articles where faith was discussed but enveloped within broader conceptual discussions. Grey searches highlight the tension between following set database search criteria and letting go of prescriptive adherence to a methodical protocol; Smythe et al. (2008) therefore encourage "grace of synchronicity and engaging with a wide range of literature to call thinking and catch intuitive leaps of thought" (p. 23).

The hermeneutic circling process also requires faith that a supporting structure or resonance in the text will coalesce or crystallise with the reader's subjectivity and vice versa, as identified by Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2014). Gadamer (2013) described this coalescing process as the fusion of horizons where "what is far or alienated in a text can be brought near so it can speak with a new and clearer voice" (p. 83).

Following this method invited my intuition and unconscious to join the search for texts. I gathered poems, songs, images, and conversations, which further encouraged my openness to the infinite possibilities of meanings of texts (Gadamer, 2013). I realised how strong my fore-understandings about hope were and encouraged me to foster greater sense of openness to texts and my searching.

Reading and interpreting

After identifying a range of texts, as I read and re-read them and made notes, I agreed with Moules's (2002) comment that the researcher writes into understanding. Over time these conversations on paper expanded into new questions and new meanings would coalesce, sometimes also bouncing off another text, song or radio interview.

My question felt alive and permeated my world. Meanings rose with the sun or floated into awareness while swimming or washing dishes. Learning to dwell in the texts was a generative and infinite process, as I was not seeking 'an answer,' or a 'definition'. I noticed a tension between my trainee therapist role of having to scaffold my practice with knowing enough to develop a client formulation (a form of knowing) versus a more "post-modern epistemology viewing knowledge as linguistically co-created rather than waiting to be discovered" (Hansen, 2006, p. 295).

This led me to understand the need to find my position as an interpreter of what I was reading. Was I aligned with the hermeneutics of faith, where the meanings I found were understood as

one of many possible meanings or was I following the hermeneutics of suspicion (Ricoeur, 1984) where I was mistrusting of the texts and sought what was formed and hidden? I experienced both while reading texts, and felt I needed to choose one or the other, as though I could stand outside my experience. However, Heidegger (1996) said that was impossible, given our being-in-the-world and that our interpretations are us.

I searched for a way to hold both and found Ricoeur's (1984) hermeneutic arc, a critical hermeneutic which took the form of a spiral. Ricoeur's spiral suggests I grasp the text as a whole and dialogically engage with it (in alignment with Gadamer's hermeneutics of faith), then converse with the text as separate from its author and context, thus approaching it with suspicion or distance. Bell (2011) says this is interpreting what is or is not said on the surface, seeking the latent meaning. I experienced a tension with this process. I felt I was supposed to 'find' a meaning, something hidden, akin to modernist epistemology (Hansen, 2006) where meaning lies waiting like an 'Easter egg' in the texts. Instead, Ricoeur (1984) advised reading the text with a wondering, asking what the text is telling the reader, as opposed to what the text is saying. Schuster (2013) endorses Ricoeur's approach, and cautions how fore-understandings can lead to arbitrary or unsound interpretations, where "I see what I want to see and ignore the texts possibilities" (p. 199).

Being open and sensitive to the texts corresponds with Romanyshyn's (2007) invitation to be hospitable to the work and move toward a willing suspension of disbelief, which perhaps also drew me to the unconscious experience of my research question.

The iterative process of spiralling, developing fresh understanding, explaining my understanding, then sinking again into incomprehension then confusion, was increasingly messy. What sustained me was how the process of acknowledging my finitude scaffolded my training. I did not presume to know my clients - I explain my understandings of them in formulations and hypotheses- so I tempered my confusion by bringing this perspective to reading texts.

However, during a confused moment wrestling with the question, 'Is my understanding arbitrary or not?', I sat on my doorstep to gaze at the Waitākere ranges. As I sat, I had to push aside the tendrils of a *Tecomanthe*⁵; its irregular circling, spiralling, looping tendrils caught my attention. These searching shapes symbolically captured my unsteadiness as old understandings were let go and new understandings unfurled or coalesced into awareness.

⁵ *Akapukaea/Tecomanthe speciosa* is an endemic plant, saved from extinction after the discovery of a single plant in 1946.

Curious about how this plant's growth mirrored my process, I learnt a tendril's growth follows a process of circumnutation, seeking and expanding into space. Circumnutation provided a metaphor for how, as I read and re-read texts, my understanding felt pulled in new directions in contrast to symmetrical hermeneutic diagrams.



Figure 1: Akapukaea/Tecomanthe - circumnutation

How a tendril vigorously reaches then springs back captures my experience of engaging with a text, where I read without knowing when, or if, something would ignite or, as Gestalt theory describes, come into sensation, where “something emerges from an undifferentiated ground and into my awareness” (Clarkson, 2004, p.38).



Figure 2: Circumnutation – Tendril

These organic, irregular spirals signalled the emergence of unconscious thought. There were unguarded moments where something emerged from my unconscious or conscious engagement; moments Romanyshyn (2007) interprets as “acknowledging the third, or the transcendent function between the body of the work and the body of the researcher” (p. 310).

I wondered about this middle space—was the emergence of this space dependent on my faith in letting my responses, and my confusion, emerge? It recalled Hermes role as a liminal god bridging two worlds. Liminality is part of the hermeneutic circle where, as a researcher, I am “on the threshold of structural outsiderhood and inferiority without the protection of my knowledge or understanding” (Levine, 2001, p. 49).

The tension between having a sense of faith but being uncertain how to academically bring it onto the page was unnerving, and re-called being unsure with a client, yet also needing to call upon theory to scaffold my understanding. Turner (1974) refers to this liminality as providing the researcher with the “powers of the weak” (p. 95). This called to mind my experience of settling into not knowing, and how it felt powerful to go forward yet have no idea if or how I would become a mother. I wrote poems, photographs, swam, or added to my ‘faith’ playlist. Combined, these creative acts helped me stay in the liminal space and connect me to what I wanted to communicate when writing stalled. Acting as hermeneutic devices, they bridged my verbal and non-verbal experience, acting like faith buoys, helping me to find the words or sense of what I was trying to express and keeping me afloat, without the protection of knowing.

Initially, I came into conversations with the literature holding a view that faith was an obscured concept in psychotherapy. I realised this view corresponded with my childhood experience of needing to compliantly hide myself. In this way, I perceive my research as an enactment of my desire to be seen or, as Gadamer (2013) says, it “reveals the conscious and unconscious interests at play in my research question” (p. 241).

Sometimes the hermeneutic process felt like I was underwater, and the seabed was disturbed, and visibility was poor. Over time, I realised I needed to stop trying to see and let the water hold me and the sand settle. This imagery has been a talisman during this research, reminding me to settle into my experience, and find my voice. I understand my energetic searching as suggestive of a lack of faith in my research process and my search for evidence to find ‘the’ article, the turnkey that would provide insight. Instead, this experience helped me become accustomed to Caputo’s (1987) radical view that the role of hermeneutics is “not so much to come to grips with it [faith] but to cope with it to stay in play with it” (p. 271).

Chapter summary

This chapter describes the interpretative hermeneutic research paradigm which philosophically structured my engagement with the psychotherapy literature. I explained why I chose this methodology and the methods used to dwelling in the literature. I detailed how an experience of being-in-nature led to an understanding of how the botanical process of circumnutation captured the messy and irregular process of hermeneutically circling and spiralling in the texts. I also reflected on the tension experienced in being open to the texts and the care needed to grow awareness of how I might project myself into them.

Chapter 4. Findings

This chapter presents my gained understandings of facets of faith. I discuss how imagery and embodied responses entered the conversation between the texts' understanding and mine. The chapter's structure follows how my understanding unfurled - circling and spiralling like a tendril through the literature - to offer the reader a window into my hermeneutic journey to understand how these facets of faith crystallised as findings.

Faith is innate

My embodied sense-of-settling (when the group supported me in the past) evoked reverie of slowly descending, settling on the seabed, which intersected with wondering about constancy and the feeling of being-with-another. I reflected on my first experiences of constancy, imagining the foetus's experience of being in-utero, with the constant, rhythm of heartbeat, mother's respiration, temperature, diurnal cycles and the ever-present experience of connection to the placenta and umbilical cord.

I associated the flatness of the placenta with the seabed. Curious about my association it was a surprise to learn the etymology of 'placenta' is from the Greek, denoting a flat surface (Harper, 2020). Following this thread of language, the etymology of 'bed' included the meaning "bottom of a lake, sea, or watercourse" (Harper, 2020). These links between my reverie and language generated a sense of faith within me, and an openness to my imaginal and embodied responses as I dwelled in the literature.

This then led me to wonder if the womb's constancy provisions the foetus with an embodied experience and sense of faith, which re-called Winnicott's (1968/2010b), theories of being and object relating and usage. Winnicott proposed there is a paradox because the baby seems to create the object (the mother or the womb), yet the object was there waiting to be discovered, which Eigen (1981) says Winnicott understood as "the infant living within a faith without radically questioning its basis" (p. 414). The imagery of living within a faith evokes and circles back to Winnicott's (1945) emerging notion of transitional space where the infant "starts to build a capacity to conjure up what is available" (p. 141). This also joins with his view that "being with someone comes before any knowledge that one has the presence or absence of the experience" (Groake, 2010, p. 404).

The combination of 'conjure' and 'living within a faith' and 'being comes before knowledge of the experience' crystallised as a sense the infant might be drawing on something internal and pre-conscious – a time of continuity without impingements - to support their developing sensory experiences of going-on-being. This led me to consider if faith could be interpreted

as an innate experience, something possessed but unrealised, that is out of reach of words but experienced in an embodied way.

This corresponds with Shapira-Berman (2022) who suggests faith as an inborn experience, rooted in oneness and an early experience, describing faith as a “preconception of benign potential” (p. 129).

Therefore, it might not be trust that we unconsciously seek; instead, perhaps we seek a reconnection to an innate sense of faith, from which trust and hope might germinate. Eigen (1981) believed that faith was a founding principle, a germinating factor, for human consciousness. Neri (2005) also speaks to faith being an original attitude, “an igniting and driving force in a manner that trust does not possess” (p. 79).

Phenomena

Frequently, the literature referred to faith as a phenomenon (Coltart, 1992/2020; Neri, 2005). Phenomena are defined as things which are perceived through the senses; can be seen, felt, tasted or, intellectually, as situations which have been observed or perceived (OUP, September 2022). For example, Winnicott (2005) understood faith as a transitional phenomenon – yet I cannot see, feel, or taste faith. The literature seemed to suggest faith was something tangible, yet that view conflicted with a general agreement that faith was abstract.

The idea that faith might be a type of transitional phenomenon (Winnicott, 2005) drew my curiosity. Person et al. (2005) suggest that faith arises in Winnicott's thinking as a phenomenon because the embodied sense gained from the transitional object remains with the infant, and is understood as a faithful sense, which the infant evokes to "soothe and creatively sustain the self" (p. 561).

This view suggests faith is generated via the experience of a transitional object which fosters an internal sense of security. However, if the infant already has an innate sense of faith (as suggested), how is it they are unable to perceive it?

By interpreting how the foetus's experience seemed to be one full of faith and constancy, yet understanding that they are unable to perceive it, led me to consider if faith might be understood as a noumenon rather than a phenomenon.

Noumena

Noumena, as defined by Kant (Kennington, 1985), are distinct from phenomena because they represent things which are of the material world but can only be perceived and known through our unique perceptions of them. For example, an electrical current is of the material world. We feel an iron is hot and we know the iron heats by electricity, yet we cannot see electricity. Therefore, if the infant experiences the womb as faithful and constant, this experience could be understood as noumena. However, because it is pre-conscious and pre-verbal, this noumena experience might be held as an embodied memory.

Following the psychological birth of the infant and its perceptual development, the infant is re-discovering what it has already experienced in-utero. This offers an interpretation as to why expressions of faith are said to be more easily experienced in an embodied sense (Eigen, 1998), or as 'innate'. McWilliams (2004) and Neri (2005) had faith as an innate sense of a person's capacity to reach their potential (as discussed in Chapter 2), as do Bronheim (1994) and Gellman (2001), suggesting faith is an innate facet of being-in-the-world for therapist and client, to facilitate therapeutic interventions.

Numinous

The idea of re-connecting with an 'innate' facet of faith offers some explanation for why texts describe faith as numinous or mystical because the *noumenon* experience of the thing in and of itself is unknowable, yet we mysteriously experience a sense of innateness or internal sense of faith. When we seek an explanation, we find it in a place that is out of reach of words, yet perhaps it resonates with us on an embodied level or in the sense of an implicit, relational knowing (Lyons-Ruth et al., 1998).

As a trainee therapist, writing a dissertation and finding words out of reach presents a limitation and frustration. It also explains why faith is described as a crucial aspect of psychotherapy yet detailing how it is used seems to evaporate, underlining faith's numinous quality. It also highlights a gap in how to communicate or respond to numinous experience as a trainee. Having studied creative expressive therapies elsewhere, it highlights that my current training does not incorporate the arts (movement, poetry, painting, clay, drama) to bridge numinous aspects of being-in-the-world. This leads to another finding that current praxis reflects the sustained, disembodied relationship with feelings and the numinous. Perhaps the demarcations between schools of thought, where ways to express oneself outside language are discrete, contribute to the tension of faith being crucial yet as Lev (2018) says, forced to the margins in psychotherapy.

The German philosopher Otto (1958) defined numinous as a type of phenomenon evoking and arousing a sense of spiritual or mystical awe. Eigen (1998) also understands numinosity as a sense of “mystical charge” (p. 31) which, at times of change, evokes awe and mystery. Eigen argued that, in our everyday lives, moments of insight in therapy can be mystical, numinous experiences, the awe of being with a client where something powerful and beyond words happens, which implicitly strengthens the relationship. These brief glimmers of being-with another fill me with small parcels of awe, and generate faith in me for the practice of psychotherapy as clients seek insight and growth.

Awe

Imagining parcels of awe recalled Stern et al.’s (1998) “moment(s) of meeting” (p. 906) and resonated with Caputo’s (1987) interpretation of Heidegger’s use of the term ‘augenblicklich’. Caputo describes augenblicklich as a momentary glimpse, “in the blink of an eye, a light in the eye of the other leaving us wondering, puzzled, provoked, which opens the outermost surface of our body leading to the ground of the soul its hidden chambers” (p. 272). These types of ‘moments’ with another or a text capture how a relational experience acts as a conduit to awe and the numinous, which produces an embodied sense of transcendence which I interpret as re-connecting us to our embodied experience or memory of the womb. We are then able to re-experience an innate sense of faith, the sense of constancy and continuity of being.

Awe is understood as a self-expansion emotion, connecting with what Eigen (1998) describes as an enlivening experience, which allows us to transcend our self, and connect with others and our world. Chirico and Yaden (2018) suggest the experience of transcendence includes an embodied experience of oneness with another, which is experienced as numinous (p. 227). Furthermore, Monroy and Keltner (2022) report awe activates the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS), which is conducive to activating the downregulation of emotional dysregulation and they suggest may transform one’s sense of self (p. 3).

I suggest the therapeutic experience of ‘moments of meeting’ generate an emotional experience of awe. As awe produces a feeling of transcendence and physically calming response in the PNS, this feeling may act as a psychic umbilical cord back to the womb, opening a pathway for the client and therapist to re-connect to an innate sense of faith.

My attention was drawn to how numinosity is understood as a type of phenomenon, yet the literature, aside from Eigen (1998) and Lev (2018), appear reticent of using the notion of numinous to develop faith. I interpret the difficulties of writing about numinous phenomena like faith as a significant reason for faith being seen as crucial yet rarely mentioned during

training. The difficulty of communicating inexpressible experience in spoken and written language draws attention to how awe might provide us with a non-verbal experience of faith. I interpret awe as returning me to a sense of oneness, echoing my pre-conscious experience of the womb, and occupying the realm of transcendence, an area that Lev (2018) said has been sequestered to the margins of psychotherapy.

Learning where faith fled to offered me a metaphorical explanation for why faith invisibly permeated the literature. This led me to consider how faith might be (like Hermes) an intermediary or like electricity, conducting and conveying energy to facilitate insight and growth within the therapeutic relationship. Is it a way of holding the not-knowing, navigating going-on-being? Here faith keeps us afloat, buoyant through pain as we navigate rough and smooth waters. Faith, like Hermes, connects between two states, or worlds of experience, the known (embodied) but painful and the unknown yet potentially filled with growth.

Repeatedly, I recalled Winnicott's (1968/2010b) notion of the transitional object, which "gives warmth or does something that seems to show it has a vitality of its own" (p. 233). Like a musical earworm, it hummed in my mind, as a sense of seeking something unknown, being invisibly drawn. Returning from taking my son to school, Che Fu's song 'Fade away' (Ness, 2001) and the chorus, 'I would never fade away from you' came on the radio. These lyrics took me to grief for my dead grandfathers, both WWII veterans - I was curious, are they some sort of transitional object? I realise my love for my grandfathers provides me with a faithful sense; and my everlasting memories of them generated faith to go-on-being with this task. Winnicott's (1945) view the infant builds the capacity conjure what is available (p. 141) returned to mind. My grief conjures faith in the form of my much-loved grandfathers. I sense a relationship between grief, mourning and faith; the sense of going-on-being, of continuity, of the capacity to be with despair and go on.

George (2022) suggests that the hermeneutic researcher needs to tend to and bring the thing – in this case, my mourning – to come into presence (pp. 80–81). He talks of how things have the capacity to surprise and interrupt what is familiar, stating, "despite every familiarity we can be surprised by any number of ways in which the thing can thing" (p. 82). In this case, my embodied grief and dwelling in it seemed to connect to finding faith in myself to keep going.

Openness provisions faith

A repeated encounter in the literature was the notion that faith fostered a sense of openness within the therapist and client. Bion's approach to openness was shaped through his interpretation of Keats's (1817/2002) term negative capability. Lo (2018) says negative capability is a poetic stance which Keats defined as "not having a self or bearing a character

which gave him a chameleon-like ability to slip into other points of view” (para 6, lines 11 – 13). Bion’s adaptation of negative capability captured how therapists develop the disciplined technique of suspending memory and desire in each encounter with a client. Bion termed this suspension an ‘act of faith’, which he saw as scientific in approach, not for logical functions of thought but to provide an uncontaminated space for intuition to emerge (Civitarese, 2019). However, drawing on Heidegger’s view that it is impossible to stand outside one’s experience, I interpret negative capability as an unachievable stance. Whilst as a trainee it seems ideal to receive another’s unconscious communications without my subjectivity ‘getting in the way’, I instead interpret openness as not suspending my experience or my sense-of-self, but instead acknowledging their attendance, in the type of openness Del (2020) describes with her client. I interpret this as an act of faith but not with Bion’s ‘scientific’ grounding. Instead, I have faith that if I provide a space or sense of openness and safety, the client will find their experience. This is an understanding which Orange (2011) also ascribes to her view of the hermeneutics of faith, and which Allen (2021) and Coltart (1992/2020) express as the therapist having a faith in the unimaginable.

My interpretation of Bion perhaps foregrounds the difference in time between my context and his, where he strove to develop theory that the truth was ‘out there’ waiting to be received without contamination and be transformed by the therapist’s containing function. For me, training over 50 years later, I find suspending memory and desire a seductive and comprehensible yet impossible stance. I do, however, agree with how Bion understood faith as a space for the therapist to not collapse their listening by falling into knowing; that faith can furnish a therapeutic climate of openness for the therapist to receive the client’s experience, projections or for transference to emerge.

Within this idea of being faithful to the client’s experience in the here-and-now, being able to be with the terror of uncertainty and of how we may both desire relief from this terror, I returned to the literature, reaching the quote:

Steadfastness, that is holding on; patience, that is holding back;
expectancy, that is holding the face up; obedience, that is holding one’s self
in readiness to go or do; listening, that is holding quiet and still so as to
hear. (Gordon, 2020, p. 71)

The phrase “steadfastness that is holding on” lit up as I read it, evoking images of being tied to a mast, riding out the storm, alert to risks, as safely and as steadily as I can, which is an image that I hold on to when a client is in a torrent of despair or enraged affect.

Steadfastness

Within his notion of an 'act of faith', Bion (1970) saw the necessity for the therapist to have a capacity to be open or turn toward the darkness of their client's pain or despair. The peer I told of my miscarriage on the narrow street, her cry of pain, made me feel seen. I experienced her as steadfast because she did not deflect or soothe my pain but was faithful to my experience at that emotionally raw time. Her openness to being with but not pulled into my despair called to mind Winnicott's (1968/2010b) concept of object useage. The subject says to the object: 'I destroyed you', and the object is there to (faithfully) receive the communication. As a result, the subject says: "'Hullo object!' 'I destroyed you.' 'I love you.' 'You have value for me because of your survival of my destruction of you.'" (p. 90). While I as the subject was not consciously trying to destroy her as Winnicott suggests, she was still an object who was not overwhelmed by my despair. My peer's steadfastness resonates with Eigen's (1981) view of the paradoxical nature of faith, which is predicated on the object not retaliating and the subject surviving, 'full enough' of faith.

I interpret object useage requires the therapist to tolerate, persevere or withstand a client's destructive overt or covert intent. I suggest that Winnicott's theory could also be expanded to a client's emotional overwhelm. These qualities crystallise in the quality of being steadfast in the therapy. In the process of surviving these attacks or emotional storms, the client experiences the faithfulness of the therapist which is generated from their sense of steadfastness.

Reflecting on the object, surviving because they have faith, and via their survival provides the subject an experience of faith, I recall how I use imagery and embodied sense that I am a faithful Labrador or steadfast shire-horse to withstand, and persevere in relationship despite a client's destructive attacks or overwhelming despair. These imaginal and embodied states therapeutically materialise as steadfastly receiving and withstanding (versus therapeutic impasse) a client's conscious and/or unconscious destructive intent.

Reflecting on my experiences of being steadfast, I notice how they correspond with episodes in the therapy rather than hallmark the therapeutic relationship in general. Before reaching the word 'steadfast', the idiom 'gird your loins' helped to conceptualise Winnicott's idea of the object not retaliating, meaning "preparing and strengthen yourself for a period of hard labour" (Ayto, 2020). This captures the episodic nature of steadfastness rather than it being a continuous feature of a therapeutic relationship.

Abiding

The weather is always a way to feel there is something happening

And if there isn't

There's always a promise (Coixat, 2019)

As I dwelled in the literature, I saw the film, *It snows in Benidorm*. I was enthralled by the film and these lines. When adrift writing, I watched the film's trailer, and the phrase, 'There's always a promise,' drew my attention back. As an avid cloud-watcher, the phrase called-to-mind how the ever-changing presence of clouds symbolises change is constant yet, beyond this flux, there is always the promise of the sky as an ongoing constant; again, like the sense of constancy and going-on-being(faith), echoing the foetus's constant experience of the womb and the placenta which bond mother and foetus. The imagery of blue-sky enveloping Earth's atmosphere also draws me back to Coltart's (1992/2020) powerful view that faith is the matrix – a something within or from which something else originates, develops, or takes form – for the praxis of psychotherapy. Coltart's psychotherapeutic faith⁶ performs a facilitative function which holds the constantly shifting, unimaginable parts (the unknowingness, the need to be with uncertainty) of psychotherapy together as a whole.

I also experience this duality in Gibran's (2007) phrase, "Doubt is a pain too lonely to know that faith is its twin" (p. 299). Gibran's quote was my constant companion, as I questioned my interpretations. I also associated Gibran's poetic statement with the loneliness, apprehensions and sometimes terror which may accompany a client's therapy journey. As a trainee, being with a client's experience and not rushing to soothe or deny a client's experience echoed my experience of how my study-group was steadfast during the emotionally raw, initial weeks of my loss whilst also quietly alongside me as I found my way out of despair.

These experiences coalesced in reverie, where I am in the sea and feel buoyed, supported as my body moves with the waves and tide, capturing my sense of attendant waiting with a client as they edge closer to insight and change. It also recalls both Safran's (1989) description of "faithful distance" (1989, p. 20) and Eliot's (1944/2019) lines, "but the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting/So the darkness shall be the light and the stillness the dancing" (p. 171). Together, these phrases evoke a sense of the therapist waiting in the stillness, suggesting a facet of faith is to embody a sense of stillness, to be a waiting presence. As I

⁶ It only occurred to me to look up the etymology of matrix after I wrote up my findings, and I was surprised to read matrix is Latin for womb. I interpret this as an example of how the hermeneutic practice brings us back to what we know but each time our knowledge expands, and we comprehend more.

waited in these coalescing wonderings, a sense of being with or alongside the word 'abide' came to mind.

Initially, I associated abide with the hymn, "Abide with me" (Lyte & Monk, 1847) and big F Faith. However, the etymology of abide describes states of "remaining, waiting for, and dwelling" and, in the transitive sense, abide is defined as "enduring, sustaining, stay firm under" (Harper, 2020). These definitions called to mind my London group's enduring and sustaining support over a year, which circled back to an embodied sense of faith as a seabed or enduring supportive underlying presence. This imagery, in turn, coalesces with Del's (2020) description on staying steady and recalls Allen's (2021) description of faith providing a client with confidence when the future is unimaginable. It also resonates with Winnicott's (1990) account of his client saying "the only time they felt hope was when Winnicott said he could see no hope, but the analysis continued" (p. 130).

Initially comparing the etymology of abiding with steadfastness, I was concerned I might be conflating these qualities. I interpret steadfastness as staying firm, committed under an episode of duress, as the group was when I first shared my despair or when during phases in the therapy when a client's anger threatens to derail it. Conversely, I understand abiding in reverie as a sense of ongoing and enduring, an undercurrent that is ever-present, like the sky, seabed, or placenta.

The notion of abiding connects the parts of my experience or a client's experience to a whole or wider experience of how the land and horizon are always present, the parts of our experience are held within a wider whole of nature, which reminded me of my experience of faith as an embodied sense of support. I wondered if this sense of firmness might signal how faith moves from a numinous experience to a phenomenal experience —while faith might be physically realised in the workings of the parasympathetic nervous system.

Faith in the parasympathetic nervous system

Feldman (2006, as cited in Palmieri et al., 2021) states that our physiological signals "synchronise between individuals at rest" and these signals "appear to originate from intra-uterine life between mother and foetus and [continue] to characterise relational events in the entire human lifespan" (p. 1).

Therefore, conditions of rest, or abiding, recall Del's (2020) description of sessions having a "timeless tranquil quality and waiting in patient unknowing" (p. 322). Being in the presence of a calm, constant, bodily regulated other may offer the synchronising potential Feldman has identified or understood as implicit relational knowing (Lyons-Ruth et al., 1998).

Anacker and Berry (2013, as cited in Palmieri et al., 2021) comment that such states (which I would interpret as abiding as a facet of faith) are “generative of oxytocin which mediate social engagement dynamics by facilitating the trust and cooperation needed to adjust to new relationships and groups” (p. 2).

The faithfulness of the therapist extends to the embodiment of faith in the frame and space of therapy, found in the regularity of time, sameness of location and temperature being reliably reproduced each session to offer. spatial and visual continuity and constancy. These simple measures create a nascent atmosphere comparative to that of the womb, where both environments coalesce around faith and going-on-being.

Faith is facilitative

Coltart’s (1992/2020) matrix of faith underpinning psychotherapy praxis suggests to me that faith encircles or infuses the therapist’s capacity to be with the unknown, while a client struggles to form a relationship with terrifying certainty of the uncertainty of life. Therefore, faith can be position or a sensibility. On the other hand, Allen (2021) proposes faith is confidence in the unimaginable, which Shapira-Berman (2022) builds on, stating faith “connects the therapist to their immediate experience by accounting for the possibility a client’s experience holds within it some unknown potential possibilities” (p. 135). Perhaps the therapist’s faith is the mechanism of possibility and facilitates the capacity to move (to risk or to have courage, maybe?) from resisting fear to a growing capacity to be with fear. It also calls to mind Caputo’s (1987) description of how radical hermeneutics requires one to construe a particular way we can find to “remain open to the mystery and venture out into the flux” (p. 271).

Trauma therapist Judith Herman (1992) describes how trauma “shatters the construction of the self in relation to others and violates the client’s faith in natural order” (p. 51). The ‘natural order’ links to the sense of order or constancy that seems beyond words, which develops our sense of faith via our in-utero experience. Therefore, faith could facilitate a reconnection not just to a sense of safety in the world (as Herman says is found in basic trust), but to safety as represented in the experience of going-on-being that is found in the foetus’s in-utero experience of faith.

Therefore, in being with one’s fear, or becoming faithful to one’s experience, this may germinate trust, as Allen speculated (2021), or even - I suggest - hope. This allows faith to be a conduit for the generation of trust and hope. The idea that faith might be the ground from which trust and hope germinate is also proposed by Neri (2005) and Eigen (1998). I also return to Eliot’s (1944/2019) lines, “I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope/ For hope would

be hope for the wrong thing; there/ is yet faith". Eliot is not negating hope, but faith might precede and provide the conditions for hope.

This hypothesis recalls Hopkins' (1997) synthesis and development of Winnicott's (2010a) idea that the 'capacity to believe' links to the ability to hold belief, and it is only from this position that we are then able to develop the 'capacity to believe in'. The capacity to 'believe in' is being able to set out an expectancy of something occurring, which I interpret as linking to how hope is to expect a particular outcome. I interpret Hopkins as suggesting Winnicott was proposing that "the 'capacity to believe' precedes being able to believe in" (p. 491), viewing the capacity for belief as linked to the capacity for faith, a confidence in the future without an expectation of outcome.

Outside psychotherapy literature but relevant, Martin Luther King's famous phrase of "taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase" (Edelman-Wright, 1988, p. 74) also locates faith as a place to begin. King's statement evokes memories of my children taking their first steps, teetering on the edge of uncertainty, a combination of innate urge and awe at finding one's feet heralding the germination of trust, and the surge of agency and expectation.

Perhaps these first steps are reflected in the risk a client takes stepping out away from the safety of their introjected objects, toward a new footing heralding a change in their experience of self-and-others. The infant does not know what will occur at each new step; similarly, for clients, this is an intrapsychic action, and only as each new psychic step is taken does the next one become clear. To my mind, trust builds incrementally, and I propose that faith (as an innate, yet dormant, capacity) facilitates and offers the grounds and conditions for trust and hope. This idea returns me to how faith is facilitative, acting as the ballast, a stabilising counterweight to the tiller of trust and the hopes that fill the sails of both therapist and client.

Furthermore, the idea of first steps and not knowing but faithfully (or perhaps riskfully), moving into change and uncertainty, contrasts with my understanding of hope as a psychological concept focused on developing self-agency via the certitude of setting out of a pathway and defining expectancies and goals and treatment plans (as Snyder & Taylor, 2000, advocated).

Being in the flux, staying open, evoked of the silence of a seed in the soil suspended in patience, awaiting germination and how faith is facilitative recalled my client's comment about how even though not knowing was "freaking them out" they could also manage not knowing.

Chapter summary

This chapter introduced and discussed how the discipline of psychotherapy might understand faith as having several facets. These facets centre on faith being an innate experience and extend outwards to also understanding faith as informing how the therapist strives to be faithful to the client via parts of faith as openness, steadfastness and abiding. Then faith as a whole was found to be a facilitative force which supports client and therapist's ability or capacity to be with uncertainties or anxiety which accompanies emotional insight and growth.

Chapter 5. Concluding discussion

Summary of findings

My hermeneutic journey led to understandings of faith as multi-faceted. The journey began with the proposal that the experience of faith may be understood as innate. This interpretation unfurled to exploring how faith might be understood as numina rather than phenomena. Then my findings coalesced with how experiences of awe, which generate a transcendent and embodied experience of oneself and another, are potentially experienced in Stern et al.'s (1998) 'moments of meeting' between client and therapist. I suggest these moments reconnect with our innate pre-conscious experience of faith, and this experience connects to the PNS and is generative of faith between therapist and client, which when combined may generate openness to emotional insight and change and a sense of going-on-being.

Then the findings move into the world of the other, focussing on how faith might be realised in therapeutic qualities of openness, steadfastness, and abiding. These facets come together to realise faith as a facilitative force in the therapeutic relationship. Faith is like Hermes, moving in-between the therapist and client, and may perform a facilitating role in fostering healing and growth, reconnecting the client to their innate sense of faith in going-on-being, from which they are then able to move toward developing a sense of trust and holding the terror and joy of hope.

Discussion

At the start of this research journey, my quest(ion) was to explore the meanings of faith as a trainee. I initially held faith in mind as the skills of negative capability to allow 'acts of faith' to occur and provision me with intuitive receptivity to a client's unformulated thoughts. Adhering to paradigms of practice as a trainee let me have faith in the therapeutic relationship being a place of insight and emotional growth.

Then, as I dwelled in the literature, I came to understand faith like varying states of water. In some texts, such as Orange's (2008) the term faith was briefly used but not elaborated, faith was misty, and hope seemed to step in to evaporate faith's presence. In others, faith was more traceable as water, which I could cup in my hands, as in Winnicott's, Eigen's or Coltart's texts. Or it was like ice, as in Bion's models of 'acts of faith', requiring the therapist to cognitively discipline their desire to know.

Now, I perceive faith in its varying states as weaving throughout psychotherapy thought and praxis, reflecting its identity as a numinous aspect of psychological phenomena, rather than,

for example, its intangibility because of Freud's desire for empirical validity. Nonetheless, faith's chameleonic quality means grasping it is a challenge and can lead to faith being conflated with other notions such as trust and hope.

Developing these exploratory understandings of faith, I appreciated Smythe and Spence's (2012) description of hermeneutics as a messy process. It also explains why my gaze was drawn to the Akapukaea/Tecomanthe's irregular spiralling because these shapes captured my struggle to understand how the literature held faith in a variety of states simultaneously. This experience also highlights how, in my efforts to write this dissertation, I repeatedly used nature metaphors to communicate faith; the ebbing and flowing of tides, the horizon, the sky and water provided me with a sense of faith as they symbolised reliability, constancy and going-on-being but also faith's shifting, hard-to-define nature. This connection between faith and nature also signposts future research as I wonder if, within nature, we might find ways to connect to an innate sense of faith through the constancy of the cycles of the natural world. Perhaps time in nature is not only grounding and calming for our PNS but also numinously and unconsciously connects us to a sense of constancy, reliability and going-on-being which defines faith.

Historicity

Several key concepts, such as Winnicott's (1953) transitional objects and phenomena, were developed 50 years ago. Finding relevance in these texts across time supports Gadamer's (2013) view that the essence of texts may indicate "a higher level of universality, and timelessness that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other" (p. 305).

At times I wrestled with distinguishing whether my interpretations reflected this timeless universality or were the result of projecting myself into the texts (Schuster, 2013). This flux was compounded by how Winnicott's and Bion's writing can be elusive to interpret (Eigen, 1981; Ogden, 2019). However, over time, I developed faith that as I dwelled with the texts the conversations would organically emerge. This returned me to the sense of abiding with a client and the sense of faith in the process of being-with-another.

I also understood the ineffable aspect of Winnicott's writing also illustrates historicity, because concealed meanings in the texts might become more visible as Winnicott's horizon and mine coalesced or "mix with a larger movement of transmission of a tradition over time" (George, 2022, p. 305).

Where faith has taken me

Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2010) suggest exiting the hermeneutic circle when new texts offer diminishing returns to understanding. I contest this view because writing this sentence sparked a wondering about the contrast between words 'capability' and 'capacity', illustrating the hermeneutic process is ever-present and never-ending. However, I am exiting this research task, holding an expanded understanding of holding faith and hope together, rather as separated from each other as they are in Pandora's myth (and my understanding when I began this journey) . My exploration has helped me to take back my projections from hope and lessened my trepidation about the risk of hope being an impingement. I believe this shows how in the perhaps alchemical process of hermetically dwelling in texts I have as Gadamer (2013) says "been transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were "(p. 314).

Now I also understand faith as wider than the cognitive development of the negative capability to be with uncertainty. By being hospitable to the paths of reverie and embodied memory I feel I re-connected to an innate yet cognitively forgotten experience of faith. This research also helped me to understand my experience of how I found faith and hope to become a mother despite the uncertainties. Therefore, reflecting on faith now, I am open to faith being an experience that is embodied and enlivening and helps therapist and client take the first step to risk change.

Laverty (2003) suggests the adequacy of research is offered by seeing the research as a statement of the experience itself. Hermeneutically dwelling requires faith, and in this way I have been researching the notion as I have been in the notion. This process also paralleled my experience of being with clients.

As with a client, this process consistently invited me to review my understanding, which fed my imagination. The poems of T.S. Eliot and Emily Brontë anchored me, capturing the essence of my experience of faith and my expanding understanding and openness toward hope, until I could exit, and agree with McNiff's (2004) quote, "The simpler the deeper, don't try to do too many things" (p. 235).

Strengths

A strength of this study has been the moments of vision or augenblicklich, which are generated in the hermeneutic process. For example, typing the word 'healing' led to a cascade of thoughts, which led me to Wampold's (2015) work on common healing factors in psychotherapy (see also Finsrud et al., 2022). I did not imagine exploring faith would lead me to this area of the literature, yet I argue a strength of this research is in identifying this potential gap in understanding how faith might join hope as a common factor. I feel this points to greater strengths. Firstly, the inclusive power of hermeneutic research provides a way to research and understand notions which are numinous. Secondly, hermeneutic interpretative methodology provides a way to find our own thoughts and to re-visit, remind the discipline of its relationship with faith (Smythe & Spence, 2012).

Personally, I found strength in how alchemical hermeneutics (Romanyshyn, 2007) supports researchers to access and use their imaginal responses. Without the methodological permission to play with imagery and bring in my complexes, I would not have come to the finding of faith as innate. I have included in this dissertation a small amount of my imaginal responses. I also created a playlist, took photographs, wrote poems, and swam. These activities were also part of the to-and-fro process of questioning, playing, and dwelling with the texts and nourished my research. This immersion also benefited my clinical development particularly being able to bring the imaginal into supervision to express numinous moments (the misty experiences that do not conform to grammar and text), not yet ready to be verbalised.

Limitations

Hermeneutic interpretative methodology is underpinned by being open to texts, and the continuous expansion of the discipline's knowledge over time. However, as Schuster (2013) cautions, the quality of findings can vary; potentially made unsound by reporting what I want to see and not all textual possibilities. This speaks to the paradox of hermeneutic research where not all interpretations are equal. To manage the risk of arbitrary findings I endeavoured to explain my interpretations to offer transparency and coherence to the reader.

Another challenge to the study's rigour and trustworthiness was the threat of conflating faith and hope, and how there are myriad definitions of each, different to this research. However, I argue this also highlights the strength and modesty of hermeneutics, as it presents research as unique and personal to the researcher, while inviting (and sometimes provoking) the reader to develop their understanding of the texts and the question.

In hindsight, searching beyond the PEP database for psychodynamic texts to include existential and transpersonal texts, may have enriched the review. I also learnt faith was more widespread than initially understood, particularly as faith was enveloped in texts that explored hope, illustrating the slippery, conflating nature of the terms. Therefore, what began with a concern faith would be hard to find ended with an understanding of how widespread faith is in the literature; therefore, maybe my narrow search limit was appropriate for this level of study.

Implications for psychotherapy and future research

My findings are a unique and personally meaningful response to the selected literature. Unlike quantitative research, these findings are not replicable. However, I have endeavoured to be transparent in my review method so the findings can be evaluated by the reader. The implications of my findings are a modest contribution to the discipline of psychotherapy. I invite the reader to use this review as a place to expand the conversation about small 'f' faith as a notion of relevance to psychotherapy, or as Symthe and Spence (2012) suggest, a hermeneutic literature review seeks to provoke and expand thinking about small 'f' faith's relevance to psychotherapy.

As my understandings of faith crystallised, they resonated with Hopkins (1997) synthesis of Winnicott's (1968/2010a) notion of the capacity to believe. It was as though Winnicott had begun to bring - faith and hope - together. I was surprised I had not found this article earlier, and note his other notion – 'capacity for concern' (Winnicott, 1963) - is more prevalent. Here again I encountered the notion of faith's presence being overlooked or obscured. Faith is invisibly woven within Winnicott's writings, such that he writes about belief rather than faith, yet I interpret he is speaking to faith. Further exploration of Winnicott's writings, particularly the capacity to believe, may expand psychotherapy's engagement with the notion of faith and the relationship between faith and hope.

Another implication is how the facets of faith, might as a whole, provide generative conditions for the development of trust and hope. Developing an understanding of how these three might form a whole, much like the relationship between a sailboat's ballast, tiller and sail, where all are needed to navigate the ocean, may offer a way to integrate transcendent and relational schools of thought within the wider discipline of psychotherapy.

An expanded understanding of faith might help therapists working with trauma, where trust and hope are conceived as powerful and necessary elements of treatment but are often hard to foster. An area of further research might explore how the development of faith, could support the fragile process of developing trust and hope with traumatised clients.

Gadamer (2013) says texts are understood as sites of meaning which reveal and conceal the author's interests. Brontë's and Eliot's poems became key orientating texts, and their potency led me to wonder why the arts or creative expressive therapies were absent from psychotherapy training. Whilst I agree with Coltart's (1992/2020) view that training needs to be structured and grounded in theory, she also attested that the praxis of psychotherapy is founded on the matrix of faith. A wider engagement with creative expressive therapies might offer clients and therapists a greater therapeutic vocabulary and a way to be with the numinous experiences of the self, including faith.

I now understand numina, faith, and the connections between the transcendent experience of awe and the PNS are powerful facets in developing insight and growth. Yet, none of these notions, even in informal discussion, were included in my training, echoing Lev's (2018) comment that the numinous aspects of psychotherapy are marginalised. Reflecting on the discipline's relational turn and noting Vargas's (2019) reflection that his clients desire to explore the numinal aspects of their experience, simply exploring the numinal (and the neuro-psychotherapeutic) may at the very least introduce trainees to transpersonal and neuro-psychotherapeutic schools of psychotherapy. It might also grow trainee's capacity to be- with the intangible and the unimaginable.

Conclusion

Ending this hermeneutic journey of circling and spiralling (with its moving centre of gravity), I am not exiting the hermeneutic endeavour as my wonderings continue to expand like the Tecomanthe's tendrils. I notice I want more time to understand, which recalls how my findings might also be understood as communicating that to have faith, and to foster faith, needs time. This reflection lights up my understanding, it is an augenblicklich moment, a surprise, I feel pulled to dwell in time. Typing this, a settling feeling emerges, like my experience of being with the group and reaching a place of going-on-being, and I experience this as a sense of faith that time will allow me time to explore it. The practice of hermeneutics has deepened my understanding of being with the unimaginable, which is part of being-in-the-world. Now my expanded understanding of faith helps me settle into living with the reliability of uncertainty.

The sea has been a constant presence during my research journey, so it feels appropriate to end this voyage with a quote from Nietzsche (2001). His phrase resonates with my expanded clearer and brighter understanding of faith as a crucial companion to hope, and facilitates venturing into the flux and risk finding new ways of experiencing ourselves and others, and in doing so expand our sense of being-in-the-world.

The meaning of our cheerfulness: Indeed, we philosophers and “free spirits” feel, when we hear the news that “the old god is dead” (maybe the things we feared and yearned for in terror, our trauma, grief, disappointments) as if a new dawn shone on us; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation. At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, our sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an “open sea”. (p. 280)

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