



The Mind's Eye: Image and Memory in Writing about Trauma

Marian Mesrobian MacCurdy

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In the post-September 11 world, therapeutic writing has become a topic of heightened interest in both academic circles and the popular press, reflecting a growing awareness that writing can have a beneficial effect on the emotional and cognitive lives of survivors of traumatic experiences. Yet teachers and others who encounter such writing often are unsure how to deal with it. In *The Mind's Eye: Image and Memory in Writing about Trauma*, Marian Mesrobian MacCurdy investigates the relationship between writing and trauma, examines how we process difficult experiences and how writing can help us to integrate them, and provides a pedagogy to deal with the difficult life stories that often surface in the classroom.

MacCurdy begins by discussing what trauma is, how traumatic memories are stored and accessed, and how writing affects them. She then focuses on the processes involved in translating traumatic images into narrative form, showing how the same patterns and problems emerge whether the writers are students or professionals. Using examples drawn from the classroom, MacCurdy investigates the beneficial effects of the study of trauma on communities as well as individuals, witnesses as well as writers, and explores the implications of these relationships for the world at large, particularly as they pertain to issues of justice, retribution, and forgiveness.

Throughout the volume the author draws on her own experience as teacher, writer, survivor, and descendant of survivors to explain how one can engage student work on difficult subjects without appropriating the texts or getting lost in the emotions generated by them. She further shows how appropriate safeguards can be put in place to protect both teacher and student writer. The end result of such a pedagogy, MacCurdy demonstrates, is not simply better writers but more integrated people, capable of converting their own losses and griefs into compassion for others.

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