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## When Words Become Medicine: Understanding Healing in Pierre Alex Jeanty's *Heal, Grow, and Love*

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**Abstract:** This paper explores poetry as a literary mode that transcends aesthetics to function as a medium of restoration, resilience, and renewal. Poetry has historically served therapeutic and communal purposes, from ancient Greek catharsis and Indian devotional verse to indigenous chants and Sufi mysticism, all of which recognize language as a form of medicine. In contemporary contexts shaped by trauma, alienation, and ecological crisis, poetry continues to provide an affective space for processing suffering, affirming identity, and cultivating connection. Drawing upon Pierre Alex Jeanty's *Heal, Grow, and Love*, the study examines how poetry facilitates personal healing by enabling reflection, emotional articulation, and self-acceptance, while simultaneously engaging broader questions of communal and spiritual restoration. By situating Jeanty's work within both historical traditions and modern practices of bibliotherapy, the paper demonstrates that healing poetry occupies a vital role in literature: it articulates pain, transforms wounds into language, and fosters possibilities for growth and wholeness. Ultimately, this inquiry affirms that poetry must be understood not only as art but as a restorative force necessary for individuals and communities navigating fractured realities.

**Keywords:** Healing, Resilience, Renewal, Reflection, Acceptance

Poetry has long been associated with beauty, imagination, and the refinement of language, yet beyond its aesthetic dimensions, it carries a profound capacity for healing. Healing poetry may be understood as a form of writing that serves therapeutic, cathartic, and restorative purposes, offering individuals and communities a means of confronting pain, processing trauma, and moving toward renewal. Unlike ordinary discourse, poetry relies on rhythm, imagery, and metaphor to articulate the unspeakable, to externalize what remains repressed, and to create an affective space where wounds of the psyche, spirit, and body can be acknowledged and transformed. The act of writing or reading a poem thus becomes not only an artistic endeavor but also a mode of self-care and communal restoration. Thus, one can say that "Poetry is an act of memory, an insistence that the individual and collective wounds of life be given language, and thus recognized and transformed" (Heaney 19).

The idea of poetry as medicine is deeply rooted in human history. In ancient Greece, Aristotle conceptualized tragedy as a vehicle for catharsis, the purgation of emotions such as pity and fear through art. Greek drama, performed before large audiences, functioned less as entertainment and more as ritual, enacting collective healing through a shared confrontation with suffering. In India, Ayurveda recognized the therapeutic role of sound and verse, with mantras and poetic chants believed to align the mind and body with cosmic balance. Native American traditions similarly employed chant and narrative poetry in healing ceremonies, emphasizing harmony between the individual, community, and natural world. In the Sufi tradition, poets such

as Rumi and Hafiz used lyrical verse as spiritual medicine, guiding readers toward divine union and offering solace in the midst of worldly suffering. These diverse traditions reveal that poetry's curative function is not incidental but intrinsic, embedded in practices where art, ritual, and medicine were inseparable. Thus, "Healing poetry mediates the unspoken by providing metaphors that translate interior suffering into relational and imaginative spaces of renewal" (Marcus 112). In modern contexts, the relevance of healing poetry has intensified in response to the alienation and crises of contemporary life. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been marked by wars, genocides, forced migrations, ecological degradation, pandemics, and systemic inequalities. At the personal level, struggles with depression, anxiety, grief, and fractured identities demand new forms of articulation that medical discourse alone cannot adequately provide. Poetry has become a vital medium for such expression, offering language to those who seek to process trauma and restore a sense of wholeness. Confessional poets like Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton exemplify this role, transforming their anguish into verse that resonates with readers experiencing similar struggles. Kamala Das's fearless explorations of gender, sexuality, and the female psyche similarly demonstrate how personal wounds can be voiced and partially mended through poetic expression. Beyond individual catharsis, poetry plays a significant role in collective healing. In times of war or cultural oppression, it functions as a communal language of mourning and resilience. Wilfred Owen's depictions of trench warfare, Paul Celan's haunting post-holocaust verses, and the spoken

word traditions of African American poets illustrate how poetry has borne witness to suffering while simultaneously affirming survival and solidarity. More recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, poetry circulated widely on digital platforms, offering comfort and connection in isolation. Such examples reveal how poetry not only consoles but also mobilizes, enabling communities to remember, resist, and endure.

Another vital dimension of healing poetry is its engagement with the environment. In an era of ecological crisis, poets turn to verse to address ecological grief and to re-imagine humanity's relationship with the natural world. Eco-poetry emphasizes interconnectedness and mindfulness, fostering awareness of the earth as a living entity. The works of Mary Oliver, with their attentive observation of landscapes and creatures, and Joy Harjo, who integrates indigenous traditions that affirm harmony with the earth, remind us that healing the self is inseparable from healing the planet. By situating human suffering within broader ecological contexts, eco-poetry offers solace and inspires ecological consciousness, contributing to resilience in the face of environmental loss. Equally significant is poetry's role in spiritual healing. Across cultures, mystical traditions have turned to verse as a path toward transcendence, mindfulness, and inner peace. Rumi and Hafiz, for example, continue to inspire global audiences with poetry that affirms the soul's longing for divine connection. The Bhakti poets of India similarly employed devotional verse as spiritual medicine, cultivating intimacy with the divine and providing relief from worldly anxieties. In contemporary practices of mindfulness and meditation, poetry functions as a reflective tool, where rhythm and metaphor invite stillness and contemplation. Such works illustrate that poetry can offer not only consolation but also a sense of higher purpose, guiding readers toward wholeness, "Narratives that focus on growth, reflection, and restoration can facilitate resilience and emotional integration in the aftermath of adversity" (Emmons 74).

Taken together, the dimensions such as personal, collective, environmental, and spiritual illustrate the multifaceted nature of healing poetry. It draws upon ancient traditions while addressing the urgent crises of modernity, enabling both individuals and communities to navigate trauma, loss, and uncertainty. Whether it names private suffering, bears witness to historical catastrophe, restores bonds with the natural world, or points toward transcendence, poetry affirms the enduring belief that words hold the power to heal.

Pierre Alex Jeanty's *Heal, Grow, Love* has been selected as the primary text for this study because it exemplifies the transformative potential of healing poetry in contemporary contexts. A Haitian-American poet, writer, and entrepreneur, Jeanty has emerged as a distinctive voice in contemporary

literature, particularly for his exploration of themes such as love, healing, and personal growth. Born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and later relocating to the United States, his literary journey was shaped by experiences of personal loss and his community's search for guidance in navigating emotional struggles. Rising to prominence with *Unspoken Feelings of a Gentleman* and later with the internationally acclaimed *HER* series, Jeanty established himself as a poet who bridges the intimate and the universal, making his work resonate with a diverse readership across cultures and genders. His founding of Jeanius Publishing LLC further highlights his commitment to democratizing literature, expanding the reach of poetry beyond traditional establishments through digital and grassroots platforms. In *Heal, Grow, Love*, the writer offers a carefully curated blend of poetry and prose that guides readers through self-reflection, emotional recovery, and the reclamation of love after trauma. The collection embodies the therapeutic dimensions of literature by providing language for pain, pathways toward resilience, and affirmation of self-worth, making it an apt case study of poetry as both a personal and communal resource for healing. His poetry not only articulates individual restoration but also fosters collective hope, affirming poetry's enduring role as a vital force of renewal in times of fractured realities.

"The journey of healing/ is choosing to play the hands you've been dealt /while changing which table it is played on." (Jeanty 4)

The metaphor of the 'hands' foregrounds the inevitability of trauma and loss, underscoring that the past cannot be erased but must instead be confronted. Healing poetry, in this context, becomes a vehicle for articulating unspoken suffering, initiating catharsis and releasing emotional weight. The subsequent image of 'changing the table' extends beyond endurance, suggesting the reconfiguration of painful experiences within new interpretive frameworks that encourage resilience and renewal. Rather than erasing wounds, such reframing highlights the restorative capacity of poetry to transform narratives of pain into sources of agency and growth. The poet offers not only recognition of inner struggles but also imaginative strategies for redefinition, sustaining both personal recovery and collective hope.

You've been an un-watered rose for too long.

Your thorns have been all that can be seen for too long.

It's time for your beauty to bloom again.

Not even for them, but for you. (Jeanty 6)

The metaphor of the 'un-watered rose' conveys neglect, emotional deprivation, and the inertia of unresolved grief, while the emphasis on 'thorns' marks the defensive postures developed to endure prolonged suffering. Yet, the insistence on the rose's ability to 'bloom again' affirms the possibility of revival, positioning healing as an intentional process of renewal rather

than passive survival. The shift in the final line, blooming “not even for them, but for you,”(6) privileges self-affirmation as central to recovery, redirecting the locus of healing from external validation to the reclamation of agency and inner worth. Here, metaphor operates as a transformative medium, enabling readers to recognize their wounds while simultaneously envisioning their transformation. Jeanty’s verse thus gestures toward self-directed growth, where acknowledgment of pain becomes inseparable from the imagination of renewal.

Hardened hearts only become anchors that keep  
beautiful souls from sailing.

Don’t miss the beauty of sunrises and sunsets  
because you almost drowned. (Jeanty 9)

Through maritime imagery, the poet illustrates the psychological weights that obstruct healing. The ‘hardened heart’ signifies rigidity cultivated in response to suffering, while the ‘anchor’ reveals how protective mechanisms, though once adaptive, ultimately immobilize the spirit. Recovery, in this view, requires the deliberate release of such burdens to restore openness and movement. The transition from the threat of drowning to the vision of ‘sunrises and sunsets’ capture the therapeutic shift from immersion in trauma to the rediscovery of life’s rhythms and beauty. By urging readers not to forfeit renewal because of past devastation, Jeanty reframes survival as an invitation to embrace possibility rather than remain bound to loss. His imagery affirms healing as a conscious reorientation toward life, where recovery entails both release and receptivity.

You’re alive.  
You’re breathing.  
You’re here.

Are you living? (Jeanty 11)

The repetition of affirmations ‘alive’, ‘breathing’, ‘here’, anchors the subject in undeniable presence, yet the concluding question interrupts this rhythm, exposing the gap between mere endurance and meaningful inhabitation of life. From a healing perspective, this movement highlights the necessity of moving beyond survival toward intentional engagement with one’s own renewal. The lines insist that restoration is not measured by physical continuation alone but by the capacity to inhabit life with awareness, purpose, and openness. By confronting the difference between being and living, the poet reframes healing as reclamation of vitality, urging readers to transform survival into an active practice of presence and growth.

Healing is when you smile  
Doesn’t hide anything  
But shows what has been  
hidden inside you. (Jeanty 17)

Here, healing is articulated as authenticity and emotional disclosure. The image of a ‘smile’ that no longer conceals but

reveals signifies the transition from repression to openness. In this formulation, recovery entails dismantling the protective masks constructed to obscure pain, allowing the self to emerge without distortion. The act of smiling becomes emblematic of integration, where hidden wounds are neither erased nor denied but acknowledged as part of one’s lived reality. Healing, therefore, is framed as the capacity to inhabit one’s inner truth visibly and unapologetically, transforming vulnerability into a mode of strength. Jeanty’s verse thus positions restoration not as concealment of suffering but as the recovery of wholeness through honest self-expression.

“You need you,/whether they want you or not/You need to want you.” (Jeanty 21)

The poet foregrounds self-recognition and self-affirmation as foundational to healing. The lines emphasize that recovery does not depend on external validation or the acceptance of others; rather, it requires an active investment in one’s own worth. The repetition of ‘need’ underscores the urgency of self-care and the ethical imperative of attending to one’s own emotional and psychological needs. From a healing perspective, the verse asserts that true restoration arises when individuals cultivate an intrinsic sense of value, embracing themselves fully and unconditionally. By centering the subject’s responsibility to ‘want’ them, Jeanty reframes resilience as an inward practice, highlighting that empowerment and renewal originate in self-acknowledgment rather than reliance on external affirmation. Jeanty states, “The fortunate truth will always be that when a soul is in need of healing, it will always find itself at the feet of growth, for it knows that without shedding, love cannot come in and hurt doesn’t just walk itself out voluntarily.”

In conclusion, Jeanty’s poetry conceptualizes healing as a complex, dynamic process encompassing recognition, release, renewal, and self-affirmation. Through the strategic deployment of metaphors, spanning chance, nature, the sea, breath, expression, and self-worth, his verse illustrates that recovery extends beyond the mere alleviation of suffering to encompass the deliberate cultivation of vitality, authenticity, and agency. By foregrounding both the acknowledgment of past trauma and the imaginative reconstruction of experience, Jeanty frames healing as an inward, self-directed endeavor that simultaneously engages with broader human capacities for resilience. His work underscores that genuine restoration arises not from avoidance or external validation, but through the conscious embrace of one’s inner reality, the affirmation of presence, and the commitment to live with awareness and intentionality.

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