*Heal Yourself with Writing* by Catherine Ann Jones. Divine Arts. 2013. 203 pages. Reviewed by Andrea Montgomery Di Marco.

Catherine Ann Jones, PhD, is an award-winning author, screenwriter, and writing consultant, holding a graduate degree in Depth Psychology and Archetypal Mythology from Pacifica Graduate Institution, California. Following a successful career in stage acting, Jones discovered her voice in screenwriting and thereafter, found success in two highly acclaimed books on writing. *Heal Yourself with Writing* won a Nautilus Book Award for 2014. Jones invite readers into self-reflective writing exercises, while offering personal examples and anecdotes in support of each premise she presents.

Chapter One asks the readers ‘What story are you living?’. Jones invites readers to examine the influence of familial and cultural expectations. She includes examination of personal heroes or role models, and the subconscious influence of parents. Jones recognizes that our journey includes growing and evolving, and encourages authenticity on the road to healing and self-discovery. Jones begins this study with the critical point that the story one tells becomes the life one lives. In reflection of the contemporary sense of fragmented selves, Jones asks “What story do you choose to live by?”; advising that “the answer offers a clue to your soul, your deepest self” (p. 4). Writing exercises throughout the chapter invite examination of beliefs, inner calling or *dharma* (Sanskrit word for universal guidance or inner law), self-limiting thoughts, negative patterns, shifting focus from passive to active, recalling lessons from experiences, and gratitude for the teaching of others. Jones moves the readers through re-visioning and reframing, and grounds the chapter in the imperative of being open to movement and growth.

Chapter Two is devoted to the ways people become stuck in their stories. After examining whose life one is living, Jones peels back another layer in asking why one wants what one can’t have? Jones devotes this chapter to examining the depth and breadth of desire, and our psychological attachment to our illusions around, and idealizations of our desires. The chapter discusses reaching for and attaining desires, without becoming mired in wanting what is past. Jones presents the notion of openness to moving past our own scripts or agendas. She challenges readers with introspective exercises aimed at recognizing unexpected turning points, abundance, and revelations. Jones invites identification with worthiness, working toward finishing with the past, discerning what one loves and why, and recognizing imprints from childhood. This chapter emphasizes moving into newness with openness to change, ultimately coming to recognize when the habit of self is no longer serving the self.

In the third chapter, Jones focuses on balancing heart and head; intellect with emotions. Jones points to the Cartesian dualism of the West in which feelings and emotions are devalued and dismissed in favour of thinking and intellectual knowledge. Jones introduces the experience of dark emotions by youth, and the imperative for safe places, and posits that “creativity offers a suitable outlet for these dark feelings” (p. 39). The exercises include rediscovery of our emotional body and learning to recognize and identify with our emotions. Jones sums up this chapter in her statement “the way we think controls our feelings. And the way we feel dictates how we think” (p. 41). Learning may include unlearning, opening spaces for the new.

Chapter Four is entitled ‘Souls Dialogues: Getting in Touch with the Inner Visionary’, and includes the inviting promise of “creating a place for your soul to play” (p. 56). Jones invites readers to create space for creativity to arise from the unconscious. Stillness, meditation, and music may be useful tools in creating such a space. The chapter includes exercises involving visualization, dream journaling, the visual drama of encountering and dialoging with one’s soul, and ultimately cultivating the inner voice.

Chapter Five introduces the method of focused journaling, or turning a “laser beam onto your psyche” (p. 71) for the purpose of exploring one’s worldview, and feelings about it. Healing moves from awareness through creative expression. Jones discusses *bibliotherapy*, or the use of words to heal the psyche, as well as *narrative psychology*, a way in which humans come to understand experience through creating story and hearing the stories of others. Jones encourages readers to find what is unique to them; an inner voice, and/or authentic self. The exercises in this section suggest reflections on the historical journey; looking back over the road that had us arrive at this place in time. Values, transforming negatives to positives, listening to the unconscious thoughts, looking for metaphors in both dreams and wakefulness, dream recording, and lessons from the past, are just some of the topics covered in this rich chapter.

In Chapter Six, Jones explores the Jungian view on shadow self and shadow work, and concludes, like Jung, that the tensions between two opposing forces within our psyche, are the ground for creativity. “Both healing and growth come through working and integrating the shadow side within all of us” (p. 91). Jones suggests that soul is most served when individuals are being their deepest selves, and discusses the integration of our spiritual selves with our secular or vocational selves. This chapter includes exercises focusing on the blame game, daring to be vulnerable, idealism, and loving what is. As Jones claims, the aim of the journey is “growth of the soul” (p. 106).

Chapter Seven moves into ‘Shamanic Journeying’, with a focus on listening to spirit and ancestral guides. Similar to the structure of all chapters, Jones shares personal and meaning story exemplifying her themes. This chapter begins with giving thanks to the ancestors and welcoming spirit guides, and continues with discussion on the synchronicity in seemingly chance encounters, the energy of sacred, timeless moments, the value of living in the unknown, and “writing to tap into shamanic, healing spirits” (p. 116). The exercises in this chapter focus on calling into awareness dreams or encounters with humans, animals, or birds, that were unexpected and powerfully meaningful. Jones encourage readers to allow the chance encounters to happen, by making time to walk and search for new metaphors. Jones declares “if you wish to change your life, change your metaphor” (p. 119) and offers practical advice to make this happen. Part of Jones’ process is quelling unwanted inner critics, and inviting spirit helpers into the process of disposing of the heavy baggage. Jones closes the chapter in discussing the importance of being present to presence, for both ourselves and others.

The topic of Chapter Eight is discovering personal myth, and engaging in the Jungian discussion of archetypes. Jones posits that “consciously or unconsciously, each of us is living some myth” (p. 128). Imprinting from our childhoods and our ancestral cultural past shape our adult lives. People inherit both positive and negative traits such as courage, resiliency, and vision, together with addictions, shortsightedness, and self-denial. The exercises in this chapter focus on recalling family characteristics and identifying family archetypes. The writing may lead to discovering allies, values, and tendencies from past lives. Jones addresses childhood behaviour patterns that may no longer serve a healthy adult life, and provides writing exercises for gently releasing unnecessary patterns. This chapter concludes with the discussion on personal myth, and the power of imagination.

Chapter Nine deals directly with overcoming trauma. Jones emphasizes the importance of being ready to heal, being open to courageously step into writing about painful events, and the imperative of writing in such a way as to create distance between events and self, thereby not misidentifying *as* the event. The exercises in this chapter invite healing during dreams, and writing to reshape perspective from victim identity to self-healer. This section briefly touches upon deep traumatic injury, while focusing more upon the lesser impactful daily traumas that interrupt the flow of life. Exercises in this section include dialoging directly with the greater need, writing about the trauma (in first person) from the perspective of a hero or conqueror, writing from the soul’s point of view, and lastly, writing from the perspective of the perpetrator or one who is blamed for the trauma. This chapter emphasizes taking ownership and responsibility for self, letting go of all that does not serve us, developing compassion toward self and others, and moving beyond trauma.

In Chapter Ten, Jones discusses the challenge of creating or clearing space for a daily writing practice. She offers strategies for overcoming busy schedules and distractions, and the benefits of time set aside for contemplation. Jones reiterates the importance of listening, and of “replenishing the well” (p. 173). She invites writers into centering the self for clarity, and cultivating a balance between the work of the soul, and bringing that work to relationships in the outer world. The overarching theme of this chapter is balance; first coming to a deepening awareness of self through time spent alone, and thereafter, bringing that self into communion with others. Jones encourages focusing on the experiences of coming home to self, listening to the inner voice, and living fully present to the “essence of your being” (p. 184).

In the final Chapter Eleven, entitled “Looking Backward, Growing Forward”, Jones discusses the times when humans encounter life crises, often experiencing identity crisis simultaneously. She recommends returning to story to rediscover the lost self, describing such journeys as symbolic identity pilgrimages. This chapter moves into discussion on the embodied soul; learning to pay attention to the messages of the body, together with the heart and mind. Jones emphasizes reading and trusting the messages from the body. Some exercises in this chapter explore listening to, and writing from, the voice of the body. Additional exercises focus on recognizing which thoughts are “remnants from the past” (p. 188), and releasing the belief that the past holds more power than the present. This chapter, as per the promise of its title, concentrates on the enormous value of writing and healing. Jones discusses the movement from judgment to empathy, and learning to both trust and enjoy the unknown. This chapter describes living from an integrated self, noting that “the further and deeper the journey takes us, the more content and inwardly quiet we become” (p. 191). The exercises include writing about goals, and what must be released from belief in order for goals to be attainable. Jones encourages writers to create an altar placing the goals for moving forward alongside a note on what stays behind. Jones advocates feeding the stories that hold compassion and joy, and releasing the stories that are obstacles to growth and healing. In this manner, “global healing takes place one individual, one tribe at a time” (p. 196).

Overall, the book is a straightforward how-to manual and workbook written in an engaging and very accessible language. While Jones’ spiritual beliefs are outside of mainstream, her story enhances the pages lending legitimacy to her claims. Jones offers herself in sharing with honesty and no apparent self-consciousness. She embodies the message of her book; the freedom of expression of standing in the deepest and most authentic self without shame or inhibition.

In critique, the book is not written in gender inclusive language which is surprising considering the date of publication, and slightly jarring. Additionally, there is no mention of seeking professional or other assistance should the writing about trauma re-engage overwhelming stress responses. As the practice of writing for healing becomes increasingly familiar, the voices of other writers and methods are recognizable throughout the text. Jones weaves the various practices together in an inviting and logically developed step-process. I would highly recommend this book for individuals or groups seeking healing through writing practices. It is a rich source of both wisdom and practical exercises, supplemented with hopeful and encouraging personal narratives, and quotes from a variety of inspiring spiritual leaders.