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## The King's Speech, Trauma, and Good Psychotherapy

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The nuanced portrayal of psychotherapy by Geoffrey Rush in *The King's Speech* displayed authenticity and genuine relationship, awareness of posttraumatic stress in early childhood trauma, use of innovative verbal and nonverbal therapeutic methods, and an existential framework of posttraumatic growth that encouraged his client to find his own voice.

The scene is set just before the advent of World War II, as England faces emergencies economic and psychological depression and the rising power of Hitler. Prince Albert's father, George V, is about to die and succession to the throne is critical. King George's eldest son, David, the future Edward VIII, is a reluctant and weak ruler who scandalizes the country with his bridal choice of a twice-divorced American woman, Wallace Simpson. When David steps down from the throne, Prince Albert must lead the country (Holden, 2011, p. 13).

Prince Albert, however, lacks confidence and has a terrible speech impediment. Driven by the advent of modern technology and the need to lead his people by public speaking, he seeks help for his stuttering from an unknown speech therapist, Lionel, played by Geoffrey Rush.

In one of their first sessions, Prince Albert confronts the reality of Lionel's seedy office and tries to flee therapy, while Lionel confronts class differences as part of the initial therapeutic challenge. Lionel, having learned his techniques by working with World War I veterans, nevertheless insists on a stable therapeutic frame, sets rules of engagement, and helps the prince admit his pain and loneliness to motivate the difficult journey ahead.

Understanding Prince Albert's ("Bertie") nonverbal language of stuttering and body twitches, Lionel has him practice relaxation exercises sing, roll on the floor, shout obscenities and feel his emotions, probe painful childhood repressed memories and finally feel a growing friendship between two equal human beings. Using seriousness, rhythm, play and improvisation in the "transitional space" between them, Lionel bridges Bertie's negative self-talk with positive glimpses and new narrative of his future as a respected and self-determining king.

### References

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