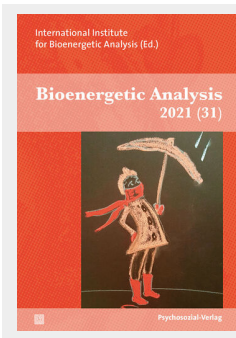


Scott Baum

A Memoir of Psychotherapy



Bioenergetic Analysis

31. Volume, No. 1, 2021, Page 79–94

Psychosozial-Verlag

DOI: [10.30820/0743-4804-2021-31-79](https://doi.org/10.30820/0743-4804-2021-31-79)



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Submissions for consideration for the next volume of *Bioenergetic Analysis* must be sent to Maê Nascimento (maenascimento@terra.com.br) between June 1st and September 1st, 2021.

Bibliographic information of Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (The German Library)
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

2021 Psychosozial-Verlag, Gießen, Germany
info@psychosozial-verlag.de
www.psychosozial-verlag.de



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Cover image: Vincentia Schroeter, *Umbrella girl* © Vincentia Schroeter
Cover design & layout based on drafts by Hanspeter Ludwig, Wetzlar
Typesetting: metiTec-Software, me-ti GmbH, Berlin, www.me-ti.de

<https://doi.org/10.30820/0743-4804-2021-31>
ISBN (PDF-E-Book) 978-3-8379-7809-4
ISBN (Print) 978-3-8379-8363-0
ISSN (Online) 2747-8882 · ISSN (Print) 0743-4804

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Bioenergetic Analysis • The Clinical Journal of the IIBA, 2021 (31), 79–94

<https://doi.org/10.30820/0743-4804-2021-31-79>

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Abstracts

In this memoir an experienced psychotherapist describes a fifty-year personal psychotherapy, more than thirty years of this therapy as a patient of Dr. Michael Eigen. The author's and Michael Eigen's lived experience of madness and murder is examined for insight into the possibilities of working psychotherapeutically with very damaged psyches and souls. Michael Eigen's theory and practice are part of the investigation, and questions are raised about what can be enough, if anything, in the successful psychotherapy of people in profound and enduring psychological and emotional pain.

Keywords: psychotherapy, Michael Eigen, anhedonia, soul murder, madness

Um memorial de uma psicoterapia (Portuguese)

Nestas memórias, um experiente psicoterapeuta descreve um processo de psicoterapia pessoal de cinquenta anos – sendo mais de trinta como paciente do Dr. Michael Eigen. Sua experiência vivida de loucura e assassinato é examinada de modo a permitir uma visão das possibilidades de trabalhar psicoterapeuticamente com mentes e almas muito danificadas. A teoria e a prática de Michael Eigen são parte dessa investigação, suscitando questões sobre o que pode ser suficiente – se é que algo o possa, para uma psicoterapia bem-sucedida em casos de sofrimento emocional profundo e duradouro.

Memorias de una psicoterapia (Spanish)

En estas memorias un experiente psicoterapeuta describe su psicoterapia personal de cincuenta años, de los cuales más de treinta años como paciente del Dr. Michael Eigen's. La experiencia de locura y asesinato vivida por ambos es analizada apuntando a la posibilidad de trabajar psicoterapéuticamente con psiquismos y almas muy dañadas. La teoría y práctica de Michael Eigen's son parte de esta investigación, y sus interrogantes sobre lo que sería suficiente, si esto es posible, en una psicoterapia exitosa de personas en profundo y duradero dolor emocional.

Biografia di una psicoterapia (Italian)

In questo memoir uno psicoterapeuta esperto descrive la sua terapia personale durata cinquant'anni, di cui più di trenta come paziente di Michael Eigen. L'esperienza in diretta,

dell'autore e di Michael Eigen, della follia e dello strazio viene esaminata per comprendere le possibilità di lavorare con la psicoterapia con anime e menti molto danneggiate. La prassi e la teoria di Michael Eigen costituiscono parte di questa investigazione, e vengono poste alcune domande su ciò che può essere sufficiente, se è possibile, a garantire il successo della psicoterapia di persone che vivono un dolore emotivo e psicologico profondo.

Un mémoire de psychothérapie (French)

Dans ce mémoire, un psychothérapeute expérimenté décrit une psychothérapie personnelle de cinquante ans, dont plus de trente ans en tant que patient du Dr Michael Eigen. L'éprouvé de folie et de meurtre par l'auteur et Michael Eigen est analysé afin d'éclairer les possibilités de travail psychothérapeutique avec des psychés et des âmes très endommagées. La théorie et la pratique de Michael Eigen font partie de cette discussion. Des questions sont soulevées sur ce qui serait suffisant, le cas échéant, pour la réussite de la psychothérapie des personnes souffrant de douleurs psychologiques et émotionnelles profondes et durables.

Memoiren einer Psychotherapie (German)

In diesen Memoiren beschreibt ein erfahrener Psychotherapeut eine fünfzigjährige persönliche Psychotherapie, davon mehr als dreißig Jahre als Patient von Dr. Michael Eigen. Die gelebte Erfahrung des Autors und Michael Eigens von Wahnsinn und Mord wird untersucht, um einen Einblick in die Möglichkeiten der psychotherapeutischen Arbeit mit tiefsten psychischen und seelischen Verletzungen zu erhalten. Michael Eigens Theorie und Praxis sind Teil der Studie. Es werden Fragen aufgeworfen, was in der erfolgreichen Psychotherapie von Menschen in tiefem und anhaltendem psychischem und emotionalem Schmerz ausreichen kann, wenn überhaupt etwas.

Мемуары о психотерапии (Скотт Баум) (Russian)

В этих воспоминаниях опытный психотерапевт описывает свою личную психотерапию на протяжении пятидесяти лет, более тридцати из них – в качестве пациента доктора Майкла Эйгена (Michael Eigen). Для понимания возможностей психотерапевтической работы с сильно поврежденными психикой и душой рассматривается жизненный опыт обоих – и автора, и Майкла Эйгена, – связанный с безумием и убийством. Теория и практика Майкла Эйгена составляют часть исследования, поднимется вопрос о том, что можно считать достаточным успехом, если он вообще возможен, в психотерапии людей, испытывающих глубокие и продолжительные психологические и эмоциональные страдания.

心理治疗传记 (Chinese)

在这个传记中，一位富有经验的心理治疗师描述了50年的（其中包括作为Michael Eigen博士30多年的案主）个人心理治疗历程。在治疗中，作者从他与Michael Eigen博士一些关于疯狂和谋杀的生活经验中，挖掘并考察与重度受损的心智和灵魂进行心理治疗工作的可能性。Michael Eigen的理论和实践是调查研究的一部分。其中一个提问是在成功的心理治疗中，在案主承受着深刻和持续的心理和情绪痛苦时，到底有什么工作可能是有效或足够的。

Preface

Many years ago, not long after my wife, Elaine, and I bought the house in Montauk that became her true home, we bought a runty-looking Japanese red maple tree. This was probably at a yard sale, since we did not have the funds or inclination to purchase a nursery-bred tree. It was short, with a narrow trunk and some foliage. It was one of the few species that would have appealed to me. We planted it on a property covered with mature, large trees. For years it hung on. It appeared to barely grow despite our ministrations and Elaine's very green thumb. Most things she nurtured thrived.

Then, at some point, maybe twenty years ago, it began to grow. But only the canopy grew. The trunk has remained as narrow in circumference as before. But now it sports healthy looking leaves, that unique bright scarlet red of the species. An impressive display for such a compromised being. I have long felt that that tree was in some way connected to me, was showing the truth of my life in its own. A life in which the foundation cannot be broadened, the connection to earth and reality expanded much, but we have made as much with what have as we can. And continue to.

Introduction

Throughout this paper – or as one person said who read a draft, what is more correctly called a memoir – I write from three perspectives. The most challenging is my own experiential voice. Next, are the validating and sometimes perspective-shifting views and insights brought by Michael Eigen's experience of our work together. Then there is my effort to combine these streams with my experience as a therapist to render something useful to other therapists and their patients.

In my professional writing and presentations a number of themes emerge consistently. The first is that most therapists do not live in the universe I do. A universe characterized by murdered soul, shattered personality, sensations of aloneness, death, terror, horror and pain that are interminable, and largely cannot be described in words that name them, despite the extensive vocabulary that English provides for that purpose. Not living in that universe leads to misunderstandings, small and large, about the nature of the experience and what can be done to ameliorate the condition.

The second theme is that most conversations in psychotherapy about transformation is about the transformations of healing, which inevitably includes the presumption that it is a transformation to goodness. My experience is that the transformation to evil is equally important. As a baby who knew before he was four years old that he would kill his mother to be with his father, the change of

consciousness in me that knowledge entailed was a transformation of being, not solely the experience of a feeling and intention.

The third theme I return to consistently is whether the ministrations, the validations, the challenges issued by therapists – and I have had a number of very talented, very deep, very committed therapists – are enough to create the matrix needed for a successful psychotherapy. Interestingly to me, the first drafts of this memoir did not include the idea that I am depicting a successful psychotherapy conducted over fifty years, more than thirty years of it with Michael Eigen (Mike). Whatever success has been accomplished was undergirded by my relationship with my late first wife, Elaine Tuccillo, herself an immensely talented psychotherapist, during more than forty years. A question I raise is whether success would have been possible, or at least to the level achieved, without that.

Pain and Suffering

Bearing the Unbearable

Preparing to participate in a celebratory event of the publication of the Hebrew translation of Michael Eigen's book, *The Sensitive Self*, caused me to think more consciously about the experience of a psychotherapist working with someone like me. Someone who is so damaged, psychically and emotionally, that, as Mike put it in an article that included a description of our work: "Whether or not I could help Milton [my pseudonym] was scarcely the issue. The first question was whether I could bear him. To bear something of what he seemed to be bearing seemed crucial. Milton was attempting to bear the unbearable."

What it is like to work with, be with, people so damaged in every way, runs through all of Mike's work. His unwavering commitment to see and feel what is in me, what I am made of, is a significant part of the oxygen provided to me when we are together, and I am in the toxic universe I live in, where the air is poisonous. At one point, not so long ago, I realized that my therapy functioned as a kind of psychic and emotional dialysis. Without regular and rigorous treatment I would drown in my own poisons.

Anhedonia

Central to the understanding of the organization of schizophrenic and borderline people is the condition of anhedonia. This is a condition in which a person's capacity to apprehend, to experience directly the benevolence in the universe is destroyed. It is not the inability to enjoy oneself. Functions of relief and gratification may remain operational. But pleasure, here defined as connection to, and

experience of benevolence is not possible. This basic destruction underlies all the disorders, disturbances, dysfunctions of self and self-other relationships. The sensations that accompany the apprehension of goodness – thrill, glow, streaming – are co-opted and taken over by horror.

In time in therapy I came to realize that I could observe the phenomenon of benevolence. As I have written (Baum, 2011) I could see it as a haze of feeling enveloping my wife and children. But I could not participate in that with them. This incapacity to experience goodness affects so many essential functions of life. It makes everyday living unbearable. It makes feeling good about oneself impossible. It renders one incapable of forming a well-structured and organic moral compass.

Living Death

For many years of my psychotherapy with Vivian Guze, before I started working with Mike, I dwelt in the world of the living dead. Session after session I encountered the experience of a specimen pinned to a display, of a being encased in a cotton wool-like cocoon, held in living death by terror, and by possession, a source of energy of adoration and idealization. It was Vivian's willingness to facilitate and endure hours of kicking, screaming, hitting, gagging, that enabled me to take barely felt tendrils of sensation and link them to feelings whose development had been truncated in infancy.

The stories of zombies and vampires are all true, insofar as they are attempts to realize and describe actual states of being. The states are engendered by a combination of forces. First, being scared, psychically and emotionally, but not quite completely, to death. Then in that frozen, unlocatable space, being entered, possessed, colonized by the energy of a parent. This possession and colonization are perpetrated for the same reason it takes place on the macro, social, level, that is to secure resources. Here, in the family, for me, the resources that are taken are adoration, worship, idolization. A heady brew.

A vampire creates the vampire in another person by draining the person's blood, and then returning some of the mixed blood of both victim and perpetrator. Vampires are immortal, meaning that the ordinary reality faced by humans of mortality and its humbling effects is denied them. And they cannot generate their own positive self-regard, they need to suck that energy from others, repeatedly, because they cannot generate it for themselves. They create the next generation of vampires both inadvertently, through identification, and to have companions in their own ultimate aloneness.

Before I came to understand my transformation to vampirism, which is another way of describing a profound narcissistic deformation, I lived through many years of the more primitive form of that condition, being in a cocoon of no-selfness and no emotional identity. Here the cocoon describes a state in which the

child is preserved so as to be fed on. The nourishment I provided was my unalloyed idolization of and identification with my father. Fighting my way out the cocoon was a daily fight of all the things I did in my sessions – gagging, punching, screaming – until I could, for a time, enter the present-day reality around me. My interface with that reality was very limited. I did what I could in that limited space.

I can't specify it exactly, but Mike's understanding of the compelling nature of what he calls "toxic nourishment" was very helpful to me. It has helped me also as a therapist to move away from facile judgments about what is healthy and sick in relationships and the certainty that I know why people do what they do and what is better for them to do. He's not unclear in his support for what is healthier, but his compassion for my frailty in choosing what is not, allows us both to consider what I am really doing in making the choices I do. I am not saved from an encounter with myself by being able to oppose his thrust, a pressure to change or do things differently. Still, he and my late wife, and my wife now, and my patients and my friends present with me new and different ways of seeing and being with things.

I easily decompensate, my structure fragments and my feeling of self disappears each time I make the effort. As Mike described it:

"There were periods of little distinction between shattered self and shattered/shattering object. Milton would try to 'ground' (his term) himself in the face of shatter, but often the ground shattered too. Yet each session he started at square one, aiming at ground zero, the point of cataclysm. Whatever he saw and felt, was a taste of what he could not see and feel, he kept stretching – a snake with infinite elasticity expanding around infinitely expanding shatter. Can the infinitely shattering self- and -object ever be encompassed?" (Eigen, 2001, p. 73)

Brokenness

The brokenness of mind and spirit is manifested also in the brokenness of body. My practice, personal and professional, as a bioenergetic therapist makes a unified view of the psyche-soma a tangible and workable experience.

My body is broken, shattered, the emptiness of inner life and reality that came about when, as Mike put it, "your mother tore out your psychic heart and guts and your father decimated you", a sensory reality that cannot be borne. For years the pain in the middle of my back was the living embodiment of the black hole that Grotstein (1990) describes in his work on black hole phenomena in borderline structure. Energy exited my body, irreplaceable. A warm hand, my wife's, for example, placed over that spot brought warmth as if the place in my body was in a state of absolute zero. Removal of the hand and it was as if warmth had never been there.

So many of the sensations of psychosis and the accompanying emptiness and despair cannot be rendered in language. I depend on Mike to apprehend them directly, even if, as he describes in one paper, he blacks out from the pain. At the same time, my body has offered me tangible, concrete experience to contrast with unanchored language disconnected from meaning, and the susceptibility to mind manipulation that attends on the lack of felt experience. Generating sensation from movement, from strain, working with pain until sensations, barely felt, become rivulets of feeling, has been a key part of my psychotherapeutic work. Mike doesn't work directly with those dimensions, but I was experienced enough at that work myself, and practiced it daily for years, that I could carry that on my own. He was explicitly validating of the value of the knowledge that comes from the amplification of somatic processes, and the expression that emerges. When I asked him one day if he could hold my head so that I could scream, he said that no, he could not, he wished he could, but he did not know how to do that. His limitation, his honesty. I could live with that.

What Mike can work with, and endure is, first, the felt reality and experience I have of watching myself die. This death took place along three dimensions. The first was the death necessitated by survival and the complete deadening of connection to inner and outer reality to survive without permanent madness. The second the death of soul to preserve identity. Ursula Le Guin (2017) tells a story of a magician captured by an evil sorcerer who says a spell of undoing of self rather than have his true name be known. A death to preserve identity and prevent possession of one's essence. And then a death caused by manipulation of mind, twisted consciousness, and finally the transformation to malevolence.

Mike could endure these states, validate them, accept them as they are, even when the malevolence is directed at him. My late wife could do more. At her burial I described her power to bring out to life those who had been captured by living death.

Malevolence

There is much discussion on transformation in modern psychotherapy. It is implicitly transformation to goodness. This ignores the dimension of experience (with few exceptions such as Sue Grand's *The Reproduction of Evil*) like mine, in which the transformation was a transformation to malevolence.

Facing the transformation to malevolence cannot be real if there is an implicit out. As a senior colleague I worked with many years ago said to me on getting to know me: "There must be a lot of good under there for you to represent yourself as so bad." A representation I did not even know at the time I was manifesting. But she was wrong. Mike's willingness to live immersed in the caustic shattering reality of my negativity has been essential. In one article he

talks about the experience of being ground down by me over and over. Even as he thinks a secret love develops between us. I know the love he is noticing, if such it is, only emerges from processes at the middle layers of my body. The deepest reality in me is of utter emptiness, unyielding narcissistic desperation for recognition that allows for no other to be well-regarded, and an infant's wish to destroy everyone, to wreak revenge and achieve some measure of peace in its accomplishment.

I knew by the time I was four years old that I would have murdered my mother, if I could have, to get to my father. He did eventually rescue me from her when I was between the ages of six and eight. The people around my mother, drug and alcohol inebriated, dead-end people, are revealed to me in dreams and images as Hannibal Lecter-like characters, non-human in their internal identity, capable of cold-blooded abuse.

My father had more life in his body than my mother, and more connection to reality. But in the end, he revealed himself to be as corrupt. My adored father, in whose body I found the only secure place, revealed this corruption in many ways, not least by his practice of espousing the rationalizations of his sexual abuse of his psychotherapy patients by claiming (as Martin Shepherd did in his book *The Love Treatment*) that it was ultimately the best treatment he could offer them, in their own best interest.

Evil

Evil is a hard word for psychotherapists, implying as it does absolute realities, and forces beyond a person's control, and perhaps transpersonal forces, as well. Psychotherapists, being, in general, an optimistic and hopeful group of people are shocked by the degree of negativity I experience and inclined quickly to 're-frame' it as a fear of the vulnerability of goodness and of loving, or an identification with a negative attribution by early authorities. Mike was not of this ilk, although he understood my inclination to see him that way. In fact, he writes of his willingness to take at face value a person's identification of self as evil.

That has certainly mattered to me. I know that in the deepest parts of my being, places I can now breathe to, that there is a coldness and malevolence that is not mitigated by any feeling, not love, which I am incapable of, nor sympathy. At most, the fear of punishment keeps me from acting out. I have done enough from this coldness to know it is evil, including the use of my late wife as a transference object, thus sparing my therapists from the treatment usually accorded them by people like me – endless suspiciousness, scathing scouring of their duplicitous self-interested consciences, haughty, grandiose, belligerent arrogance – but costing her dearly as she valiantly fought with me (both against and alongside) to move me toward an aspirational self who was not going to behave this way.

No stronger example of this is known to me than the entity that lives in me who would have clawed and destroyed my wife in sexual ways had I allowed it. Long before I knew of this creature I had pulled back from a sexual life, despite the opportunity of being with the most sex-positive person I had ever met. Elaine's insistence later in our marriage, when I could do it, on the development of a reasonably healthy sexual life between us was a gift beyond measure. It is an enduring, acutely painful part of my grief that I can be sexual, desirous, flexible in a way now I could not in our life together. I remember her gratitude for our last lovemaking before illness took her too far away.

So, it was not only Mike's ability to be with, countenance, be immersed in this miasma of despair, alternating with malicious grandiosity and sadistic malice. It was also my wife, Elaine's determination to do the same, and without the protection of the psychotherapeutic space, which insulates the therapist. Elaine wrote to me once: "let your gaze remind you of your unique constellation – energy, resilience, in the context of the blackness that can engulf and terrify." And now the similar determination of my current wife, Pascale who told me, as I strived to tell her as much of the truth of my destructiveness as I have come to know: "your darkness is my aurora borealis". Mike has insisted, in these later years, thirty-plus years into our work together, more than fifty years since I began in psychotherapy, that he sees, and experiences a beauty in me, even in the darkness. This vision is beyond my comprehension.

Treatment

Bearing Witness

It is commonly understood in the methods of psychodynamic psychotherapy that bearing witness to the pain and suffering a person has and continues to experience is central to any healing of those conditions that arise from the harm done to that person. However, bearing witness means more than observing and validating. Witnessing can be done from some distance, like the Red Cross worker visiting Auschwitz. This is no small matter, and a particularly poignant vision to me, since I have often experienced my father's leaving me with my mother, twice a week for five years after he left her when I was one and-a-half years old, as if we were being parted at the railhead at that horrible, and all too human/inhumane, place.

In this scenario the witness is preserved from direct victimization, which is not to minimize the effects of vicarious victimization. Rather it is to distinguish what makes the psychotherapeutic work of Mike, and of Elaine, effective. It is rather to say that without experiencing the victimization directly treatment may not be effective. Here is how Mike put it: "He speaks of concentration camps

inside, not only outside. He is like an inducted vampire, a victim who carries the destructive plague. He looks at me with love at the end of many sessions, as he heads out the door. He loves me for letting him pulverize me into nothing, for being there in the nothing.” (Eigen, 2004, p. 109)

The way this pulverizing takes place is through an intention to annihilate, which is the wish to destroy the other and make it as if the other never even existed. And it is executed in grinding, caustic contempt that poisons all relationship, making the other person, any other person, nobody and nothing, and oneself good and great.

Mike is not only acknowledging the truth of my experience. He is actively, if silently for the most part, engaged in a process of living it with me. When he has spoken, far more rarely for many years than recently, it was often to offer a deeper consciousness of my suffering than I was capable of. As, for a most potent example, when he said to me that my mother tore out my psychic heart and guts, and my father decimated me. This is an intervention in my being and process, here bearing witness is not only a record of what happened it is a consciousness and testimonial of its effects, its meaning, its significance in shaping, perhaps permanently, a personality and a life.

Living in It

At the end of the quote I report above, Mike says that the love he experiences in me is: “A nearly secret love. It does not stop the torment, at times adds to it.” I would say that the love always adds to the torment. Love, and faith, and the beauty in them, in all things is searing. Like the sunlight to the vampire. The inducted vampire made so by the people who first appropriated and used me as a source of narcissistic supplies: respect, admiration, adoration, idealization. Inducted so as to preserve me as an unambivalent, unfailing source, I had to be prevented from developing *self*-respect, admiration, etc. I have written extensively about how this is accomplished elsewhere (Baum, 2010). An inducted vampire I turned the incessant, unquenchable craving for those resources on those closest to me. It is this they had to bear.

In the end, or, more rightly in the end of the beginning of therapy, I had to renounce the vampire life, at least in my conscious action, and subsist, as best I can, on limited supplies, never satisfying, like Louis, the inducted vampire in *Interview with the Vampire* (Rice, 1977). This destruction of a very basic function of personality points to other very fundamental damage. In one place Mike speaks of me as someone who’s “dream screen” as Bion calls it, has gone down in flames. Soul and psyche destroyed by endless attacks on being. Psychotic states are the result of these depredations. Horrible states of being in which Mike accompanies me.

But his love, his respect, which he has more recently insisted be present between us does add to the torment. I found a particularly trenchant example of this in the novel *A Little Life* (Yanagihara, 2015). The evident value and lovability of the central character, and the love and respect of those who care so deeply for him is insufficient to heal. In the novel it is left as a tantalizing possibility that more contact with a psychotherapy healing and healer might have made a difference. But how does psychotherapy proceed in this reality? After fifty years of intensive psychotherapy in a reality like that of this character, I know well the limitations of what can be accomplished.

Therapeutic Action

What does a therapist cling to in a psychic and emotional environment like this? Mike describes a moment with a patient, who may be me, as it is certainly recognizable to me:

“He speaks of his diaphragm as holding within holding. A muscle spasm is his being. Seeping through is someone seeing him as he really is – his wife. I don’t seem to play much of a role, but it is doubtful he could begin to let her in this way without the background support of therapy. His wife offers another kind of truth, beyond psychic bloodletting” (Eigen, 2004, p. 111).

Elaine saw my parents’ casual, radioactive contempt long before I did. She understood my father’s effort to poison me against her, and she waited, holding fast in the strength of her feelings for me, and what she gained from our relationship, while she waited while I decided, in successive, agonized steps where to cast my lot in life.

Mike sees tremendous power in waiting, just as Elaine did. And there is tremendous power in Mike’s embrace of the deranged, of the damaged, of the monstrous, of the suffering, that are my elemental life experiences. But he is not waiting for me to work it out, while he is shielded from the toxic radiation, the fallout of an infinite number of soul-destroying explosions. He is not waiting, or hoping, or needing me to change, to come to see the light, for example. He is actively, if, mostly, silently, in his case, engaged in a process of living it with me. He might say, based on what I know of his thinking and feeling, that his is an act of faith. Hope, I would say, requires something to happen outside oneself, which places an implicit demand on the environment, and me. Faith is contained in him and sustains him, and perhaps me.

Living and facing malevolence is a challenge beyond facing suffering. My vitality is tied up with defenses against decompensation and overwhelm first, and then against the acting out of malevolence that is driven by the implacable need

to restore my integrity by fighting and restoring evenness in relationship through revenge. And further by the sadism I have been marinating in. I am therefore incapable of one of the most basic tenets of psychotherapy, the exhortation to be myself. I am neither capable of it, nor can I risk it. Coming to face the enduring malevolence in me, and then more, to see and be responsible for my devotion to it has been beyond difficult. But that is the only way I can attempt to modify or minimize the damage that I do.

I cannot overstate the importance of Mike's attitude in this. He does nothing to minimize the severity of the problem as I lay it out. As he said once to me when I feared I was being treated as a celebrity whose predations were whitewashed, "nobody is letting you off the hook." He supports me by saying that "at least you agonize about it", but he seems to me under no illusion that agonizing about it is the same as doing something about it.

Doing something about malevolence in the absence of the moral compass provided by a soul is beyond solution to me. I was lent a soul, I realized, by Elaine, and that made a difference in my life, perhaps beyond what any psychotherapy could provide.

Truth and Love

In the compilation of talks assembled in the book *Murder and Madness* (2010), Mike says this about his understanding of me:

"Here is a little example. It is about a man I wrote about in *Toxic Nourishment and Damaged Bonds*. I called him Milton. He is a man who has been in pain all his life, pain that won't go away. I don't know whether it will ever go away or not. I have no idea and he doesn't either. It is awful. He would commit suicide if not for what I'm not sure – maybe his children. Maybe something more, a kind of deep dedication to the truth of life, his truth. He is devoted to inner truthfulness" (Eigen, 2010, p. 18).

At the same time, he wrote elsewhere how my father – an outspoken rebel and critic of conventional social mores and hypocrisies – used the truth as a weapon with which to condemn, to disdain, and even to eviscerate. As did I.

Into this reality Elaine stepped. We met in graduate school. We met around the same time I began a long-lasting psychotherapy with Vivian Guze. In a piece written for the journal of the American Academy of Psychotherapists, *Voices* (2014), I wrote that Elaine held on to me as I spun and writhed, shot into the inner-outer space void of an infant surrounded by madness and malevolence left alone for an eternity. Vivian saved my life, and Elaine found me. To be found is as essential as anything to a life lived rather than just survived.

Elaine did more. When I gave that paper to Dr. Richard Fulmer, who had worked as a therapist with my family many years ago, and who I asked to be a consultant on my work after Elaine's death in 2012, he said that he understood from what I wrote that I felt Elaine made me fit for human consumption. In Elaine's absorption of, and confrontation with my malevolence she offered me a method and a path for confrontation of it. It cost her dearly, I see that now, in her body and soul. I see how it caused her body to thicken and her face to harden in ways I doubt they would have if she did not have to guard herself continuously and take up my unending contempt, disdain, and superiority, hardened by my identification with my father, and simultaneously pressurized by my transference to her as my father.

It took her time to realize the full extent of the poison, and my unconsciousness of it and its deployment. Eventually, she let no expression of the poison go by, no matter how slight it might seem to an observer. She presented all this to me slowly, as a good therapist might, showing me things, confronting me with the awful truths of my interior reality, of who I am, just a little beyond what I could already know and tolerate. She lost this ability, as she predicted she would, in the last months before she died. What will I do now without her to check me, to hold me in the embrace of loving remonstrance, putting herself in harm's way, for me, for our children?

Why did she do it? After her death this became an urgent question for me. Mike's answer to that perplexing and painful question was both elegant and compelling and had the instantaneous feel of truth. Elaine had the opportunity to live the life she wanted to live. The psychic and emotional benefits to her of living a life with someone she loved so deeply, who was devoted to the truth of his, and her, emotional reality made the suffering and the cost worthwhile. She could be the person she actually was.

She embraced the darkness in me, as does Mike, as does my present wife, Pascale. Embrace here not signifying any approval or perverse gratification. Rather it is a muscular embrace, holding, containing, of a vital part of my being. Elaine wrote of it once as a dark star. Mike speaks of the beauty in it and in me. This is completely incomprehensible to me. The people who destroyed me have no beauty in them for me. I see the damage my poison caused my children, and their mother. But I am compelled to acknowledge the truth of Elaine's and Mike's and Pascale's and others' experience of me. Elaine demanded that I honor the experience of others as much as I did my own. And I am compelled to acknowledge that there is a dimension, "force" is a better word for it, or talent that I have for supporting what is best, most creative, and self-expressive in people. Hence my success as a psychotherapist, as a director of a psychology internship program, as president of an international psychotherapy organization.

My grief for Elaine intersects with life-long devastating griefs. The loss of my mother to madness, to malevolence, to alcoholism. The loss of my father repeat-

edly in childhood, and then the final loss of him in hate and, as Mike referred to it “blood-curdling disillusionment”. The loss of myself as I succumbed to annihilatory intention and feeling and action directed at me, and I became a shadow of myself, and watched myself die. The loss of innocence, of the connection to benevolence as I was transformed to malevolence. But the difference in the griefs are differences of kind, not degree. In my grief for Elaine our relationship persists, grows. I see how I failed to develop sufficiently by the end of her life to do some of the repair, to do some of reaching out, to do some of the healthy things I can do now, only seven years later. And when my despair is greatest, it is to her I address my plea that I be rescued, taken in the ‘arms of the angel’ safely away from here. My grief for my parents is hard, sear, and bleak. They failed to develop, as they might have, could have. It is not true to say of them that they did the best they could. They surely did not. They had access to resources to knowledge, even claimed to have it. I would have done anything to help, had I only been asked.

And Yet

And yet. Mike completes the quote I started above from *Murder and Madness* by saying:

“We have been together many years, and he was in therapy many more years with people before me. He is trying to make contact – with himself, with life. He is committed to his search. To be present in his search yet not able to present in life – to be present at all is a plus. For some being present to one’s non-presence may be better than not being there and not knowing it. For Milton it’s a must.”

A few weeks ago he said, ‘I feel like my father killed me or some part of me. And I said I absolutely believe you. And he weeps. After a long silence he says, ‘When I heard your words I felt an entity leave me.’ That’s a little vignette. He’s not cured, I’m not cured. I’m in pain, he’s in pain. I’m broken, he’s broken. But at this moment, this one little moment, this one little moment when he felt, actually felt, took many years to find. These weren’t wasted years. They could look wasted. Some therapists wouldn’t have been able to stand it. But these years weren’t wasted because a moment arrived when he actually felt my belief in his pain and that his pain could be permanent. He heard me and for a moment felt my affirmation of the truth of his feeling. A feeling that came through was ‘Yes I absolutely, absolutely believe you.’ And he said ‘When I heard you, when I heard your words I felt an entity leave me.’ Now I know that if one entity leaves there are probably a million more. But it was a precious moment that took years to happen. No insurance company would pay for this moment. But it was an eternal moment. A moment that makes a difference to the universe forever. And some of you may be feeling ripples of it today” (Eigen, 2010, p. 19).

Mike's faith in possibility sustains him, and me. Elaine and Pascale's faith in the meaningfulness of life lived consciously sustains me, for whom the destruction of meaning is the ground-zero of existence. Is it enough? No. It is so much, and yet it is not enough. Terror, murder, hallucination, despair, desperation, emptiness, envy, are pervasive, unbearable. But it is so much more than I ever thought was possible. To live, consciously, the life of my body.

Postscript

In 2014 I was invited to participate in an event to celebrate the publication in Hebrew of Michael Eigen's book: *The Sensitive Self* (2014). He writes about the work he and I do as a psychotherapeutic couple in that book and other writings. I have written about it also, as a therapist, drawing knowledge and inspiration, and as a patient, making an effort to convey a reality of experience so much of which has no language to communicate it.

But communicating it is vitally necessary for me. The reasons that is so, are a mix. The pressure of insatiable narcissistic craving, for recognition, admiration, is the most experientially vivid and consuming. That it is a craving that can never be met. The fact is that the structure for metabolizing positive regard was destroyed in me, or never even seeded, only makes it more agonizing. The other reasons I am compelled to tell my story – I will avoid characterizing the reasons, for now, as good or bad, healthy or sick – are also compelling. Although the attack, lifelong and now embedded in body and mind, on my sincerity, is so ferocious that writing is a torment. In a perverse version of William Blake's assertion that energy is eternal delight, for me energy is eternal torment.

Still, there are reasons for writing this that are not destructible by these attacks. Bearing witness, certainly. Bearing witness is not only the acknowledgment that certain things happened. It is also the consciousness of what those things mean. What psychic and emotional and cognitive messages are carried in those actions that are witnessed. What personal and political significance those actions have.

Beyond bearing witness, I can ask the question for me, and others, what are the psychotherapeutic benefits possible working with people like me? People whose souls have been murdered, people transformed to malevolence, our psyches shredded and fragmented, flooded continuously with sensations nameless and beyond bearing. And, if there are benefits – or benefits that outweigh the immediate conscious contact with the agonies of hell – how are they to be accomplished? Not only how is a therapist to facilitate those beneficial outcomes, but how is a therapist to survive the exposure to, and immersion in the black hole of a destroyed soul? How will a therapist accompany a child consigned to hell for the sins of parents' forebearers? How will a therapist survive the malevolent

contempt of a patient struggling to be real and authentic when doing so means destroying the identity, sincerity, value of those trying to help him?

And, finally, at risk of bringing down that same shattering contempt on myself, the possibility that without understanding this nearly worst of personal realities, we cannot hope to understand the destructiveness that abounds around us. Through our social fabric. The matrix of relationships extending from our bodies, through psyche, and emotion, to the world in which we are unique elements and collective identities. We need the information that comes from the most damaged among us if we are to do anything durably successful to make a healthy life environment for those who come after us. If that effort actually matters.

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