

# Sustaining an Erection: Brotherhood, Manhood, and Psychotherapy

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**ABSTRACT** *Men have yet to see through a social revolution paralleling the feminist revolution. Lacking rite of passages, and still oscillating between primal kinship and effeminized emotionality, men today often find themselves struggling to discover masculinity that is connected both to emotions and to manhood. The author describes his own yearning for such brotherhood in his personal and professional life. But what happens when such a man appears as a client?*

*This case study discusses Milton's fascinating journey into manhood, which includes mourning the position he assumed in his family, recognizing the deep narcissistic wound and committing to a different relationship with himself and others around him. The paper challenges the classical emphasis on the mother-baby attachment and proposes to include within it the necessity of the triadic-self, and the familial challenge of severing the parental-dyad to make space for the child without breaking it.*

*All the while this paper describes the impossible connection between two men – client and therapist – who learn to love one another, transferentially and even more so – as two men; who struggle with the implications of such love and allow it to transform them both. Shame, self-love, and questions of reality and transference all emerge when client and therapist struggle with the forces of needs, desire, and brotherhood that bring them together through waves ruptures and repairs. Copyright © 2010 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

**Key words:** manhood, narcissistic, relational, trancework, wound

*Welcome joy, and welcome sorrow  
Lethe's weed and Hermes' feather;  
Come today, and come tomorrow,  
I do love you both together!*

(John Keats, *Welcome Joy, and Welcome Sorrow*, 1818)

## MY BROTHER – HOW MUCH INTIMACY IS TOLERABLE?

Intimacy in the consulting room, I often think, is one of the hidden or not much talked about pluses of the job.

Susie Orbach (2004, 403)

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**Figure 1.** A call for a community.

It may seem a little strange to begin a psychotherapeutic paper like this, but the story of my work with Milton needs to start with a tattoo. I had this tattoo, which is seen here as Figure 1, done four years ago and it has a story to tell. The story of this tattoo depicts the therapeutic journey of Milton and me.

For many years, I have been involved in shamanic journeying. My comfort cruising within the archetypal realms started as a biographical flight from loneliness, and this is still a tendency of mine, which requires ongoing monitoring. However, the archetypal and collective realms have also become a great source of support and connection for me, ones that allow me to deepen my connection with myself, with others, and with that which is beyond me, not just used to escape such connections.

These shamanic trances have been spontaneous occurrences of episodes, rarely initiated, that started when I was 20. I would *find* myself heating up, shaking, and opening into a deep trance, being shown important teachings in archetypal language. Sometimes it would take me weeks to fully understand these lessons, at other times it would take years. One day, I found myself in the desert, sat on a rock with this shamanic guide, the *dark lady*. I asked her what was on the forefront of my mind: ‘what would I need to be a good father?’ She laughed and pulled a silver dagger out of her blouse, throwing it into a black rock. The dagger penetrated the rock and got stuck; I think I might have seen the rock bleeding. I was no longer sat with her. Instead, I was crouching on the black rock, strangled, a lone wolf.

Instinctively, I knew that howling would save me. The dagger wound was hurting, although it was not my own, and I struggled to breathe. I tried to howl once but could not utter a sound; twice – no sound; I was despairing. Around me all was quite and deserted. Suddenly, I remembered my pack, and in my desperation I could extend myself to feel my brothers, summoning them to help. A storytelling of ravens began circling the rock as one wolf appeared and stood by the rock, then another wolf, and another, and another. Soon, the entire pack was there, I was no longer alone. I suddenly felt strong, and the wolf that I was stood erect on the rock and howled. It was a long howl, and as I closed my eyes to welcome it I felt the rock beneath me melting. When all was done I could see, by my feet, a golden dagger.

I came back knowing that I would need a community, particularly of men, to be able to rise to fatherhood. I always found strong yet soft women, powerful and emotionally able; it was men that I was looking for. In fact, this is one of the main reasons we have moved back to live in Israel after over ten wonderful years in the UK: in search of a community for my wife, my self, and our daughter. The scarcity of strong men in my life who are connected to their masculinity and at the same time committed to soften, to feel, and to dialogue, is possibly my deepest personal wound. The dagger and the raven, the shaman and the wolf have all found their way into my skin with the help of an amazing tattoo artist, Stave A.

When Milton came to see me I immediately noticed a fellow wolf, searching for his own howl. Our entire journey together held – for both of us – the delight of discovering a brother on our similar, yet separate paths, and a great sadness: the psychotherapeutic setting we elected to operate in allowed the two wolves in us to connect, yet at the same time limited our connection.

## THE DOOR TO CONNECTION PASSES THROUGH FIRE: ANGER

Fear and anger stiffen the organism, love and caring soften it.

Stanley Keleman (1985, 56)

Untrusting in his loveability, Milton became a charismatic, astute, and highly impactful man. At 42, it was difficult not to want to spend time with him, not to lean back and listen to him telling stories. It was also clear from the start that no one wanted to be on the receiving end of his wrath. Milton's anger was always brewing, mostly self-directed but at times erupting outwardly through his skin and into the world with great velocity. I felt a mixture of joy and apprehension in his company, on the one hand not wanting to *say the wrong thing* to him to avoid his anger, yet on the other hand – being mindful that my integrity and his required me not to hold back. Milton was intelligent and highly associative and I felt committed to remain alert to not lose him. Our work was characterized by making many mistakes and saying the wrong things, and continuously coming back to connection, where we found one another again and reminded each other: we are here together.

Milton tells stories beautifully, poetically, and with great passion. Yet at the beginning of our work together, I felt that the stories took me away from him. It was as if he erected barricades to buffer between us – loveable buffers, admirable buffers, but nonetheless buffers separating him from me. We have later learned that these buffers were crucial in saving Milton from the physical and emotional wrath of his father and from the apathetic,

pedagogic indifference of his mother. Do we stand a chance of forming a new relational organization when the earlier ones were so damaged? Touch was really helpful here, an ongoing invitation to join the reality of our connection, for Milton to witness the truth of his impact on me without blind admiration. Milton deeply wanted to be known without projections, he set out bait for me to swallow and was hoping to discover they were not eaten. I too wanted to get to know him and to be known by him; I wanted neither an alpha wolf to lead me nor a subordinate admirer: and Milton's deep need for a brother coincided with my own. While not ignoring the power imbalance between us, we have also recognized the similarities of our journeys, and I (metaphorically) offered myself to him as his older brother. Milton for the most part, accepted.

Anger slowly turned from an emotion deserving to be scolded to a potential bridge, an opening of the *door* into flow. Milton learned to recognize that he had often *felt his way into the world* through anger. The door could then be opened wider, letting other feelings in. A year into working together, witnessing the courage and brutal honesty with which he opened his wounds and mourning his failures, I could feel my love for Milton growing. This is when his biography ceased from being yet another one of his fascinating stories he told me, and had become a vibrant scenario taking place both inside of him and within our relationship: for us to note, learn about, and to cultivate change within.

## SUSTAINING AN ERECTION – THE HERITAGE AND THE WOUND

What is our legacy? When is it time to let go of what we have been given? Indeed, our cells reflect ancestral history; our tissues tell the story of our dynasty. But somewhere deep inside, far beyond the membranes, within the depth of our nucleus, rests our potential to make a choice; to declare our identity as separate; to find the *I* in the *Us* – not despite, but because of the us.

Asaf Rolef Ben-Shahar (2002, 14)

The history of attachment theory and object relations emphasizes the importance of our earlier relational organizations. A child is likely to do whatever is in his power to gain his parents' love. The child will tune into every nonverbal hint his mother and father might provide (Field, 1985; Bányai, 1998) in order to organize himself in a way that would make his parents happy; for it is their happiness that is at the core of the child's desire for safety. Ideally, the mother and father reciprocate this attunement. But what if the very experience that would satisfy their deep, unconscious needs comes in direct contradiction to the well-being, or even the aliveness of the child? What if he perceives, as children so often do, that what is required of him is to sacrifice himself on the altar of his parents' happiness? To become an object of hate? How does such a child organize himself in reality? What hope does he have to grow up and become a man capable of giving and receiving love? How can such a man sustain the knowledge of his goodness, of his lovability, of his worth?

Jacob and Jacqueline, Jack and Jacqui, Milton's parents, did not intend to bring a hate-child into the world. They are good people; they are devoted Christians; they try to live morally and truthfully. Jack and Jacqui did not want any harm to come to their boy. But they stepped into marriage blindly, and blindly they embarked on parenthood, inattentive to their own wounds; dishonest with their true desires. Milton was too intelligent for his own good, too sensitive. He picked up what was needed of him, and executed it perfectly. Well, nearly perfectly. Thomas Ogden (1995, 2) suggested that 'every form of psychopathology

represents a specific type of limitation of the individual's capacity to be fully alive as a human being.' That might be so, but perhaps it is important to remember that such limitations are often created as gifts that we bestow on our parents, in our relentless (not altruistic) efforts to save mom and dad from themselves. *This is my blood; this is my body.*

When Jack's mother (Milton's grandmother) discovered she was pregnant, it was not the most wonderful moment of her life. Already struggling with two children she conflicted about the pregnancy, yet living in a society that did not look kindly on abortions her decision to abort the pregnancy must have been a difficult one. She got a toxic concoction to induce the termination and hid it until she was ready to carry out the procedure. As it turned out, she did not hide it too well. Her three-year-old daughter found it, drank it, and died. The plan to abort Jack was abandoned, and Jack arrived into this grief-stricken and shocked family: the direct cause of his sister's death, a child bound to be the object of disowned hate and grief, guilt, and shame.

What a dreadful beginning to anyone's life! All the more dreadful, for Jack, despite being a student of psychology and reading at length into his 50s, had not looked at those dynamics, ensuring he passed them on to the next generation, to his son Milton.

Like their son Milton, Jack and Jacqui are both creatures of fire, full of passion, anger, and energy. This fire travelled dangerously with them. Before Milton was born, Jacqui had an affair with Jack's brother, Milton's uncle. The *happy couple* got pregnant. Jacqui was harbouring a secret she did not intend to share, and her religious fanaticism increased her burden of guilt. Whose child was it? Was it Jack's or his brother's? The birth ended sadly, the child was stillborn. Jacqui's grief was double, yet she had still not shared her betrayal with Jack. Depressed and terrified, she got pregnant very shortly after that, and Milton came to the world in a manner that repeated the story of his father. Two people, who joined the world through shame, gave birth to a shame baby, a baby who would generously – like all babies do – give himself to the service of their needs, making sure they got what they wanted. And what Jack and Jacqui needed was someone to wash their sins away and absolve all their faults. At church – they found it in their perception of Jesus; at home – in Milton. However, Milton (being only human) failed to do what Jesus managed, by paying for the cost of this with his life.

As Peter Fonagy (2000; Fonagy et al., 1995) argued, when parents have not worked through their own insecure attachment patterns, they are likely to demonstrate low reflective capacity. When people who experienced painful childhood have developed their reflective capacity, they are more likely to cultivate secure attachment in their children (Fonagy, 2000). Jack and Jacqui made an almost conscious choice to keep their cans of worms closed and, in so doing, effectively closed down Milton's hope for parental love, and their own – for healing.

## THE FAMILIAL RELATIONAL MATRIX

The dynamic quality of love lies in this very polarity: that it springs from the need of overcoming separateness, that it leads to oneness – and yet that individuality is not eliminated.

Erich Fromm (1942, 225)

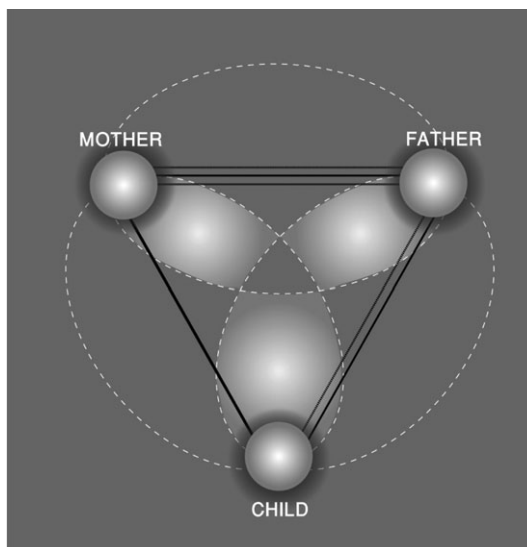
To better understand Milton's life struggles, and therefore the therapeutic challenges of our work together, let us take a look at the construction of the relational field between

mother-father and child. The traditional family model of father-mother-child is given here for two reasons. Firstly, it serves here as a model, an example of the simplest familial relational field, and is based on the belief that there is a primary attachment figure (which is most frequently the mother). Other family constellations (such as same-sex marriages or more complex family systems) may still follow a similar structure. Secondly, this traditional family model depicts Milton's family and so is relevant for this case study.

Before the child is born there is a dyad; a field of shared connection between two subjectivities and the intersubjective *couple*. This dyad is hopefully strong enough to risk reorganization, since upon the child's arrival (and the creation of a family), the mother-father dyad has to flex, soften, and even – for a short while – become relatively insignificant. When the baby comes to the world it does not come alone: it exists first and foremost as a dyadic form of self, a primary intersubjectivity (Trevarthen, 1974, 1993, 2004), reminding us, yet again, of Winnicott's celebrated saying 'there is no such thing as a baby' (1952, 99) – only a baby-mother unit.

This primary intersubjectivity is close to Freud's (1957) concept of primary narcissism, which results from the fusional, symbiotic relationship with the mother. In this early stage, the infant's love is directed at the mother, who is perceived as part of self. To reiterate, the child's *love* to the mother is at the beginning primarily love for the dyadic-self (the *relational-self* is the love-object), and a necessary precursor for self-love. This primary narcissism supports the baby in feeling itself as 'the centre and core of creation' (White, 1980, 6). In a good-enough relationship, the couple can tolerate such a wound to the dyad between man and wife to allow space for the establishing of primary intersubjectivity (or primary narcissism) between mother and baby.

Figure 2 illustrates the facilitative relational field in a family. When a baby is born, the primary dyadic relationship in the system becomes the mother-baby. The child's capacity



**Figure 2.** The facilitative relational field in a family.

to penetrate the father-mother dyad and claim the primacy of the baby-mother dyad is essential for its survival. Without this penetration, the baby's self is fragile and disconnected. It is through this primary intersubjectivity, this symbiotic connection that the child learns about its body (Orbach, 2003), mind, and later, about its separateness (Bowlby, 1951; Mahler and McDevitt, 1982). While the mother-father relationship is compromised and stretched, if it is a good relationship, then it would survive the deconstruction and reorganization. The dyadic field opens and is not as stable as it used to be – but a new organization takes place: a field of fields, a triangular order of dyadic connections. The child therefore needs to experience its own potency in penetrating the mother-father exclusiveness, while at the same time failing to completely shatter the parental dyad.

There is something paradoxical in this position. The child needs to (unconsciously) feel its potency by penetrating the solidity of the parental dyadic field, and at the same time fail to destroy this dyad altogether. A failure to attain an appropriately-timed symbiosis (which Margaret Mahler, 1958, 77, usefully considered as the second, healthy stage of narcissism, 'in which the infant behaves and functions as though he and his mother were an omnipotent system (a dual unity) within one common boundary (a symbiotic membrane as it were)') and achieve this fine balance between omnipotence and helplessness is the source of the narcissistic wound, resulting in disturbance of the relationship between inner and outer world (Fenichel, 1945), particularly surrounding love and worth.

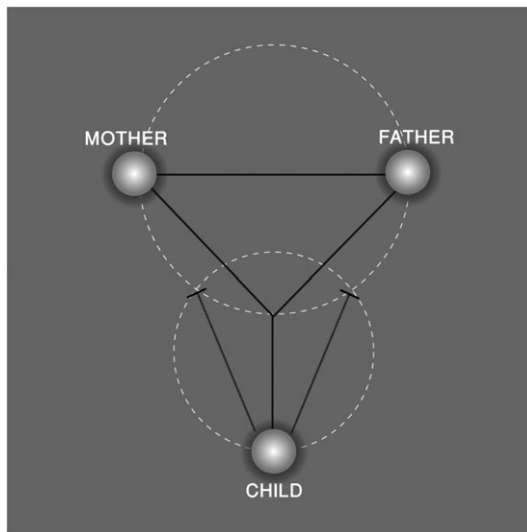
When all is well, out of this fusion with the mother, the breaking open (but not destruction) of the paternal dyad to make space for the triad, there begins a web of interactional forces (relational fields), which, as Loewald (1971) observed, can gradually support differentiation and independence. Attachment theory emphasizes the mother-baby primary intersubjectivity as crucial tenet for the construction of self (e.g. Benedek, 1959; Bowlby, 1980; Bromberg, 1983; Mahler, 1967; Spruiell, 1975; Winestine, 1973; Winnicott, 1990). To this, I would like to offer the additional importance of the father. At the early stages of infancy and babyhood, it is not simply the creation of the motherbaby wider-self, but also the deconstruction of the father-mother dyad and its survival that facilitates a strong separate ego, which is capable of surrender. The child witnesses at the same time the destruction of a relational self (the mother-father dyadic self) and the reconstruction of a relational form (the mother-father dyad within the familial wider-self).

A child who has succeeded too much (i.e. whose arrival into the parental dyad resulted in the break of the relationship, a break which is not only parental separation, but may also express in unhealthy liaison, or worse still as abuse, where the child-parent relationship is successfully competing with, and destroying the couple) has lost everything. The triangular field of familial relationship will collapse, and while the child *won* and got his mother all to himself, he has lost a great deal more than that. As an older child and adult, he might find it difficult to discern fantasy from reality and may oscillate between feelings of omnipotence and helpless anxiety. Since this injury to organization results in heightened omnipotent anxiety, it will be termed here the *narcissistic-anxious* position. The child will be frightened of its actions, preoccupied with how it might impact the world. The capacity to surrender to the relational self would be impaired since the person would fear that he could not be contained without causing destruction. My client Ruth, for example, waited over 18 months before she disclosed a big biographical detail (she ran away from home for a year when she was 18, used drugs and was promiscuous), because she feared it would

destroy me to hear it. The *narcissistic-anxious* position is an organization that is full of blame, guilt and shame.

On the other hand, a child who has not succeeded enough to penetrate the parental dyad (i.e. whose parents did not allow for the child-parent dyad to take temporary precedence over the parental relationship) is an emotional orphan. When the parental dyad is impenetrable, and the child is unable to form the basic relational-form (primary intersubjectivity) with his mother, he is isolated and lonely. While the very first stages of primary narcissism (which Mahler, 1958, considered as pre-symbiotic stage) may still be in place, the later symbiotic stage – of true wider-self will be missing. Milton's self did not properly form as a dyadic self. Instead he was left to form a relationship organization with the shared *Jacqui* entity. Figure 3 presents Milton's family organization. Jacqui was still depressed from the loss of her stillborn child, doubtlessly harbouring guilt from the unspoken affair, and probably hosting a myriad of mixed emotions towards her newborn boy. She was definitely not emotionally available for Milton. As for Jack, his own life story was re-enacted. Jack and Jacqui responded to the threat of breaking their dyadic field by strengthening it and protecting themselves from Milton. Milton commented on an image he saw clearly during a session, of himself standing in front of a much larger cube; graphite, solid, impenetrable, and featureless.

A child who cannot penetrate the parental dyad to form separate relationships with one parent, then with the other, is left dangling and impotent, failing the most crucial task of the baby: *to make his mother love him*. The position created here is the *narcissistic-depressive* position. The narcissistic element here manifests, once more, in the distorted sense of agency. This child has been unable to make the most basic connection and would often struggle with depression. He might be full of anger, trying again and again to thrust into connection, wanting to force relationships or create meaningful connections, yet his thrust will be short-lived. The terrified parents castrated the essence of the child potency: his power of attracting love.



**Figure 3.** The terrified castrating relational system.



When Milton was eight Jacqui confessed her affair to Jack. This day marked a new level of violence in his family. Jack's wrath was swift to rise and sustained for many weeks, during which time he left the family home for two weeks. When he returned, he claimed to have forgiven Jacqui, something Jacqui felt to be true. Indeed, she commented 'he never mentioned it again' during a tentative exploration with Milton many years later. In reality, the simmering wrath was transferred to Milton, who became the target of repeated physical violence at the hands of both parents. To the sexual and physical shame that was regularly directed at Milton was now an added layer of physical harm. Jacqui did not interfere to protect her son from Jack's tyrannical outbursts. Instead, she chose to act with violence dispassionately; labelling it necessary punishment to discipline bad behaviour. While Jack vanished emotionally and physically into his work, both he and Jacqui continued to strengthen their symbiotic impenetrable connection. From the child's perspective they became a single entity of Jacquijack. Milton had generously positioned himself as the scapegoat for the unspoken jealousy, the unexpressed anger, and the deep mistrust. As a child, he believed (and was probably right) that dad hit him instead of hitting mum. More painful still was watching his younger siblings being born to slightly more loving parents. As Amy Gross and Harold Keller (1992, 181) wisely observed 'Psychological abuse was a much more powerful predictor of depression, self-esteem, and attributional style than physical abuse.' Milton had to balance both.

Analyst Philip Bromberg (1983) acknowledged that alongside therapeutic interpretations, successful therapy involved meeting the earlier needs of the client – including gratifying these through genuine affirmation. This affirmation, in Milton's case, was affirmation of his existence within a dyad, and such a dyad could not have been formed without our growing love. Our therapeutic task involved re-establishing a secure (inner and outer) relational self – a place where Milton could receive love. To be able to do that, he had to feel the stabbing pain of realizing that he was not loved. Milton had faithfully accepted the unloved position to save his parents from having to touch the depths of their unprocessed biographical pain – in his very existence he processed it for them; now, in therapy, he started rebelling against his un-lovability.

It was not Milton's parents that were disturbing his life, however; it was his own incapacity to separate the abusive parenting he had received in the past from his present self-sponsorship. 'The fact that your parents have abused you all these past years,' I told him once, 'does not give you the right to continue doing it to yourself, not now nor in the future.' Milton was committed to creating a new form of self-parenting, to deconstruct the self-negating organization he has inherited and recreate a new one. Although he worked hard at this process, struggling and surrendering, truthfully facing the most unpleasant aspects of his childhood, his resemblance to his parents, and discovering his own shadows, he was unable to shift these patterns. Time and again hope would appear in short bursts and new ideas, fantasies, and future plans would surface. Time and again these hopes and plans would crash. Milton woke up to realizing he was not making enough money from his artwork, that he had very few close friends, and the women in his life were repeated pattern of his mother: women he was looking to save, women who were unable to see him, women who were terrified of his fury. Milton needed to find a new mother and a new father. (Our brotherhood therefore symbolized a meeting across the narcissistic spectrum. Milton was the depressive brother, while I was the anxious one.)

## JOINING A PACK OF WOLVES

But somehow or another you will realize that you are safe, that you are secure, that there is somebody you know and can trust, and whom you can recognize who will be with you, with whom you can talk, with whom you can shake hands.

(Erickson and Rossi, 1989, 31)

For many years, and always in cyclical waves, Milton suffered from episodes of depression, which are understood here as resulting from the lack of primary dyadic self. But while Milton did struggle with degrees of helplessness and depression characteristic of psychological and physical abuse (Gross and Keller, 1992), he still kept a relentless, creative, and unyielding (if short-lived at times) thrust into life. Milton did find a mother, but she was found closer to Jung than to Freud. Since he was eight or nine he would often play in woods close to his home and there he found her, in nature, in Gaia; the supreme Greek goddess of the earth. The archetypal symbols of lover, wizard, and king have also manifested here as fathers. His artwork was mostly archetypal in nature, a meeting of the elements, and it was in nature that Milton was at his best: he felt met in nature, he felt held and seen and most of all, he trusted deeply. Mountain tops or deserts, primordial landscapes on or under the ocean: wild nature was the only mother who could sufficiently contain him. When Milton drew or sculptured, he entered a trance, and there – even though he was not always happy – he was certainly always alive. He spoke of several occasions when he felt the veil between himself and these archetypal energies drop and he was part of the whole, and whole. This at first was a terrifying experience, being so connected was overwhelming.

Erich Fromm (1957) considered the creative act as an alternative path to attaining union and escaping isolation (i.e. path to forming a relational-self), and Heinz Kohut further illustrated the power of the creative choice:

The creative individual, whether in art or science, is less psychologically separated from his surroundings than the noncreative one; the 'I-you' barrier is not as clearly defined. The intensity of the creative person's awareness of the relevant aspects of his surroundings is akin to the detailed self perceptions of the schizoid and the childlike. (Kohut, 1966, 259)

I believe that this surrender to the creative, mythical, and archetypal saved Milton from psychic death and actual suicide. At the same time, it made his human existence complicated. Milton always had amazing ideas, and was able to initiate projects and start beautiful paintings, but he quickly lost his energy, becoming despondent and lost. He admitted how difficult it was for him to apply himself to life. Seeing Milton struggle was painful: there was he, one of the most talented artists I have seen, creating works of great beauty and yet failing, time and again, to break through the patterns of inaction and lethargy. Those difficulties were particularly painful when it came to relationships. In his relationships Milton would forcefully approach the deepest, most sincere, and exposing places, only to be left disappointed and after spending years trying to penetrate and failing to sustain a connection, he would let go. I saw Milton, still knocking on heaven's door, still desperately wishing to make an impact and save his mother so she could finally – as he wished she would from the day he was born, love him.

In some ways, I view our work together as bridging the archetypal – where Milton is not only fluent and potent but also healthy and connected, with the human realm – where Milton

often struggled with anger and fury, depression and helplessness. We easily met at the archetypal world of symbols, myths and trance – it is a world we have both inhabited with ease. We also shared a deep and seldom met yearning to be seen beyond our archetypal and societal role which we have both repeatedly created, only to be heartbroken. As such, we were brothers. Two wolves, accustomed to, and somewhat invested in, their loneliness, terrified of the hope and dread of a beautiful, sustained connection, standing there on the rock.

I remember the session when I told Milton for the first time of my great love for him. After a long few minutes he replied ‘I love you too,’ and later he added: ‘you are the first man in my life that I told him “I love you.” ’ The only way for us to erect that bridge between inside and outside, fantasy and reality, archetypal scenery and human relatedness, was to open to love. And love, I fear, required us both to mourn the unloved child within us. First, the two of us recognized our loneliness as we stood on that black sooty rock. We were both there to transform our daggers – our phallic masculinity. Carl Hammerschlag described the pull of the spirit as it awoke within us, demanding our attention: ‘It doesn’t matter how long your spirit lies dormant and unused. One day you hear a song, look at an object, see a vision, and you feel its presence’ (Hammerschlag, 1992, 171). It had to begin with a man, since Milton did not trust his mother at all, and indeed, Milton was referred to me by Stephen Gilligan, with whom he had done important work. It also, and critically so, had to be supported by surrender, and Milton’s art, as well as him finding Maggie allowed for it. It had to be accompanied by a painful separation from his parents, of which I shall write later.

Milton and I might have required different journeys for transforming the dagger (the majority of my journey was done in my own individual psychotherapy) but the opening to the community as a wounded wolf was a necessary start. Like the parental dyad, we both had to tolerate a period of literal and metaphorical impotence. The phallus had to soften so it can be recreated, not as a compensated archetypal *hero*, but as a breathing, pulsating, and connecting human penis. The boy’s rigidity had to melt down or break to give way to a real man. The transformation of the phallic power, from an admired totem to a dynamic aspect of connection demanded both of us to face our own fears of depression, impotence, and annihilation. A rite of passage was in play. Here, began the mindful acknowledgment to the spirit’s call: ‘come and meet me,’ with a joint reply by both Milton and myself: ‘we are here’.

## **PARADISE LOST, HUMANITY REGAINED: DISCONNECTING FROM PARENTS**

Why is it that a dog is so free? Because it is the living mystery that doesn’t question itself.

Clarice Lispector, *Waters of the Sea* (1974, 162)

Milton would arrive at the clinic, remove his shoes and put his bag down by the hall, as if making sure that only that which is crucial to his journey entered the room. He would sit on his chair and we would make physical contact, frequently it was simply our feet that touched. The stories would then unfold. We lived the dreams and dramas of Milton’s sincere effort to liberate himself from the violence he had taken upon himself to perpetuate. Following his childhood predicament, Milton has made himself the object of violence, and we

both desperately wanted to stop this cycle. The conditions for reparative work became more promising: his girlfriend Maggie, a psychotherapist, was at times emotionally, cognitively, and physically able to meet with Milton more fully than ever and a new mother was created, a mother with whom a new story might begin. While Milton still finds himself at times saving Maggie and abandoning himself, they engage in an open dialogue about it – as mindful and honest as is possible for them right now. I was there too, a father who is willing to be terrified, willing to risk anger or hurt in order to stay connected.

Transferential trances opened very easily, and we used trancework throughout our meeting. Elgan Baker saw the potential for reparative work in hypnosis, writing: ‘hypnotherapy becomes an experiential arena in which the unfinished developmental work of psychic maturation can be explored, focused, and addressed’ (Baker, 2000, 67). Milton’s mood swings, however, did not improve. He did gain a deeper understanding of his transferential organizations, but his capacity to sustain his emotional potency was still wanting. We worked through his anger with his mother, his hate and guilt. We have scrutinized Milton’s need to violently penetrate others with his forceful emotional and intellectual thrust, as if he was still hoping to break that parental dyad and form a relationship with his mother and father. Indeed, Milton was still invested in trying to have a meaningful relationship with his parents, as two separate people not just the unified Jacquijack.

After a powerful session, where Milton brought in a dream in which his mother was holding him, and recognized he was both the mother and baby, the penny finally dropped. He understood, not simply cognitively but somatically, with all of who he was, that he had tried to save her all his life both from his father’s wrath and from having to deal with her incapacity to love. He made it easy for her by making himself unlovable for her, by handing his body for his father to hit. ‘I don’t have to save these women’, he wrote to me after the session, ‘I don’t have to save my mother.’ With this, came a very painful decision. Milton recognized that he was unable to sustain these insights, his self-love, and sponsorship as long as he was in touch with his parents. Every contact with them set him back months into pits of bitterness, resentment, depression, and suicidal ideation. He became regressive, a rebellious teenager, self-shaming, highly dissociative, and self-negating. These contacts would result in acting out with Maggie, who felt threatened by Milton’s velocity; it would sabotage his career – more galleries expressed interest in his work yet he would not pursue these invitations to connect following conversations with his parents. During a particularly painful session, Milton told me he had decided he needed time to separate fully from the original source of his wounding, to separate inner from the outer and give himself a chance to establish a stronger connection with his own emergent inner parents. He stopped contact with his parents. He realized that whatever he wanted, whatever he craved from them, he would not get and worse, that he risked sacrificing his own life (again) in trying.

Milton talked about it in the session, speaking of the great disappointment of his failure to integrate his internal parenting while staying in touch with them, wanting to be in a stronger place (relational organization) before he reconnected with his parents. Listening to him, I felt torn and terrified. My own daughter was about one year old at that time, and particularly attached to her mother. In my personal life I had to deal with the stabbing pain of being rejected, time and again, by my baby – being devastated by her not wanting me and yet coming back. I was working hard to let her witness her impact without shattering or making her pay unbearable consequences. I thought of the intolerable pain I would have

felt if my daughter approached me like Milton had his own parents, telling me that for her own sanity she must break contact with me until she was ready; I would have wanted to die. How much of it could I share with Milton? How much did my own terror deserve space in the therapeutic dyad? At first I didn't share much, particularly since I felt, deeply so, that Milton was right.

His mother was never able to provide him with the facilitative environment, which Stephen Mitchell (1988, 187) described as 'her effort to shape the environment around the child's spontaneously arising wishes, to read the child's needs and provide for them.' Nor was there any reason to believe that she would. I also recognized that the desire to be loved by her kept clouding the development of Milton's fragile new organization of self-love. The new *inner parents*, internalized partly from Maggie and me, would quickly crumble when Jacquijack appeared. Almost despite himself, Milton was forever attuned into his mother's deepest needs, answering them with his self-negating depression.

Psychologist and feminist Carol Gilligan was relaying a story she was told in a seminar by an attending woman who was sitting in the living room one day when her four-year-old son came up to her and asked: 'Mommy, why are you sad?' Wanting to be a good mother, she thought she should not burden her son with her sadness. 'No, I'm not sad,' she said. 'Mommy, he said, 'I know you. I was inside you.'(p.113)

Milton did not only know his mother from inside, he also knew that he could, by his very impotence, satisfy her unconscious need. His self-annihilation was not at all what Jacqui wanted, as no mother would want her child to be so self-violent, but it did represent some deep and never worked through needs. To be able to form a healthy relationship with himself, Milton needed to mourn his impotence: he was not unable to separate his inner parents from his real ones.

A few things happened when Milton disconnected from his parents. Firstly, he was more able to internalize the new relational organization: he started practising self love. His surrender allowed for the penetrative quality he always sought, yet it was not a violent penetration, but a softer and more loving one, as Erich Fromm posed: 'In the act of loving, of giving myself, in the act of penetration the other person, I find myself, I discover myself, I discover us both, I discover man' (Fromm, 1957, 24). Secondly, his *emotional erections* were sustained for longer (this metaphor of sustaining an erection became one that kept coming back, throughout our work together.) He was able to focus on his artwork and promote himself over longer periods of time, his relationship with Maggie became healthier, and both were able to recognize their projections and transferences more easily. Thirdly, Milton became more aware of his shame, the shame he now recognizes to be at the core of his anger, depression, and confusion. Milton wanted to work with shame in therapy, he explicitly brought it up almost every week, and every week I found myself deflecting from shame, telling him his issue was not shame, such was my desire to not go there.

Milton's breaking contact with his parents had a fourth consequence: it impacted us. We became more distant and our work lost some of its magic and became more cautious. For a few weeks I avoided bringing Milton up in supervision (or my own therapy). I explained to myself that this was a calculated clinical decision, given that we only had a few months to work together before I left the country, that shame is a big topic and maybe Milton ought to work with it with a woman therapist. I even acknowledged to myself that I did not want

to face my own biographic shame and that possibly held me back from doing this important work with Milton. However, It took us both a couple of months (assisted by my own therapist and supervisor) to figure out what really was going on between us. When Milton confronted me one day by saying how unsatisfying he found the last few sessions, and challenging my inability and unwillingness to work with his shame, it dawned on me. It was indeed my shame that I was not wanting to touch, but not my biographical shame. Instead it was the shame in the *here-and-now* of our relationship, in the reality of our connection. I was holding back from sharing with Milton just how terrifying I found him breaking contact with his parents. How frightened it made me feel that he would wake up to realize it was a huge mistake, and how deeply it touched my own fears of rejection.

Philosopher and psychoanalyst Heinrich Racker (1968) demonstrated that the patient dynamics resonated with the analyst's: both in their struggle with the universal human conflicts, and with the intertwining idiosyncrasies of their own biographies. Therapeutic work, so he claimed, was located in the dialogic and dyadic field created by the two. I was ashamed of how deeply Milton had affected me, and in my protecting him from my shame, I also perpetuated his own history – the parents who tried to protect their child from their feelings, only for him to pick it up and enact it – feeling on their behalf. As Lewis Aron convincingly argued: 'Self-revelation is not a choice for the analyst; it is an inevitable and continuous aspect of the analytic process' (Aron, 1999, 261).

With my admittance and disclosure, Milton had not only confronted me as he could not confront his parents (as they never responded) but has also witnessed me surviving the crash and coming back into relatedness. The metaphor of crashing and surviving the relational crash throughout this case material is inspired by Jessica Benjamin's (2006) excellent paper. Our therapeutic relationship deepened since our love grew steadily and we managed to dialogue with the virtues and failures of our relationship more honestly, allowing our ending to honour the deep reciprocal impact we had on one another.

The last period of psychotherapy saw powerful intersubjective trances, where the father-son, brothers, lovers, and rival alpha dogs all stepped aside, like respectful wolves, making space to a real meeting. Lennart Ramberg called this *moments of meeting*, where the central experience manifested in feelings, and what was said mattered very little. These moments of meeting are paradoxical, since 'in the same moment that I feel that I express my (free and independent) will, I am dependent on how the other actually sees me' (Ramberg, 2006, 29).

Milton and I have both lost our paradise – in life and now in therapy. It was the very breaking of the therapeutic paradise, where the therapist *fucked up* and there was a threat of repetition and retraumatization, that humanity was regained. It was not only Milton's breakdown that facilitated a breakthrough (Field, 1996) – it was also our dyadic breakdown (and my own, as a therapist).

Milton's relationship with Maggie is the most mature connection he ever had. He is able to relate to her directly, to recognize and dialogue with his projections, to fail and come back into relationship. He had a few very successful exhibitions and I believe that as an artist he is destined for greatness. Milton is also slowly coming to terms with his need to prioritize his connection with himself and his capacity to monitor his life over the advantages of reconnecting with his parents. I trust his capacity to monitor himself, making sure that he does not sacrifice himself unnecessarily, and that he only reconnects with them if

he trusted it would not sabotage what he has so vigorously fought for. I trust that he can listen to the *Butterfly* fluttering his wings in his belly. Our work together was not smooth, we went through many cycles of rupture and repair, accompanied by hopes and disappointments within the connection, and – mostly – being able to return to one another, a little less perfect, a little more human.

*Welcome joy and welcome sorrow...* Milton's therapeutic journey is an epic voyage towards fully reclaiming his humanity. Unlike the poet he was named after, he has maturely given up the effort to regain paradise. Instead, he opted for the more meaningful and fulfilling task of reclaiming his humanity.

I'm reminded of Mr. Savage's conversation with Mustapha Mond, the world controller in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New-World*:

'We don't,' said the Controller. 'We prefer to do things comfortably.'

'But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin.'

'In fact,' said Mustapha Mond, 'you're claiming the right to be unhappy.'

'All right then,' said the Savage defiantly, 'I'm claiming the right to be unhappy.'

'Not to mention the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer; the right to have too little to eat; the right to be lousy; the right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen to-morrow; the right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pains of every kind.'

There was a long silence.

'I claim them all,' said the Savage at last.

(Huxley, 1932, 219)

I do not want to be Milton's friend. I want him to always have me also as his therapist, his father, his older brother, a wolf in his pack. But I wish I had more friends like Milton – a man who is connected to his masculinity and his feelings at the same time, a man who is able to feel deeply as a man, not as a woman (my best friend, Shaul, is one such man). Knowing that a man like Milton exists in the world makes me a happier and a more hopeful man.

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