sessions like this and I'll need to go home by ambulance!' (p 49).

Then there are incidents of rule breaking where I'm thinking 'Oh, no you didn't really do that?!'. Such as pressuring a client named Alvin into agreeing to a home visit in order to discover what was preventing him from allowing people into his life. This was decades before reality TV shows about extreme horders and what Yalom found there shocked him. Alvin stopped therapy abruptly and Yalom was sure he had messed up badly. Then 30 years later they met (Alvin now happily married with a grown-up family) at the funeral of a woman called Molly, a household organiser. Yalom had forgotten that after the final session he had phoned to suggest contacting Molly to sort out the mess. Now he was told, by a very grateful Alvin, that their sessions and Molly's ministrations had turned his life around. Yalom was left with his mind swirling with thoughts 'about the impossibility of ever learning how psychotherapy works' (p 80). Yes, indeed!

The book title comes from *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, a second century Roman emperor, who dictated daily his reflections on how to live a virtuous life. During a session Yalom quoted from this book and suggested the client might read it, while muttering to himself that he knows such suggestions are seldom helpful and often a bad idea. It did nearly backfire with this client who liked to retreat from the difficulty of the matters in hand by engaging in theoretical dialogue. But finally he did become inspired by *The Meditations* and resolved to make changes, saying 'every morning he [Marcus Aurelius] took himself more seriously than I have ever done any morning in my entire life' (p 204).

The Examined Life: How We Lose and Find Ourselves

Stephen Grosz (2014). London: Vintage.

Grosz, an American who trained in London, has worked here as a psychoanalyst for 25 years. In the same number of pages as Yalom, he publishes 31 'episodes' covering a wide range of issues including change, loss and alienation from self. His presentation style is the mirror of Yalom's in that his ratio of dialogue to commentary is about 20/80, with much shorter but still satisfying case histories describing the understanding gained through the to and fro of client/therapist conversation.

Like Yalom he doesn't refer explicitly to theory or diagnostic categories, rather each story illustrates individuals with unique histories and reasons for how they are now. He says he was gripped early in his career with the idea that we can become disconnected from ourselves, something he discovered initially about himself during training therapy and finds here with some of his patients.

Grosz also makes occasional references to a book or quotation prompted by something in the client's story. One which caught my imagination being

the short story of *Bartleby* by Herman Melville first published in 1853 (page 126). With the unwitting collusion of his over-caring employer, Bartleby gradually stops working and gives up all effort and responsibility for himself. He increasingly responds to entreaties to action with 'I would prefer not to' while his employer becomes increasingly anxious for him. Eventually, he even prefers not to eat and dies of self starvation. For Grosz it's a gripping illustration of how if someone else takes responsibility for our anxiety they risk taking away our motivation for change. This story also illustrates something we all experience when two competing inner voices say 'let's do it now' and yet 'I would prefer not to'. Such procrastination may be about something vitally important to explore, as happened with Grosz's client in this episode.

I particularly appreciated Grosz's penultimate episode where he challenges the notion of bereavement closure and 'the tyranny of shoulds' (p 208) derived from the proliferation of self-help books. This so often causes the bereaved person to suffer more because they're stuck on the idea of closure, which mostly doesn't happen. He points out that Kubler-Ross's grief stages were originally about the process of dying, only later becoming the inspiration for the widespread notion that we can permanently end our sorrow while we continue to live. This idea has taken hold even though we know it seldom accords with our experience of bereavement. We have the possibility to suffer the pain of loss repeatedly until we die. It may return less frequently but can still be as raw (or more raw) when it returns, often unbidden like a thief in the night. And it can change, as for example when we are old and feel deeply sad in a different way for someone who died tragically when they were young. I find clients are hugely relieved when I suggest this alternative view of bereavement and encourage them to accept the loss into their life story – making it 'mine' – written deep inside for ever like Blackpool rock.

In his final episode Grosz talks about remembering long gone patients and yearning to reach out to them, to say one more thing, to get it right this time. I know that feeling!

In conclusion, I enjoyed both books and recommend them for anyone doing psychotherapy, whether psychodynamic or existential. They relate recognisable tales of the everyday situations we encounter with clients and our struggles to help them. Both writers discuss things they have found bothersome which is always interesting and instructive. Neither focuses on theoretical framework, they use simple everyday language which is a good model in itself. What came across for me was their passion and commitment to being as good a therapist as possible for each client, and their wisdom in acknowledging we never really know what that means.

Their presentation styles are different, such as their choice of dialogue/commentary splits. So that Yalom's longer and dialogical chapters provide

exemplars for therapeutic practice whereas Grosz's brief episodes encapsulate and make memorable insights into a wide range of typical client dilemmas. Both approaches have their merits. Most importantly, these books worked for me in stimulating reflection on my way of working and development of my internal supervisor, which I think is the main purpose of this genre.

Notes

[1] Details about this study are available on the internet : 'Adult depression study (TADS) | Tavistock and Portman'; and 'Pragmatic randomized controlled trial of long-term psychoanalytic psychotherapy for treatment-resistant depression: the Tavistock Adult Depression Study (TADS) - Fonagy - 2015 - World Psychiatry - Wiley Online Library'

Diana Pringle

Hardship & Happiness

Lucius Annaeus Seneca (2014). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Stoicism appears to be having a major resurgence at the beginning of the 21st Century. Three authors still celebrated today are Lucius Anneus Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. Like their Hellenistic predecessors, these three Roman stoics concentrated on developing concrete, therapeutic philosophies about daily behaviour and suffering. Today, it is widely accepted that some of the ancient stoic remedies for emotional problems bear a resemblance to Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy and Cognitive Therapy. Thus, Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck both took explicit inspiration from stoic philosophy. However, in some ways the roman stoics are closer to existential therapy and existential philosophy. This similarity is evident in *Hardship & Happiness*, which collects a range of essays by Seneca intended to instruct on how to achieve happiness or tranquility in the face of a difficult world.

Stoicism is born between an old foreseeable world falling apart and a new multicultural mass society, the empire of Alexander the Great and the Roman Empire. Stoic philosophy takes off because it offers human flourishing and security in a time of existential alienation and rootlessness. It is a practical and therapeutic teaching aimed at freeing human being from worries and suffering due to irrational emotions. We can have a life that truly involves flourishing if we free ourselves from externals beyond our control and concentrate on the moral and existential aspects of life that lie within our control. Furthermore, if we have a reflective relation to our feelings, we can avoid being affectionate and led away from ourselves. If you lose it, you lose! Similar to the early Greek stoics, the later Stoics of Roman Imperial times, Seneca, Epictetus and Aurelius, therefore idealize