

of voices, ideas and influences, and to question what perspectives I might be missing. Before being gifted this book I did know I was missing it. And yet I now await with impatience for Volume 2 to be published in English.

Sarah Hopkins

In the Wake of Trauma: Psychology and philosophy for the suffering other

E.R. Severson, B.W. Becker & D. M. Goodman (eds.), 2008. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Upon receiving *In the Wake of Trauma*, I was keen to jump straight in. The cover depicting a solitary tree with calming sun on one side and a moody storm on the other was tantalising. The sub-heading, *Psychology and philosophy for the suffering other*, further hinted at an enthralling read. Upon completion, I cannot confess to it being an easy read. However, it is a worthy addition to any trauma library. The following review will attempt to pull out the key aspects of the book.

The editors' opening introduction sets the book's objective clearly; the aim is to start a conversation. It brings together a set of chapters, not necessarily to offer any ground-breaking new theories on trauma, but to instigate thought, critical thinking and to collate some of what is already laid out before us in the trauma field. The book also positions itself more towards client-facing readers, conveying thoughts on how the text can be applied in a therapeutic setting. As with any book that is a collection of papers, the reader finds oneself drawn to some chapters while less captivated by others. For me, it was more a case of a book of two halves, with half filled with trauma as represented in the arts and the other half more traditional philosophy and psychology writings.

In that vein, the chapters that position trauma in the context of its portrait within the arts do so predominantly in play and literature. I felt the offer of a pre-reading list might have been useful. A chance to refresh on texts such as James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the biblical book of Job would have made for a more informed read. In parts, I forgot I was reading chapters on trauma rather than literary critique. However, there was much to be considered from the offerings, especially in terms of how practitioners might use the texts to reflect on client's trauma within the therapy room.

Chapter One documents a conference discussion between those defined as scholars, namely Severson, Critchely, Pellegrini, Kearney and Skerrett. What transpires in the debate is an agreement that *Hamlet* is a text about failed mourning, love and desire. In considering the notion of suicide is the thought that beliefs about an afterlife are often paradoxical, between belief in an afterlife and belief in nothing following life. Observing how

those in distress navigate the paradox of these two positions can see both leading to fear. The philosophical debate leads to anxiety regardless. We either believe what we are creating in life might carry forward after death, taking the good and the frightening bad along with it, or upon death all is lost and life was meaninglessness. Such paradoxes are important when considering a client who is encountering grief.

Similarly, there is the dilemma of love and loss. In *Hamlet* every love is compared to his father's, but how can clients process every other love being lesser than the one they may have lost? *Hamlet* becomes an acting out of Hamlet's desires from the safety of his evolving play; within script Hamlet can learn how he has been the helm of his mother and father's desire to the point that his desires can only begin to surface when one of them is lost. The chapter highlights how people can become 'lost' in others and how the arts can provide a distance through which to explore the client's processes.

The chapter on St Augustine's body also predominantly identifies the conflict of living in paradox. Manoussakis uses Augustine's most aspired work *Confessions* to detail his transition from youth into the faith of Christianity as a basis for exploring the gap that often exists between people's impulses or will and their rational thoughts. The chapter specifically tries to capture what individuals do when the body wants one thing and the mind another. Here existential theory enters the debate, specifically Merleau-Ponty's embodiment stance. In doing so, the reader is left questioning how much of the body is included in therapeutic encounters; how trauma both connects with and disconnects from the body and mind; the role of the body in self-deception and self-awareness; and our sense of lived experience.

We return to *Hamlet* in the next chapter along with *Ulysses*. The key theme of the piece is to illustrate how in writing the impossible can be played out, that narrative can help manifest a chaotic process by playing with ideas, namely by offering a way for those experiencing trauma to work through their trauma history. Kearney offers up Shakespeare's characters as able to repeat the trauma and tragedy, and uses Freudian discourse on the need repeat to help work through. In writing, or indeed reading other trauma-related works, clients might find a way to bring a trauma that is too much for words into the light. They can play out different endings and explore aspects of their experiences that are thus far lost in translation.

Whilst most writings on trauma avoid association with the word 'broken', in 'Being Broken and Unbroken' Chalfin does not shy away from the term, often colloquially used, to describe the feeling after trauma by survivors. It is perhaps not surprising to find this is the chapter where existential philosophy dominates, namely in the examination of Heidegger's application to trauma. The chapter examines what it is to be broken, perceived here as a by-product of vulnerability; to be unbroken takes courage. It draws

on Heidegger's theory that to be authentic, one needs a degree of shattering or brokenness. However, in the case of trauma, often Dasein will lack the required attunement with the body and feelings to achieve authenticity. Thus, Dasein becomes overly aware of the ever-presence of death. The conclusions drawn in working with trauma clients is to help reinstate attunement and assist in an acceptance that the individual at this point now needs to take responsibility for their victimhood.

Moving away from individual trauma, Houck-Loomis provides insight into the collective and generational aspect of trauma. Using the biblical text of the people of Israel, the reader is journeyed through how historical trauma can become the narrative of generations thereafter. It concludes that whole communities can become 'traumatised people'. What is then important is looking into the unremembered. A client who finds it difficult to make sense of fears that are passed down may find understanding once they can be contextualised in their historical narrative by looking at the gap between the individual and the collective history narrative.

Novak's Chapter Eight felt particularly relevant in a world where the loss of loved ones appears at the forefront of the COVID-19 experience. With the help of a case study, a client who has lost a romantic lover, it makes for one of the lighter chapters. While there is no denial of the client's pain, what emerges is the relational aspect of loss and by counterpart the relational aspect of healing. The study demonstrates how exploration in therapy can help move a relationship with a loved into a posthumous one, reframing it from complete loss into perhaps a different type of relationship but a relationship, nevertheless.

Moving on, there is an opportunity to consider suffering. Richardson and O'Shea critique modern psychology for its part in denying the full experience of pain and suffering. The pair offer suffering as a concept beginning at birth and specifically visible through mothering. A mother brings a child in the world, and such joy is only available at the denial of reality. The reality is the pain the world will infuse upon the child throughout the course of their life. Suffering, in general, is viewed as an illness, whereas a more ontological approach might present as a more effective way of helping clients being-in-the-world. Yalom and May are presented as examples of such client work, as they assist clients in viewing the uncertainty of the world as the more usual way of being while certainty are rarer moments of experience.

This book is undoubtedly a refreshing read for those with a love of literature and the arts. It brings to life how the arts can be useful in expanding thoughts on trauma and how therapists can apply them in their work. *In the Wake of Trauma* is a helpful read for those working with trauma in an existential way even though it does not contain lots of existential theory

or new ideas. The book does, however, achieve its aim of providing a variety of papers it gives the reader much to converse on.

April Mangion

Reflecting On the Inevitable: Mortality at the crossroads of psychology, philosophy and health

Peter J. Adams, 2020. Abingdon: Oxford University Press.

“Whenever I try to think of my own death I end up muddled and confused” is the first sentence the author writes in the preface of the book *Reflecting On the Inevitable*. The exploration of ‘my-death’ as opposed to ‘other-death’ is the main subject matter the author has dedicated this book to. Presumably the intention of the author was to get to a more clarified place by the end of the book and assist the reader in that journey of clarification in turn.

Clearly the topic is an important one, maybe more so at this time, when the global pandemic of the coronavirus has meant a confrontation with death in a way unknown for a long time in the West. For over a year there have been extended and intermittent lockdowns in order to ‘keep safe’ and ‘save lives’, and the virus has been a relentless media subject. Bombarded with the daily chronicle of death figures, stories emerged of those who have lost someone dear or had a brush with death with recoveries that sometimes included long-COVID.

What better time to think afresh about our relationship with death?

The book has certainly kept my-death close by, perhaps more in the form of a background hum of uncomfortableness residing quietly in the shadows, always tinged with the pandemic and lockdown blues chugging by now faithfully alongside the uneventfulness of the collective mundaneness of COVID existence.

Sadly, the book has not added much to what I might already know, or at least sense I know, about death, nor has it managed to bring me closer to a clarified place of my-death. Perhaps, as the author alludes to, this is an impossibility. And yet, I feel this is a missed opportunity.

The author seems to have tackled the subject in an uninspiring manner. Both the title (exasperatingly not containing the word death) and the structure of the book have felt muddled and confusing throughout, so that I had to keep checking and re-checking what the argument at hand was and what the author was trying to get at.

Completing my read of the book, I must admit with relief, I will try to summarise in three points what I think the author was grappling with and trying to convey. First, our focus on other-death is much easier than focusing on my-death, and research and conversations around death are generally conducted with other-death in mind. Next, given the elusive nature of