

Stroud's book has answered them for me. I do not think this is a book to turn to for 'answers' in a simplistic kind of way. I think that her generosity in allowing us to walk part of her experience with her is a gift. I found the fact that someone struggled but is finding a way of attuning to her experience, finding words for it, and creating meanings out of the starkest, and darkest, of experiences reassuring. I am hopeful that I too can find a way to become someone who can live alongside death.

I am aware that this review is unusually personal for a professional journal. And, I am aware, even more so than usual, that I cannot say that this is the right book for you. But my sense is that as powerful as this book may be for those of us struggling to live with death, it is also a useful book for those who want to support us – whether personally or professionally. Because of that I am convinced it will be useful for members of the Society to read.

Stroud has offered something rare, something exquisite and something worthy of any attention readers may want to give it.

Martin Milton

A Matter of Death and Life: Love, loss and what matters in the end

Irvin D. Yalom & Marilyn Yalom. 2021. London: Piatkus.

I am unsure how to start this review as there is something too confronting if I simply write that this is by a couple who grapple with the impending death of one of them, the retirement of the other and the aftermath of it becoming a solo rather than joint project, much like their life. I am aware there is a broad range of literature on death and managing it as an experience, but it is not a topic I have ever really been drawn to and, in that sense, this feels like a novel undertaking. As I type this review, I can feel a disjoint between my upbeat activity and the real loss I know is to come.

The book is simply structured with a preface giving some background to the project, followed by thirty-five chapters. The first twenty-one chapters mark the time before Marilyn's death; there is an additional unnumbered chapter entitled 'We will remember' which includes tributes from their children that were spoken at her funeral. The passage of time is marked with each chapter having a month in the top right corner of the page; some months have multiple chapters.

The way in which Marilyn's actual death is dealt with is understated. The last chapter she authors ends with a statement that feels cruel and dissociated from the reality as she writes that:

Sandy sent material to Stanford University Press and within a

week they made an excellent offer – not just to publish Innocent Witnesses, but also to publish this book with Irv. This feels like a gift from the gods. Now all I have to do is stay alive in order to work on the two books with my editor...I hope I'm up to the work. With Thanksgiving just two weeks away and the children all coming here, I have to conserve whatever energy I can for them and my two book projects.

(p131)

From this point on the sole author is Irvin. It is not made into a big thing.

I cried quite a lot throughout the book. In part at the ending that I was bearing witness to, and the clear love that emanates from the shared life and endeavours together. In part at the strength and resolve that comes from Marilyn in her steadfast refusal, aside from her last written words, to not avoid or sugar coat her reality but to really accept that she is about to die. In part from at the innocence that Irvin displays in his contradictory desire to support his wife of so long in ending her suffering with his desire to not be without her. In part as events resonated with me as I prepare for my own mother's death.

The Yaloms discuss shedding possessions, especially books, and things that hold memories. Their acknowledgement that the memories will die with them mirrors the discussions I have had with my mother; while she has things that she wants to pass on to my daughters, she needs, well, they may benefit from her being clear what they mean so that they are not just lumbered with 'things'. There is an honesty, especially to Marilyn's chapters, about accepting that "everything is insubstantial" (p27) in the end.

One thought that keeps bugging me, and has returned to me while reading, and out on my morning run since, is based on a line in the preface where Irvin says Marilyn has told him:

It will be our book, a book unlike any other book because it entails two minds rather than one, the reflections of a couple who have been married for sixty-five years!

(p xii)

So, my initial reading of this was that the concept of dual authors writing alternate chapters is new, yet, and I am incredulous as I write this, the Yaloms wrote and edited *Every Day Gets a Little Closer* (Yalom & Elkin, 1991) which followed the same format. I am unsure why it bothers me. Perhaps because references to other publications by both prolific authors are dotted about all over the book, yet not to this, and it seems a logical place to reference a format that worked so well, and a project they were wholeheartedly involved in together. I think it has stayed with me as it is

a strange, inexplicable omission and it has left me wondering what is not being said, largely the only time I have felt that in relation to the book.

The only annoyance or criticism I can really offer is around privilege; that the Yaloms point towards their privilege that they have financial means, success and a successful family. On the one hand, this chimes with the fact that it is all insubstantial in the end as Marilyn dies, and Irvin is left to grieve and contemplate life on his own. On the other, and this is diametrically opposed to Irvin's descriptions of clients, is a prominence of the achievements of friends. My mind was drawn to Professor Slugworth in *Harry Potter* and his desire to collect famous people, yet in the Yaloms' case the two most famous people are the authors themselves. I wonder what it is about me that sees this as an annoyance; that there is something in American culture that accentuates the professional achievements perhaps, or that the sheer volume of friends, let alone friends of substantial professional repute, is something I could only dream of. Perhaps I am denying that dream to such an extent that it has displaced feeling escaping towards a grieving widower. This is a minor critique. Most of the work is heavyweight, sensitive, honest and revealing.

I reviewed Irvin's autobiography previously and would make some similar general comments again; that this is unlikely to change one's life as a practitioner and will appeal to some readers of this journal more than others. That said, this book will likely appeal to a wider readership as it is raw and offers an experience which we all know of in various forms, but not necessarily through direct experience, and certainly not in the same way. I do not know anyone who has had a relationship as long as the Yaloms. My own independence prior to marriage means I have experience of being independent that Irvin simply cannot grasp until Marilyn is dead. This is not a taxing read from a literary perspective but it brings up a depth of emotion, almost certainly, and I would recommend it purely from that perspective, and irrespective of one's disposition towards Irvin before this.

Ben Scanlan

The Touch Taboo in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life

Tamar Swade. 2020. London: Routledge.

My therapist has, over seven years, offered touch and I have found it, variously, powerfully healing, ordinary and terrifying. This is a book bristling with research examples of how touch can be healing. Swade's first example is of lab rats whose survival rates increased when they were stroked and petted by humans, an action described by Swade as being 'gentled' (p7). In using the word 'gentle' as a verb, the unusualness of which makes it an arresting, powerful word, it is as if Swade is asserting that the very act of