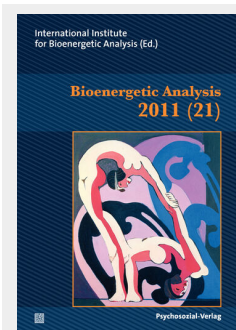


Robert Lewis

Broken and Veiled in Shame



Bioenergetic Analysis

11. Volume, No. 1, 2011, Page 83–103

Psychozoal-Verlag

DOI: [10.30820/0743-4804-2011-21-83](https://doi.org/10.30820/0743-4804-2011-21-83)



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>.

2011 Psychosozial-Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, Gießen, Germany
info@psychosozial-verlag.de
www.psychosozial-verlag.de



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). This license allows private use and unmodified distribution, but prohibits editing and commercial use (further information can be found at: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). The terms of the Creative Commons licence only apply to the original material. The reuse of material from other sources (marked with a reference) such as charts, illustrations, photos and text extracts may require further permission for use from the respective copyrights holder.

Cover image: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: *Pair of Acrobats*, Sculpture , 1932–33, Oil on canvas, 85,5 x 72 cm

Cover design & layout based on drafts by Hanspeter Ludwig, Wetzlar

<https://doi.org/10.30820/0743-4804-2011-21>

ISBN (PDF-E-Book) 978-3-8379-6889-7

ISBN (Print) 978-3-8379-2107-6

ISSN (Online) 2747-8882 · ISSN (Print) 0743-4804

BROKEN AND VEILED IN SHAME

REVEALED BY THE BODY'S IMPLICIT LIGHT¹

Robert Lewis

ABSTRACTS

ENGLISH

This paper was a keynote presentation at the 2009 IIBA Conference on the Poetry of the Body in Buzios Brazil. It is proposed that we bioenergetic therapists are artisans whose craft is both an art form and a clinical science. In support of this thesis, the following questions are explored:

Is it possible to both celebrate the poetry and ineffable mystery of our work, and yet to remain true to and to honor our Reichian and Lowenian roots?

Can we be grounded in the mystery of life, without slipping into the “mystification” against which Reich warned us?

Has the ‘grace of self’ that we seek to ‘unveil’, actually evolved from the core pulsation which our founders strove to liberate from our character armor?

Key Words: mystery, broken, genital embrace, pulsation

¹ This paper is taken from a keynote presentation at the IIBA conference, whose theme was, *Unveiling the Poetry of the Body*, and held in Buzios, Brazil, 2009.

FRAGMENTIERT UND VERHÜLLT DURCH SCHAM – ENTSCHEIERT DURCH DAS IMPLIZITE LICHT DES KÖRPERS (GERMAN)

Dieser Beitrag ist die überarbeitete Version eines Hauptvortrags anlässlich der IIBA-Konferenz 2009 mit dem Leitthema “Poesie des Körpers” in Buzios, Brasilien. Es wird vorgeschlagen, Bioenergetische AnalytikerInnen als Handwerker zu betrachten, deren Handwerk sowohl eine Kunstform als auch eine klinische Wissenschaft darstellt. Zur Untermauerung dieser These werden folgende Fragen untersucht:

Ist es möglich, die Poesie und das unbeschreibliche Mysterium unserer Arbeit zu feiern und dabei gleichzeitig unseren Reichianischen und Lowenianischen Wurzeln treu zu bleiben und diese in Ehren zu halten?

Können wir im Mysterium des Lebens geerdet sein, ohne in “Mystifikationen” zu verfallen, vor denen uns Reich gewarnt hat?

Hat sich die “Anmut des Selbst”, die wir zu entschleiern versuchen, tatsächlich aus den pulsierenden Bewegungen unseres inneren Kerns heraus entwickelt, die unsere Gründerväter vom Charakterpanzer zu befreien suchten?

Schlüsselbegriffe: Mysterium, fragmentiert, genitale Umarmung, Pulsation

CASSE ET CACHE DANS LA HONTE. REVELEE PAR LA LUMIERE IMPLICITE DU CORPS (FRENCH)

Cet article a été la conférence d'introduction du congrès 2009 de l'IIBA sur la Poésie du Corps à Buzios, Brésil. Il est proposé que, nous thérapeutes bioénergéticiens soyons des artisans dont le métier est une forme d'art (et) en même temps qu'une science clinique. A l'appui de cette thèse, les questions suivantes sont explorées:

Est il possible de célébrer à la fois la poésie et le mystère ineffable de notre travail et, en même temps, rester fidèle et honorer nos racines Reichiennes et Loweniennes?

Pouvons nous être enracinés dans le mystère de la vie sans “glisser” dans la “mystification” contre laquelle Reich nous a prévenu?

“La grâce du self” que nous cherchons à «dévoiler», s’est-elle développée à partir de la pulsation du centre que nos fondateurs ont tenté de libérer de notre armure caractérielle?

Mots Cles: Mystère, dévoiler, grâce, bioénergétiques, étreinte génitale, vague, pulsation, cassé

ROTO Y VELADE EN LA VERGUENZA. REVELADO POR LA LUZ IMPLÍCITA DEL CUERPO (SPANISH)

Este artículo se basa en la ponencia presentada en el Congreso del IIBA del 2009, La Poesía del Cuerpo, en Buzios, Brasil. En ella desarrollo la propuesta de que los analistas bioenergéticos somos artesanos cuya habilidad es a la vez una forma de arte y una ciencia clínica. Para apoyar esta tesis, se exploran las siguientes preguntas:

Es posible celebrar a la vez la poesía y el misterio inefable de nuestro trabajo y a la vez mantener y honrar nuestras raíces Reichianas y Lowenianas?

Podemos estar enraizados en el misterio de la vida, sin deslizarnos hacia la “mistificación” contra la cual Reich nos advirtió?

“La gracia del self que buscamos” “desvelar” ha evolucionado desde la pulsación nuclear que nuestros fundadores lucharon por liberar de nuestra armadura de carácter?

Palabras Clave: Misterio, roto, abrazo genital, pulsación

SPEZZATO E NASCOSTO DALLA VERGOGNA. RIVELATO DALLA IMPLICITA LUCE DEL CORPO (ITALIAN)

Questo articolo riprende la relazione presentata al Congresso dell’Iiba del 2009 a Buzios in Brasile. Vi si propone che noi analisti bioenergetici siamo artigiani la cui opera è sia una forma di arte che una scienza clinica. A sostegno di questa tesi, sono esplorate le seguenti questioni:

È possibile celebrare la poesia e l'ineffabile mistero del nostro lavoro, restare nel vero e onorare le nostre radici loweniane e reichiane?

Possiamo essere radicati nel mistero della vita, senza scivolare nella "mistificazione" contro cui Reich ci messo in guardia?

La "grazia del Sé" che cerchiamo di "svelare", in realtà si sviluppa dalla pulsazione del core che i nostri fondatori hanno lottato perché fosse liberata dall'armatura caratteriale?

Parole chiave: Mistero, spezzato, rapporto sessuale, pulsazione

DERROTADO E ESCONDIDO DE VERGONHA. REVELADO PELA LUZ IMPLÍCITA DO CORPO (PORTUGUESE)

Este artigo foi uma apresentação na abertura da Conferência de 2009 do IIBA – Poesia do Corpo – Buzios, Brasil. Propõe-se que nós terapeutas bioenergéticos sejamos artesãos cujo ofício é uma forma de arte e uma ciência clínica. Em apoio a esta tese, as seguintes questões são abordadas:

Será possível que celebremos a poesia e o mistério inefável de nosso trabalho, e ao mesmo tempo ainda permaneçamos fiéis à honra e às nossas raízes Reichiana e Loweniana?

Podemos ser fundamentados no mistério da vida, sem resvalar para a "mistificação" contra a qual Reich nos preveniu?

Será que a "graça do self" que procuramos revelar, realmente evolui a partir da pulsação vinda do núcleo, aquela que nossos fundadores se dedicaram a liberar das armaduras de nosso caráter?

Palavras chave: Mistério, derrotado, enlace genital, pulsação

THE REAL WORK

It may be that when we no longer know what to do
we have come to our real work,
and that when we no longer know which way to go

we have come to our real journey.
The mind that is not baffled is not employed.

The impeded stream is the one that sings.

Wendell Berry

INTRODUCTION

Our conference theme is quite wonderful. It was obviously chosen by the Brazilian alchemists on the scientific committee. Like a great poem, it delivers a deep truth in a deceptively simple way. It sings of the art form that is therapy. It tells us that we therapists are artisan/artists. That is, we are skilled craftsmen and women. Different in some ways from the artist who creates his work of art, we learn to tune to the tone and rhythm and pain and gesture of the body's poetry, and in so doing, our patients' inner spirit is slowly revealed- unveiled to us. The other side of this, however, is that what is unveiled/created in our therapy sessions is actually co-created: it is deeply interactive and can be described as two limbic systems in dialogue. The grace of self has a lot to do with who is doing the unveiling. As the poet Yeats put it, "O body swayed to music, O brightening glance, How can we know the dancer from the dance?" (p. 217)

So we are artisans whose craft is both an art form and a clinical science. Is it possible to both celebrate the poetry and ineffable mystery of our work, and yet to remain true to and honor our Reichian and Lowenian roots? Can we be grounded in the mystery of life, without slipping into the "mystification" against which Reich warned us? Has the 'grace of self', which we seek to 'unveil', actually evolved from the core pulsation which our founders strove to liberate from our character armor?

Body in Poetry: with these three words the Scientific Committee, perhaps with the help of the alchemically gifted god Hermes/Mercury, have challenged an older scientific/medical left brain view. From this mainstream perspective, the body is a complex piece of machinery that has no relation to poetry. With these four words, I believe they both

honor our Reichian and Lowenian roots and incorporate recent research in neuroscience on the right brain that supports the current evolution of our bioenergetic craft. The “poetry of the body” is a poetically rendered metaphor/simile that crosses a boundary and invites us to make hidden connections.

But let us reflect further on the theme of our conference. Why, you may ask, is “the poetry of the body” such a powerful title? Suppose we were to change just one word and the title became “the prose of the body”. Not good, you say, because, as we all know, as prose spells things out, it often becomes matter-of-fact. Indeed in English, the word prosaic means not fanciful or imaginative, not challenging and lacking in excitement. So let me return us to poetry of the body and grace of self and share with you what I really love about our theme. You see, I am happiest when the truth can barely be glimpsed in the twilight. Too much illumination kills the magic and mystery. When it comes to our theme, I believe I am not alone, because I am suggesting that poetry, grace of self and a living body are all finally ineffable – that is, they are beyond our grasp. Both grace and poetry, for instance, have so many varying definitions because they are probably indefinable. Kenneth Koch, a poet himself, puts it well:

“Poetry is often regarded as a mystery, and in some respects it is one. No one is quite sure where poetry comes from, no one is quite sure exactly what it is, and no one knows, really, how anyone is able to write it.”

Simply said, you can listen to the wind or to someone’s soulful cry, but you cannot grasp, or fully comprehend them.

FINDING LIGHT HERE IN THE DARKNESS

But I can almost hear you asking – how did Bob start with the lovely conference theme and arrive at a keynote topic of “broken and veiled in shame?” I have four answers. First, the mythological explanation: my muse and my chosen god, is Hermes/Mercury – god of contradictions and paradox. He is, in truth, actually my co-therapist. Thus, any talk

inspired by Hermes could only be about the alchemy of graceful shame and shameful grace.

A second more profane reason is that I am a recovering wounded healer speaking to an audience of mostly recovering healers. Therefore the limbic and autonomic nervous systems of most of us in the room today do **not** tell a story of a self unveiled in grace. Hopefully we are more gracious today than we were when we emerged from our families of origin. But how many of us, like the Wizard of Oz, are still ashamed to be seen behind our professional personas for the people we really are in our private lives? I, for one, often catch myself trying too hard to be of value to my patients. I assume that at such times I am not feeling very valuable, certainly not gracious, as the human being that I am. Those of us who find this wounded healer talk discouraging, may be comforted by the message of Akiro Kurosawa in his film *Rashomon*. He tells us that we are not alone:

“Human beings are unable to be honest with themselves about themselves. They cannot talk about themselves without embellishing. This script (*Rashomon*) portrays such human beings – the kind who cannot survive without lies to make them feel they are better people than they really are” (p. 183).

A third and related reason is that with such beautiful words as poetry and grace, it is easy enough to forget that the poetic form which best describes the embodied pain and loss of many of our patients is the elegy ... in this case, the mournful lament for their own loss of life.

When I wrote this speech, the fourth reason that came to me was that I had just finished reading Paulo Coelho’s, *The Alchemist*. I am not sure that I understand the connection. I believe that it was Coelho’s telling us that:

“There is only one thing that makes a dream impossible to achieve: the fear of failure” (p. 141). So, on the way to success and grace, it is good to remember our failures. Coelho is certainly candid about the core shame and inadequacy that has been part of his inspiration. I hope he would agree that we are saved from hubris – excessive pride in our work as artisans, when we remember the many we have not helped as

much as we and they had hoped, and when we remember that the best work we have done occurred when we surrendered to the wisdom in our (broken) hearts.

But let us get down to work and try to define the indefinable. What is grace, for instance? Here is a very short story about grace and a quality of mercy:

A mother sent her young daughter, aged 6 or 7, to her father's study one morning to deliver an important message. Shortly thereafter the daughter came back and said, "I'm sorry mother, the angel won't let me go in." Whereupon, the mother sent the daughter back a second time, with the same result. At this point the mother became quite annoyed at her young girl's imaginative excess, so she marched the message over to the father herself. Upon entering, she found the father dead in his study (Kalshed 1996, p. 41 – see Edinger 1986).

This story of the little girl and the angel brings home to me that when we are broken by life's traumas, this happens partly because some wisdom in us mercifully breaks up our cohesive wholeness so that the flame within us does not go out – so that our indomitable spirit can live on. Like the little girl in the story, we are born with a grace of self, and it scatters our spirit to the wind and armors our body until – by the awful grace of God – some day in the future – our life becomes safe enough to live the poetry of our body. So I am finding a wisdom and dignity in our brokenness along side of the shame.

Two of the many definitions of grace that I found are (1) a generosity of spirit and (2) mercy or clemency. I am quite certain that it is our generosity of spirit or graciousness as human beings, which enables us to witness the unveiling of grace of self in our patients. But first let me call on Shakespeare to help us illuminate grace. I myself felt a quality of mercy in the grace that delivered the angel to the little girl in the story I just read to you. Shakespeare (in Portia's soliloquy in the Merchant of Venice) tells us that:

*The quality of mercy is not strained
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes*
(p. 111, lines 180–184)

Thus, in this way mercy is akin to the seemingly effortless beauty of movement, proportion and behavior which conveys grace and which we call gracious. And whether we ourselves experience or we witness a moment of unveiling, when body and spirit become one, we are indeed, as Shakespeare tells us “twice blest.”

So bioenergetics has always been about the grace and poetry of our animal selves. Being grounded in one’s sexuality and surrendering to the mystery of life, actually go hand in hand. It is not given to us to know exactly how the little girl found her angel. When it is given to us to witness such stories of survival, it is because something in our patient senses that we are a fellow human being who is safe enough and they then grace us by dropping the veil a bit.

We see, then, that bioenergetic artisans do not unveil people. The present participle “unveiling” in the conference title makes clear the obvious fact that we are never a finished product that can be fully understood as long as we are alive and as I put it some years ago ... as long as there is spirit to our bodies and body to our spirits. We remember that grace is something freely given, but like the mysterious essence of a poem or a human being, though it may be unveiled for a moment and received by us, we cannot grasp it too strongly, we cannot know it too fully. Most of us delighted, for instance, as children in the game of hiding and being found. Our patients still want us to find them. But when they have been broken and shamed, we must indeed be both wise and gracious to know how to visit them in the inner place where their core grace is shadowed by torment and isolation.

But why has it taken all these years and the Brazilian culture (forgive me for reducing this vast and vital country to one culture) to declare the body in poetry? I believe this has to do with the powerful personalities of Wilhelm Reich and Alexander Lowen. Both men were at their best when illuminating what had been in the shadows. But poetry and grace, as I have said, do not lend themselves to full illumination. Thus, I believe that in deference to the certitude of our founders, we have shied away from the ineffable.

Al set an example for all of us in how he both remained deeply true to his Reichian roots and yet did not canonize/mummify Reich’s teachings. Rather, he infused them with his own creative inspiration. Now, with

his passing, we can, as a living body of artisans, honor Al best by reaching for a bioenergetic institute that moves from and is inspired both by what Al inherited from Reich, what he added to the bioenergetic work in progress and what we each in turn bring to it.

In spite of our differences, what I do hope we all share and what Scott Baum described as foundational in his recent inaugural presidential message (IIBA Spring 2008 newsletter) to us, is a commitment to keeping our patients' (and our own) somatopsychic unity or lack of it, at the heart of our clinical encounters. This was Reich's enduring gift to us: the functional identity of a person's character and his bodily attitude. It will not go out of style.

But there is a sober reality facing us. It is possible, but not likely, that someone will emerge from among us post-Lowenian bioenergeticists who will be able to lead us with the force of certainty about his or her truth that emanated from Reich and Lowen. I doubt that anyone will ever match Al's passion for and genius at knowing a person in and from the pulse of their body. In fact, it was part of the genius of both men that they saw the life of the body with such a powerful and explicit light.

It will therefore be interesting to see what kind of therapeutic outcomes and unforeseen partnerships may arise as our patients sense that, even though we do the best we can to read in their psyche-soma the person that they are, we cannot see into their deepest recesses with the same conviction in the clarity of our vision that Reich and Lowen had. Sensing that we need help to unveil the mystery that they are, our patients may have to engage with us in a slow, implicit, mutual process of discovery.

Having said this, let me contradict myself at once, and urge you to read the chapter by Reich called the "genital embrace" (Reich, 1976) in his book "the Murder of Christ". I will quote a few lines which reveal a poetic nature that is not often seen in the rest of Reich's voluminous writings. He tells of the delight in the growing surrender to and discovery of embodied intimacy:

"It takes many months, sometimes years, to learn to know your love partner in the body. The finding of the body of the beloved one itself is gratification of the first order ... this search itself and the mutual wordless

finding one's way into the beloved's sensations and truly cosmic quivering, is pure delight, clean like water in a mountain brook ... The growing itself, the constant experience of a new step, the discovery of a new kind of look, the revelation of another feature in the partner's make-up, no matter whether pleasant or unpleasant, in itself is great delight" (pp. 37–38).

So, after all, there is poetry in our Reichian roots and there is even the mystery of why Reich was unable to reveal more of the poetry that was in his heart. But let me unveil some of my **own** issues with poetry. I like to play with words, and I like to play with the obscure and complex in people. But I am no good at poetry. I am thinking of two poems that I have read numerous times and that are somehow too much for me. They are probably similar in this way to patients to whom I was not much help because I could not bear the pain and poetry in their hearts. The first poem is by John Milton, "On His Blindness". I present the first two lines of his sonnet:

*"When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide ..."*
(p. 84)

The fact that this man lives in darkness and that I cannot fully grasp his words, brings his blindness too close to me. It is true that some of his references require knowledge of the Scriptures and his personal history to be explicitly understood. But my discomfort, as I have said, is with how Milton's rhythm and meter and words implicitly pull me too close to darkness. I was trained as a physician to tolerate the awful physical afflictions of life, but I am still afraid of the dark. And I was more or less also trained as a psychiatrist and bioenergetic therapist to be able to tolerate the awful emotional, spiritual and mental afflictions of life, but I am still afraid of the dark.

So when the embodied poems in my patients are too dark for me, I sometimes flee into my left brain and insist on a bright, explicit light. But as we know, grace comes unbidden. So as I, still baffled but hopeful, once more submit myself to the last few lines of Milton's sonnet, they bring me light. He says:

*God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts: who best bear
His mild yoke, they serve him best ...
They also serve who only stand and wait.*
(p. 84)

Milton was a deeply religious man who feared that his blindness would prevent him from adequately serving his God. Like many wounded healers, I struggle with a kind of religious zeal to adequately serve my patients and thereby feel less damaged, more whole. So, in the famous last line of his sonnet, we learn again from Milton what we learn from each patient – that we are somehow most healing when we embrace our blindness and our brokenness.

The second poem is “The Little Black Boy” by William Blake. I will read a few stanzas. The black boy’s mother is speaking to him:

*And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love;
And these black bodies and this sunburnt face
Are but a cloud and like a shady grove.*

*For when our souls have learned the heat to bear,
The cloud will vanish, we shall hear His voice,
Saying, ‘Come out from the grove, my love and care,
And round my golden tent like lambs rejoice.’*
(p. 9)

The poem continues, but if I allow myself to feel the two stanzas I have just read to you, the ecstatic love is too heart breaking. So to approach and really step into the sacred grove with our patients – to the anguished places where there may still be some hope – how do we do it? Personally, in some ways I find it easier to share my failure and brokenness, than to reveal my power, my Trickster, my magic, poetry and grace. As I already said, my inner Hermes has been a friend for years. At first I just asked him to hide my shame by seeing to it that people did not laugh **at** me but rather **with** me. But over the years he has been doing some kind of alchemy that allows

my laughter to come from closer to my heart while still protecting my dignity.

Let me tell you a little story about how the alchemist does his quiet work with me and with my patient Paul. Paul, a very sad lonely patient of mine in his early forties, was lamenting with self-loathing that, in the past fifteen years, not only had he never had sex other than with a prostitute, but that he had **never** had whatever it took to suggest a sexual liaison to any woman. For some minutes as we sat quietly, I felt something like pity for Paul i.e., “wow, what an awful problem **he** has”. His story was well beyond any conscious sense I had of my own masculine self. But over some minutes our two limbic systems had a silent talk, and my more shameful story came to light. I remembered how paralyzed with fear I had been as an adolescent – too frightened to kiss my first girlfriend – terrified of the rejection of my heartfelt erotic impulse which was the painful poetry that had been engrained in my young body. I remember then feeling much closer to Paul – as to a wounded brother. But I was far too ashamed to tell him about my painful recollection. I have no videos of that session, now some dozen years ago, but I doubt that a video would have fully captured the change in the implicit dance, in the poetry of our bodies, which occurred between Paul and myself. In English, we say, “don’t just stand there, do something!” In our case, we did not even have to get out of our chairs.

But I know there was a lot of movement going on inside of me, and there is an immense amount of clinical research suggesting that our breathing, our matching of bodily attitude, our mutual gaze pattern and the music beneath our silences all reflect our shared vulnerable space in those silent moments. This was early in Paul’s therapy and he might have been burdened by explicit knowledge of my sad story – he might have needed to hold on to some illusions about me in order to feed his hope. Here is where we healers need to be truly gracious: to sense how much our patient needs to know about the all too human soul to whom they have entrusted their healing. Thank God, as with our children, our patients sense, often in spite of our efforts, much more about who we really are than we realize.

CORRESPONDENCES

There are many ways in which, when we are wise, we approach our patients the way we approach a poem. Modern neuroscience increasingly validates our bioenergetic view of the human organism. It calls our attention to the limitations of explicit symbolic language in conveying the essence, the heart and soul of a person. Often, out of awareness, our body sends implicit messages. Sometimes, they lead to instant insights, at other times we are only able to see their shape and hear their sound slowly as they emerge from the inchoate shadows. A gentle pulsation becomes a poignant gesture. A whispered breath becomes a heartfelt murmur. As our 'grace of self' is thus 'unveiled', our respiratory wave – little by little – embraces our head, our heart, our pelvis and the earth. So we are never that far from the hidden grace of self as it resonates in our inner pulsation. We sense its presence as our micro-tremors become spontaneous gestures. We try to sense what body tissues, organs, flows and blocks produce what movements and sounds from the different selves within us.

The tone and shape and flow of the body's shame, betrayal, the heart's forgiveness, its spastic pain, its sweet erotic pulsation ... these are the metre, paradox, metaphor and quatrain of the body's poetry.

In both the body and poetry there is a complex, intuitive dance between form and content that can be glimpsed for moments, but never be fully seen in the light of day. The body tells a story – by how it moves and breathes and how it is still. It embodies the story of what it has lived. If we are to approach our patients' bodies as the poems that they are, then we will begin by accepting that, like the body of any deep poem, they tell a story that is much more than we can ever fully know. How could it be otherwise, since, as we wounded healers know, our patients have come to us to help them with a pain that has been more than they could bear.

Those of us who have been artisans of this healing craft for some years know that we have done very well for our patients if we have been able to help them face and tolerate some good measure of the trauma that broke their wholeness. If this happens, it happens slowly. Like the poem that we read again and again, discovering together what pieces of the embodied poem, of our selves in pieces, that we can be with.

So the story with its terrible pain and shame has been more or less frozen in our character armor. Wilhelm Reich taught us that. Some of us may be able to see quite a bit of the story in our patient's body, but the patient will feel no more of it than what he can tolerate of the pain and shame that broke him in the first place. Much of the story, the poem, remains in the shadows, the unconscious, the implicit. The muted breathing, tight musculature, misaligned body segments – in themselves tormenting – also mercifully destroy meaning. The lights go out on the unthinkable loss of our selves.

CLINICAL VIGNETTES

FIRST VIGNETTE

Quite a few years ago, as I watched Al Lowen doing a demonstration session, he put his hand over the left chest of the patient and commented that one could make pretty direct contact with the patient's heart – I found the comment both obvious and startlingly powerful. As you know, that was often a signature quality of Al's comments.

Recently, after a break of several years, I was once again working with my now 50 year old patient, Paul, whose earlier session I just shared with you. As we worked, my hands found their way over his left chest. This had happened every now and then, and my patient always found some kind of deep comfort from it. A few months prior, it had in fact triggered a deep, sweet experience of melting into a state of loving feeling that was both new to Paul and very moving to me. This time, however, when I touched him, it led to him feeling a barrier covering his heart and he said angrily, "I am not going to cooperate – won't give you what you want. I'll do it when I'm ready" ... This was followed by, "but I do feel the value of what you are doing – don't give up on me – I don't want to be left alone". After some moments, he said, "you must be a valuable human being ... I've always thought of you more as an excellent therapist". I said, "perhaps you are also a valuable human being". After a silence, he said, "Doing this kind of work must be quite moving for you". I said,

“Yes, it is”. Paul later said that the word that came closest to capturing this moment was: “humanity”. But words do not quite capture this man’s soul coming to the surface of his being and enveloping us in its poetry. Al Lowen, via bioenergetic analysis gave me (us) this and similar kinds of clinical ‘now moments’ in which we are privileged to directly touch the living body such that we unveil the grace of self.

LISTENING TO THE SILENCE

THE POETRY OF THE BODY EXTENDS TO ITS MUSIC AND DANCE – we surrender to the story that is told by its gesture – the question it raises with the slightest quiver of an eyebrow – we are **informed by the many sounds that can be found in its many silences**. If we are patient and attentive to the void, to the body’s darkness, it lights our way – shows (unveils to) us meanings that illuminate even as they remain obscure, The improbable becomes familiar. The light suffuses and water and oil become one.

SECOND VIGNETTE

When I hear my patient’s voice as partially blocked/strangled and I sense that she is on the threshold of coming into the room with a more vulnerable, spontaneous sound, I sometimes massage the front of her throat – often at the thyro-hyoid membrane (a fibrous, membranous sheet filling the gap between the hyoid bone and the thyroid cartilage). I usually do this with a sense that I am going in to find or perhaps inviting out a traumatically fractured part of my patient’s self. I tend to assume that I will be able to tolerate this part of them that is strangled within and thus help them to unveil some grace of self. But I often get ahead of myself and the poetry of my patient’s body surprises me.

For instance, the cry of my patient, Anna, is strangled. Wendell Berry tells us that, “the impeded stream is the one that sings.” Wendell is wise, but silence, like darkness, is strong poetry: neither of them tell you exactly which way to go and what to do. If I really listen to Anna with

my whole body, I can feel something beckon. I can feel the sound that I cannot quite hear. When she falls silent, I am afraid to fall with her ... there is no familiar form to hold onto ... afraid to fall too far into the right brain. When I hear her broken, cracked voice that does not yield to a deeper sobbing, I feel an ache in my heart and grow frustrated. Why can't this woman trust that I can tolerate and will not recoil from her broken heart? Then she falls silent ... in the sudden quiet ... can I trust my senses? Did I hear some tone rising up from her heart? This partial deafness, this lack of clarity, pulls me once more too close to Milton's dark world. I am not sure, for instance, if Anna meets my gaze, what shades of feeling (emotion) might be dancing across my face in response to her silent song (music). What if her impeded stream of life sings not only of a broken heart, but of an ecstatic love that long ago her father could not bear and she now needs me to receive. Has my own broken heart healed enough so that I can bear her loving me now ... so that I can bear the heat and beams of love that made William Blake's poem too ecstatic for me. If not, then Anna and I may both be blessed that her angel is silently, graciously holding both her heartbreak and her ecstatic love until we both can better bear them.

THIRD VIGNETTE

I will close with the last of three clinical vignettes to illustrate the body's implicit light creating a space in which shame and grace wash over and into each other. On the surface, the stories seem quite different. I first worked with Sam at a Bioenergetic Conference about 5 years ago in a "demonstration session". I "knew" almost nothing of his story. As I stood face to face with this powerfully built man and we exchanged a few words, I sensed a dark, ominous presence. This was not the first time I remember wondering how I had gotten myself into a situation where I was likely to fail and make a fool of myself. I would say that the crucial feature of my intervention was that in spite of feeling quite small, something told me that it was alright to step closer and make physical contact with this threatening, but tormented man. What happened then and in two subsequent sessions

recently is too complicated to do justice to here, but I want to quote some of Sam's own words to give you a sense of the poetry in body that happened:

First, some context: Sam had been an ordained priest. His family came from Lebanon. The words "guilt and shame" seem inadequate to describe the profound sense of unredeemable black damnation that was his torment. His call to the priesthood was in part a failed attempt to find that redemption via rising above his body and its sexuality. Sam explains:

"As we worked and you encountered me – I was holding onto your right elbow, and you my left forearm – I had an impulse to grab you around your chest. As I grabbed you, you grabbed me in the same manner. My sense afterwards was that I could have crushed you in a bear hug and thrown you across the room. But with you matching me, I felt held by a loving human embrace and I was able to drop and surrender to a deep sobbing grief, and then rise up into a mutual joy with you at what we had accomplished."

I did not make a conscious decision to touch Sam because he felt untouchable i.e., hopelessly damned due to his darkly evil body and sexuality. Rather, our limbic systems silently cast a suffusing light on each other – and I was told (by my intuition) what to do. Poetry in motion happened. Something, perhaps my limbic angel, told me that underneath his ominous dark side, he was terrified, and that is what gave me the courage to walk into his Hell.

Here Sam describes a more recent session:

"I told you I was really scared of turning into Satan and was terrified. You held my hand and I wept. You asked me how I wanted to work and I found myself kneeling with my head on your mattress with lots of tears and snot flowing, as if I was bowing down before God as a hopeless damned soul. You noted my sense of 'heaviness', of having to hold myself, and you, sitting beside me, supported the weight of the head and upper torso, and then my whole weight (200lb) with me across your torso as I wept. I was conscious of holding onto your arms and feeling the flesh of your arm, as if feeling real flesh for the very first time. You then suggested I find the middle human position, of kneeling and simply asking for forgiveness instead of the (my) grandiose defenses of omnipotent God and Satan."

The alchemy of touch was happening on many levels. (As our eyes met, I sensed the wounded human soul behind Sam's 'evil eye' and he saw in me a safe enough mix of darkness and light to trust that he could share some of the evilness in his eye.) Grace of self is not easily unveiled, but it helps when we can glimpse the desperate human being who is veiled behind our demons. Something like this was set in motion for Sam as he received my touch. As he puts it:

"The essence of our work ... was the holding together of two things: the absolute simplicity of being gently, physically touched/held and the creation of a momentary space in which you made the very quiet suggestion to me (when faced with my fiery demon) that I allow the alchemy of the defenses to work."

So I did two things. I physically touched Sam and I invited him to think and move closer – as I had in our first encounter – closer to the angel in his demon. Anchored in our simple human contact, he was able to grasp that his angel-turned-demon had originally come to him with the same humanity that I had embodied in my touch. In his case, however, because of the specific culture and metaphor from which he came, and in response to his mother's profound rejection of her own and his life force, Sam's angel had pulled him up or perhaps down into a Heaven and Hell cosmology and become its demonic guardian. The angel had become the demonic guardian. In Sam's words:

"In my ordination as a priest, I had turned down life (offered up my very self-hood and sexuality in the form of a cross), and now I was opening upwards to life, and in physical touch with your flesh to affirm it. I felt able to breathe very deeply, and felt like a 'very old soul' from the Mountains of Lebanon where the splitting-belief in God and Evil Eye were very strong – but now the alchemy was working ... I kept my hands on your face, arms and hands, feeling your flesh and the realness and poetry of the contact ... I felt, as if for the first time, what it was like to be a human being in real time and space."

The body's language is poetry because it brings the unity that existed before there were words. Sam was graced in being able to begin a simple human dialogue with his fiery friend-foe-friend. And now I finally give

you the secret of unveiling the grace of self ... take your demons to lunch!

REFERENCES

- Berry, W. (1999) *The Real Work, The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry*, Counterpoint
- Blake, W. (1988) *Songs of Innocence. The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. Random House (Anchor Books), New York, pp. 7–17.
- Coelho, P (1998) Part II. *The Alchemist*. Harper Collins, New York, pp. 51–163.
- Edinger, E. (1986) *The Bible and the Psyche*, Toronto: Inner City Books. (Story reported by Edward Edinger in the course of his audio-taped lecture series on the Old Testament at the Los Angeles Jung Institute. The story apparently originated with the New York analyst Esther Harding who knew the person in England to whom it happened.)
- Kalshed, D. (1996) *Further Clinical Illustrations of the Self-Care System. The Inner World of Trauma*. Routledge, London, pp. 41–67.
- Koch, K (May 14, 1998) preview of an article by Kenneth Koch from the *New York Review of Books*, volume 45, number 8.
- Kurosawa, A. (1983) *Something like an Autobiography*. (A. E. Bock, Trans.). Vintage Books, New York.
- Milton, J. (1998) *John Milton the Complete Poems. Sonnet XVI ("On His Blindness")*. Penguin Books (Classics), London, p. 84.
- Reich, W. (1976- published by Farrar, Straus in 1966) *The Genital Embrace from the book, The Murder of Christ*. Pocket Books, New York, pp. 35–43
- Shakespeare, W. (1988) *The Arden Shakespeare (Thompson Learning). The Merchant of Venice. Act IV, Scene 1. (Portia's Soliloquy)*. Thompson Learning, London, pp. 103–122.
- Yeats, W. B. (1996) *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats. Among School Children – a Meditation on Life*. Simon & Schuster, Inc., New York, pp. 215–217.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Lewis, M.D., in private practice in New York, is a senior trainer on the IIBA faculty, and a member of the clinical faculty of the NYU/Mount Sinai Medical Center. He has published extensively on the integration of early developmental and relational issues into the basic bioenergetic approach. Bob has long been interested in the sensory-motor story which trauma engraves in our bodies. He coined the term

“cephalic shock” to capture the psychosomatic experience of what Winnicott called the mind as the locus of the false self. His elucidation of Cephalic Shock and way of working with the head, voice, and diaphragmatic connections to the pelvis, are beyond words. He has found the Attachment paradigm deeply confirming of the centrality of relationship in his clinical approach. Bob aims for and is touched by the moments of encounter in which implicit mystery becomes almost palpable. He leads workshops in Europe and the Americas, and residential intensives on Long Island, New York.

docboblewis@gmail.com

bodymindcentral.com