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Discussions**

**Psychoanalysis  
in the  
21st Century**



**Volume 4 • Issue One**

**July 2026**



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The International Journal of  
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Psychoanalysis in the 21st Century

**Volume 4 • Issue One**

**July 2026**

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## From the Desk of the Editor-in-Chief

M. Sagman Kayatekin

**H**umanities/arts have always been in a neighboring relationship with the unique human enterprise of Psychoanalysis. Yet, compared to ever longed-for relationship of Psychoanalysis with “science,” they have always taken a place of secondary importance. Taking the risk of controversy, I will propose two statements. First, in psychoanalytic vernacular “science” has lost its defining character and useful preciseness as a concept. And second, humanities/arts may also be considered as a major source of enrichment for our psychoanalytic theories and techniques.

With these thoughts in the background, in this issue, we will take a closer look at the potentially creative cross fertilization between psychoanalysis and humanities, through the lens of memoir.

In the first section, Molofsky offers us a memoir with her colorful and deeply personal style, and her text serves as a nidus for others to critique and expand on. Depending on their fields of sub-expertise, the contributors to this invitation respond from many different angles. From music to poetry to politics to language and identity. We hear personal stories, subjective evocations and philosophical, political discourses develop from this text. I personally found them illuminating and thought provoking.

I have a section on conversations I had with Molofsky with an intention to provide a sense of her as a person with her unique history and also focus on her approach to writing—both as a context to her text.

In the second section we have an unusual memoir. Donnelley, who has worked with psychoanalytic clinicians as a “patient,” courageously published a book about his experiences and thoughts on psychoanalytic treatment. The clinician who provided a review and critique of his book is well informed about the philosophy of treatment Donnelley extensively talks about.

I was part of Donnelley’s journey through psychoanalysis, and I added a conversation with him about his impressive and important book. Other

than a few well-known books and articles, similar publications are rare in psychoanalytic literature. Donnelley, in my perhaps transference laden opinion, deserves the gratitude of patients and clinicians for what he has offered.

I hope this will be an interesting, informative and enjoyable issue to our readers.

With deep regards,

M. Sagman Kayatekin, MD

## Section One: “Mangia and Enjoy”

### Culture is Memory, Memory is Culture

Merle Heidi Molofsky

**I**n the 130 years since Sigmund Freud first published his psychoanalytic writings, psychoanalysis has clearly emerged as a worldwide cultural force, defined by interdisciplinary cultural knowledge.

Sigmund Freud: “Not I, but the poets, discovered the unconscious.” “The poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious. What I discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied.” *The Hebrew Physician/Harofe Haivre*, The Thirteenth Year, edited by Moses Einhorn, dedicated to Sigmund Freud, Volume One, /1940, pp. 161–176, reported by Phillip R. Lehrman, “Freud’s Contributions to Science”, Freud in conversation.

Freud meant the dramatic poets—Goethe, Shakespeare, Sophocles, who wrote “Oedipus Rex”, those who wrote about the great passions of life. Sophocles, like all the ancient Greek dramatic playwrights of his time, wrote all his plays in poetic form. The dialogue was written in iambic trimeter, the chorus in choral lyric meter, usually dactylic trimeter or hexameter.

“In a very real sense, Freud joined to the probing eye of the scientist the creating eye of the poet.”

—Lionel Trilling, 1940, “Freud and Literature”,  
*The Liberal Imagination*

Trilling has said that writers are preoccupied with reality. In contrast, in “Delusions and Dreams in Jensen’s ‘Gradiva’”, *S.E.* 9.8, 1907, Freud said that art is pure pleasure principle. He said, “Creative writers are

valuable allies, and their evidence is to be prized highly, for they are apt to know a whole host of things between heaven and earth which our philosophy has not yet let us dream.”

Muriel Rukeyser, in *The Life of Poetry* 1949, reprinted 1996, Paris Press, Amherst, Mass., speaks not only of poetry, but of the arts in general: “The universe of poetry is the universe of emotional truth. Our material is the way we feel and the way we remember.” (p. 23).

“Our experience, set in our time in the world, may be shared through any art. We are ready for pictures of our true life; we are ready for the poems of our true life. All the forms wait for their true language. The poems of the next moment are at hand.” (p. 155).

“For poetry is, at every instant, concerned with meaning.” (p. 161).

“These three terms of relationship —poet, poem, and witness—are none of them static. We are changing, living beings, experiencing the inner change of poetry.” (p. 175).

Noted psychoanalyst Michael Eigen, author of more than 25 books, in *Feeling Matters*, (Karnac, 2007), writes of language and symbolic process, speaking of “Words”:

“...words encode and create affect, are parts of emotional fields... . Words are a kind of emotional blood. For writers, words are a life blood. There is soul in words.” (p. 46).

Michael Eigen, *Contact with the Depths*, (Karnac, 2011), Chapter Four, “Wordlessness”:

“One of the great functions of poetry is to find (and create) the thrill of the wordless through words.” (p. 58).

“Yet words—whatever else they are—are gateways to the wordless.” (pp. 70–71).

How do we enhance our innate resonance and attunement with the analysand’s symbolic world, symbolic process, and metaphoric language? In creative listening, we learn to hear that language, and so doing, we

learn to use that language. Our core assumption is that we have a poetics of mind, manifested in dream, free association, and also in every day, quotidian language use.

Along with language, with poetry, there are many other cultural stimuli related to memory, and psychoanalysis. Music is essential. Currently, we have a phrase, “ear worm”, that reminds us of the power of music. An “ear worm” is a snatch of music that seems to us to be “stuck” in our mind, in our brain, popping up repetitively, over and over, somewhat obsessively. The musical phrase may be pure music, wordless, or, may be a song, with lyrics. I think of lyrics as poetry set to music. The musical cadence and the lyrical cadence are one. To word in the world is breathing. Song is breath with wings. Words are breath dancing.

I have previously written about music and lyrics in song. “What is the relationship of music and words in song? The words of the song have to fit the rhythm of the music; the music has to express the emotional meaning of the words.

Are words set to music lyrics or poems? Lyrics are words deliberately set to music, and the lyricist knows that the words have to fit the musical structure of the song. Yet, poetry itself has a musical aspect. The sound of the words in a poem is as important as the literal meanings of the words.”

—*Clio's Psyche*, Volume 29, Number 2, Winter 2023, pp. 156–170.

It is common, all over the world, for caretakers, parents, to sing lullabies to babies, to children. I am 83 years old, and I well remember my mother and my father singing lullabies to me. Most likely, some of those lullabies were songs they may have heard as children, Yiddish songs. I remember singing lullabies to my children, lullabies I heard as a child, and one I made up myself, specifically for my children.

I also remember reading nursery rhymes to my children, from a book of Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes, and a few poems from *A Child's Garden of Verses* by Robert Louis Stevenson. The rhythmic, musical cadences made it very easy to memorize these nursery rhymes and poems, and soon enough I knew most of them by heart.

Telling stories to children at bedtime, or reading a story aloud, is a common cultural ritual, a treasured ritual. Treasured rituals are a major

aspect of keeping culture alive, becoming part of a shared cultural memory. Whatever adults share with children becomes cultural memory. Many children, from varied cultural backgrounds, remember adults dancing, and remember joining in the dance. They learn the dance by watching, and by joining in. My family background is Eastern European Jewish, Ashkenazi Jewish, Osten Juden. Both of my parents enjoyed dancing. There was a particular glow to my mother's face, to her joy, when she spent a few moments doing a specifically Old-World dance style, lifting her arms, swaying her arms. I can dance that way now.

Along with children sharing cultural experiences with families, they also share cultural experiences with their peer groups, particularly in adolescence. Yes, I was inspired to dance the way my parents danced. When I was very young, my father actually taught me to dance by having me stand on his feet while he danced. That's how I learned to waltz. But I learned the lindy, and mambo, and cha-cha, and the twist, from peers, and, eventually, in my late teens, salsa. I remember a friend telling me that the secret to salsa isn't in the hips, but, in the knees. Learn what to do with your knees, and your hips will automatically do what your hips should do.

Food is the quintessential element of culture and memory. A famous literary representation is Marcel Proust, writing in *Remembrance of Things Past*, also published as *In Search of Lost Time*, describing experiencing a cascade of memories when he dunked a madeleine in tea. The combination of flavors and texture and aromas was a potent stimulus for memory.

There are distinct cuisines all over the world that people cherish because they evoke happy childhood memories. In the United States, the proverbial melting pot, there are myriad cuisines, often thought of as grandma's kitchen. Fry bread among indigenous tribal people. Bagels with a shmear of cream cheese and a slice of lox, nostalgically Eastern European Jewish, but, also, now, nostalgically New York City. People of all backgrounds may say that there is nothing like a New York bagel.

Pizza. Pizza wars! What pizza is the best pizza? New York? Chicago? Connecticut? Philadelphia? Detroit? St. Louis? Just as long as it is Italian! "When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie, that's *amore*"

—“That’s *Amore*”, 1953, sung by Dean Martin. Pizza means pie! Who says pizza pie? Everyone! I remember the once upon a time pizza wars in Greenwich Village, with a few pizza places claiming to be the original such and such pizza parlor. Which style is best? Neapolitan? Sicilian? Thin crispy crust? Thick doughy crust? Triangular slice? Rectangular slice? What would Nonna say? (For the culturally deprived, Nonna means Grandmother in Italian.)

Jajongmyeon, Bibimbop, Tteokbokki, are favorite childhood foods for many Korean-Americans.

Southern soul food, such as mac and cheese, sweet potato pie, cornbread, collard greens, barbecue, black-eyed peas are favorites for many. “Give me a pig’s foot and a bottle of beer,” sung by Bessie Smith, and later by Billie Holliday, evokes nostalgia for some.

Many decades ago, I met noted blues musicians Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, and I was invited to have lunch with them at Brownie McGhee’s home. He served chittlins, and they both were surprised, and delighted, that I knew what they were, and that although it was the first time I tasted them, I enjoyed eating them. As far as I was concerned, they were a totally non-kosher, delicious variant of stuffed derma, a Jewish delicacy.

Food is culture, and food culture is history.

My beloved youngest child, my daughter Sarah, died in April 2025, a month short of her 59th birthday. Recently, reviewing some papers of hers, my husband Les and I came across two papers she wrote for a course in memoir-writing she took in 2006. One is titled, “You Don’t Eat Meat, You Don’t Eat Here!”. The first four paragraphs describe her joy at finding a yoga group with a food market, discovering other people who were vegetarian, or vegan, people who didn’t eat meat. Then she describes visiting her paternal grandparents’ apartment in the Bronx. [Note: My husband Les is not her biological father. He met my three children when he and I first started dating, and he fulfilled the role of father for them, providing financial and emotional support.] She was visiting her biological father’s parents, most likely after my marriage to him ended.

She writes of the joyous anticipation she felt: "...we're heading up the elevator of the large tenement building in the Bronx, that familiar scent of 80 apartments, all cooking their 'Sunday gravy' or 'sauce' for the last day and a half. Hints of sausage and onions infused the hallway as you exited the elevator. Ahhh... we all loved the anticipation of Gramma's big meal."

She goes on to describe the set table, the vast array of foods. And then... she describes Grampa saying, "Eat your meat, eat your sausage". She continues her narrative: "My clear, young voice simply stated, 'I don't eat meat. I'm a vegetarian.' ... My mouth longed for the delectable bread, pasta and amazing sauce Gramma prepared, which was all I ever ate when I went to their house on Sundays. Grampa's face twisted with disgust, his hunched over body repelled from me as he bellowed, 'You don't eat meat, you don't eat here!' And so, with that, my first and last real conversation with my paternal grandfather, I *mangied*, enjoyably, whole-heartedly, my bread, pasta, and yummy salad, for the very last time in my Grampa's house, while he remained alive."

Ironically, yet perhaps inevitably, Sarah grew up and started her own successful business, as a private chef and caterer, *Mangia and Enjoy!*. She remained a vegetarian, and cooked anything, any cuisine, including barbecue, any sort of meat that people wanted.

My family's relationship to food is cultural/historical. My mother Sima Lee was born in 1910, in Poland, at home, in a dank basement apartment, her parents' first-born child. She was premature, weighed less than four pounds. Her parents, Mirel and Jacob, created a home-made incubator, bricks heated in the potbelly stove, then lined with soft fabric. She survived. During subsequent years, her mother had three more babies, and all three died in early infancy of malnutrition, of starvation. They didn't have enough money for food, so her mother was malnourished, and didn't produce enough breast milk to adequately feed her babies.

My grandmother Mirel would send her daughter Sima Lee up the hill to the "big house", carrying a soup pot. My mother would go to the back door, the kitchen door, to receive kitchen scraps: potato peelings, carrot peelings, onion skins, any vegetable discards. My mother would carry it home, and her mother would add water and make soup.

The family emigrated to the United States in 1920, when my mother was 10 years old, and her mother was pregnant again.

Her mother had two more babies in the United States, Fred when my mother was 10 years old, Bess when my mother was 12 years old. When my mother was 13 years old, she came home from school to find her mother lying on the kitchen floor with her head in the oven, the gas on. My mother flung open a window, turned off the gas, and saved her mother's life. Her mother had left her two little babies with a neighbor, and they were removed to foster care. Her mother was delusional, was hospitalized, and spent the rest of her life in the hospital. Why did she decide to kill herself? She had brought laundry to the "Chinese laundry", received a redemption coupon, and the number on the coupon was the same number as the basement apartment in which she had lived when each of her three infant babies had died. She took it as an omen that her American babies would also die.

My mother had three years of formal education. She was very smart, self-educated, truly cultured. She craved knowledge. She listened to WQXR, the classical radio station, on an AM/FM radio, paying avid attention not only to the music, but to the DJ's announcements, eager to learn names of composers and performers.

My working-class mother and father both worked hard and struggled financially. We ate meat maybe once or twice a week at most, and chicken and fish perhaps once a week. My mother would announce, in a bright, happy voice, "Dairy tonight!", meaning cottage cheese and sour cream. If, other than "dairy", we ever had leftovers, she would form them into little pancakes and heat them up for her lunch. My mother was not comfortable preparing food. She had difficulty following the instructions on the Minute Rice box, the My-T-Fine chocolate pudding box. She once told me, "I don't care what food tastes like. I only care that it is nutritious."

My oldest child and her husband, who themselves now are grandparents, love to entertain, and have done so for decades. My daughter well remembers the food shortages of her childhood, after her biological father left home, and didn't provide child support. I had a four-year-old, a two-year-old, and an infant, and had not yet been able to complete my college degree. I received welfare, food stamps, and surplus food. Yes,

we had enough food, but the choices were very limited. Although eventually I completed college (free tuition!), and even graduate school (full scholarship!), and was able to get a job, so that I was able to provide food without struggling to do so, my daughter didn't seem to trust that there would be enough food. Today, when entertaining, she happily prepares more than enough food!

Thus, I see the cultural influences within the generations of my family, the desperate poverty of my maternal grandparents and their daughter, my mother, then my own experience of food shortage, and then, my own adult children's relationship to food, guaranteeing ample food, loving to provide food to others.

Another cultural theme that fascinates me is ethnic/racial/religious/national identity. Who are we? Who do we think we are?

The second memoir paper my daughter Sarah wrote is titled, "The Day I Found Out I Was a White Girl". We lived in Brooklyn, in a "changing neighborhood", meaning that when other-than-white people moved in, white people moved out. But I did not move out. I loved our Crown Heights neighborhood, our proximity to the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, the Brooklyn Museum, the Grand Army Plaza library, which looked like a temple of learning to me. My parents had raised my brother and me to respect all people of all backgrounds.

Shortly before Sarah found out she was "white," Les, the man I had been dating, the man who would become my wonderful, beloved husband, at his request, met my children for the first time. Sarah was so delighted to meet him and immediately showed him her third-grade class picture, which she had just received. She eagerly said, "Guess which one is me!" It was all he could do to keep from laughing. There were two white children in the class, a blonde girl, and Sarah, who had very dark brown, almost black hair. Sarah didn't focus on "looks". All she saw were her classmates, her friends, and other children.

Sarah wrote, "When I was three or four, I would spend my days... watching all the girls get their [hair] corn-rolled, wishing my hair would do the same. But my hair was different. It was 'too soft', they would tell me".

She continued, “There were only two ‘white girls’ in my whole school, [name redacted], a blonde, blue-eyed girl in my grade, and myself, a Jewish-Italian girl living in the ghetto of Crown Heights, Brooklyn. Everyone I had ever known had beautiful brown skin, nappy hair, twisted into gorgeous braids and clever knots above their heads. I was always the ‘odd-ball’, with skin quite tan, especially in summer, but never to the level of my friends and neighbors. People would speak to me in Spanish, of which the only Spanish I spoke was, *‘No comprende Español.’*”

She also wrote, “When we moved to a new neighborhood, I learned that there were many more ‘white’ people in the world than I ever thought. I also learned far too much about the fact that many of these white people were racist and cruel. I was also exposed to a larger Latino population and learned that there was racism amongst this group of people as well. It seemed, in fact, that every ‘group’ owned racism, and my world came crashing down faster than I could get my questions answered. Didn’t we have the same color blood? There was no justifying racism, amongst any group, no matter what the past had brought. I couldn’t understand why anyone would choose to live in this kind of disharmony amongst their neighbors”.

Sarah wrote about her delight in being in a school dance team in middle school. She described one girl who kept trying to see if Sarah could learn a new dance step, seeing if she could daunt Sarah. “Each time, however, I’d get the step right, and you could see her laugh it off as she flipped her hand up at me saying, ‘Alright, white girl, you got it.’ But her respect for me was building, slowly. Not because of who I was, my humor, my thoughts, but merely on the fact that I was able to dance like her ‘sisters’ could.”

In discussing cultural affiliations in terms of our various traditions and histories, I thought of the term “critical race theory”. I attended Brooklyn public schools in the 1940’s and 1950’s, long before that term came to be used in the 1970’s and 1980’s, applied to the Civil Rights Movement. Yet, I certainly learned about race, racism, discrimination, and oppression in history classes. I learned about slavery, about white people bringing Black people from Africa here, enslaving them, the horrors of the Middle Passage, the horrors of slavery, the Emancipation Proclamation, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow laws, segregation, lynchings. I

learned about the attempts to destroy the indigenous tribal people here, relocating them from their homes on the East Coast to the West, the Trail of Tears, the Wounded Knee massacre. I learned about the American “concentration camps” during World War II, incarcerating Japanese-Americans who were identified as potential spies and enemies, but not Italian-Americans or German-Americans, although the United States was at war with the Axis powers, Japan, Italy, Germany.

I learned about the Holocaust.

Perhaps we all need to learn about each other.

Memoir and autobiography provide a valuable educational tool.

Here are a number of memoirs and autobiographies that offer accounts of lived lives that teach us about the world in which we live:

*Night*, Elie Wiesel, 1956.

*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou, 1969.

*Conundrum*, Jan Morris, 1974.

*The Woman Warrior*, Maxine Hong Kingston, 1976.

*Growing Up*, Russell Baker, 1982.

*Patrimony*, Philip Roth, 1991.

*Angela’s Ashes*, Frank McCourt, 1993.

*Dreams From My Father*, Barack Obama, 1995.

*Thinking In Pictures*, Temple Grandin, 1995.

*A Life in The Twentieth Century*, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., 2000.

*A Tale of Love and Darkness*, Amos Oz, 2002.

*The Story of a Life: A Memoir*, by Aharon Appelfeld, 2003.

*Persepolis*, Marjane Satrapi, 2003.

*Mirror to America: The Autobiography of John Hope Franklin*, 2005.

*The Year of Magical Thinking*, Joan Didion, 2005.

*Fun Home*, Alison Bechdel, 2006.

*Country Girl*, Edna O'Brien, 2013.

*Mott Street: A Chinese-American Family's Story of Exclusion and Homecoming*, Ava Chin, 2023.

*Unorthodox: My Life Inside and Outside Psychoanalysis: A Memoir*, Arnold D. Richards, 2023.

*I Am Nobody's Slave: How Uncovering My Family's History Set Me Free*, Lee Hawkins, 2025.

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## **Culture, Memory, and the Living Art of Psychoanalysis: Reflections on Merle Heidi Molofsky’s “Culture Is Memory, Memory Is Culture”**

Gary Fleishman

### **Abstract**

**I**n this response, reflections on Merle Heidi Molofsky’s article, “*Culture Is Memory, Memory Is Culture*,” are presented. It investigates the complex intersection of psychoanalysis and art, and between memory and culture. Molofsky invites us to reflect on Freud’s discovery of the unconscious. But Molofsky locates the unconscious in a richer artistic tradition. One that encompasses poetry, music, and spoken word as disseminators of emotional truth. Building on her work, this paper explores the ways in which memory, culture, and time intersect in an analytic encounter. It argues that, irrespective of theoretical orientation, psychoanalysis can be understood as a cultural act of creative remembering for which both analyst and patient are responsible, and in which both participate.

### **In “Culture Is Memory, Memory Is Culture”**

Molofsky leads us to wonder what the status of psychoanalysis would be if we imagine it as a living art, an art form deeply interwoven with the poetic, musical, and narrative expressions through which people move and mold experience. Rather than belonging to one school of thought or another, might psychoanalysis instead be imagined as a living art, an evolving cultural form that draws from the same creative energy as poetry, music, and narrative? For Molofsky, analytic work is not confined to theory or technique alone, but lives within the aesthetic dimension of human expression, where rhythm, symbol, and story shape the movement of psychic life. She invites us to consider that the analytic encounter, like art itself, transforms unformulated experience into meaning. In this sense, psychoanalysis becomes less a fixed discipline than a cultural practice, one that breathes, improvises, and remakes itself through the dialogue between memory and imagination.

Citing Freud's admission that "not I, but the poets discovered the unconscious," Molofsky sees analytic work in the tradition of artistic endeavor. Poetry here can enter and help to transmute the unknown experience into a symbolic structure. Lionel Trilling's phrase that Freud "attached the searching eye of the scientist to the creating eye of the poet" underscores this ground: might our interpretative method be both rigorous and imaginative, a disciplined act of remembering as well as discovery?

What Molofsky artfully brings together in a fusion of art and science is a way for us to look beyond technique and theory, at something more primal, the shared language of human memory and meaning that exists for both analyst and analysand. The old, controversial question of what constitutes "true" psychoanalysis, Freudian, Kleinian, Winnicottian, Lacanian, Relational, or Contemporary Freudian, is alive and well. Yet as intellectually stimulating as this debate can be, might this ongoing posturing also risk distracting us from what these perspectives share?

Underneath their theoretical disputes, is there perhaps a shared objective, a platform for us all to learn how we, as human beings, metabolize memories into meaning, a work that takes place within the living culture of the analytic relation? If psychoanalysis is, as Molofsky proposes, a living art that speaks through symbol and story, then perhaps the real question should not be whose theory wins out, but how our cultural memory shapes what we do and hear in the analytic encounter.

Perhaps we could take a brief pause from the cultural infighting about psychoanalytic modality, theory, and practice that is so prevalent today, and instead address a more basic question: what role do culture and our memories play in determining what we choose to do with, and for our analysands? Is it that culture itself, whether psychoanalytic or otherwise, is necessarily founded on a dialectical relation between the conscious and the unconscious? Could it be that any theoretical orientation, psychoanalysis included, can be conceived only through defensive formations that reanimate memories from the depths? More simply stated, the theoretical orientation is shaped by the same unconscious processes it tries to study.

Molofsky elaborates this vision by demonstrating that memory is never a simple recall of fact but an act of cultural remaking. Her poetic

reflections on poetry, music, and family stories show that the symbols, rhythms, and rituals of daily life, lullabies, dances, recipes, and stories, are the forms through which psychic life is transmitted. No less than her mother's songs or her daughter's cooking recollections inscribe emotional truth across generations, could our analysands also bring into the analytic space the melodies, metaphors, and myths of their own cultural inheritance? To listen psychoanalytically, then, may also mean to listen culturally, to hear in language the music of history, and in defenses of survival.

### **The Correspondence Between Time, Culture, and Memory in the Analytic Setting**

If, as Molofsky states, psychoanalysis is a cultural and poetic art, one that gives language and rhythm to the unregistered processes of the mind, then must we not also revisit our concept of time? Before we consider how culture and memory shape the analytic relationship, perhaps we should pause to reflect on how time structures psychic life.

We often speak of past, present, and future as separate realities, distinct, measurable points along a continuum we all traverse. But what if this is an indispensable illusion, a poetic convenience rather than a psychological truth? We speak of a past, but there is no past to return to; it is gone, recoverable only in remembrance. What remains are the memories of what once was, imaginative reconstructions, charged with emotion and constantly revised in the act of recalling.

And what of the future? What if the future, too, is less real than we imagine, a fantasy, a dream, a projection from the present shaped by our recollections? There is no actual future, only our anticipation of it. The truth is, there is only the present, the now. We imagine the future here, in this living moment. Thus, what we do right now, in this minute, may be the only chance we have to make a difference in our analysand's life.

It is within this living present that analytic work takes place. The "now" is where the past is remembered, reimagined, and transformed. What we do in the analytic hour, our capacity to notice, explore, and work through psychic obstacles, may help the analysand begin to remap a different story. Through this process, the analysand negotiates with others and articulates, in words and feeling, a newly expanded or revised

version of memory, one that integrates the cultural dimensions of their interactions with others and with themselves.

In this way, might analysis be understood as a form of cultural creation? When memory, once sealed or distorted by trauma, begins to open and expand, the lullabies, languages, foods, gestures, and symbols that shape one's sense of belonging and identity can re-emerge as living elements of the self. Could it be that culture becomes the very medium through which memory breathes again, and that time, the immediacy of the analytic encounter becomes the stage upon which transformation unfolds? If this is so, how might such a process manifest in the living moment of analysis? Perhaps a clinical example can help illuminate how time, culture, and memory intertwine in the process of psychic change.

### **Clinical Vignette: Rewriting Cultural Memory in the Analytic Process**

Such is the correspondence between time, culture, and memory that informs the analytic process. Consider *Julie*, who feels trapped in a deeply internalized and chronically distorted memory of her early cultural experience with her mother. The enduring message, heard in both language and affect, was that she was not good enough. What if this belief could be understood as more than a thought, not simply an idea, but an embodied mechanism within the brain's network of neural pathways and internalized object relations, constantly reinforcing the emotional conviction of inadequacy?

Julie was raised in a family that valued accomplishment and dismissed emotion. Her beautiful, socially anxious mother prized image over truth, an ideal quietly supported by her compliant father. Praise was given for performance, not for authenticity. Over time, Julie learned to suppress spontaneous feelings and to maintain a polished false self to secure belonging. The culture of her family became the architecture of her psyche. In analysis, this pattern re-emerges in the transference. The analyst, at times, becomes the symbolic mother perceived as disapproving. When interpretations touch her vulnerability, Julie's defenses activate, straining her capacity to speak or sustain eye contact. She monitors the analyst's reactions as though scanning for danger. Her voice, once animated, grows cautious, as if preparing for the humiliation she expects will follow any genuine expression of need. She retreats into silence or

intellectualized observation, defending against the longing for closeness and the terror of exposure.

It is within these repeating moments of withdrawal and tentative return that the deeper work begins to take shape. What appears as resistance reveals itself as the psyche's effort to preserve an old cultural narrative written in the emotional language of survival.

Contemporary neuroscience helps us appreciate what psychoanalysts have long understood: the process of working through is not a single act but an ongoing biological and psychological unfolding. Each analytic session invites the gradual creation of new neural connections while pruning away old, maladaptive ones. This rhythmic, cyclical engagement, similar in nature to the poetic and musical forms Molofsky celebrates, becomes a medium for psychic reorganization.

Through sustained attunement, the analyst supports Julie in reconnecting with the memories, affects, and defenses linked to a once-muted self. When the analyst remains present through Julie's self-blame, rather than correcting or withdrawing, something opens. The culture and the once-suspect memories of the past begin to reconstitute. Julie starts to take small risks in new expressions: she laughs at her perfectionism, voices anger without apology and wonders aloud whether her mother's distance might once have been rooted in fear rather than rejection.

A new internal rhythm begins to emerge, one more flexible, fluid, and forgiving. As trust deepens, the transference becomes both container and stage upon which the atmosphere of Julie's early cultural world is relived and revalued. Analyst and analysand trace the emotional language of Julie's history, the expression of "not enough," and begin to revise it through mutual recognition and shared reflection. The analytic space becomes, in Molofsky's sense, a poetic workspace of the mind, an arena where language, memory, and feeling intersect to create new symbolic configurations. In time, Julie's narratives expand; her inner voice, once harsh and critical, softens. She integrates tenderness with assertion, doubt with hope. What once felt like rigid repetition becomes a more fluid dialogue, an opportunity to break from the old script of the past. She begins to experience herself not as the failed daughter of an unattainable ideal, but as part of a broader cultural story, one that

includes vulnerability as a form of strength. Her growing flexibility within the analytic space mirrors an expanding freedom in her external relationships, where she now allows for mistakes, humor, and emotional reciprocity.

Such transformation does not occur suddenly but accumulates through countless small shifts in awareness and affect. Each new connection, each moment of curiosity or self-compassion, reinforces the gradual rewiring of psychic structure. Perhaps, then, these restructured memories allow genuine structural change within the psyche and even within the brain itself. Julie's relationship to herself and others becomes more fluid, less confined by the imprisoning dictates of the past. Could it be that analytic work does more than interpret culture and memory, that it recreates them anew in the living present of the analytic hour?

### Closing Reflection

Ultimately, Molofsky argues that psychoanalysis does not end with the analytic session or the theories that divide it. Might it best be understood instead as an ongoing dialogue between memory and culture, between what was and what is still becoming?

Every word spoken, every silence held, belongs to that ancient poetic tradition that began when human beings first sought meaning in loss and longing. Molofsky reminds us that culture is the means by which memory survives, and in turn, shapes what memory becomes. Perhaps the analyst's work is to listen for the lullabies and lamentations that echo within each analysand's story, to honor the songs of their forebears and help them compose new verses of their own.

At its best, psychoanalysis becomes what Molofsky so beautifully calls "*breath with wings*," an act of remembering that takes flight in new directions. Maybe our work isn't merely to understand the past, but to create the future in the only place it can ever truly exist: the living now.

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## Culture is Memory Engaged

Lee Jenkins

**M**erle Molofsky's *Culture is Memory, Memory is Culture* begins with emphasizing the interrelated significance of psychoanalytic exploration of the unconscious mind and artistic presentation or representation of unconscious effects in human behavior. When artistic production is literature, there is the primacy of the use of language, words, as conveyors of meaning. Something similar is true of music, in that both are irreducible vectors for the communication of thought and feeling that is humanly shared, whether as a sense of identity, community, or togetherness. Perhaps the primacy of what has been experienced is what implants in memory, in the way that experiences of emotional resonance are internalized. What has been recalled finds voice in the forms of artistry that preserve it, giving it a cultural identity and continuance. Thus, this process gives rise to Molofsky's trope, culture is memory, memory is culture.

The unconscious possession of such cultural memory seems to be the source of its value and performance, a reservoir of all that has been beautiful, ennobling, or meaningful, as well as disturbing and painful, inseparable from the experience of being alive. Perhaps too it is contradictory aspects of conflict-laden feelings imbedded in this process that consign it to the unconscious. What we come to love may be painful to hold, expressing helplessness that we have been forced to confront. We cannot always remember, but we cannot fail to remember either. This is the material held in the unconscious waiting for the time when it can be accessed and brought into memory and consciousness again. It is the unconscious emotional inheritance being referred to when Molofsky cites Freud's statement that "the poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious. What I discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied." We appreciate the difference between the artist's presentation of unconscious effects in our behavior, and the scientist's observation and study of it.

Molofsky cites the poet Muriel Rukeyser in emphasizing that “the universe of poetry is the universe of the emotional truth. Our material is the way we feel and the way we remember.” This is accomplished using words. As the psychoanalyst Michael Eigen says, “words encode and create affects, are parts of emotional fields...words are a lifeblood. There is soul in words.” A supreme paradox is Eigen’s belief that “one of the great functions of poetry is to find (and create) the thrill of the wordless through words.” This seems to be the feeling that is reawakened, that is summoned back into being through words. It is meaning that can only be felt, as experienced in music, for instance. Music is a comparable art form dedicated to capturing the meaning of human interaction that is experienced as feeling, thoughts embedded in feeling, the way, we imagine, a child first experiences the world. Memory brings into being possession of experiences that define us, that we have forgotten, probably just as dreams do, providing an ever-retained, continuously accumulating cultural memory of what our experiences have defined as important in our lives.

In Michael Eigen’s terms, “words—whatever else they are—are gateways to the wordless.” I considered what either Mozart or Claude Debussy might have meant by the handed-down statement, “The music is not in the notes, but in the silence between.” This might mean that while notes may be the sound, the structure of their arrangement is what produces tension, expressiveness and depth. The silence here might mean the feelings evoked by the notes and their arrangement, the music, rising from the unconscious, evoked by the association and progression of the notes, telling their story of emotional life fed by and encoded in unconscious processes.

Molofsky refers to the psychoanalytic therapeutic experience, on the part of the therapist and patient, that is a shared psychic resonance and attunement, a mutual participation in symbolic processes and metaphoric language. This could be called a shared “poetics of mind”. It is manifested in cultural receptivity to the mechanisms of dreams, free association, transference, denial, all the signifying suggestiveness of the way words can be used to reveal or conceal the truth.

Molofsky emphasizes the way that music, like poetry, permeates the mind and evokes feelings, memory, and emotional involvement, the mystery of

the delight or fright music can evoke. What is the unconscious content that is being stirred, the pleasure of a melody stuck in the mind? She tries to get at this dimension when she says that “to word-in the world is breathing. Song is breath with wings. Words are breath dancing.” This is fanciful but griping. She continues: “What is the relationship of music and words in a song? The words of the song must fit the rhythm of the music; the music must express the emotional meaning of the words. Are words set to music lyrics or poems? She continues, “Lyrics are words deliberately set to music and must fit the musical structure of the song.” Is the meshing of the elements of song—words, melody or rhythm—a transposition of unconscious processes that have found expression through the creation of poetry, music, art?

Rhyme, rhythm, repetition, allusion, reversal, substitution are mechanisms at work in songs, perhaps reflective of interacting and conflicting unconscious states of being. There is the pleasure of being comforted in the presentation of conflicting feelings and their resolution, as in nursery rhymes. The sharing of such experiences on the part of adults and children, for instance, becomes cultural rituals of what one’s experience is that becomes inseparable from the memory of who one is.

I remember the progression of reading to my son, from the point at which he looked at and commented on pictures accompanying the text to the point where we read a text together, aided by his being able to read by age four. We would read stories and make them up. During preschool years he would first ask me to tell him what he had done that day. What I imagined he had done I would say, and he would add to this or embellish it. Then I would ask him to tell me what he thought I had done that day. We touched on who we were and what our tasks were in the world, interacting with others.

Molofsky talks about such experiences, showing how they are enacted in the memory of what one does because of who one is, the cultural definition of life imbedded, for instance, in preference for specific cuisine, rituals of socialization, and fellowship, modes of interaction and expectation related to ethnic, racial, economic identity. Molofsky demonstrates the lived life of such things in referring to her Eastern European Ashkenazi Jewish heritage and its elaboration over time. Poverty, discrimination, and hardship were experienced in immigration to the United States.

New forms of oppression and suffering were experienced along with hope and aspiration in the ghettos of the new country. Molofsky discusses her own childhood and growing up, eventually having her own family, experiencing cultural, social, racial intermingling that brings into being new conceptions of cultural identity and selfhood, defining and being defined by new life experience. It is a story of perseverance and openness to life, remembering the old that is now made to interact with the new, a social and cultural amalgam characteristic of American life.

Merle Molofsky's younger daughter, growing up in 1950's in Brooklyn's Bedford Stuyvesant, among exclusively Black, Latino and other people of color, had not thought of herself as "white," as such, though she was Jewish. This is interesting, since Merle had married an Italian who was the daughter's father. This daughter wrote a middle school paper on "the Day I discovered I was White," documenting a realization of her difference in appearance from her dark-skinned classmates, who had also begun to make reference to that difference. From the position of the majority authority that they held being Black, they teased her regarding her attempts to master the dance moves of their group. This emphasizes the relationship of group identity and individual identity, reversing the usual authority of being white. This daughter later had white friends and began to appreciate their readiness to look down on colored friends the same way the colored friends had disparaged whites.

Another daughter, visiting the Italian grandparents, whose food and social life she loved, came to appreciate the clash of her individual cultural awareness and identity with that of ancestral identity when she announced that of ancestral identity when she announced that she was vegetarian and didn't eat meat, at a holiday family dinner. The Italian grandfather announced that if you don't eat meat, you don't eat here. This daughter retained her vegetarianism but grew up to be a caterer who specialized in preparing food for all cuisines and cultures. A prohibition had been transformed into a heritage now of cultural receptivity.

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Reading Merle Molofsky's story made me think of some aspects of my own, as an American Black, typically confronted by the specter of racism and its undermining and corrupting effects, the insidious intrusion into one's psyche of a sense of unworthiness and a lack of autonomy and self-respect.

I grew up in Tallahassee, Florida, in an all-Black middle-class neighborhood, near the campus of Florida A&M University. We were protected from outright displays of racial prejudice, though I could certainly go to areas where I'd be subjected to them. But Tallahassee was the Capitol of the state and generated a moderating influence, the locale also of Florida State University, at the time our local white institution. I am thinking of the time when I experienced my first direct exposure to racist belittlement. The event let me see how I was viewed by the powerful, represented by whiteness, and how I was supposed to view myself. It was a social enactment that settled down into the mind and took up residence there. Memory revives culture and identity, and how culture and identity are experienced live again in memory. I am remembering the occasion when I was 14 and went with my father to get my restricted driver's license.

When I acquired my license, I started acting as a kind of chauffeur for my father, who was a district manager for an insurance company. I think he liked having me with him on days after school, just as he liked to have me mind the office on Saturday mornings when he or the secretary was out. He took me himself to take the road test, the anxiety we shared about what I might encounter muted. In his pride I don't think he wanted to acknowledge the ways in which the labyrinthine operation of racist designs could impede my progress or dim my hopes. When my time came my name was called and I was beckoned by a trooper to follow him. It seemed that actual state troopers conducted the road tests. He was a sandy-haired young man with the florid complexion of an orange, of middle height, with a compact build. He wasn't wearing a gun or other equipment, but his shirt and trousers were official-looking, with a stripe running down the side of the leg, and his wide belt fit snugly around his waist.

We drove and went through some maneuvers. I think I did them well enough. I used hand signals to indicate turns, and when I had to back up, I was able to do so in a reasonably straight line. All the while he wrote up my performance on a clipboard. I, however, felt confident, and immediately I thought that such an attitude was precisely what I should not show him. When we pulled up to the point from which we'd departed, he told me to stop. He said that I had failed and that I would have to come

back. The way he'd said it, as if he had no obligation to explain himself, hurt me into utterance.

"What did I do wrong?" I asked. It wasn't a defiant statement, so much as it was a genuine inquiry. He turned and rested his grey eyes on me, flecked with changing color the way the marbles were I used to play with. He then listed some things which we both knew were spurious. We simply continued to stare at each other. I think it might even have lasted a full minute. We both knew that something of some moment was transpiring, and it was up to him to say what it was. His stare wasn't contemptuous or cold. It was more one of surprise, and then one of examination, of himself, maybe, and of me; and my stare was one of respectful waiting for my right to a reply. He then said, and I knew he was going to say it.

"Come on in and get your license." He didn't say it with apology; it was just a statement he wanted to make, no more than he might have been commenting on a stain on his trousers. So, I went in, got my license, and didn't have to take the parking test. Here was an example of the social/cultural ritual, as can be experienced by Black and white people, that Merle was talking about as applied to race relations. The white person legislates, the Black person obeys; he has the fund of knowledge, I am taken to be deficient and come to better myself.

When I got back, I didn't know what I was going to tell my father. He could see, just as others watching could, that I hadn't taken the parking test, but when I got into the car, showing him the papers, he just beamed at me and said nothing further. Then, about ten minutes down the road, he said:

"I see you didn't take the parking test."

"Yeah."

"Must have really liked your driving."

"He told me I had failed—and then changed his mind."

"He's that nasty SOB, messes with everybody, the white people too. My heart sank when I saw you had him." There was silence.

"I just stared at him."

“SOB changed his mind?”

“Yeah.”

“Now that is something!” He laughed, and then, for the first time that day, I did too (Jenkins, 2018, pp. 13–14).

I thought how both my father and I were experiencing our version of how memory is culture, culture is memory, as it applies to the prevalence of inequitable treatment, producing an internalized notion of one’s place in the world. The inevitable question is once again introduced: Why does the establishing of one’s place in the world so often involve the need to look down on others and measure one’s own progress in terms of the degree of elevation over them? This makes the other seem “less than” oneself and can lead to one feeling justified in subjecting the other to a status beneath oneself if one has the wherewithal to do so, or can profit by doing so, in defiance of moral precepts against the exploitation of others for one’s own benefit or gain.

When others do not occupy status equal to one’s own, they can therefore be seen as less than oneself and, as we like to think, unequal. The usual way to measure this comparative value is in reference to social status, wealth, power, privilege, physical appearance. One’s own limitation or vulnerability seems hard to accept. One needs the other to see what that vulnerability or limitation looks like. One remembers one’s own place in the regime based on the treatment one receives, reinforcing a conception of one’s place that is consigned to memory. This is how the idea of memory is culture, culture is memory can be seen as it applies to the prevalence of racial prejudice or inequitable treatment, producing an internalized notion of one’s place in the world—high, low, or in the middle. (Jenkins, L., 2018. *Right of Passage*, Sphinx Books: London).

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## Not Having Been Loved

Lee Jenkins

I am in my 83rd year now, an African American therapist, a psychoanalyst (and retired professor of English) working on the Upper West Side of Manhattan for more than 30 years. My clientele reflects the diverse demographic of my area, as well as the diverse interests people have that might send them to me. Socioeconomic, cultural, racial, gender concerns are reflected in the choosing of a therapist, with the expectations of shared background and the comfort of being understood. This is particularly important for American Blacks. People might want a prominent practitioner, or someone recognized for dealing with what they imagine their problem is; clients might be prompted to explore the possibilities of basic human similarity among those of different or divergent identities, or an unstated or unconscious interest in disproving this idea; or fantasizing in any way about what benefit my identity might hold for them, as in “he’s Black but he’s good.”

I say this to emphasize how the lure of the interior world exercises pressure on what we do. Of greatest importance are the earliest emotional attachments and how they were experienced. They typically drive people to seek them out again, reflecting how they were emotionally used, rewarded, tolerated, loved, disregarded, affirmed, abused—these are the driving motives for so many of the choices people make that get explored in therapy.

Recently I was asked by a long-standing patient to come to a book reading at 82nd Street Barnes and Noble in Manhattan. You may have heard of *I Am Nobody’s Slave*, by Lee Hawkins, who is a social commentator and prize-winning journalist. He has talked about the book in a multi-part Podcast “What Happened in Alabama.”

The book deals with the intergenerational relations and transmission of trauma in a Black family, presenting the intimate and anguished relations of Black men, women and children from slavery times to the present. Lee did extensive research on his family lineage, consulting

courthouse records, tracking down and interviewing family members white and Black. This was a project he was occupied with for almost a decade. This subject alone seems groundbreaking.

He recounts the brutalization of Blacks, their being subjected to physical and emotional humiliation, the internalizing processes of such treatment, the physical and emotional effects. He examines the undermining of self-respect, leading to guilt accompanying the inflicting of pain during anger and helplessness. It is a magnificent picture of both torment and triumph. Punishment and protectiveness can interact in hurtful yet in ultimately affirmative or supportive ways, as when a father's punitive actions to protect a son from exposure to racist threat may seem excessive in the curtailment of the son's assertiveness, with the intent to keep the son alive when the father's thoughts are of the grandfather's brutalization and murder when he defied the racial codes of the time. It is pent-up anger and hurt on a parent's part that may be acted out on a child, in extraordinarily humiliating and abusive ways, and the remorse, accountability, and desire to be forgiven which can follow. It is also loving and respectful relations experienced in daily life.

Working out the anger Hawkins felt at having been subject to his own father's mistreatment, and the guilt he felt about talking about it in his memoir, as well as a rejecting stance on his mother's part, were the painful experiences that led him to come to therapy. He had been abused and traumatized. Such treatment was a legacy of the internalized racist abuse now being discharged against innocent family members. At the book reading Lee acknowledged these things; seeing me in the audience, he called me to come up to join him and talk about our shared experience. It was an impromptu interaction, an arresting introduction to the therapeutic working out of such problems discussed by two Black men.

Somewhere in the background of African American life may be the question of a person's considering what it might mean to not have been loved at all, the effects of the many ways one has been devalued, racist subjugation being one of them. How to survive has been an overarching concern. The descendants of the slaves, those on the bottom of the social hierarchy, have been able to communicate with each other, endure their hardship, establishing an alternative community. They satisfy their needs as best they can, love and respect each other when possible, and learn to

affirm a will of resistance and hope of change, despite the possibilities of demoralization, self-denigration, or co-option. Families are still separated and attachments disrupted, individuals pitted against each other, in abusive internal dramas and in competitive ethnic strife. People love and need each other but face poverty and rejection. The sense of a worthy self could still be respectfully anchored through loving affirmation. A child needs to have been loved, affirmed by somebody, enabling him to know that such a thing exists, that he has value because he exists in the other's eyes; and he might recognize the desire in himself to satisfy a similar need when he sees it in others.

Lee traces over time the struggle to live under racism, showing the effect on whites and Blacks. What is demonstrated in the memoir is examined and discussed in the Podcasts. One example is the historical effects of the Slave Codes, whites given the right to interrogate and discipline Blacks at will, leading to internalized abuse and paranoia in both Blacks and whites. There is an intriguing discussion in Podcast 4 of the wholesale theft of the land and property holdings of Blacks at the beginning of the 20th century, exploring what the value today might be, had Blacks been able to take advantage of entrepreneurial opportunities in the business life of the nation without being opposed or shut out.

The historical mistreatment of Blacks, their exploitation for financial gain by others, sanctioned by custom and law, cannot be overstated. Yet Blacks have engaged in a most extraordinary cultivation of the will to survive, building stable communities, making contributions to the betterment of American civic life in the arts, sciences, music, entertainment, sports and politics. Lee reveals how the individuals in his family have been contributors to this achievement. When the family moved to Minnesota in the 1950s, it encountered the benefits and agonies of racial integration, laying down roots in an environment that provided greater opportunities for personal accomplishment, while racist resistance to such accomplishment sharpened their will to achieve.

At the book signing Lee talked about these things and referred to some of the difficulties Black people, and others as well, have in maintaining respectful relationships. The example of the character Troy Maxson in August Wilson's 1986 Pulitzer Prize winning play, *Fences*, was brought up. When Troy's son, Cory, confronts him, asking Troy why he has never

liked him, Troy explodes, saying that his job isn't to like him but provide for, do right by, him, as if these two things were incompatible. Troy seems to be saying that looking after a dependent is only satisfying an obligation, a duty, not an expression of a willing and affectionate desire to ensure the other's well-being. Loving someone, needing to be loved by someone, can sometimes be felt as being weak, taken advantage of. Having been deprived can make for bitterness and a sense of vulnerability in offering oneself to another to promote that person's well-being, having been deprived of this gift oneself.

Troy had never been loved in this manner, not having had supportive parents, a supportive childhood environment, not having been treated fairly by white society, being demeaned, as when he was denied the opportunity to play major league baseball at a time when the color barrier was still in place. No one had done right by him, not to mention love him, about which he seems to have maintained a seething bitterness. This is rendered forcefully and sympathetically by Wilson. Troy is the son of an impoverished sharecropper who was hardworking, exacting, abusive, with many more children than he can support. Hard work, deprivation, oppression have practically driven him mad. The successive women he's co-habited with, one of whom was Troy's mother, all leave, sooner or later, each to be replaced by another. But, hard and unempathetic, he does not abandon his family and tries to make an impossible go of his life, passing on to Troy the resentment of a hard life but a resolve to accept his responsibility to endure it, delivering his sharecropper's allotment of cotton to the white landlord whose land he tills, but always finding himself more deeply in debt each time.

Troy has a bitter confrontation with his father, like the one he later has with his son, Cory. Troy and his father fight over sexual access to a young woman in the neighborhood. Troy is thrust out of the house, and as a teenager he embarked on a journey to manhood, through desperate straits of unemployment, unintended fatherhood, racist oppression, impoverishment. He becomes an outcast, descending into a life of assault, crime, and murder. His rehabilitation begins when he is imprisoned. He forms a life-long friendship with another inmate, Bono, and becomes a talented baseball player. He meets his wife and begins a respectful life as a sanitation worker. He accepts the harsh demands of survival in the ghetto, the weight of obligation to family life and home ownership. He is

weighed down by the conflict between the acceptance of his life and the desire to scream out against it. He seems to imply that what he's doing is not an expression of what fulfillment of authentic selfhood should be, undone by the burden of concern for others, since never in his life has he been the beneficiary of another's caring concern.

Troy feels a proper offering of respect is still owed to him, giving him the right to demand attention from others. Giving of himself to others makes him feel weak and unmanly. He resents the opportunity his son now has in times of greater racial acceptance, and he refrains from giving parental consent to his son, which would have allowed him to go to college via being recruited for the football team. Cory says that he has mattered to Troy only as burden on him. In therapy, I frequently see the sense of not having mattered, not having been loved in social and familial relationships, someone exploiting someone else's need to be loved.

At the book reading, a Black woman from the audience came up to get her copy of the book signed, but she wanted to ask Lee Hawkins what was wrong with so many of the men she knows, who act just like Troy. I did not get a chance to speak to her, but I am thinking now of what a patient just recently said in session to me about this matter. She was herself disturbed by the manner in which Black men and women sometimes relate to each other, a similar complaint I hear as well from white women I've worked with speaking about their relations with white men, some of whom seem to be having a crisis of identity and feelings of disempowerment. "What is wrong with them," my patient asks. "Their anger at Black women is misplaced. They're probably angry at never having had a father, and the mother and grandmothers [who raised them] were angry and bitter about having been abandoned [by their men]. So, they probably had a negative attitude toward men. Not feeling loved, they [the men] don't know how to love, and Black women no longer want to tolerate their noncommittal attitudes. No one has taken care of them, so they accept the challenge of taking care of themselves, no longer expecting to be taken care of by men. So, they don't submit to a subordinate role, having been charged for so long with the task of being the one in charge who held the family together." This was the opinion of an unmarried Black woman holding a doctorate with an academic career, in her late 30's.

In looking at August Wilson's portrait of Troy, we see a big, dynamic man with a large, compelling spirit, uneducated, but obviously intelligent, causing the woman who will be his wife to quickly fall in love with him. He is a dominant figure among his family and friends. He is a natural leader. He even questioned the 1950s racial hierarchy at his job; and instead of being fired, as his Black co-workers expected, he is instead promoted to become the first non-white sanitation truck driver, no longer having to run behind the trucks. His determination and self-confidence work for him here, leading to more money and a higher social ranking, but it has not altered his position in society as a despised underling.

He is still fenced in, as the title of the play suggests, unable to say no to the obligations of his life under strained economic circumstances and social injustice, and unable to see how he can rise above it. He's fenced in by his imperfections, which intensify his distress. He is ill-equipped to meet the challenge of being responsive to the needs of another, his wife. He breaks free of his 17-year marriage, forming a relationship with another woman and having a child. He viewed this as a liberation from duty and the expression of internal freedom.

This resolve to be free seems to be linked to the refusal to be bound by the strictures of social organization that impose the necessity of marriage and family life. We can imagine how he might even view it as a means of keeping a Black man within the bonds of limited personal freedom. He is not doing what he wants, only what he must do to live respectfully in society. It would be easy to recall how the marriage bond of Blacks was dismantled and corrupted for financial gain by whites.

Throughout the play, Troy has used the analogy of playing baseball as comparable to meeting the challenges of life. When he married Rose, he says that he did the safe but confining, compromising, thing—he bunted, instead of risking a strike out to do the defining and fulfilling thing, swinging with all he's got for the home run, knocking the ball out of the park. Instead, having bunted is like being married; he has been waiting on base for another batter to bring him home. In other words, the fantasized choice, for many Black men, might be either emasculation or rejection of life's social expectations. Perhaps this is why we admire so readily the many men who have accepted the restraints of their lives and given themselves to the management and fulfillment of married life and the support of their loved ones.

Troy comes home on Friday afternoon, with a “sack of potatoes and a bucket of lard,” having cashed his weekly paycheck. He gives the money to Rose, his wife, who gives him back his weekly allowance. He engages in “man talk” in his backyard, sharing a bottle with his faithful buddy, Bono, and family members, one of whom, Gabe, is his brother injured in the Second World War. Gabe now needs to be cared for, whose disability check Troy has appropriated, bitterly thinking that for him to even be able to get a house, providing care and lodging for his disabled brother, meant resorting to something dishonorable. His first son, Lyons, an unemployed musician, dependent on his wife’s earnings as a laundry worker, is frequently present asking for the “loan” of more money. This is the weekly interaction transpiring each Friday, with Rose alternating between talking with the men and preparing dinner in the kitchen. It’s a picture of the warmth and brotherly feeling of Black family life in its struggle to survive. This ongoing ritual will lead to another, that night, when Troy goes in to eat dinner, after which he and Rose go up to the bedroom where he takes hold of her and, as he says, “I fall down on you and try to blast a hole in forever.” From this he hopes to get the strength to be able to get up the next day and function for another week, able to endure the erosion of spirit and promise he feels each day.

When he betrays Rose by taking up with the other woman and having a child, living a life where he can laugh and feel free of obligation, we see how he’s trying to address a crisis of meaninglessness in his life. He is not sorry about what he’s done since “it felt right in my heart.” He did not intend to hurt her. He seems to want to continue to live with her while he enjoys the company of the other woman and the sense of freedom to do whatever he wants. This may seem naive and ludicrous, irresponsible and immature, but it seems to represent the thinking of many men in their despair and sense of inadequacy, expressed in a disregard for the life held out for them in which they are supposed to find fulfillment.

Rose too speaks of her own need to meet the disappointing circumstances of her life, burying herself in Troy, trying to grow something beautiful in their union, facing the rejection of her dedication and sacrifice. She too is fenced in, though she has her Christian faith from which she draws solace. She sees what Troy does not, that no woman could meet, or should be asked to meet, the demands of satisfying his existential crisis

without abandoning herself, giving his life meaning at the price of giving up her own, if his fulfillment requires the giving up of her own.

Black men have been held up to ridicule regarding notions of respectability while racist undermining has corrupted the means through which self-respect can be engendered. It is a battle against being spiritually violated, as if they are only themselves to be held accountable for what racist action in society has done to undermine and subvert their self-respect and manhood. Probably no man other than an African American can have an unsummoned vision of a charred object hanging from a tree limb intrude into his consciousness—as a warning that any self-respecting, autonomous action will be viewed by a rejecting white society as an unacceptable impertinence or presumption. Despite this, such a man has still been able to provide love and support and not succumb to a retaliatory hate that would have brought complete blight on life.

As a Black man, I think we have been able to love and affirm ourselves against great odds, a remarkable story of resilience still not sufficiently acknowledged. This self-affirmation is best witnessed in the fact of its being lived. This may perhaps be why the late poet Nikki Giovanni was so loved. Her poetry demonstrates the acceptance of the pain of life and its internal strife yet finds a way to endure the things that keep us awake at night because the morning can still bring the opportunity to prosper and live and affirm each other again, being our true selves, without apology. This is the ongoing insistence to retain the vision of a good life, despite the many forces at work in the world seemingly orchestrating its destruction. We are accountable only to ourselves, not having to prove, to any observer, our worth or our delight and belief in each other. This is something I think Giovanni would loudly affirm, since, as she has said, “Black Love is Black Wealth” (Giovanni, 1993).

Imagine a Black man and woman romantically assessing each other, drawn, as we all are, by the lure of the same old hope and pleasures; the same old fear and dangers; thoughts of being pretty enough, agreeable enough; thoughts of seeming promising enough with the expectation of making enough money; questions of being able to be committed, able to negotiate difficulty and compromise. Somewhere too in the backs of their minds might be the awareness of how these expectations are experienced through the corrupting influence of racist measuring of personal

adequacy, inviting them to see themselves always as lacking something in comparison to whites, leading to the possibilities of doubt, resentment, dislike, and shame that have been instilled in each in their view of the other.

They might have been able to resist and overcome such thinking, compete against the privileges of whiteness. Their efforts will always be met by the internalized expectation of the merit and value of whiteness that have been institutionalized in society, in comparison to the assumption of inadequacy assigned to being Black. An individual white person might not see himself a possessor of such privilege or even desire it; but being a member of the group which has it automatically makes that person a recipient of it, whether he wishes it or not, just as the Black person is a recipient of the way being Black has come to be seen. These notions stay in place so long as society keeps in place this view of the difference between the two.

An African American man might hear somewhere in himself an echo of Troy, thinking how ironic it is that doing the responsible thing could cause him to feel so alone, alienated from himself, trying to meet life's demands. He and his mate reach toward each other, wondering if they can match. They both know so much is in the way, making it hard to sustain their connection. When they can't, it is easy to turn to the illusion of trying to make up for such loss through the socially approved accumulation of money and possessions, positioning oneself in proximity to authority or power—not that we don't want and need these things, which can make life so much more manageable or comfortable or free of burden. But we can also sometimes see how these things are substitutes for the staying power and sense of adequacy resulting from having been loved and valued. Is it true that love given to us by another fortifies the self, enlarging it, helping it to be proof against depletion, making it strong enough to offer generosity because such generosity was offered to oneself? Is this how we get love within ourselves such that we can give it back to others? Not having received it can often lead to social alienation and individual self-destruction.

The last scenes of the play deal with the preparations for Troy's funeral. All the family members are present, including Troy's child, Raynell, 7 years old, whom Rose has raised. Cory has become a military man

with an upright, slightly stern, demeanor. He has decided not to attend the funeral, to affirm himself by at last moving out from under Troy's shadow. When he and Rose discuss this, she emphasizes the futility of the carrying of resentment and blame as a response to the hurt and rejection of their lives. She expresses to Cory the anguish and pain of her own relationship with Troy, her recognition of inherent conflict in life. Nothing was a deliberate attempt to undermine, being caught up in the consequences of their behavior that were beyond their capacity to properly manage or resolve.

When Cory and Raynell speak, they interact in the spirit of the remembrance of Troy, singing stanzas of a song that Troy sang often that they came to love, about Troy's hunting dog Blue:

I had a dog his name was Blue  
You know Blue was mighty true  
You know Blue was a good old dog  
Blue treed a possum in a hollow log  
You know from that he was a good old dog  
Hear it ring! Hear it ring!

Old Blue died and I dug his grave  
Dug his grave with a silver spade  
Let him down with a golden chain  
And every night I call his name  
Go on Blue, you good dog you

Blue treed a possum out on a limb  
Blue looked at me and I looked at him  
Grabbed that possum and put him in a sack  
Blue stayed there till I came back

Blue laid down and died like a man  
Now he's treeing possums in the Promised Land  
I'm gonna tell you this to let you know  
Blue's gone where the good dogs go

When I hear old Blue bark  
Blue treed a possum in Noah's Ark  
Blue treed a possum in Noah's Ark.  
Hear it ring! Hear it ring! (Wilson, 1968).

The two of them sing the love of their father, what Cory sees was so hard for his father to express to him. When Rose comes back out, where the others are gathered, Gabe, Bono, and Lyons, Troy's first son. Cory joins them as they go to the funeral. We deduce from this the spirit of love in Troy that was always there but not easily accessed or expressed, elicited here in his affection for his dog, a creature free to be himself and act in accordance with what his will dictates, the magnificence, I think, in all of us that seldom finds its full expression.

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## **Recognizing Trauma: Response to “Culture is Memory, Memory is Culture” by Merle Heidi Molofsky**

Les Von Losberg

**I** was asked, along with a number of other people, to write a response to Merle’s article, and thinking this would be an easy task, I agreed to write something. I thought, frankly, how hard could it be to write even a few thousand words on as pregnant a topic as “culture is memory, memory is culture”? The task, however, proved more daunting than I imagined.

In fact, over the last few weeks I have written dozens of pages of blather attempting to craft a first paragraph that would ease open the mental door behind which a clear path forward would make itself known to me. This, however, was not happening. Rather than finding the princess-guide I hoped for, behind every door I opened sat a hungry tiger licking its chops.

I could not understand why this was happening. I have, after all, family with roots in multiple cultural heritages. My paternal great-grandfather was a German Jew who emigrated to the United States in the mid-to-late 1800’s. My paternal grandmother was Irish Catholic. Her mother, my great-grandmother, emigrated here most likely in the late 1800’s. My maternal great-grandmother was an orthodox Jew who emigrated to the United States and married an orthodox Jewish dairy farmer. My grandmother, who was the first-born of six siblings, married a Scots-Irish Alabama Baptist when she was sixteen years old. My paternal grandfather’s family, I was told, had roots in North America that reached back to the late 1600’s.

Fast forward to 1975, the year in which I met Merle on the steps of the Grand Army Plaza Public Library in Brooklyn, New York, and to the story Merle occasionally tells about how I responded that day when she asked me about my family background: for the record, I said “middle class”.

Well aware as I am of my Irish, Jewish, and Scots-Irish background, I am not sure why I responded that way then. Today, at 78, I can surmise that the reason was not so much a matter of obsession with wealth and class status as it was a matter of leaving my past as a solitary, largely ignored child and adolescent in the past. This suspicion makes sense to me after following, not a clear and straight path into this response, a path not always certain, but rather one with twists and turns, substantial shadow and unanticipated insights, the first of which was that virtually all the adults in my family had endured substantial trauma in their lives. It became clearer to me why no one eagerly shared their memories.

I was born in 1947, just short of two years after the end of World War II. During the late 1940's and well into the second half of the 20th century, the revelations of Nazi Holocaust atrocities were fresh in the minds of many, especially so in the minds of Jews around the world. The freshness of the horrors of the Holocaust may have kept my Jewish relatives quiet about their deep cultural roots in their religion. And, it is very likely, if not virtually certain, that my Jewish great-grandmother and her children, my maternal grandmother and her sisters and their husbands, lost family members who had remained in Europe when my great-grandmother emigrated to the United States. They may not have known them, but would have had deep cultural bonds with them, even if they did not even know their names or what they looked like. They may also have had a heightened awareness not only that, had their parents, grandparents or great-grandparents not emigrated to the United States, they too could have been sent to concentration camps and murdered, but also that there was during the war a heightened atmosphere of antisemitism so virulent as to support an American Nazi Party in some quarters.

My maternal grandparents also had a life-changing trauma here in the United States. They never spoke about this, but when my grandparents married and moved down to my grandfather's home in Alabama, his family refused to accept my grandmother into their family. Their rejection drove them back north, to Brooklyn, New York, where my grandparents lived and raised their family until my grandmother died. Perhaps as some kind of concession to my grandfather, my grandmother did not impress on their children that their heritage was as much Jewish as it was Alabama Baptist.

My paternal grandmother and her son, my father, experienced a significant trauma when my paternal grandfather abandoned my grandmother, my father, and his brother. Part of my father's trauma was the shattering of his dream to become an engineer when he had to quit school in 10th grade and go to work to help support his family, which he rarely talked about.

Part of my maternal grandmother's trauma was years of illness. She lived with my family, first in our small one-bedroom apartment in Brooklyn and later in our house in a Long Island suburb. She had Parkinson's disease and could not work or live alone. All the time I knew her she rarely spoke, and when she did speak, never talked about herself or her children or what their lives had been like.

My mother's trauma was rooted in the role she was cast in as an older sister/stand-in mother/family caregiver. From the time she was in her early teens, her mother would leave her late in the afternoon to take care of her younger brothers and sister until late at night. As my mother grew older and married my father, she cared for my father's mother for over 10 years as my paternal grandmother's health deteriorated.

When my maternal grandmother died, my mother's rebellious brother moved in with us in our Long Island home for three years so he could avoid the violence he experienced in his Brooklyn high school and finish high school outside the city. Shortly afterward, my mother's older brother and his wife moved into our house to live in a furnished room in our basement. A year and a half later, my mother took on the care of their first child when his wife suffered a year and a half period of post-partum depression. Then my mother was asked to care for her mother, who was diabetic, blinded by glaucoma, and eventually a double amputee, losing both legs above the knee. My mother spent almost fifteen years caring for her mother who was confined to a hospital bed in our home, where she eventually died.

The second insight was that the tradition my grandparents and parents created, principally family gatherings for holidays—Easter, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas—lacked any acknowledged religious, political, social or historical cultural context. These holidays were just traditional days for the family to get together for a big meal.

Certainly, these gatherings had repetitive elements, including the food that we ate—baked ham and roast turkey that we ate every Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas—and activities to which the adults looked forward to engaging in after the tables were cleared: Pokeno or canasta for the women and pinochle for the men. Even as I look back and see these gatherings as similar, I also have the feeling that each was a discreet event in time, place and meaning rooted in the present, with no ties to the past or the future.

Odd as this might seem, because of the mix of Jewish and Christian relatives in my family background, religion was something that was rarely if ever mentioned by my relatives when they gathered for the holidays. What is less odd by far is that in this environment, I received no religious education beyond the few stories my paternal grandmother read to me out of a child's collection of Old Testament stories when I was preschool age.

By the time I met Merle, in spite of answering the question about my background with “middle class”, I had come to identify myself as a secular Jew, and my interest in Jewish history and writing, especially our mutual interest in poetry, worked significantly to bring us together to share, though we had no concept of this when we met, the last fifty years together.

Over so long a period, many things develop that together create the warp and weft of a family tradition. Of all the things the past fifty years has wrought for us, one of the traditions that I treasure most is celebrating Jewish holidays that were not part of my younger life. Of course, as Merle points out in her article, food plays a big part in creation of family culture, as do cordial family relationships that make getting together something everyone looks forward to doing, making it possible to create positive traditions.

One of our traditions I treasure most is the broadened scope Merle wove into our Passover Seder when she compiled a revised Haggadah back in the 1970's. The focus of what she wrote is on both the history of the Jewish people and on the universal hope for the liberation of all people everywhere from the many forms of religious, social, political, racial, ethnic, gender, gender-identification oppression that exist in the world.

This tradition is something we've seen carried into the next generation—supported by the memories and ideas Merle and I and the other members of our family have shared, among many other times and places around the Seder table.

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## **A Response to Merle Heidi Molofsky’s Paper, “Culture is Memory, Memory is Culture,” Finding the Intersection of Culture, Memory, Colonial Trauma, and Puerto Rican Resilience**

John R. Muñiz González

### **Abstract**

**T**his paper examines the relationship between cultural memory and colonial trauma through Puerto Rico’s historical experience. Building on Merle Heidi Molofsky’s thesis that culture is transmitted through memory, this study explores how colonial domination disrupts cultural memory and produces collective psychological trauma. Drawing on psychoanalysis, postcolonial theory, trauma studies, and liberation theology, the paper argues that colonial repression, racial stratification, historical erasure, and economic inequality fracture identity, while cultural expression, especially music and dance, preserves memory and fosters resilience.

### **Introduction**

Culture serves as the repository of collective memory. Through rituals, language, music, food, and shared narratives, communities transmit identity across generations (Assmann, 2011). Merle Heidi Molofsky captures this insight succinctly: “Food is culture, and food culture is history,” underscoring how everyday experiences carry historical memory across generations. She further reminds us that treasured rituals keep culture alive and become part of shared cultural memory.

According to Clifford Geertz (Interpretive Anthropology), culture is a system of shared meanings through which people interpret their world. “Culture is a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (Geertz, 1973, p. 89). Hence, culture is meaning-making through symbols, rituals, and shared interpretations. In addition, according to Edward B. Tylor (Foundational Anthropology), Tylor provided one of the earliest comprehensive

definitions of culture. “Culture... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1871/1920, p. 1). Hence, culture encompasses the total way of life learned within a society. Furthermore, according to Pierre Bourdieu (Sociology & Cultural Practice), Bourdieu emphasized culture as embodied social practice shaped by history and power. Culture is embedded in habitus, the internalized dispositions shaped by social experience that guide perception, thought, and action (Bourdieu, 1977). Hence, culture lives within people as internalized patterns shaped by history and social structures.

And yet, colonial domination often disrupts cultural continuity. Frantz Fanon warned that colonialism “turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it” (Fanon, 2004). Puerto Rico’s colonial history provides a compelling case study of how political domination can fracture cultural memory while simultaneously generating powerful expressions of cultural resilience.

This paper examines the intersection of cultural memory and colonial trauma in Puerto Rico, arguing that cultural expression, especially music and dance, serves as a vehicle for transmitting historical memory, resisting oppression, and fostering collective healing (therapeia). This Greek word, used in the New Testament, appears about 48 times and is translated as “to heal,” “to cure,” or “to serve,” implying a process of care or treatment. This process is a therapeutic dance that seeks catharsis and helps create a new normal amid social, political, and economic oppression by the colonial superpower or the oppressor. People are empowered to resist through song, music, dance, and poetry, and this resistance is a form of reprogramming to endure the various fragmentation and splitting of the human psyche.

### **Culture as Memory and Emotional Truth**

Molofsky emphasizes that culture endures through memory embedded in symbolic expression, ritual practice, and sensory experience. Drawing on poetic and psychoanalytic insight, she notes that “our material is the way we feel and the way we remember” (Rukeyser, 1949/1996, as cited by Molofsky). She further observes that art enables shared experience: “Our experience, set in our time in the world, may be shared through any

art.” Culture therefore travels through music, poetry, dance, and storytelling, allowing emotional truth to endure across generations.

Similarly, Michael Eigen writes that words “encode and create affect... words are a kind of emotional blood” (Eigen, 2007, p. 46). This suggests that language is not merely descriptive but affective, carrying emotional and historical resonance.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973), as already mentioned, defined culture as a system of inherited conceptions expressed through symbols, while Pierre Bourdieu (1977) described how culture becomes embodied through lived practice. Together these perspectives show that culture is not only learned but felt, embodied, and remembered.

## **Ritual, Sensory Memory, and Intergenerational Transmission**

Molofsky describes how lullabies, nursery rhymes, dance, storytelling, and shared meals transmit culture across generations. She observes that treasured rituals keep culture alive and that what adults share with children becomes cultural memory.

Taste and smell can evoke deep memories. Proust’s famous madeleine episode illustrates how sensory experience can trigger involuntary recollection (Proust, 1913/2002). Cultural foods function similarly, evoking childhood memories, migration histories, and ancestral identity. Hence, Molofsky’s reflections illustrate how culture is transmitted through embodied practices that shape belonging and identity.

Assmann (2011) explains that cultural memory survives through ritual repetition and shared narratives, preserving continuity across generations.

For example, the smell of ethnic foods can evoke fond memories, especially for those living in the diaspora. Grandmother’s cooking of white rice and red beans, along with thin steaks with caramelized onions, created a distinctive scent that reminded one of being back in the homeland. At least during mealtimes, one could forget the hard times, including economic, social, and cultural oppression. Food brought community and families together, especially during the holidays and special religious events. For me, going to my grandmother’s house for the meals she

prepared was a celebration of family and culture. She lived in the Lower East Side in one of those railroad apartments, as we called them back in the day. Not only did she cook a large pot of rice and another pot for the red beans, but she also made a pot of caramelized onions and thin steaks. The scent in the air made one hungry. Besides this, we had uncles who could play the guitar, and they would sing, and we children would dance with one another. We would also dance with our aunts and uncles. It was a happy time. The pressures of being Hispanic seemed not to matter for the moment. We were singing, dancing, and speaking Spanish. As we entered the home of our grandmother, we would say, “*bendicion abuela*,” asking for her blessing. Every time we met grandmother or grandfather, we would say “Bendicion abuela/o.” All of these acts were connected to the old country. In my case, it was connecting with my Puerto Rican roots through the food, song, and dance. I tried playing the maracas, a rattle-based percussion instrument made from dried calabash gourds filled with seeds or pebbles. I really was not good at playing them, but it didn’t matter. I was part of the community. I was happy and looked forward to going to the Lower East Side on Sundays. All of this created a sacred cultural space where oppression faded and belonging emerged.

Uncles played guitar, children danced, and even my attempts at playing maracas connected me to the community, as noted. These rituals embody Molofsky’s insight that cultural memory is preserved through shared sensory and communal experiences.

## Colonialism and the Destruction of Cultural Memory

Colonialism disrupts cultural continuity by suppressing language, rewriting history, and marginalizing identity.

Another example was the Gag Law of 1948, which prohibited Puerto Ricans from waving their flags at home or in public. Furthermore, to sing patriotic songs or speak against the United States. Doing so was illegal and could result in imprisonment and fines of up to \$10,000.00. Yet many Puerto Ricans took the risk of waving their flags in defiance of the law. That is why, during the Puerto Rican Day Parade in New York City and other major cities in the United States, one might ask why so many Puerto Rican flags are waving. It is a collective memory that declares we will not be defined by the empire’s will! We will resist and maintain our dignity by waving our flag proudly, even if it means imprisonment

for the past generations. I have a picture of the Puerto Rican flag on my Apple phone. It is my connection to the historical struggle of my forefathers and a living testimony that I will not be defined by what others say about the flag of my parents and my flag. Let me go on record, I am a proud American who lives in these United States, born in New York City. However, I love that little island, 100 miles long and about 35 miles wide at its widest point, where my parents were born.

Fanon (1967) wrote that colonial domination produces alienation and internalized inferiority. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, he explains that colonialism seeks to erase the colonized's past in order to dominate their present and future.

Puerto Rico's colonial experience reflects this pattern. Following the U.S. acquisition of the island in 1898, policies promoted English instruction and suppressed nationalist symbols (Ayala & Bernabe, 2007). Law 53 (the Gag Law) of 1948 criminalized expressions of Puerto Rican identity, including displaying the national flag, as already mentioned.

Historical trauma is compounded when violence is erased from public memory. The 1950 bombing of Jayuya remains largely absent from mainstream narratives, underscoring what trauma scholars describe as unspoken historical violence (Caruth, 1996).

### **Psychoanalysis, Trauma, and Identity Fragmentation**

Freud's theories of repression, splitting, and repetition compulsion describe how trauma is internalized and transmitted across generations (Freud, 1920; 1923). Postcolonial scholars extended psychoanalytic theory to colonial contexts.

Fanon (1967) described colonization as producing a fractured identity and internalized inferiority. He observed that the colonized subject is forced into a divided self, alienated from culture and history.

Alexander, et al. (2004) explains that cultural trauma reshapes collective identity when communities experience profound social suffering. Unrecognized trauma continues to shape identity and behavior.

## **Puerto Rico: Colonial History and Sociodemographic Realities**

Puerto Rico's colonial condition continues to shape socioeconomic realities. Approximately 43% of Puerto Rico's population lives below the poverty line, compared to approximately 11–12% in the mainland of the United States. Median household income remains less than half that of the poorest in the United States.

Following Hurricane Maria (2017), prolonged power outages exposed structural vulnerability. Nearly 3,000 deaths were attributed to storm-related impacts and infrastructure collapse (Santos-Burgoa et al., 2018). Some communities lacked electricity for nearly a year. For six months, my daughter had to walk six flights of stairs due to no electricity for the elevator for the building. It was an emotional time for me. I wanted my daughter to leave Puerto Rico and come live with me. She responded, "Daddy, I am a nurse and the people here needs me. Don't worry, I will be alright." Her words brought tears to my eyes and a sense of pride that my daughter was willing to sacrifice her quality of life to serve others. I called and encouraged her among other things.

Between 2006 and 2020, Puerto Rico lost nearly 15% of its population due to migration to the mainland United States (United States Census Bureau, 2021). These demographic shifts disrupt cultural continuity and family structures.

Such structural realities contribute to collective stress, identity tension, and intergenerational trauma.

## **Music, Dance, and Cultural Memory as Resistance**

Puerto Rican musical traditions, including bomba, plena, salsa, and reggaetón, emerged from histories of colonization, African diaspora resistance, and working-class struggle.

Bomba originated among enslaved Africans in sugar plantations as a form of resistance and communication. Plena became known as the "newspaper of the people," narrating social realities and injustices.

Salsa emerged in Puerto Rican and Caribbean communities in New York City, transforming the struggles of migration into a global cultural

expression. Dance spaces in Spanish Harlem, the Bronx, and Brooklyn allowed migrants to preserve their identity through rhythm and movement.

Molofsky reminds us that dance and music are cultural rituals that transmit memory across generations.

## **Performance, Symbolism, and Resilience in Contemporary Puerto Rican Music**

Contemporary Puerto Rican performance art communicates narratives of oppression and resilience. Global performances featuring Puerto Rican artists often incorporate imagery that reflects colonial history, labor struggles, and cultural pride.

The recent Super Bowl 60 performance of the Puerto Rican artist Bad Bunny (Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio) during the Super Bowl half-time show did just that! Imagery evoking sugarcane fields recalls plantation labor and exploitation. The blackout imagery spoke about the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, where the United States did little to help the people of Puerto Rico, who are American citizens. Afro-Caribbean dance movements embodied resistance and survival.

Moments depicting darkness or power loss symbolize the prolonged electrical outages experienced after Hurricane Maria. Such imagery transforms lived trauma into collective memory and global awareness. What needs to be reflected is how Bad Bunny used a 13-minute space to tell a compelling story of suffering, discrimination, and occupation. That halftime show became a sacred space to speak and show the struggle, the pain, the rejection of a people, and at the same time, their resilience.

Urban dance forms rooted in salsa environments reflect resilience through movement and communal expression. Music lyrics often narrate migration, inequality, and dignity, transforming suffering into testimony. These performances function as cultural memory in motion, preserving identity while communicating resilience.

## **Liberation Theology and Collective Healing**

Liberation theology provides a framework for addressing collective trauma through justice and restoration. Gutiérrez (1988) argued that

poverty results from structural injustice. Cone (2011) emphasized divine solidarity with the oppressed. His liberation theology informed him that G-d is not neutral in the face of suffering. Rather, G-d identifies with, dwells among, and suffers with the oppressed. In theological circles, this concept is often described as divine solidarity and represents one of the foundational principles of Black Liberation Theology. This theological foundation is found in the book of Exodus regarding the Ancient Hebrew people. G-d sends Moses as an agent of Liberation for an oppressed people.

Martín-Baró (1994) developed liberation psychology, linking individual suffering to structural oppression. Healing requires restoring dignity, reclaiming memory, and fostering community solidarity.

The Greek term *therapeia*, as already mentioned, suggests healing as a process of care, restoration, and service (Liddell & Scott, 1996). Healing colonial trauma requires culturally grounded approaches that honor history and identity.

## **Restoring Cultural Memory and Identity Integration**

Healing collective trauma requires restoring suppressed histories and cultural memory. Decolonial education can foster historical consciousness and affirm identity. Community-centered mental health services must incorporate cultural and historical awareness.

Cultural expression, storytelling, music, dance, and ritual support identity reintegration. When communities reclaim their narratives, dignity is restored and resilience is strengthened.

## **Conclusion**

Culture and memory are inseparable. Cultural identity emerges through shared narratives, rituals, and embodied experiences transmitted across generations. Colonial domination disrupts cultural memory, producing collective trauma and identity fragmentation.

Fanon reminds us that colonial systems attempt to erase the past of the oppressed. Molofsky demonstrates that culture survives through memory embedded in daily life. Puerto Rico's experience illustrates both realities: cultural memory has been wounded yet remains alive through music, dance, storytelling, and communal practice.

Restoring historical memory, affirming cultural expression, and implementing culturally grounded healing practices are essential steps toward reclaiming dignity and integrating identity. Cultural memory is not merely remembrance; it is resistance, resilience, and hope. “*Que Viva Puerto Rico!*”

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## **“Culture is Memory, Memory is Culture” by Merle Heidi Molofsky**

**Julie Jaffee Nagel**

**M**erle Molofsky’s first three words in her title are inversely mirrored by the following final three words in the title. I feel curious to find out what she has in her mind—or in her memory. As I begin her article, I also start to pay more attention to what comes into my mind.

The author sets the stage for readers with various quotes. After paying homage to Freud, she adds her concept of culture to her conviction that “psychoanalysis has clearly emerged as a worldwide cultural force, defined by interdisciplinary cultural (*italics, mine*) knowledge”. Given the controversy in some psychoanalytic thinking around the concepts of “interdisciplinary” and “culture”, often not being the mark of a “real”, psychoanalyst, Ms. Molofsky already throws her hat into a controversial ring. Ms. Molofsky emphasizes a dichotomy here when Freud speaks about his discovery of the scientific method while maintaining that the poets and philosophers discover the unconscious.

Following her word play of the first three words in the title, Ms. Molofsky cites author Lionel Trilling commenting about Freud ...” probing the eye of the scientist the creating eye of the poet”. Another citation, among many in the opening pages, is by Muriel Rukeyser who maintains “the universe of poetry is in the universe of emotional truth. Our material is the way we feel and the way we remember.... For poetry is, at every instant, concerned with meaning” (p. 23; p. 161).

I read the author’s words and am both confused as to where she is going with her quotes about words, their meaning, her definition and use of culture, poetry, and the deeper role of interdisciplinary ideas in her psychoanalytic canon. The quoted passages make definitive statements and/or interpretations without context in the quotes cited or what they mean to the author—as though “answers” may equal a truth of some kind, i.e., “emotional truth” and “our material is the way we feel and remember”; (Rukeyser, Muriel 1949, 1996 “The Life of Poetry”, Paris Press, Amherst,

Mass. Trilling Lionel, “Freud and Literature” *The Liberal Imagination*. poetry is...concerned with meaning”. One more example is offered but isolated from a context by Michael Eigen raises further question “... words..whatever else they are—are gate words to the wordless” p. 70–71. I think to myself, isn’t this the way I think about music—the “gateway to the wordless” when I use the phrase the Royal AURAL Road to the Unconscious (see Nagel, J.J. 2013) expanding Freud’s more common Royal (ORAL) Road to the unconscious with words/verbal in his dream books (1899/1990) to expand a different route way music enters our mind. Music evokes words, and in particular, expresses emotions and memories too difficult to bear at times. ...until ...the music, expressed in sounds becomes words that are felt through the talk of psychoanalysis which, in turn, may lead to deeper understanding. I felt hanging in the space between Merle Molofsky’s music and words. Her memories were still in the form of unexpressed something in the music in her mind. I did begin to see some connection in the interdisciplinary nature of her work.

It was years ago that I read a comment by psychoanalyst Roy Schafer (1983, p. 8) who challenged those who assert one method of psychoanalysis is the “true” (clinical psychoanalysis) and that “interdisciplinary” psychoanalytic work is not.

Addressing the concepts of over determinism and multiple function when he notes that psychoanalysts do not talk about “what something really means” (see Nagel, J.J., 2013) Rather, Schafer notes “That one has discovered further meaning, weightier meaning, more disturbing meaning, more archaic meaning, or more carefully disguised meaning than that which first met the eye or ear does not justify the claim that one has discovered the ultimate truth that lies behind the world of appearances—the ‘real’ world?” (Schafer, 1983) It is curious to me that the author, in the beginning of her exposition, chooses definitive citations that may lead one to believe definitive comments have the answers to complex life questions.

As I got deeper into this paper, it became increasingly clear that the author was tapping into her life via her personal poetry and music—blanketed in metaphors and word play that went forward and backward (as in the title). In fact, the title itself is full of clues as we begin to read this paper—and write about it. “A core assumption is that we have a

poetics of mind, manifested in dream, free association, and also in every day quotidian language in use". (Molofsky, p.5). The reader is next introduced to Molofsky's idea that "Music is essential" and cites the phrase "ear worm" that "reminds of the power of music". She suggests that lyrics are poetry set to music. The musical cadence and the lyrical cadence are one. To word in the world is breathing. The song is breath with wings. Words are breath dancing." Her words are lyrically poetic and evocative—but leave me wondering how—or will—she—integrate them into her polemic in the title of her paper and into her concept of what does she mean by interdisciplinary? What does she mean by culture—used in her title—twice. What is taking time to jump into a deeper end of her emotional repertoire?

We read now about music and lyrics and their relationship. Again, a multiple function (a term used by musicians and psychoanalysts) persists regarding words, poetry, and music. The author states that "Lyrics are words deliberately set to music, and the lyricist knows that the words have to fit the musical structure of the song." (p. 5). It would be helpful if she elaborated with an example here—to show her thoughts more clearly. "Ear Worm..reminds us of music that seems to just to be 'stuck' in our mind, in our brain, popping up repetitively, over and over, somewhat obsessively..." The paper picks up depth as Molofsky turns a corner to become autobiographical and invites the reader into her life which then starts to make the initial quotes also have a life of their own... a life filled, as we continue, with forward and backward events in her personal culture. Culture now takes on some meaning and memoir which increases as we read further.

Revealed when she is 83 years old, Merle Molofsky opens the door to her personal history—I assume from her references cited in the paper, this is partly in response to the music and poetry evoked inside her memories that lead to shares how she remembers her mother and father singing lullabies to her—evoking both music and words. Mentioning a few examples in her own younger life, she begins to speak of mother goose nursery rhymes she has read to her own children.

I associate to a topic that I have written about for many years that maintains music is the Royal AURAL Road to the Unconscious—separate from Freud's ORAL road that he discovers in his Dream Books (1900)

and upon which he bases his theory of mind upon mental verbal communication. I suggest that Freud's aversion to most music is in great part defensive (see *Melodies of the Mind*, Routledge 2013). I am starting to form an idea of what Ms. Molofsky is getting at but not sure where she is going with her comments, indeed her title of this paper, about memory and culture and culture and memory. I feel some sense that this reversal in her title is both unconscious and conscious. Her writing draws me in. What is she leading to? Clearly she enjoys wordplay. But is wordplay, like a joke—or a defense against deeper and often painful meaning to the user? Is wordplay a representation of the ambiguities and reversals in life itself? Is Merle Molofsky telling us something about herself? I hold the belief that all writing is autobiographical, some more obvious than other writing which may be more disguised. I feel we are nearing a turning point in this paper.

I need not read too much further to discover her discussion of cultural stimuli and metaphors including music as “essential”. Ahhh!! We are on a similar wavelength here. She uses the two words often applied to having some music play over and over in your mind as an “ear worm”—a tune that will not stop voluntarily. As music plays over and over in your mind it creates or reacts to meaning. Poetry does not have to be set to music, though sometimes it is. She brings back a stylistic leitmotif of reversals when she writes “The musical cadence and the lyrical cadence are one. To word in the world is breathing. Song is breath with wings. Words are breath dancing.”

I have been drawn in with the quotes but started to wonder “where is all this going—culture, memory, memory, culture? What is Merle Molofsky going with her word play and her message to readers? Her writing style is engaging and different from the technical “scholarly” articles we read in journals. She has an “alternative” style of conveying something interesting that has drawn me in. Perhaps it is her style and my interest and background in music and emotion. I think this is part of it. But I sense we are only reading appetizers and opening themes—and that there is more meat to this article than first meets the eye and sparks the imagination. Later in the paper I am struck by how I just used the word “appetizers” and “meat” here given the evolving emphasis on food and eating. I discover that food and family, love and loss, heritage and broken family ties, and memories of generations past are laid open for us and find the

heart of what I feel is the essence of this paper. If memory is culture and culture is memory, I begin to realize that family traditions and memories are one's personal culture that include love and loss, happiness and pain, food as literal sustenance and as emotional nourishment and memory.

The author reminisces about her age of 83 which she tells us have been full of lullabies that she continues to remember sung to her by her mother and father. The lullabies are continuing Yiddish songs her parents learned as children which she tells us she sang to her own children. She calls nursery rhymes she read to her children with their "rhythmic, musical cadences." (p. 5). Culture—and heritage—was kept by reading stories as a 'shared cultural memory.' (p. 6). Subsequently the topic encompasses dance as a way to keep culture alive—particular emphasis on how her parents danced and how she copied their model to this day. Food enters her reveries as an "essential element of culture and memory" often sparked by an aroma that was a "stimulus." (p. 6). The author goes into a long gleeful discussion of ethnic food enjoyed by various cultures worldwide and the nostalgia these traditions holds for her i.e., Pizza, Bagels, Jajongmyeion, Bibimbop, Tteokbokki, mac and cheese, sweet potato pie, cornbread collard greens, barbecue, black eyed peas, chittlins... all food AND nostalgia representing different cultures and times in her life.

That which follows is most poignant of all—Merle Heidi Molofsky writes—in one separate sentence—sitting alone without being surrounded by paragraphs or further explanation. "Food is culture, and food culture is history." And immediately following, "My beloved youngest child, my daughter Sarah, died in April 2025, a month short of her 59th birthday." (p. 7).

I take a deep breath—inhaling the poignancy of this unexpected comment and memory in the wake of her praise and joy about food—tragedy appears in her life—barely a year ago from writing this article. This article is no coincidence and less of a puzzle to me where she is coming from and where she appears to be going. She talks about Sarah—and her interests, particularly regarding food that gilded Sarah's career. Sarah had started a business as a private chef and caterer and cooked all kinds of foods even though she had become vegetarian. Food was the connection with family and loss of Merle Molofsky's daughter—and we

read about Sarah as a eulogy—the joy of food and tears of sorrow buried in sauces and menus as though grief is expressed and/or repressed beneath the joy of eating well and feeling nourished. Molofsky immediately proceeded to inform us of her parents in detail—from Poland and her grandparents—and malnutrition, inability to afford food, and the grandparents' loss of three babies who died of starvation due to malnutrition of their mother who was unable to nurse. Her family emigrated to the United States in 1920. Poverty and depression followed them and her grandmother, who had two more children, tried to commit suicide by putting her head in the oven with the gas on. Merle's mother found her and opened the window and saved her mother—who was hospitalized for the rest of her life. It was assumed her 2 babies born in this country would die as had her infants in Poland.

Molofsky continues to write about her mother and father—which I leave for you to read—and how the delicacy of eating well prepared food was not emphasized—having enough food seemed enough. It also feels as though the author is backing off from the power of her earlier statement about losing her daughter as she continues in detail to spell out her family history—evolving into her own family's joy of cooking and eating and their struggles with earning an income—which she compares to the “cultural influences” on her own family and the poverty of her maternal grandparents, her own food shortage.

As we near the end of this paper, another topic is brought to our attention which contains a cultural theme i.e., “Ethnic/racial/religious, national identity.” (p. 10). I will not detail that here only to say the distinction between black and white neighborhoods occupies her thoughts around culture and equality/inequality. Her deceased daughter was only one of two white girls in her class in the area where the family first lived in Brooklyn and was unaware of differences between people until the family moved to a new neighborhood where she discovered racism and “the world” came crashing down faster than I could get my questions answered.” (p. 11).

Molofsky ends her paper abruptly—“Memoir and autobiography provide a valuable educational tool”.

She then lists an assorted random but meaningful bibliography on racism and antisemitism of which the author became aware and found meaningful. to her paper that “teaches us about the world in which we live.” Merle Molofsky’s world appears to be strongly attached to the title of her memory and memorializing her family and her life in this paper she titled, Culture is Memory, Memory is Culture.

Her memory is concluded by two words spaced in the center of her page—and the center of her life.

I believe this is a paper that is written from the heart—and a need to reflect on some of the most poignant experiences in the author’s life. It is a reflection of the author taking stock of own experiences expressed in terms that she attributes to culture—or cultures—I would emphasize her life experiences, many of them traumatic, and an effort to illustrate the reader’s resilience in growing up in an atmosphere of hardship and loss of her great grandmother, her divorce (which she mentions in passing and her remarriage again mentioned in passing) yet situated in the article immediately after sharing with us that she lost her daughter about a year ago and emphasizes her daughter’s love of food—both enjoying it and making it into a business. We are not told what ended her daughter’s life—but I cannot help but believe the emphasis on food—psychological nourishment for the body and soul and staying alive—was diminished and still grieved by this sadness. That which followed was autobiographical detailing family trauma and experiencing race differences both as invisible and then eventually very apparent as racism in her neighborhood.

My feeling is that Merle Molofsky is telling us that memory is shaped by everything that impacts us i.e., which she calls culture that is formed in the unique course of one’s life memories of each person’s unique personal history. Her story of the death of her daughter approximately a year ago is painful and shocking, and I hope it was comforting to write about this loss in the context of the memories she shared about her biological family and remembering comforting lullabies, happy dancing, and delicious food as intrapsychic nourishment as a tribute to Sarah. In that respect, Merle Molofsky has re-lived and written very personally about her life, her own formative experience of culture and her culture as formative in her memory.

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## **On Choosing the Conservation or Redaction of History (A Resonant Meditation on Merle Molofsky's “Culture is Memory, Memory is Culture”)**

Alexander Stein, PhD

“You are not allowed to give up”  
—Alexei Navalny

**W**hen I began my psychoanalytic training, Merle Molofsky was one of my first teachers. While never formally a supervisor, she became a mentor and, in time, a friend. I experienced her as an encouraging and patient steward of my curiosity and early explorations into psychoanalysis, nurturing my development as a psychoanalytic thinker and practitioner. We eventually began to exchange ideas and perspectives on countless topics and provide mutual support in our respective writing projects.

She has figured importantly in my psychoanalytic journey. There’s a rightness that all these years later I would again engage with her thoughts and words on memory and culture. But I want to take Merle’s article as a point of departure, a meditation sympathetically resonant with, not a discussion of.

I consider resonance a form of attachment. Whether taken as a feature of physics and acoustics or as a metaphoric descriptor for emotional connectedness, it is a phenomenon that involves a reflection or synchronous vibration of frequencies—a system of reverberation and amplitude. I think that we can construe it in a psychoanalytic frame as a way of describing a relationship, even as a type of love. And which, bearing the hallmarks of separation and individuation, is a mature love, for, while both objects are in relationship to each other, they are neither identical nor fused. They do not occupy precisely the same time or space although one cannot exist without the other.

By my reading, her piece travels, while also inviting us along too, into pastness. Drawing from her own life, experiences, and family history,

she explores how culture lives through memory across generations. Hers is a deeply personal peripatetic of Proustian remembrances—of relationships, foods, lullabies, and cultural touchstones. To her, these shared experiences, passed between generations and across communities, form the living fabric of culture. She shows how cultural memory isn't just preserved in artifacts and formal traditions but in everyday rituals. She suggests that understanding each other's memories and stories is essential to bridging the divisions that separate us.

I am resonant with that, albeit from and within a different cultural, experiential, and generational context. And I similarly cherish how the aesthetic and emotional alchemy of art, music, poetry, film, writing can transport us through time and space into other times and spaces, allowing us to know and be engaged in the full spectrum of the human condition.

These experiences and recollections of pastness—an inward reverie—evoke not just feelings of nostalgia or melancholia or grief or mournfulness but, often, of what I think is best captured by the German word *sehnsuchtsvoll*, essentially translated in English as longing or yearning—an aching for something not present.

Many of my writings from the early phase of my career are investigations of those experiences—all intrinsically psychoanalytic—and also seem concordantly resonant with Merle's reflections. Her foray into culture and memory could only prompt me to reconsider some of them.

In "The Sound of Memory" (Stein, 2007), I examined how the sound environment of earliest life plays a profound formative role in psychological development and that the vestigial remnants of early auditory perceptions and impressions—now distorted, condensed, fragmented, obscured, garbled, dissipated—assert inimitable ongoing influences throughout the life cycle. Following the late Australian semiotician and musicologist Naomi Cumming's idea that music is "interiority made into sound" (2000), I suggested that by closely listening to how memories and feelings sound—by asking "what is it to experience a relationship that sounds like this?" Or 'what about the past, or this individual's inner life, is being conveyed by how he or she sounds?'—we could access idiolectic sonic renderings of individual pastness—the sound of memory.

As a part of my working through the personal impact of the 9/11 attacks and its large-scale socio-political and cultural aftermath, “Music, Mourning and Consolation” (Stein, 2004) explored what is it about the constellation of affects connected with grief—and, more particularly, the mental state of a person in mourning—that apparently finds such felicitous expression or evocation in music. That essay also focused attention on consolation—something that (or someone who) provides or offers reparation, repair, relief, safety, peace, or support. By situating consolation as the second sequential component in a biphasic process—an empathic reply to a mournful call—it can, I offered, provide a vital counterpoint, even an antidote, to the painful desolation of loss and is thus, ideally, restitutive and reconstructive.

I produced a number of other long-form essays in that period, several of which explored topics that included loss and transgenerational parenting (Stein, 2003), music and trauma (Stein, 2002), modes of listening (Stein, 1999), and auditory perversion (Stein, 2000).

Reconsidering that corpus of thought and writing now, one emerges with a particular poignancy and relevance. I co-wrote ‘Just Choose One’: Memory and Time in Kore-Eda’s *Wandafuru Raifu* [Afterlife] (Sabbadini & Stein, 2001) with the late Italian-British psychoanalyst Andrea Sabbadini. We met in 1999 as co-presenters on a panel at an IPA congress in Jerusalem themed “Freud at the Threshold of the 21st Century.” We became fast friends, colleagues, and frequent professional collaborators.

“Afterlife” was our first joint venture, a psychoanalytic exploration of a 1998 film by the Japanese director Kore-eda Hirokazu. In the film, people who have recently died go to a not-quite state-of-the-art movie studio that actually serves as a metaphysical waystation between life and death. There, they are helped by case workers who are themselves a troupe of actors and technicians culled from other recently deceased people to select one memory that was most meaningful or precious. These memories are then dramatized, enacted, and captured on film; their selected memories will mark their entry into the afterlife.

The original kernel of inspiration for the project, Kore-Eda explained in an interview, drew from his experiences as a 6-year-old bewildered

by his grandfather's diminished capacity to recognize anyone or to recollect anything. 'As a child,' Kore-eda shared, 'I comprehended little of what I saw, but I remember thinking that people forgot everything when they died. I now understand how critical memories are to our identity, to a sense of self.' Catalyzed by the desire to explore these issues in more depth, Kore-eda travelled throughout Japan interviewing hundreds of people about their most treasured memories, suggesting this would be what they will keep forever after death. 'Just choose one,' he told them. The eloquence of their responses so impressed him that he ultimately incorporated some of the actual interviewees and their stories into the final cut of the movie, integrating them with scenes portrayed by professional actors speaking dialogue he had scripted.

Andrea Sabbadini died on 12 July 2025 with many memories yet to be made and given. Oliver Sacks said it plainly: "when people die, they cannot be replaced. They leave holes that cannot be filled, for it is the fate—the genetic and neural fate—of every human being to be a unique individual, to find his own path, to live his own life, to die his own death" (2015). My heart aches for Andrea and I am challenged to follow the guidance with which we began our essay—'Let us not burden our remembrances with a heaviness that's gone' (Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, 5, i, ll. 199–200).

But I am unable to remain doleful or melancholic, nor can I agree with Hamlet's last words that 'the rest is silence' (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 5, Scene 2). I'm clear-eyed in orienting to the future because, as the early twentieth century inventor, engineer, and businessman Charles Kettering once said, "I'm going to spend the rest of my life there."

Shortly after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and, seven months later, becoming a father, I began an intentional migration to a different future, another culture. I pivoted from treating patients and publishing in peer-reviewed psychoanalytic journals to founding a strategic consultancy, Dolus Advisors. My mission: to deploy, not practice, psychoanalysis as a peerless technology for uncovering unrecognized decision-making patterns and the cascading effects of overlooked human dynamics to help senior leaders and boards resolve complex organizational challenges, and to address abuses of power and influence on a broad social scale.

Central to that is carrying forward what I've come to see as a meaningful distinction between therapeutic action—what psychoanalysis can do in the consulting room for and with patients—and what I call psychoanalysis in action—using psychoanalysis as a force, a technology, for good in the wider world (Stein, 2020).

There may be no other profession besides psychoanalysis which acknowledges and understands the presence and forcefulness of internal reality as distinct from externalities. But there may also be no other profession in which an actual observable crisis could be seriously questioned as potentially just a symbol, a mental construct to which no actionable response is required.

Therapeutic action draws on diverse models of mind and technical approaches to facilitating mental and emotional change—to work through and break out of repetitive cycles, overcome the crippling effects of deeply embedded responses, and relinquish or update ancient positions to allow for and welcome greater intimacy and vitality in relationships and work. This is achieved through understanding and addressing issues involving psychological development and functioning, subjective and emotional experience, the problems and sequelae of trauma and early attachments, fantasies and anxieties, unconscious conflict and repetition and their powerful ongoing impact on decision-making and behavior.

To me, all of that demonstrates substantial utility beyond conventional clinical or so-called 'applied' academic uses. Psychoanalysis can be used in more muscular, actionable, and outward facing ways. It can, in addition to being an utterly unique treatment method to help patients, be used as a tool for positive change and influence on a larger scale.

Today—these days—my work has taken on an elevated urgency. As a professional whose work focuses on leadership and bringing to bear the power of psychoanalytic insight to address institutionalized malice and malfeasance—and as a citizen and a parent—it feels impossible to stay quiet or be inactive.

My concern and attention are focused on the future of the American democratic republic.

It may be that, as Benjamin Franklin famously quipped, democracy is “two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for dinner.” Now, however, the lamb may well actually be, as Yale University Jackson School of Global Affairs Senior Lecturer Asha Rangappa suggests, “a wolf in sheep’s clothing” (2026). And that vote, already gerrymandered, is being scrutinized for revocation. This transformation, though characterized by its architects and proponents as a noble restoration of a lost (or stolen) greatness, is not a generative developmental advance but a regressive devolution – a deliberate, grinding erasure of multiculturalism and the nullification of validated history through the imposition of what the historian Timothy Snyder calls “structured memory policy” (2021).

The United States, for generations a paragon of civil democracy, is now fully in the throes of autocratic takeover and kleptocratic fascism. As I write this, America is in a period of baldly unapologetic brutality and abuses of power, xenophobic dehumanization, maniacal inhumanity, brazen fraud, corruption, despotism, and state-sanctioned criminality on a mass scale. Millions of people have been subsumed through a masterful multi-pronged long-game propaganda campaign and the tactical weaponization of socio-economic and cultural vulnerability into violent conspiratorial delusion, abetted by social media and other frontier technologies and the ideologically fanatical tech titans profiting from them, and are passionately enthralled in a cult of malignant sociopathy. Legions of elected officials and lawmakers along with hordes of complicit enablers and feckless facilitators are rejecting their sworn oaths of duty and office including undermining the rule of law and supporting anti-constitutionality, dismissing established scientific findings, and repudiating shared understandings of objective empirically validated truth.

The field of play for all of this, for all practical intents and purposes, is partisan politics, competing ideological narratives, radically opposing visions for governance, values, economic stewardship, and civic life, and insatiable aspirations for power, wealth, and dominance. But it’s not only that. As a psychoanalyst, I see the roiling cauldron of all-too-human issues propelling that. Policies of repression, cruelty, dehumanization, shame, degradation, and depravity can only be developed and endorsed by those whose life histories are scarred by those experiences. More than a century of clinically validated psychoanalytic observation and data

supports the understanding that oppressive systems—whether imposed by mafiosi, authoritarians, strongmen, fundamentalists writ large in nation states or the tyranny of a parent in a family—structured on tactics of humiliation and abuse, secrets and lies, willful denial, reckless disregard, defilement and destruction, indifference and the eradication of empathy are nearly always borne of desperate neediness and vulnerability, unfathomable emotional deprivations, psychological impotence, the lacerating rage of abandonment. Holy wars launched in the name of sanctified love are, invariably, gestated by the ferocious drive for its opposite—to exterminate not just the wish to be loved but love itself.

“Death isn’t the only way to die but it can be argued that it is the most merciful,” says poet, essayist, and cultural critic Hanif Abdurraqib (2024). Something not present is not necessarily of the past or an artifact of memory. It can be about something perhaps still partially or intermittently present but inevitably, inexorably disappearing—or more accurately, being disappeared. We are living in and through the enforced erasure and militaristic rendition of cultural memories.

What can we—each of us—do? Will we choose the conservation or redaction of history? Salman Rushdie is right that “a poem cannot stop a bullet. A novel can’t defuse a bomb.” But he reminds us, “We are not helpless. We can sing the truth and name the liars” (2022).

And in one of his most admired closing arguments, in a 1926 case defending two African-American men facing an all-white jury while espousing what he called “the Law of Love,” Clarence Darrow said:

*“Every human being’s life in this world is inevitably mixed with every other life and, no matter what laws we pass, no matter what precautions we take, unless the people we meet are kindly and decent and human and liberty-loving, then there is no liberty. Freedom comes from human beings, rather than from laws and institutions”* (1926).

The answer, then, is for people—us—to understand ourselves and each other more deeply. To resist easy explanations and confront uncomfortable truths. To care. To love. To remember that we have a solemn duty to never lose our humanity.

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## In Response to “Culture is Memory, Memory is Culture”

Joseph M. Scarpati

“Not I, but the poets...”

**F**reud’s acknowledgement that he alone could not take credit for the burgeoning study of the unconscious, is but another vital link in the practice of building collective memory. In this vignette, Freud, with his life’s work laid out in front of him, instead looks back to the storytellers that informed him and rightfully says *without them, there is no me*.

The author of this article, my grandmother, Merle Molofsky, fills in the blanks for Freud, and points to the greats who still permeate our culture and language such as Shakespeare. At this suggestion, I’d like to imagine that Shakespeare himself may protest with his own humility, and point the devoted back to Arthur Brooke, the man who penned the narrative poem, “The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet” two years before Shakespeare’s birth. And Brooke of course may then acknowledge Pierre Boaistuau. And Boaistuau, Matteo Bandello. And so on.

In the introduction of Leslie Marmon Silko’s 2012 reissue of her 1981 collection, *Storyteller*, she writes “...the urge to share our experience, to tell our stories to another human is so strong that humans invented language—sign languages and spoken languages but also dance, music, and painting...”.

My grandmother touches on both music and dance as cultural conduits and how they can enter through us as individuals, before permeating out of us to our children, grandchildren, and into the wider collective. The image of my great-grandmother’s face, lit aglow, in a moment of joy, her arms raised, performing a dance she undoubtedly learned from her elders.

Marmon Silko goes on to say “...I imagine that at first humans exchanged stories to acquire knowledge as a survival strategy, to learn to anticipate the many threats and dangers in their world. Considerable details and

vivid descriptions were essential to the telling; the most important actions in a story might be repeated to make sure listeners remembered...”

These first stories, these first songs, first dances, and cave paintings, that spurred on our creation of languages, in one way or another made it into our collective memory. And this was necessary for our survival.

My grandmother writes, “Food is the quintessential element of culture and memory.” As she mentions, I was fortunate enough to come from mixed Jewish and Italian descent in the global cultural mecca of New York. Arguably, two of the most recognizable foods, pizza and bagels, have become synonymous with the city. Each of these delicacies has a story, or rather stories, that are paired in our collective consciousness. The *Margherita Pizza*, a royal offering honoring the long struggle and newly realized nationalistic ambitions of the Italian peninsula. And the bagel, born in the boiling pot of an oppressive Eastern Europe that dictated how and when Jews could make and sell and even touch bread.

Both these staples are of course descendants of older traditions, bread indisputably being a cornerstone of many civilizations. They have persisted though because they were cheap, hardy, accessible, and not to mention delicious. Passed down from baker to apprentice, and parents to children, for generations.

Food is ubiquitous with culture because it is necessary for survival. This is evident in the story my grandmother retells of her own mother’s food insecurity as a child. The desperate kitchen scrap soups made in poverty in Poland reminiscent of the simple matzah ball broth that graced my grandparent’s Seder table I grew up reclining around.

The food that may carry one of the oldest, specific memories, I also ate around my grandparent’s Seder table. More than three thousand years after accidentally creating the “bread of affliction” in their hasty escape, their descendants are still eating matzah in different iterations today. In soups, dipped in chocolate, topped with hummus, and of course in the ceremonial retelling of the exodus. In Jewish culture, the old saying “don’t wait for the bread to rise” has served its people well. A food that became a story, a story that became a value, and a value that became critical to the collective survival of its people.

For me there may be no clearer example of the relationship between memory and culture than the Seder itself. My grandmother compiled her own Haggadah, accompanied by her sketches of eggs and lambs and frogs, before I was born. In our family's Haggadah, and like many of the other Haggadahs from the last fifteen hundred years, we read the words, "The more one recounts the Exodus, the more praiseworthy it is."

Culture is memory, memory is culture. And the more we share these memories, these stories in the form of song and dance and food and symbol, the more likely the culture is to survive. And this throughout the course of human history has been key to our survival.

My grandparents' Seder has always opened with a reading of Elie Wiesel's preface to his 1964 novel *Gates of the Forest*. In it a succession of Rabbis, tasked with saving their community from misfortune, perform a three-part ritual which includes going to a sacred place in the forest, reciting a specific prayer, and lighting a fire. Through each generation, a step is lost. First the fire, then the prayer, and finally even the place in the forest is forgotten.

When it falls on Rabbi Israel of Ryzhyn to overcome misfortune, we are told he is left sitting in his armchair, head in his hands and he says, "I am unable to light the fire, and I do not know the prayer, and I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is tell the story, and this must be sufficient."

It is in this tradition, this story, this living memory shared with me by my grandmother, that I find the best representation of our shared culture. Growing up in my family, I have been instilled with both a sense of wonder and a sense of responsibility around the art of sharing of stories, whether those stories are shared through literature or music or dance or food. When my grandmother writes about the stories of her mother, Sima Lee, and her grandmother, Mirel, two women I unfortunately never had the opportunity to meet, they are stories that are intimately familiar to me. This is because anytime growing up I asked my grandmother or my own mother about themselves; they inevitably told me the stories of my ancestors. They told me these stories in their own ways, with their own remembered details, and resonant moments. And so I heard these stories, the premature birth, the kitchen scrap soup, the Exodus from

the Pale, and the struggle to make it in America, a thousand times over. And with every retelling, the story only became more praiseworthy.

Eventually, after some prodding, my mother and grandmother would get to themselves, sharing their own stories with me, vital links in the chain, but never before acknowledging...

“Not I, but those who came before us...”



## In Response to Merle Molofsky's Memoir

Tata Traoré

I want to give a shot to this response to Merle's memoir. I have to say that I had a mixture of feelings when I received the request. I was surprised. I have never written such a document, a response to a memoir or to a psychoanalytic paper. I then started questioning the reasoning as to why I was invited to respond. Was this tokenism? Was it fetishism, the interesting Black woman who might have things to say? My mind, as usual, wandered into various places. I guess that is why I am training to be a psychoanalyst.

I started thinking about Merle herself, whom I first encountered during my ethics class years ago, in the first iteration of my attempt to become a psychoanalyst before I took a four-year break. I had found her eccentric and interesting, my type of gal, I would say. She stayed in the periphery of my mind because she is a prolific writer, and I had created a folder of her contributions to the Institute's life that I called "Merle's Ramblings." I know that might sound pejorative, but ramblings is quite a great word in my world. I have another folder called "Jane's Ramblings." Jane used to be my mother-in-law's sister. She was an eccentric photographer who lived in the woods in New Hampshire, cursed up a storm, smoked pot, and liked to tell me about my ex-husband's family lore. I had a fondness for her. She has passed away. From time to time, I am seized by a bout of nostalgia, and I open the folder called "Jane's Ramblings" and read her meandering thoughts.

Meandering is another word that I really like. I use it a lot, and it is a positive one that goes along with rambling. I also used to write, back when I had social media, these rambling thoughts, or that is what I called them. And now I am realizing that all of this is just that I am a natural free associator. I free associate all the time and expect people to follow me in that path of free association. Often, of course, it throws people off, and I get a little annoyed when people cannot stay with me in those meandering paths and want something linear.

Which brings me back to Merle and her request, and my thoughts about this invitation to write. When Mehmet, the editor, sent me the request, he told me I could call him by another one of his names, and of course I went on another meandering path about that. I wondered why he would say that. Was it because he is used to dealing with Americans needing a simpler name when they are given a foreign one, that one has to simplify and shrink one's name?

Many Mehments/Mohameds/Mohamets I know call themselves Mo when they come to America, and even with a name like Tata, which is already short, I sometimes get people who want to shorten it further, to Ta or T. How short can a name get? One of my brothers is named Mehmet, my father is Muslim, so the name is not foreign or exotic to me. It is familiar, ordinary, lived. Still, I wondered why the suggestion.

Those were my initial thoughts when I received the request. Then came the familiar noise: can I do this, do I have the skills, why me, do I need letters after my name to have something worth saying about a colleague's thoughts. I stayed there for a moment. And then curiosity won, as it always does. And Merle's writing rewarded that curiosity. What struck me was the storytelling nature. It did not feel linear, it did not feel like it had an arc, even though there were themes that resonated with me, and it did not seem to be calling for something logical or academic. The little stories were very attractive to me, and in some ways mirrored my own way of thinking.

Merle also made my mouth water. And my mind. The way she writes about food, I could not help but think about my own relationship to it, and to scarcity. There are similarities with her story, but also differences. I did not grow up with scarcity because of poverty. I spent about four years, from ages eight to twelve, living with a mother who was a raging alcoholic. She consumed all the alimony and child support she received within days, and as a result created scarcity for us. Before that, we had lived a comfortable middle-class life, and there had been a buffer in my father's presence. When that buffer disappeared, we entered a life structured by feast and famine. The money would come in, and my mother would spend it within five days. The remaining twenty-five days were extremely scarce. But I find myself trying to sanitize this experience. Because what I am not saying is what those twenty-five days actually felt

like. Not hunger exactly. More a bareness. A joylessness. Food had been a source of pleasure, and now it was a source of disappointment, even anger. We ate. But there was nothing to look forward to. Until the next feast, twenty-five days later.

My eldest brother and I never believed that was our life. In French we say *en sursis*. We lived suspended, waiting. We believed that what we were experiencing was an anomaly, that we would return to our real life at any moment. We did not identify with those around us who were living in similar conditions, even though in reality we were. We refused it, and I think that belief saved us. Not from the experience itself, but from despair. From settling in. And yet, the body remembers something else. To this day, I live by that rhythm. I stuff my fridge, I buy more than I need for myself and my two daughters, I don't even realize I am doing it. It is not about need, it is repetition, it is emotional muscle memory.

So reading Merle's story of scarcity, which is different, deeper, structural, leading even to death, I felt both similarity and distance. Her descriptions of food pulled me in. I love cooking, I cook abundantly, I cook for a village that is not there, I host dinners that are decadent, and it is tied to the same fear, what if there is not enough. Or worse, what if what is there brings no joy, only a sense of despair and necessity. That is the other side of scarcity that nobody talks about. Not just the absence of food, but the absence of pleasure in it.

In Merle's story, scarcity goes further than that. It leads to death. Babies who did not survive. A mother who tried not to survive. And then, much later, a daughter. The passages about the death of her daughter stayed with me. Stayed, and also lingered in a way that I did not expect. I think I became a little obsessed with that part of the text. The lightness with which she speaks about such a recent death felt extraordinary to me. Not dismissive. Not minimized. But not engulfed either.

And I tried to imagine myself in that position. I imagined myself unable to write, unable to speak, unable even to stand if something like that were to happen to one of my daughters. But that is imagination. She has lived it.

And I realized I was creating a whole fantasy about her. About Merle being brave, strong, magnanimous in the face of loss. It might not be any

of that. It probably isn't. It is my construction. But it tells me something about how I think about death.

I want to stay here a little longer. I want to talk a little bit more about Sarah, Merle's daughter, and about what I perceived as lightness. Not that Merle discussed her death, she didn't. She announced it in passing. That is very different from discussing. And maybe my curiosity and my desire to know more makes it seem light, when in fact there is nothing light about it. Maybe it is so raw and so difficult that it can only appear light at this moment.

And again, what right do I have to ask for more, to probe into somebody's mourning. Merle might be mourning still, might be in the early phases, and my desire to merge here seems a little unhealthy.

So I will leave it at that. And sit instead with what her daughter's death stirred in me from a distance.

Her daughter, when she died, was older than I am today, and that fact stayed with me. It created something in me around age, around legitimacy, around who gets to speak, who gets to respond. I come from a culture where age matters, where there is deference, where older means more knowing, and yet here I am responding to a woman who has lived so much more than I have, including this.

And then, almost as if the thought of death called it up from somewhere, a poem came back to me. One I had memorized as a child. *Les morts ne sont pas morts*, by Birago Diop. The dead are not dead. They are in the air, in the water, in the fire, in matter.

And I realize now that this did not come out of nowhere. Recently I have been returning, almost without intending to, to that whole intellectual and poetic world. Through psychoanalysis, I started rereading Fanon, which led me back to Aimé Césaire, then to Léopold Sédar Senghor, and then again to Birago Diop. It feels circular rather than linear, as if something that was always there is resurfacing.

I grew up, in part of my childhood, in Senegal, with Senghor as president. He represented something to me even then, a kind of elegance, a love of words, a form of intellectual presence that felt whole. Recently I ordered

his collected poetry, almost as a way to reconnect with that early impression. Fanon, Césaire, Senghor, Diop, they were not aligned in the same way, but they were all grappling with the same wound. Colonization does not simply dominate and disappear. It installs itself. And even as it ruptures everything, language, memory, identity, ways of knowing, it creates an umbilical tie between the colonizer and the colonized. An intimacy that was never chosen. A bond that persists even in resistance. They were all thinking about what that rupture carries forward, what it forces you to become, and what, despite everything, refuses to disappear.

For me, one of those things was books. And words. And the hunger for them that started very early. Around twelve or thirteen, I discovered novels. Real novels...not comic books, not children's books, not graphic novels, just words page after page after page that yielded unbelievable adventures. Books had already become something else for me by then. Not just objects, but a space, a world, something that contained everything. Words, imagination, solitude, companionship, escape, knowledge, all at once. Books had it all.

My father noticed this. He was a reader himself, always with a book or a newspaper or a magazine, and I think he recognized something in me. One day, during a visit, he looked at what I was reading and said, with great enthusiasm, that he was going to bring me a suitcase full of books. A whole suitcase. I did not question the image, did not find it excessive or impractical. I believed him completely. I dreamed about that suitcase for months. What would be in it. How heavy it would be. Where I would put everything.

It never came.

I don't want to say that this was a cinematic moment where I suddenly saw my father fall from his pedestal. It wasn't that clean. I was surprised, shocked really, that my father was so fallible that he would make a promise he couldn't keep. Even though, if I am honest, he had made other promises he didn't keep. But this one I could not ignore. It contained everything I loved. And so, the rupture it created was not the first one, perhaps, but it was the one that made all the others impossible to keep refusing.

At the time I was living with my grandmother for a year, on a temporary basis. She was illiterate, not the warm and fuzzy type, very “professional/economical” in her behavior with her grandchildren. The world of adults and the world of children were kept very separate. I was an introverted child who spent a lot of time alone. Her house had a mango tree, and I would sit under it and read. When I finished a book, I would walk miles to the one library in her town to get another one. By the time I got home, I was almost done with the book I had just picked up. On the way back I would bump into adults who found me rude and strange for walking around with my head in a book. I did not care.

When I got home I would sit under the mango tree again. And I would hear my grandmother talking to her friends, whispering, because she thought she was disturbing me if she spoke too loudly, saying that I was always in books, wondering what was in them, what could possibly be so interesting. I would hide a small, satisfied smile and pretend I had not heard. And I also felt, alongside that satisfaction, a tinge of sadness for her. She would never discover what was in there. That whole world, all those words, and she would never have access to it. I felt bad for her, because I wanted her to have what books had given me, all those worlds she would never enter.

I have a painting in my house now. Actually, it is a media piece. I found it browsing a website for art, something I do often, looking for young artists, undiscovered artists, anyone whose work my heart fancies. And I saw this older African woman who reminded me of my grandmother in her demeanor. Grumpy. Serious. And on her head, balanced carefully, a pile of colorful books.

I contacted the artist, a French woman who had lived in West Africa for years and then returned to France and was painting a lot from that experience. I bought the piece immediately.

*Because what she had painted was a replacement. The things African women carried on their heads, what my grandmother carried, wood, water, practical and necessary things for the household, for survival, had been replaced. Not abandoned. Replaced. My grandmother carried water and wood. My father carried books, or at least the idea of them. And I carry books. Words. Fantasy and*

*reverence and creativity, the past and the future, all contained in the many, many words that I love so much. My grandmother is just one generation away from me. And within that single generation, everything changed. Not the weight of what is carried. Just what it contains.*

And words, I think, are also how we keep the dead alive. Which is why I keep returning to Birago Diop. Les morts ne sont pas morts. The dead are not dead. Sarah is not dead in Merle's writing. She is present in her mother's words, in the excerpts of her own writing that are quoted, in the very texture of the memoir. She seemed alive there.

It made me think about my own relationship to death.

My mother died about twenty years ago. We were estranged for most of my life. When she died, I did not mourn her. I felt free. Free to rediscover her. Free to allow her to exist as a person, not as a failed mother. Her death humanized her. As long as my mother was alive, my anger was alive with her. My reproaches, my longing for her to be the mother she never was and the mother I wished for, all of that remained active as long as she was alive. As long as she was alive, there was still the possibility, however unrealistic, that she might become that mother. Her death removed that possibility. It freed me from longing for something I knew I would never have. The impossibility became final.

You get what you get, and you don't complain.

And that's what I got.

And I try to understand what I got.

And I continue to try to understand what I got.

And that journey is freeing.

And I think I have been mourning her ever since.

Slowly. Through fragments. Through stories that change depending on who tells them. There is not much written about her. Not much to hold onto.

And then there is my father. He is alive. Eighty-two. Ill, but alive. Our relationship is underwhelming. And I find myself thinking about what his death will mean.

My father was the s\*\*\*. Truly. When I was a child, around seven, he was everything. Beautiful. The smartest. The kindest. The most generous. The gentlest. It was easy to make him that because my mother was the opposite. She failed at everything. And so, he shined.

I think I had an exponential Oedipal phase. He was the object of everything. My love, my admiration, my desire to be seen by him, to please him, to be like him. My mother's failures only amplified it. She was so absent, so destructive, that he became not just a father but the entire positive universe. Freud would have had a field day. Pure jouissance for him.

I remember him very vividly. His afro. He would shape it with a newspaper or a magazine, tapping it into place, a cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth, music playing. I thought he was the most beautiful person who ever existed.

He loved music. And not just any music. Music that nobody else's father seemed to listen to. Singers from Madagascar. Brel. Nina Simone. Congolese music, Rochereau and so many others. To this day, Congolese music is joy for me. Movement. When I feel down, that is what I play. And I love seeing my Brooklyn-born daughters hum it, sing it, try to move their hips to it. That is him in them.

I named one of my daughters after a Nina Simone song. The first time I heard Nina Simone was through my father, her version of *Ne me quitte pas*, which is originally a Brel song. And that song still carries something. A sadness. A nostalgia I cannot quite locate. My ex-husband once told me that all the music I listen to, no matter how joyful it sounds, has an undertone of melancholy. I think he was right.

There were also very concrete moments with him. Around that same age, seven, I used to make him coffee every afternoon, black coffee a la Francaise. I felt so important doing it. He would lie down because of his back pain and my brothers, and I would walk on his back with our tiny feet. My brothers would get bored after a few minutes, and I would stay

and relish the alone time with him, and I would talk and talk. One day he fell asleep while I was talking. I was so annoyed that I went outside, found a pebble, put it under my foot, and walked on his back with it so he would wake up. Cruel. Ingenious. Childish. I remember it fondly.

I remember hating having my hair braided. Every Sunday I would run away and hide until the woman who came to braid it would leave. One day my mother cut my hair as punishment. And I experienced it as liberation. My father took me to his barber. He cut my hair like his. I wore white tennis shorts like his. I was ecstatic.

And then later, in my teenage years, everything shifted. I rejected everything about him. I was offended when people said I was like him. I tried not to be. The fall was not gradual. The first crack was the suitcase of books he promised and never brought. And then when I went to live with him at fourteen, the fall was complete. He went from being a god to being human. Too human.

Now I can see what I kept and what I refused. His intellect. His love of reading. His love of words. His love of music. His sense of fairness. Also, his awkwardness. The umbilical tie, you could say, between a father and a daughter. An intimacy that was never chosen and yet shapes everything.

The danger of returning is its own kind of mourning. I recall my older brother always wanting to go back to the last place we lived in. We traveled a lot as children, we were airline brats, and my parents were from different countries, so we were moved around constantly, never with our consent. There was always something we were leaving behind, friends, books, schools, relatives. And my brother, in my mind, always lived in the past. He always wanted to go back, to accomplish something, to find closure, to recover something he felt was missing in the present.

Maybe somewhere I knew that that wasn't possible. That what was gone was gone. That one can analyze it in the present, learn from it, but one cannot relive it. So, returning always seemed painful, unnecessary, fruitless. It's interesting I say fruitless, talking about food again. But yes, I did not want to turn around and see what was left behind. Nor did I want to go back and revisit it and try to relive it. I was always oriented toward what was to come. And yet, everything I do seems rooted in what has already been.

Music is how I return without returning. It is safer than memory and more honest than nostalgia. And my propensity for melancholy makes it the perfect vehicle. I tend toward darkness, not only in music but in films as well. Scandinavian noir is one of my favorites. But especially in music, it has to be sad, melancholic, for me to truly appreciate it. And I think somewhere, melancholic music makes the danger of returning less dangerous. It allows a form of return that is contained. I will not go back and relive those moments. But I allow music to take me there. To make me feel what I try not to feel. The loss. The departures. The lack of consent in being moved from place to place as a child. Being moved like the suitcase full of books that never existed.

So, what was this adventure of mine of visiting the past in a structured way through this reminiscing session via Merle's autobiography?

I don't know.

I feel like there is something about it that was pleasant, slightly melancholic, perhaps a little bit healing.

There has been something I have been trying to talk about for a while.

Since I came to America, more than thirty years ago, and because I like writing, and because I used to write in public forums in this disjointed, associative way, people would often ask me why I wasn't writing a book.

And I was always puzzled.

Why?

What is it with Americans that everyone thinks they can write a book?

What is there to say that is so extraordinary that it deserves the attention of everyone?

And that might sound like false modesty, but it is true.

I grew up in systems where writing meant something.

Where an author was Senghor.

An author was Fanon.

An author was Voltaire.

An author was Sartre.

An Author was Japrisot.

Not everyone wrote a book because they had a thought.

So, I never saw myself as someone who should write one.

And yet I was asked again recently to relate my travels and my adventure during those travels.

And I still feel that my life is utterly uninteresting for someone to sit and read.

But this piece feels worth writing.

Perhaps because I was asked.

Perhaps because I am responding to a more lived life than mine.

And I find mine, next to hers, embryonic.

So, who deserves to be read?

What gives that privilege?

Who will read this?

Do I want more readers?

Or is this possible only because it is contained, because it is addressed to people who understand or tolerate meandering thoughts?

I don't know.

But I do know that I would not be this brave if it were for a broader audience.

And maybe that is enough.



## Culture Is Memory: Language, Art, Food, and the Work of Witness

Mustafa Ziyalan

“Culture is memory, memory is culture.”

**T**his deceptively simple proposition, which opens the essay under discussion, is not merely asserted but enacted. Across psychoanalysis, poetry, music, food, ritual, and memoir, the author demonstrates how memory is neither archival nor static, but lived, transmitted, contested, and continually reworked. The essay itself becomes an instance of what it describes: a cultural object animated by remembrance, affect, and symbolic continuity.

From the outset, Freud is situated not as a solitary scientific discoverer but as a thinker in sustained dialogue with poets, dramatists, and philosophers. His acknowledgment that “not I, but the poets, discovered the unconscious,” coupled with his insistence that his contribution lay in devising a method for studying it, positions psychoanalysis as a discipline fundamentally entwined with the arts. When read alongside Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, written in the measured cadences of iambic trimeter, and Lionel Trilling’s observation that Freud united “the probing eye of the scientist” with “the creating eye of the poet,” psychoanalysis appears less as a rupture from culture than as one of its most attentive interpretive practices. It is a way of listening to what culture already knows but cannot yet say directly.

At this point, the essay productively opens onto a philosophical tension that has long haunted both aesthetics and psychoanalysis. Ludwig Wittgenstein’s final proposition in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*—“Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent”—is undeniably elegant, even seductive. Yet if this dictum were taken as a strict ethical or epistemological injunction, much of human culture would vanish. There would be no Bruegel, no Piranesi *Carceri d’invenzione*, no Goya Black Paintings, no Turner dissolving form into light and atmosphere,

no Surrealism's dream logic. Art, music, poetry, and psychoanalysis persist precisely because they refuse silence. They are sustained efforts to give provisional form to what resists articulation, to gesture toward the unconscious when it cannot be fully named, and to do so without presuming final mastery.

In this sense, these practices do not contradict Wittgenstein so much as they test the limits of his proposition. They suggest that when direct speech fails, metaphor, rhythm, image, and narrative intervene. What cannot be said outright may still be approached obliquely, affectively, or symbolically. The essay implicitly argues that culture advances not by remaining silent before the unsayable, but by inventing forms adequate to it.

This refusal of silence resonates with Muriel Rukeyser's insistence that "the universe of poetry is the universe of emotional truth," and that "our material is the way we feel and the way we remember." Michael Eigen's formulation that "words are a kind of emotional blood... there is soul in words" further sharpens this claim. Language, whether analytic or poetic, is not merely representational. It circulates affect; it binds experience to memory; it carries emotional charge across time and between people. Words do not simply describe experience—they participate in its formation and transmission.

Reading these passages, I was reminded of Emily Dickinson, whose poetry often seems to stage the act of thinking itself. Her fractured syntax, unresolved meanings, emphatic dashes, and unconventional capitalization enact hesitation, simultaneity, and contradiction. Dickinson does not smooth thought into coherence; she exposes its fractures. In this sense, her work might be understood—extrapolating from the essay's arguments—as a form of self-analysis. Her poems enact the encounter between the individual and the universal, the unconscious and the constraints of conscious language, while quietly redefining the boundary between private experience and shared cultural memory.

One of the essay's most compelling movements is its transition from theory to lived ritual. The author's reflections on song—"Song is breath with wings. Words are breath dancing"—capture with remarkable economy the fusion of embodiment, memory, and meaning. Lullabies sung

by parents, nursery rhymes memorized through rhythm, bedtime stories repeated night after night: these are not merely sentimental recollections. They are mechanisms of cultural transmission, ways in which affect, language, and belonging are inscribed before conscious understanding fully emerges. As the author notes, such “treasured rituals” are how culture becomes durable and transgenerational.

This prompted a further reflection. Perhaps most of us begin life as poets, using language in uncanny, improvisational ways that feel closer to the unconscious than to convention. Over time, language is domesticated; it becomes shared, stabilized, and socially legible. The *unheimlich*—the un-homely, the strange within the familiar—is transformed into the homely. In this transformation, we gain communicability, continuity, and social belonging. Yet many of us also lose something: a certain poetic intensity, a proximity to the unscripted. Was it a fair bargain? The essay does not answer this question directly, but it keeps it productively open.

Food, in the essay, emerges as another primary carrier of memory. From Proust’s madeleine—where taste and aroma unleash a cascade of recollection—to the author’s evocation of “Sunday gravy” permeating a Bronx tenement hallway, food functions as a powerful cultural mnemonic. Bagels and lox, pizza rivalries, Korean childhood dishes, Southern soul food: each anchors identity in sensory experience. “Food is culture,” the author writes, “and food culture is history.” Taste, here, becomes a form of knowledge, one that precedes abstraction and survives displacement.

This reflection stirred my own memory. I still possess my grandmother’s mortar and pestle, which I continue to use. It once crushed poppy seeds when no special stone was available; the paste was mixed with grape molasses and spread on fresh bread. Years later, tasting rugelach in New York, I encountered that flavor again. My grandmother and mother were from Afyon, a region known for poppy cultivation. Memory traveled through taste, across geography and time, bypassing language entirely.

Among the essay’s most moving passages are those that give voice to the author’s daughter, Sarah. Her recollection of being told by her grandfather, “You don’t eat meat, you don’t eat here!” is devastating in its bluntness. Yet this exclusion becomes, paradoxically, part of a narrative of transformation. Sarah later builds a life around food, naming her

business *Mangia and Enjoy!* Her memoir fragments—sensory, reflective, resistant—extend the essay’s argument that memory is not inherited passively but actively reworked. Identity, here, is neither fixed nor given; it is forged in response to loss, rejection, and desire.

The essay also invites reflection on cities, difference, and coexistence. Thinking of Göbeklitepe, one of the earliest known urban sites, raises a fundamental question: from the beginning, has city life not required the capacity to live among strangers, to remain curious about the unfamiliar? Why, then, does racism arise so persistently in cities—against the very logic of urban life itself? As Darran Anderson suggests, cities threaten monolithic truths precisely because of their polyphony.<sup>1</sup> Like memory, they speak in many voices at once.

The stories of survival in the author’s family line—of premature birth, hunger, poverty, and rescue—anchor these reflections in historical reality. The phrase “Dairy tonight!” announcing a modest meal as if it were a feast, condenses deprivation into resilience. Such moments recall W. G. Sebald’s insight that melancholy, far from being merely passive sorrow, can function as a form of resistance. The description of misfortune, Sebald writes, contains within it the possibility of its own overcoming.<sup>2</sup>

The essay concludes by affirming memoir and autobiography as acts of witness and education. The extensive list of life narratives—from Elie Wiesel to Alison Bechdel to Lee Hawkins—underscores a central conviction: memory is active, relational, and shared. It shapes how we inhabit

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<sup>1</sup>In *Imaginary Cities* Darran Anderson writes: “The real reason monotheistic religions feign to loathe the city is the city’s inherent polyphony. It has many voices from many angles and they multiply. By its very nature, this is a threat to any creed that has established itself as the one truth. It is the Babel and not just the tower that is the threat.”

<sup>2</sup>W.G. Sebald writes: “Melancholy, the contemplation of disaster in progress, has, however, nothing in common with a desire for death. It is a form of resistance. And on the level of art, in particular, its function is anything but reactive or reactionary. When, with a fixed stare, Melancholy considers once more how things could have come to this, it becomes clear that the mechanics of hopelessness are identical to those which drive our knowledge and insight. The description of misfortune contains within it the possibility of its own overcoming.”

the present just as the present reshapes what we remember. Cities, too, may be understood as dense constellations of memory, carried by people who arrive, remain, leave, and return.

Albert Camus once wrote of New York that its very smell could “track you down” elsewhere, reminding you that there exists “at least one place of deliverance in the world.”<sup>3</sup> Memory, like culture, works this way. It follows us, unsettles us, sustains us.

What the author has created, ultimately, is a memoir-essay that practices the very “creative listening” it theorizes. Attuned to dreams, words, music, food, grief, and joy, it stands as a testament to the simple, demanding truth with which it begins: culture endures only insofar as memory is shared. In this sense, we are not dead until we are forgotten by everyone.

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<sup>3</sup>Albert Camus writes: “I loved the mornings and the evenings of New York. I loved New York, with that powerful love that sometimes leaves you full of uncertainties and hatred: sometimes one needs exile. And then the very smell of New York rain tracks you down in the heart of the most harmonious and familiar towns, to remind you there is at least one place of deliverance in the world, where you, together with a whole people and for as long as you want, can finally lose yourself forever.”

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## Merle Heidi Molofsky's Responses

### Response To Gary Fleishman's Response:

**I** was delighted to read Gary Fleishman's response, because as I kept reading, I kept feeling truly understood. I thought, "Oh, he really gets it!"

Yes, I agree, psychoanalysis lives in an aesthetic dimension of human expression. Yes, part of that aesthetic dimension is a fusion of art and science, true creativity.

In identifying the possibility of a shared objective, even as there may be a host of theoretical disputes, Gary Fleishman recognizes that a shared objective may involve how we metabolize memories into meaning. He recognizes that what is important is not which theory "wins out" in intellectual discussions, but, rather, how our cultural memory shapes what we do and hear in the analytic encounter. His language is poetic, metaphorical, and he uses his depth of understanding to raise new questions. Is culture founded on a dialectical relation between what is conscious and unconscious? And he offers what may be the beginning of an answer, "the theoretical orientation is shaped by the same unconscious processes it tries to study".

I resonate with metaphors that mention music. *Nota bene*, "resonate" is a musical term. He says, "to listen psychoanalytically is to listen culturally, to hear in language the music of history, and in defense of survival."

His sensitive clinical vignette is presented in a context of "what we hear", as he identifies defenses, such as a "retreat into silence". He presents the defense of intellectualization as an effort to preserve an old cultural narrative written in the "emotional language of survival". His presents his clinical work as an ongoing dialogue between memory and culture.

### Response To Lee Jenkins's Response:

Lee Jenkins is a psychoanalyst, published poet, published fiction writer, just as I am. We resonate in many ways. We met when we both were

candidates at our psychoanalytic institute, in a class that was being taught by a psychoanalyst who had a PhD in literature, and we were delighted by his erudite literary references.

Lee Jenkins says, “When artistic production is literature, there is the primacy of the use of language, words as conveyors of meaning. Something similar is true of music, in that both are irreducible vectors for the communication of thought and feeling that is humanly shared, whether as a sense of identity, community, or togetherness”.

When I first read that statement, that dazzling assortment of words conveying dazzling ideas, I knew that Lee Jenkins would delve deep into the connection of culture and memory.

He further postulates the possibility of “primacy of what has been experienced is what implants in memory, in the way that experiences or emotional resonance are internalized”.

I continue to be intrigued. I am further captivated when he says, “the unconscious possession of such cultural memory seems to be the source of its value and importance.” But he speculates, the “contradictory aspects of conflict-laden feelings... consign it to the unconscious”. This is true psychoanalytic thinking understood with true creative experiencing.

Lee Jenkins acknowledges Sigmund Freud’s understanding of the need for scientific observation and study of the unconscious. He also cites Michael Eigen’s understanding that “words—whatever else they are—are gateways to the wordless”, and applies that concept to music, beginning with a well-known statement, “The music is not in the notes, but in the silences between”, which is attributed to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. He elaborates, “This might mean that notes may be the sound, but the structure of their arrangement is what produces tension, expressiveness and strength”.

Lee Jenkins applies metaphors drawn from music to psychoanalysis. When he speaks of the dynamics of analyst and psychoanalyst, he speaks of their “shared resonance and attunement”. He segues from music to poetry, a shared “poetics of mind” manifested in cultural receptivity in the psychoanalytic process. I get a deep sensation that he speaks my language!

When Lee Jenkins responded to my daughter Sarah's memoir concerning her discovery that she was white, and her reaction to racism, it brought to his mind his own experience with racism. He writes poetically, poignantly, truthfully, forcefully, of being Black and encountering racism: "the insidious intrusion into your psyche of a sense of unworthiness and lack of autonomy and self-respect".

He writes eloquently of his experience as a 14-year-old trying to get a driver's license. He wanted to be his father's chauffeur.

I highly recommend Lee Jenkins's novel, *Right of Passage* which illuminates the pernicious effects of racism and also tell a fascinating story.

I met Lee Hawkins, the traumatized writer Lee Jenkins mentions, many years ago. The evening, we met, Lee Hawkins was exceptionally kind, gracious, and helpful to me.

We had attended an evening event in Harlem sponsored by the Harlem Family Institute. I had taken a Metro North train from Westchester County to 125th Street. In the early evening a number of men were in the street, drinking, a few quite drunk. I walked to the event. When the event was over, it was late at night, and I was afraid to go back to the train station, since the men might still be there, might be drunk. Lee Hawkins and his companion walked with me to the station, and then Lee Hawkins said he would wait with me on the platform until my train arrived. He did so!

In his compelling response to my article, Lee Jenkins wrote about the famous playwright August Wilson, and his play *Fences*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1986. Lee Jenkins' skill as a poet/wordsmith social observer, social critic, leads him to use the play's title as an overarching metaphor, a skill that I'm sure he shares with the playwright, exploring the concept of being fenced-in. He writes movingly of the perceptions of Black men and Black women of each other, sadly fenced-in perceptions.

His poetic sensibility leads him to cite the noted poet Nikki Giovanni. He remarks, "Her poetry demonstrates the acceptability of the pain of life and its internal strife yet finds a way to endure the things that keep us awake at night because the morning can still bring the opportunity to prosper and live and affirm each other again, being our true selves, without apology".

Lee Jenkins shares his cultural memories, his deepest thoughts, his understanding, with us. I believe we all can benefit from his courageous sharing.

### **Response to Les Von Losberg Response:**

When I began reading Les Von Losberg's response to my article, a line from a song by Leonard Cohen came to my mind: "I was born like this, I had no choice, I was born with the gift of a golden voice".

Les was born with the gift of his golden voice. His golden voice is comprised of many attributes, such as reason, logic, poetic insight, introspection, empathy, imagination, and much more. Les is my soul mate. We have been together for 51 years, married for 46 years. We resonate with each other.

One quality that Les has that I care deeply about is his eagerness, his willingness, to learn. Another quality he has that I also care deeply about is his eagerness, his willingness, to share.

I am deeply touched that he found and valued his own Jewish identity by learning about my Jewish identity, my knowledge of what I consider being Jewish to be. I accept various ways people consider their Jewish identities, whether religious, ethnic, cultural, lineal, et al.

As Les considered his own family's heritage, he had a profound realization, that of recognizing the complex network of trauma within his diverse family of origin.

Ever since I met Les, I have been impressed by his empathy, his caring, his caritas. I was enamored of the tender, empathic look in his eyes as he gazed at me. Now, all these many years later, Les is experiencing greater empathy for the members of his family of origin, as he recognized the severe traumata they all encountered.

My understanding is that as a child and adolescent, Les himself was traumatized by his relatives' traumata.

As a little boy, he heard his grandmother moaning in pain throughout the night, heard his grandmother crying out, calling for her own mother to come and comfort her.

Because Les's mother was so burdened, so overwhelmed by caring for so many other family members, she had very little time or patience for her only child, her own little boy. Les told me that his mother told him when he was an adult that he was a very quiet, self-sufficient little boy, playing alone for hours, and that she would sometimes peek into the room where he was playing to make sure he was alive!

I not only understood from this story Les told me that he was a profoundly lonely little boy, I also imagined that perhaps she had a secret, unacknowledged wish that he wasn't alive, so that she would be free of this responsibility.

Les also told me another bit of his family lore: that when he was a baby, his father proudly brought him in a baby carriage to the pool hall where his father played billiards, showed him off, then left the carriage outdoors for the time he was there. Then his father eventually went home. When he got home, Les's mother said, "Where's the baby?". The father forgot he had the baby with him and went home without him! Yes, his father went back to the pool hall, yes, baby Les was still in the carriage, and yes, his father brought him home.

Les came from a line of traumatized people, and he was not raised truly lovingly. Yet his gift of a golden voice is his gift to love fully. When he and I began to date, he asked to meet my children, and told me, "Because I love you, I will love your children as if they were my own". And he did! And they became his own! And our six grandchildren became his own grandchildren, and our three great-grandchildren are his own as well. His golden voice keeps on singing, and his song is love.

### **Response to John R. Muñiz González's Response:**

I am deeply moved by John R. Muñiz González's use of his own dedication or preserving his cultural heritage, by his identifying the importance of the traumatic impact of colonialism in Puerto Rico's historical significance. His statement, "culture serves as the repository of collective memory", opens a profound way of viewing cultural trauma.

He draws on Clifford Geertz's theory that "culture is a system of shared meanings through which people interpret their world", that "cultural domination often disrupts cultural continuity".

And of course he uses Franz Fanon's theories productively, "colonial domination produces alienation and internalized inferiority", specifically regarding trauma, "Historical trauma is compounded when violence is erased from public memory".

I was captivated by John R. Muñiz González's attention to the significance of language and the arts. He speaks of the therapeutic dance process, tracing the word "therapeutic" to the ancient Greek word "therapeio", to heal, to cure, to serve. He recognizes that we seek catharsis, in the effort to create a new normal. He cites Michael Eigen's statement, "words are a kind of emotional blood", and then offers his own words, "language is not merely descriptive, but affective".

His understanding chimes with mine. I was taken by his statement, "Culture is not only learned but felt, embodied, and remembered". I was so touched when he described going to his grandmother's house. I don't speak Spanish, yet the word "*Abuela*" immediately came to my mind when I saw the word "grandmother". Then he described entering the house, asking to receive from grandmother the "*bendicion abuela*", her blessing. He connects with his Puerto Rican roots through family ritual. "Cultural memory is preserved through shared sensory and communal experiences".

He reminds us, alas, that colonialism tries to destroy cultural memory, citing the "Gag Law" of 1948, outlawing flying the Puerto Rican flag at home or in public, forbidding singing patriotic songs. He celebrates the flying of Puerto Rican flags in the New York City Puerto Rican Day parade!

He tells us of his pride in seeing his adult daughter's dedication as she works as a nurse in Puerto Rico to helping people there.

He recognizes that music and dance as cultural memory is resistance to colonialism. He understands so well the musical forms in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean as evolving from enslaved people from Africa, from the African diaspora. So wise! He sees the impact that Puerto Ricans and other Caribbean people have had in the evolution of salsa in Spanish Harlem, the Bronx, and Brooklyn. I remember learning salsa when I lived in Brooklyn!

John R. Muñiz González brings his cultural awareness into the present, citing Bad Bunny's performance at the Super Bowl half time show.

I deeply appreciate John R. Muñiz González's dedication to bringing psychoanalysis to Puerto Rico! He doesn't only talk the talk; he walks the walk!

### **Response To Julie Nagel's Response:**

Although we don't seem to agree in many ways, we don't seem to "resonate", in one way we do resonate, since we both seem to have a deep interest in music.

Indeed, "resonate" is a musical term, actually concerned with the physical aspects of music. Julie Jaffe Nagel uses a phrase of her own, "the Royal Aural Road to the Unconscious", evoking of course Sigmund Freud's famous description of dream as the royal road to the unconscious, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

I was charmed by her statement that, as she started to read my article, she started to pay more attention to what comes into her mind. As a writer, I find that gratifying.

I find that very close to the concept of free association in psychoanalysis.

I invite her to pay closer attention to the actual wording of the Lionel Trilling quote, that "Freud joined to the probing eye of the scientist the creative eye of the poet". I consider both scientists and poets to be creative. And I am still quite taken by Michael Eigen's wordplay, when he says that words are gateways to the wordless.

We encounter the wordless, we experience somatic sensations, and we have the freedom to use words as gateways.

Did I "choose" "definitive citations that may lead one to believe definitive comments have the answers to complex life questions"? My self-awareness tells me that I choose concepts and words that are evocative, not definitive answers.

Did I write a "polemic"? The word "polemic" is derived from the ancient Greek word "polemos", which meant an aggressive attack. Now a "polemic" is used as a rhetorical technique to undermine opposing

positions. I affirm that I did not write a polemic. I wrote about my own thoughts, my own feelings, my own insights, without any intention of arguing with anyone who may have held a different position. I emphasize “different” rather than “opposing”.

I wanted to share my concepts, offering them for contemplation. I think that sharing in this fashion rises from my devotion to creativity, communication, and community.

What do I mean by culture? I thought that by sharing personal material about me, I was offering a literal example of what I mean by culture, the milieu in which we live.

Re lyrics and poetry: I know many intelligent, well-informed, thoughtful people consider them to be different, specific genres. For the most part, I think they are similar, perhaps even in some instances, the same.

Is my writing style different from what we read in professional journals? Perhaps my style is not different from hers.

Her free association leads her to identify how she just used the words “appetizers” and “meat” on reading my “evolving emphasis on food and eating”.

I very much appreciate Julie Jaffe Nagel’s empathy for my experience of the loss of my daughter Sarah, who died one month short of her 59th birthday.

### **Response To Joseph Scarpato’s Response:**

Dear Grandson Joseph,

I am delighted with what you wrote, as I recognize our common cultural background and values in what you see and identify in your response. You and I both are writers, we both write fiction, we both are storytellers, we enjoy reading stories, and, indeed, we come from a lineage of writers.

My grandmother Mirel wrote articles for Yiddish newspapers in Poland long before my mother Sima Lee and her parents came to the United States to live.

My mother Sima Lee kept a journal.

My father Samuel wanted to be a writer, and began writing a novel, and I obtained his manuscript after he died. Alas, one of his sisters, one of my aunts, asked to read it, and I lent it to her, and she never returned it. When she died, I allowed for a period of mourning, and then I asked her surviving adult child to find and return it to me. He ignored my request.

My beloved treasured daughter Rebecca, your mother Rebecca, is, as you know, a fine writer who has published many novels.

My beloved treasured son Dominic, your uncle Dominic, is a gifted writer, and wrote, produced, and starred in a one-man show in Tribeca.

My beloved treasured daughter Sarah, your aunt Sarah, of blessed memory, took a memoir course and as you know, two memoir essays she wrote are featured in my article.

My beloved husband Les, your grandfather Les, is a wonderful writer. He and I got to know each other when he was looking for a poet to do poetry readings with at various venues. My beloved grandson Eli, your brother Eli, is a musician/songwriter.

You and I gave a presentation, “Generations: The Transience and Permanence of What is Transmitted, Shared, Remembered” together at a conference. We talked about how music you heard me listening to when you were in my house shaped your love of lyrical music. Music is essential to cultural memory! And, I was impressed by a short story you had written when you were 21 years old, since you convincingly wrote a narrative that entered into the feelings, thoughts, and world-view of a man in his 60’s. You read a short excerpt from that story at our presentation.

Amazingly, we each wrote a short story, stories very different from each other’s subject matter, yet each story featured a character who discovers a portal to another sacred world. It seems we both knew that stories are a portal to another sacred world.

You well understand the integration of many cultural elements, such as food, music, dance, and ritual, in ways that are passed down from one generation to the next to the next. Your appreciative comments about our family Passover Seders are a testimonial to how memory and culture are intertwined. “Zakhor” is a Hebrew word that means “remember”.

When our rituals involve story-telling, we reinforce memory and thus help sustain our culture. I am grateful that you mentioned that we incorporated a short reading from Eli Wiesel's magnificent book, *The Gates of the Forest*, at the beginning of our Passover Haggadah. Eli Wiesel is a master of helping us remember what is important. As he writes in this masterful book, "God made man because He loves stories".

Thank you for asking people in our family to tell you family stories! You have incorporated a number of our family memories, our family stories, into your short stories, your fiction writing. Thus, you share our cultural memories with the world, creating new cultural artifacts for others to enjoy and share.

We are a story-telling family. Tell me a story... . Once upon a time... .

### **Response to Alexander Stein's Response:**

I am touched, and delighted, by Alexander Stein's response to my article, since he begins with his memory of our meeting so many years ago, when he was a student and I was on the faculty of our psychoanalytic training institute. He considered me a mentor.

I can readily say that he evolved into being my mentor as I tried to get articles I had written published. I showed him an article I had recently written, following the protocols I had learned about writing formal psychoanalytic articles, beginning with a review of the literature. Alexander praised the article, yet sternly chided me, telling me to focus only on my ideas, and not to get caught up in beginning with citing "a bunch of dead white men". I was shocked, but I trusted his knowledge and insight. I did as he suggested, and *mirabile dictu*, lo! and behold!, the article was accepted and published.

Alexander has taught a course in psychoanalytic writing, and has published an article, "Psychoanalysis in the Public Sphere: A Call for Taking Analytic Thinking, Writing and Action into the Broader World", in *Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, 17/2, 2020.

Alexander has published numerous articles about music in professional journals, including one whose title, and contents, resonates with my theme, "The Sound of Memory: Music and Acoustic Origins", in *American Imago*, 2007.

The words “resonates” and “resonant” are crucial. In his response, Alexander writes that he wants to take my article “as a point of departure, a meditation sympathetically resonant with not a discussion of”. He further states, “I consider resonance a form of attachment”.

Alexander cites Naomi Cumming’s idea that music is “interiority made into sound”. Then he elaborates, focusing on listening to how memories and feelings sound, “we could access idiolectic sonic renderings of individual pastness—the sound of memory”.

He integrates his knowledge of psychoanalysis and music into a profound aesthetic, an original understanding.

I resonate with Alexander’s intense appreciation of music. The Quaker’s phrase, “That speaks to my condition”, fully applies here. Reading his many articles helped me understand the relationship of psychoanalysis and music. I published an article, “The Music of Awakening: Journey Toward Epiphany”, in *Other/Wise Uncut*, Volume 1, Spring 2013, the online journal of the International Forum for Psychoanalytic Education (IFPE). One section of the article is titled, “Attuning, Reverberating, Resonating: The Music of Empathy”. I use the metaphor of musical instruments that have sympathetic strings, resonating strings, in conjunction with our human quality, “heartstrings”. In the article, I cite Alexander’s 2007 article, “The Sound of Memory”, which I referred to above.

I think of the well-known phrase, “Music of the Spheres”, “Musica Universalis”. It embodies the concept that the entire cosmos is proportioned mathematically, the energies of the universe are mathematical and have musical qualities, are expressed musically.

In Alexander’s 2004 article, “Music, Mourning and Consolation”, he writes about our shared national trauma, 9/11, and grief. I remember hearing from Alexander on 9/11, because he was desperate, cut off from his home in downtown New York City, unable to reach his beloved. He knew grief. He needed to find consolation. His article explores grief as the mental state of a person in mourning, and he finds felicitous expression or evocation of that mental state in music.

I was touched when he mentioned his life decisions, life changes, post-9/11, including becoming a father, migrating to a different future, another culture, another career that involved psychoanalysis in action, a technology for good in a wider world.

He writes about focusing on leadership, the “power of psychoanalysis to address institutionalized malice and malfeasance,” showing concern for the future of the American democratic republic. I think he provides a brilliant analysis of our current political situation and concerns.

I deeply resonated with Alexander’s mentioning the 1998 Japanese film *Afterlife* by Kore-eda Hirokazu in his response to my article. It is one of my favorite movies! I enjoy the recognition of similar, overlapping appreciation of cultural artifacts—shared cultural response! He cherishes the aesthetic and emotional alchemy of art, music, film. He writes that the arts “can transport us through time and space, into other times and spaces, allowing us to know and be engaged in the full spectrum of the human condition.”

Reading his response, I learned a new word, “*Sehnsuchtsvoll*”, a German word that means longing, yearning, beyond nostalgia or melancholia or grief or mournfulness, an aching for something not present.

Alexander concludes that we must understand “to care, to love”. Thus, he reminds us of the essence of “*caritas*”. I further resonate, since he brought to mind my father singing a popular song in the 1940’s, when I was a little girl, “Nature Boy”, written by eden ahbez (who spelled his name with entirely lower case letters), with the powerful lyric carried by a sweet melody, “The greatest thing you’ll ever learn, is just to love, and be loved, in return.”

### **Response to Tata Traoré’s Response:**

On reading the response Tata Traore-Rogers wrote to my article, I was deeply moved. I wanted to reach out to her, to hug her, and to thank her for writing such a deep, inspiring response. I am honored that someone with her outstanding achievements, her role as Deputy Director of the Affiliate Support Nationwide Initiatives at the ACLU, her career, took what I wrote so seriously.

I will continue writing my response to her response by addressing her directly.

Tata, as a poet, as a fiction writer, as a psychoanalyst, I treasure ramblings and meanderings and free associative processes. One of my favorite lines to quote from literature is from a children's book, "Let the wild rumpus start," *Where the Wild Things Are*, by Maurice Sendak. And, as I just wrote the previous sentence, I thought of another quote, "Whither thou goest, I will go", from the Book of Ruth, 1:1617, King James Version. Let us go together.

Why were you chosen to be asked to participate? You wonder if you were chosen for diversity, for tokenism, or fetishism. You indeed are a Black woman, and that is essential to your life experience, your life story. Yet that is not a primary reason. I wanted to invite you because you are highly accomplished, and because I know you from our encounters at the Training Institute of NPAP, where you greatly impressed me.

Yes, you are the only Black woman who was invited to respond. People who were invited to respond could be thought of as "diverse", as they include a Black psychoanalyst, a Puerto Rican psychoanalytic candidate, and a woman. In my mind, though, each individual, including several "white men", contributes to "diversity", as each is unique.

I enjoyed reading that you found me "eccentric". I believe that is true. Eccentric may be a particular form of being unique.

Yes, people who know the Editor of IJCD, Mehmet Sagman Kayatekin, call him Sagman, at his request. He has his reason for preferring to be called Sagman, but that is his story to tell. I am enchanted by his choosing his middle name to be what people should call him. "Sagman" means "Storyteller" in Hebrew, and I think it is an apt name for him. Yet "Mehmet" or "Mo", names that would represent what most English speakers would understand mean "Mohammed", would be splendid names to use, if that would be his preference.

I am glad your curiosity was piqued! I am glad that your curiosity drowned out the familiar noise of self-doubt! You are right, my contribution is not academic, scholarly, research-based, and therefore you were not being asked to write that sort of paper. You were being asked to be true to yourself!

I was deeply moved by your account of your own life experience, the truth-telling of your knowledge of deprivation, of food scarcity.

The deprived little girl grew up to be a wise woman, and a generous adult. Your work with the ACLU is admirable. Your decision to become a psychoanalyst is generous, and admirable.

Your memory of living “en sursis”, the French phrase you used to describe your childhood, contributes to your empathy, your ability to imagine other people’s experiences.

Thank you for empathizing with me, for imagining my feelings about the death of my beloved daughter Sarah. I do not think of myself as brave. I was inspired by Sarah’s bravery. She had to face her decline and death. She used us as supports during her time of suffering and courageously prepared us for what was going to happen.

Thank you for introducing me to a poet I did not know, the Somali poet Birago Diop. “Sighs”. I was transfixed by his lines about the dead not being gone forever. He knew what I discovered, that the dead are in the paling and darkening shadows. And I was delighted by his invitation at the end of “Sighs” to listen to the fire’s voice, the water’s voice, the wind in the sobbing of trees, the breath of our forefathers.

Thank you for introducing me to an author and film maker I had not heard of, Sebastien Japrisot. Perhaps I might find the courage to see one of his films.

I too cherish Scandinavian noir films. Ingmar Bergman is my favorite film maker. When *The Seventh Seal* first was shown in New York City, I was a teenager, and it changed my life. I felt a part of something that I had always known, but didn’t have the language for, until the imagery of that film taught me my inner language. As a child, I didn’t like cartoons at all, nor much comedy. And when I saw *Smiles of a Summer Night*, I laughed. When I saw *Shame*, I stopped going to the movies for close to a year. I couldn’t bear that a film, a work of art, could make me feel so devastated.

I hope you have discovered that now you have suitcases full of books, that your father’s promise was the gift, that you continued to read and read and read.

Your life is not embryonic. You do not have to write a book, unless you yearn to do so. Your life itself is a remarkable book. Thank you for letting me read a few pages of your life....

### **Response to Mustafa Ziyalan's Response:**

It was a delight to read this response, because I felt seen, heard, and understood by a highly accomplished thinker whose work I had not encountered previously, and with whom I immediately felt an affinity.

He demonstrates, not merely asserts, but enacts, the proposition, “memory is neither archival nor static, but lived, transmitted, contested, and continually reworked”.

Reading his response, I discover his poetic sensibility. He resonates with poetry, and writes prose with poetic grace, a poetic cadence.

I am pleased that Mustafa Ziyalan addresses how I present Sigmund Freud situated as a thinker in sustained dialogue with poets, dramatists, and philosophers. He goes on to recognize that my essay “productively opens onto a philosophical tension that has long haunted both aesthetics and psychoanalysis”. He cites Wittgenstein’s last proposition in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*:

Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent. Actually, I remember reading Wittgenstein’s challenging work as an undergraduate, feeling fascinated, puzzled, alienated, and, ultimately, resentful at the notion that in my ignorance, my insufficiency, I should be silent.

Mustafa Ziyalan provided an escape clause for me! “Yet, if this dictum were taken as a strict ethical or epistemological injunction, much of human culture would vanish”. He further states, continuing to rescue me, “Art, music, poetry and psychoanalysis persist precisely because they refuse silence”.

Silence has been a lifelong issue for me. I need to know I am seen and heard. And, ideally, responded to because I am understood.

What resists articulation? Art, music, poetry and psychoanalysis don’t refute Wittgenstein. Yet they test the limits of his proposition, if not

directly, their properties may intervene. Poetry, for instance, defies the need for silence through imagery, metaphor, rhythm, narrative.

Mustafa Ziyalan resonated with the Rukeyser and Eigen quotations I offered, recognizing that they sharpen the refusal of silence. He says, “Language, whether analytic or poetic, is not merely representational”. He cites Emily Dickinson. How appropriate! He says of Dickinson that her poetry “often seems to stage the act of thinking itself”. He parses the overtly poetic, recognizing that her poetry is self-analysis. “Her poems enact the encounter between the individual and the universal, the unconscious and the constraints of conscious language.”

I was thrilled when, at this point in his response, he segued to this comment: “One of the essay’s most compelling movements is its transition from theory to lived ritual. The author’s reflections on song—“Song is breath with wings. Words are breath dancing.”—capture with remarkable economy the fusion of embodiment, memory, and meaning.”

His poetic sensibility joins with intellectual insight. I was pleasantly stunned by this statement: “Perhaps most of us begin life as poets, using language in uncanny improvisational ways that feel closer to the unconscious than to convention.” He considers language being “domesticated” and contrasts it with the loss of poetic intensity. He sees the underlying tension, and wonders if losing this quality is a “fair bargain”. Then he provides what might be the beginning of an answer: “Taste, here, becomes a form of that knowledge, one that precedes abstraction and survives displacement”.

Responding to my consideration of food in culture and memory, he offers his own poignant, evocative memory: he has in his possession his grandmother’s mortar and pestle, which he now continues to use. He recalls that years later, in New York City, tasting rugelach, he tasted his own memories of his mother’s and grandmother’s traditional home cooking in Afyon, Turkey.

When he considers my daughter Sarah’s memories recounted in the articles she wrote for her class in memoir, he focuses on how devastating her experience of her grandfather’s blunt taunts regarding what she eats or doesn’t eat, and how they became part of a narrative of transformation. “Memory is not inherited passively but actively reworked.” He notes that

Sarah eventually built a career around food with her private chef and catering business, “Mangia and Enjoy!” The Italian word, “*Mangia*”, combined with the word “Enjoy”, transforms a traumatic moment. He recognizes that “identity is forged in response to loss, rejection, and desire”.

I am delighted that Mustafa Ziyalan sees and hears and understands my daughter Sarah the way he sees and hears and understands me!

He concludes that memoir and autobiography are acts of witness and education, and mentions what he recognizes as a “list of life narratives—from Elie Wiesel to Alison Bechdel to Lee Hawkins—underscores a central conviction: memory is active, relational, and shared.” Further, “What the author has created, ultimately, is a memoir-essay that practices the very ‘creative listening’ it theorizes. Attuned to dreams, words, music, food, grief, and joy, it stands as a testament to the simple, demanding truth with which it begins: culture endures only insofar as memory is shared. In this sense, we are not dead until we are forgotten by everyone.”

Amen! Thank you for seeing, hearing, understanding what has been said!

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## Conversation with Merle Heidi Molofsky

M. Sagman Kayatekin

**M**SK: We will try and focus on your paper but give us a sense of the story of your life Merle. Let's start with that.

**M**HM: I think my paper is a reflection. It is on my reflecting over the years, about the plural contexts of my life. What really resonates with me? What matters? What am I drawn to? What did I choose to learn? What was I surprised to learn? But it is always in the context.

It is interesting, because I've been affiliated with and taught at different psychoanalytic institutes as a faculty member. When I was a candidate, met other people like me, we were all learning together. What I noticed very early on is that I was meeting a lot of people who were becoming psychoanalysts who were complaining. They had very bitter feelings about their past, about their childhood. It was very different from what I had experienced. I thought that I was one of the few who had a happy childhood. Happy in terms of my family life. There were other stressors, other difficulties but I was very happy with my parents, my brother, my relatives, and my parents' friends.

My relatives in this small niche of family were different from the people in the community where I lived. The values were different. For instance, the men on the block I lived on played poker every now and then, not all the time. And they talked about sports, cars. That's all I ever heard them talking about. They were outside, and they were animated and talking. And the women played Mahjong. They didn't come outside to talk the way the men did. They sat on the porch, with other women. What they were doing was of no interest to my parents.

My father worked six days a week and had Sunday free. That was it. And he never complained. One day he was outside, and there were some men talking, and I heard him talking to them about cars, and sports. And later, I said to him, "Daddy, how come you were talking about cars and sports, when you don't watch sports, and you're never interested in cars

and sports? “He was very sweet to me. He said, “Well, that’s what they were talking about, and I wanted to be sociable. So, I joined in to be one of them temporarily”.

My mother was very opposed to gossip. She said, “You look for the best in people”. There was a family living close by us. They were kind of crude, and my mother said, “If they had the opportunity to read the books that you’ve been reading since you were a little kid, they would have been different.” I got impatient with my mother, not in a nasty way, but I said, “Oh, Mom, they’ll never do that.”

Everyone was required to go to school until they were teenagers, probably 14 years old. You learn to read and write in school. Not everyone was interested in what was being taught in school, but she wanted to believe that people could change with opportunities for education. And I respected that side of her, even when I was a kid, even if I didn’t agree with her. I respected her attitude, and her desire to see the best in people, and to believe that they could improve themselves. I found that very touching. And that’s the culture I grew up in.

**MSK:** That’s your family culture.

**HM:** Yes, in my neighborhood, there were very few educated people. Now, my parents were self-educated. My father had a high school diploma. My mother had three years of formal education. But she was an avid reader. And we had a little AM-FM radio, she had it tuned to classical music stations, and she would listen, and she listened not only to the music, but she also wanted to hear the announcement. Who was the performer? Who was the composer? What era is it? Because she never had a chance to learn it, she would learn it from the radio.

**MSK:** This is in New York?

**MHM:** Brooklyn, East Flatbush. But my parents’ friends were also very cultured people. They were working class and lower middle class, and they were like my parents. They were educated; they were politically extremely liberal. That’s what distinguished us from a lot of people in my mainly Jewish neighborhood.

My parents were liberal, they were against segregation, they wanted public schools to be integrated, and they wanted housing to be integrated. And almost all our neighbors were against it. It was so awful. There was an organization in our neighborhood that was called Sponge, S-P-O-N-G-E. What it stood for was, it hurts me to say it, “Society for the Prevention of N...s Getting Everything.”

One day I was coming home from school, carrying my book bag. We all had book bags with books in them in those days. There were a bunch of kids from my block following me and yelling at me, “communist, communist”. I never heard the word before. I thought it was it a four-letter word, a curse word. And then they grabbed my book bag, and they threw it into some bushes that had sharp thorns, so I got all scratched up by those thorns, getting it back, and they were laughing at me. I came home and I asked my mother what a communist was. She got so flustered and frightened. This was the era of McCarthy.

My parents had friends, Min and Abe. They ran a salon all weekend long, from Friday night into Sunday night. Min would make turkey, and homemade apple pie. And at the salon, people just met. They talked about art, literature, politics, some philosophy, you know, just ideas. Very few of them could afford going to the theater.

When we got a television when I was 10 years old. In the afternoon, the kids would say, “Oh, I’m going home to watch a show”. It was children’s shows. And every now and then, I might join them, but I found it fatuous. I didn’t enjoy it at all. I hated cartoons, because in the cartoons, a lot of people got hurt. When we finally got a TV, my parents were very strict about what could be watched. For instance, there were two shows that were very popular. One was, I think it was called *The Goldbergs*, and there was *Amos and Andy*, where the main characters were Black. My mother was opposed to both of those shows, because she found the stereotypes of Black people and of Jews offensive. My children are ethnically Italian-American, Sicilian-American, on their biological father’s side. Their biological father, my ex-husband, abandoned the family. Watching tv when my children was young, I was appalled that Italian-Americans were represented as criminals. I picked that up from my mother. It is a stereotype.

**MSK:** From very early on stereotype bugs you. Good versus bad guys, Jewish stereotype and African American stereotype. You know, people attack each other through stereotypes. Or make fun of each other through stereotypes.

**MHM:** You're Turkish in background. I believe.

**MSK:** I'm Tatar Turkish.

**MHM:** Oh, so you were a minority, and they made fun of you?

**MSK:** Of course, they made fun of the way I look. Because of my Central Asiatic features. I was immediately recognized as different from the Turkish stereotype. Yes, quite similar.

**MHM:** Can I share this little bit of cultural information that I love? Really, this is where I feel I'm living in my culture. Okay, my children have had Christian relatives. They knew they were Jewish, and they knew they had Christian relatives, and they loved celebrating Christmas. So, I joined in. I had a tiny little keyboard, that was like a piano. And I would play Christmas carols on it. I learned them all, the lyrics, the melody, and I would play the keyboard, and the kids would sing the songs. But there was one Christmas carol that is absolutely my favorite one. And when I talk to many American Christians, no one knows it. Maybe a very few people who are interested in folk music, like I am, know it. It is called "The Cherry Tree Carol". (She recites and sings some parts of it.)

Who we learn from and what we remember. That's the theme of my article.

Who we learn from is the culture in which we find ourselves. And our memory passes on that culture to others. Just as my mother passed it on. She passed on her attitude about stereotypes to me, and I've tried to protect my children from new stereotypes. Yeah, that's the theme.

**MSK:** This made me think of Abe and Mini's weekends as a time that was important in shaping you. How often did you go there? Were there people from different ethnicities?

**MHM:** They were mostly, but not all, Jewish. I probably started going with my parents when I was seven or eight years old.

**MSK:** So it was like a school to you.

**MHM:** Yes. On the weekend, with apple pie, it is like a school. I loved learning whatever I could learn. By the way, I loved the schools I went to, the local elementary school: kindergarten, first grade, second grade, third grade. And it was in a Jewish neighborhood, and the students were mostly, not entirely, but mostly Jewish.

And then I was identified as intellectually gifted. And it was recommended that I should apply to a public school that had what they called enriched curriculum for intellectually gifted children, children with IQs of 130 or more. So, my parents applied for me. I was accepted, and instead of walking to school, I had to get up early, wait for a bus, not a school bus, public transportation, and go to school that way. There were kids in my class, intellectually gifted children, and most of them were Jewish. And the three children who weren't Jewish, they all had one-syllable last names.

**MSK:** I see, but if you don't mind, let me take you back a bit, So, did they measure your IQ. How did they know you were gifted?

**MHM:** Oh, there were tests. I was given IQ tests. 181 and a second one some years later came as 183.

**MSK:** That is very high. So, you are also curious, your mind had to be satisfied.

**MHM:** Yes and I loved being in those special classes with kids who were like me. The most frustrating thing that I had with the kids on my block, where I was growing up, was my higher intelligence.

I will never forget this: one day they said, "my dog is 14 years old. But that's in dog years." And I said, There's only one kind of year. It is the time it takes the earth to go around the sun once; it is 365 days. It is not a matter of dog years or human years; it is the aging. Dogs are aging faster than we are. They said, "No, you don't know, you don't understand", and I said to myself, "Okay, they think I don't understand, I think they don't understand. I know I'm right. Goodbye."

**MSK:** There, in the gifted class, you didn't feel like as much as an outsider.

**MHM:** No, on the contrary I felt like I met people like me. And the curriculum was terrific. The preferred curriculum for the fourth grade in Brooklyn was to learn about your neighborhood. What is your neighborhood like? Are there stores? What kind of stores? What kind of houses do people live in? Apartment houses? Two-family houses? Private houses? You know.

In this class, my teacher said, “I’m not going to teach that. I’m going to teach you about theories about how the world was made and what came after that”.

So, she started to explain the Big Bang Theory, the atom, and cosmological creation myths, what the Greeks believed, what the Egyptians believed, the Assyrians believed. And the idea that there were many gods, or one god. Stuff like that. And then we learned about each of those cultures.

One day she told us about a news article about a volcano erupting in the Pacific Ocean. And then she said, “Imagine that you were there in one of those Pacific islands. And write a story about what happened from the point of view of, for instance, a volcano erupted and people had to escape, and some people escaped and some didn’t. Write about it from the point of view of someone who’s escaping. Write about it from the point of view of someone who’s on an island nearby, who sees it happening. Write about it from the point of view of someone who comes in as a medical practitioner to try to treat the people who are still alive”.

**MSK:** This went on through high school?

**MHM:** No, it went on through junior high school. In elementary school was this enriched curriculum and junior high school was something called special progress.

And then you went to high school. High school was just ordinary. And I was disappointed. I said, “Oh God, what the hell is this?” once I was in high school, there were no more miracles. There were no special classes. I was so bored. I was able to graduate at the end of my junior year by taking courses in summer school. And life went on.

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**MSK:** You obviously treat people in your office, in that space, that is familiar to all of us. It seems to me that there's another side of you that is very connected intellectually. I would like to hear about that.

**MHM:** I try not to feel confined by various identities that I have. Yes, I am intellectual, yes, I am creative. Yes, I am socially aware, yes, I am a psychoanalyst, and yes, I value social service of one sort or another.

I trained at the Training Institute of NPAP, which was a major breakthrough in psychoanalytic training, since they accepted people with any graduate degree. You didn't have to be, and I don't like this phrase, a "mental health professional". An MD or PhD in psychology or LCSW.

When I went to college, my student advisor said, "What do you want to major in?". And I said, "Psychology", and she said, "that would be a very poor choice for you".

At the time, from my parents' library, I had read, the Brill translation of, several essays by Sigmund Freud and some essays by Jung and I was intrigued.

But this advisor said to me, "I know what you want, but you're not going to find it in the psychology department. Here it is behavioral. You will learn a lot about pigeons, statistics. You're a very poor science student, a very poor mathematics student. You will not be able to deal with the statistics course, and you're not going to learn what you like".

I thought, oh, okay, so I won't. So, I majored in Speech and Theater. And that was very entertaining, and I liked it. Then I got a 60-credit MFA in creative writing. Which is what I do. I write. I wrote poetry, I wrote short stories, novels, plays. All that is like a playground for me. Because all I did was write.

**MSK:** This is way before you became a psychoanalyst?

**MHM:** Oh, definitely. A friend of mine recommended that I should go into analysis and I did. I found someone who was an analyst, and I began working with my analyst. I was intrigued by the work. And I kept thinking, how does she do that? How did she come to that?

And I said to her, “I’d love to do what you’re doing. How do I learn to do that?” All those years I worked with her she said a lot of very meaningful things. But she said the best thing when I asked that question. She said, “I think you’ll be a wonderful analyst”.

**MSK:** Hmm...

**MHM:** That was very encouraging, and she recommended that I go to NPAP, the Training Institute of NPAP, because they accepted people with a varied training background. So, it took me some 14 years to graduate because I was working full-time, I had little children, I couldn’t take a whole bunch of courses at once, I had to take two at a time. Couldn’t take more than that in the evenings. You know, maybe a couple of classes a semester, not a year.

**MSK:** You’re not an outlier, though. There were other people like you.

**MHM:** There were all kinds of people. There were social workers and psychologists, no psychiatrists. Psychiatrists would only go to the institutes that only accepted psychiatrists. For instance, one of the people I met, who I became a very close friends with, we eventually shared an office suite, his background was an art historian and a lawyer. He didn’t practice as a lawyer. He studied law because he was following in his father’s footsteps, and he pursued his own love, which was visual arts, and he became an art historian and an art critic and a very influential person. There was a bond at NPAP, like there was with Lee Jenkins. Lee knew literature. We had a connection that way. Someone else I know, who is a journalist, is a psychoanalyst. That sort of thing. They came from every discipline, and it was interesting.

And we all chose our courses individually We didn’t travel as a cohort.

We didn’t all take the same classes; we just chose the classes that we could take that fit our individual schedules. When was I free to take classes. When I did I have someone to watch my children. My parents watched my children. My parents were devoted grandparents. So that’s the background.

In my article I wrote I included my daughter Sarah’s memoir, writings of what it was like for her to be a white girl in a mainly Black public school.

It is part of our lives. My mother was a civil rights activist. She worked, she had two children, but she was out there.

**MSK:** I didn't know that you were directly coming from the route of humanities to psychoanalysis. Nowadays it is more common, but still not too common, and I do think, some psychoanalysts are rather grandiose and make comments like "Well, we can teach humanities and novelists about human nature," And I think, we can teach them, but they can also teach us.

**MHM:** Definitely. That's what my article begins with, that Freud said, "Not I, but the poets discovered the unconscious."

**MSK:** Anyway, let's think together about this. It seems you're equally comfortable with being a therapist and being a writer.

**MHM:** Oh, yes! It comes from the same place in your soul.

**MSK:** But what may happen is, when they come to psychoanalysis, sometimes people downplay or abandon their other professional identities. It seems you didn't.

**MHM:** I couldn't imagine doing that. To me, there's no difference. It is in your soul. What touches you? I still read a lot of novels, a lot of fiction, because I loved it.

**MSK:** And you read them cover to cover?

**MHM:** Yes! I don't know how else to read. If you're not interested, you don't read it or you skip, let's say it was assigned in school, and you have to learn it so you can pass the test. I don't read like that.

**MSK:** You're a fast reader?

**MHM:** Very. It is a matter of eye coordination. I can see a paragraph all at once. I don't read word by word. I kind of see it as a whole. I learned how to read in school the way other kids do. You know, starting in first grade reading the silly books that they had us read. My mother used to read me stories from books, and they weren't all children's books and they weren't silly, but the children's books in school were silly in the early grades. You know, it was, Dick and Jane did this, they went for a walk.

And you read it word for word. And Dick had a cat, and the cat's name was Fluffy. Whatever, you know?

**MSK:** You didn't read like that right from the start.

**MHM:** No, I wanted the reading to be interesting. As I was learning to read, I was trying to read other things than the books that they gave me in school. I wanted to read the books my parents had. But they were more about real people, it felt real when I read.

**MSK:** So, let me ask you a question, then does it mean that writing is easier for you than talking?

**MHM :**No, they are the same. It is like breathing So, writing and talking is more or less the same thing for me, I don't feel a difference. The thing about writing is you could go back and see what you just said a few minutes ago on paper versus talking, unless it is being recorded. You can't go back and say, what did I say then?

**MSK:** Listening, is that boring for you?

**MHM:** No! I don't listen to podcasts. I don't want to listen to books on tape, because I want to hear it with my interpretation, my emphasis. I want to read them. But when I'm engaged in a conversation, or just in a room with other people, I love listening to them.

**MSK:** So you don't feel like, come to the point, cut to the chase.

**MHM:** No. What's the rush?

**MSK:** But you can read a page much quicker than most.

**MHM:** I don't know how quickly most people read. Reading, it is just like breathing. How many breaths do you take? Well, it depends, right? Or, if you listen to my voice as I'm talking, sometimes I'm talking much more quickly. Sometimes I edit a little, like, I just had to change right now as I am talking.

**MSK:** Did you edit your speech right now, on the spot?

**MHM:** Yeah. It is just a natural thing to do. You know how some people are natural athletes? It is just something natural that you do, and it is like breathing.

**MSK:** Either way, you take reading, writing, talking and listening seriously. It is not like you're frozen by an intense seriousness, but you pay attention and you edit it in the moment, something like that.

**MHM:** I'm paying full attention. It just feels like I know you, so I want to talk to you, I want to hear what you've got to say, I want to comment on what you've said, or I want to add something.

**MSK:** I think I get it. What I learned today, that's a most important lesson, that you are, at the same time, a literature person and an analyst. It is not like you abandoned one.

**MHM:** If it comes from your heart and soul, why would you abandon it?

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**MSK:** Let's go back to the themes of writing, reading. Do you read certain things you have written? Well, I believe what I am saying is the following. It happens to me all the time. If I write something and I look at it, a week or a month later, I say, "oh, I didn't recognize that. I didn't understand that I was meaning that." So, in some ways, you know, your text speaks to you differently every time you read it.

**MHM:** That's not my experience. But my experience is that I'm discovering myself when I read my writing again. It is familiar to me. But I'm usually thinking, "Oh, yeah, I remember what I felt when I wrote that," or... "Gee, that was something I didn't expect to happen, but I wrote about it, and I'm glad I did." Or "Well, that's what I was writing about back then."

**MSK:** So your poems usually remind you of that moment, or that process when you wrote them.

**MHM:** Sometimes it reminds me of what was happening then. Sometimes it doesn't, but I mean, I can remember it, but I'm kind of happy to rediscover it "Oh, I forgot about that! Oh, yeah." You know, it is different. It is not always the same feeling. But there is one feeling that is always the same. Pride. "I wrote that! Oh, look at me, I'm proud that I could write like that."

**MSK:** Doesn't surprise you, it reminds you.

**MHM:** Today I was talking to someone that I had just been introduced to, and the person who introduced me knows that I'm a writer and a poet, and he mentioned that, and praised me for my poetry and stuff. And I asked, and the person he introduced me to was interested, and looked interested, and I said, would you like to hear a poem? I don't really memorize poetry very well, but this poem, I have recited many, many times. So, I recited it for her, and she was very taken with it. That makes me happy, that it really works. That's what I enjoy about reading my own work. Oh! That works!

**MSK:** What do you mean, "works"?

**MHM:** It is a good poem, or it is a good article, or it is a good story. You know, I write fiction, I write poetry, and I write professional articles. And when I read it, if I have a feeling of pride, if I can or others can say that's a good, that makes sense that's well written. I like the way that works

**MSK:** It has an impact. It either impacts you or somebody else, that's what you mean?

**MHM:** Well, if it is only me who's reading it, it impacts me, but I can imagine other people reading it and having the same response to it, "oh this is interesting, this is good, I like this." I also get curious about how the story unfolds, as I change the pages of a story or a novel I have written.

**MSK:** Explain that sentence to me. You say, "I changed, turned the pages, and I'm curious what happens next." What do you mean by that?

**MHM:** Well, if it is a story, I want to know how the characters develop, or how the plot develops. If it is an intellectual piece, I want to know how one idea is leading to another idea or other ideas. How are the ideas connected? That's what I mean by what happens next. What's the arc of this story or this article?

**MSK:** When you read your own pieces, you do not just have a sense of remembering it, but kind of, you become your own critique, so to say. That's my wording.

**MHM:** Critique, rediscovery.

**MSK:** Let me just push you on that. So, when you say rediscovery, do you remember that intention of that connection, or do you recognize the connection as you are reading it.

**MHM:** I recognize the connections, and I admire how it is done. If I like it, if I'm proud of it. If it is a good piece, usually I feel very happy to rediscover it and like it.

**MSK:** So I think you're answering me in the affirmative. Let me tell you why.

**MHM:** Yes, in the affirmative, yes.

**MSK:** It is not just remembering, then. Because you're noticing how you wrote it for the first time.

**MHM:** Yes, I'm noticing how it is written. You know, if I'm reading someone else, I do the same thing. If I'm enjoying it, I'm following either the storyline, if it is fiction, or I'm following the ideas as they are evolving and unfolding, and I'm enjoying it, I'm admiring it, and I feel like I'm learning something.

**MSK:** You're learning something from your own work, too?

**MHM:** From when I read other people's work.

**MSK:** The question is with your work.

**MHM:** I've already known it, I wrote it. But I am enjoying how it is written, how it is unfolding. If I approve of it, you know, usually I approve of it, because I don't send it out for publication if I don't think it is worthwhile, but what I'm saying is I appreciate how it is written. I enjoy seeing the ideas emerge, or how they are connected. If I wrote it, I know it already, but I can enjoy and appreciate the way I did it. And generally, I don't send anything out unless I like it to begin with.

I'm not going to send anything that I think isn't worthwhile. You know, I want to make sure it is good.

**MSK:** I see, I think I get it now. "Good, enjoyable, pride in the work" seem to be the key words. Usually, do you write very fast?

**MHM:** Yes I write like I think. To me, writing and speaking and thinking are the same process. If I'm writing a paper that needs substantiation, you know, some research, I can add that. But most of the time, it is getting my own ideas that is the fun. That's what makes it fun.

Yeah, it is just like breathing, it happens. You can't help it. You can't stop breathing unless something bad is happening to you. Well, I can't stop thinking. I can't stop talking, but I do like to listen. Yet, if I'm talking, I'd like to, I'd like to finish the idea and bring it to a point and then wait for a response. And writing is the same thing. You write until you have all the ideas clearly stated, the way you would say it if you were talking to a person.

**MSK:** So afterwards, in some ways, the kind of reading we're talking about, goes a bit slower, you say, oh, this is how I connected that, this is how what the sequencing is, and so forth.

**MHM:** Not really. It is not slower. It just seems like that to me. I don't have to think it. It thinks itself. Oh, yeah.

**MSK:** Oh, I see. You trust the spontaneity of your mind. I am a combination probably. Sometimes I become extremely incisive. So, I go to the philosophy, I can say, he is misinterpreting the Hegelian theory of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Sometimes, it just hits me, I say, "oh!" Or, sometimes, after reading the paper several times I say, "something doesn't fit here."

For example, currently I am working on a paper of Ernst Kris, and I wasn't fully getting it, because he was talking in a way that sounded like he had data coming from child research, but he was just referencing classical psychoanalytic works, Freud, Fenichel and some others. I thought that Ernst Kris was perhaps doing child research, but he was avoiding making any reference to it. When I dug into literature about him I found out that he was indeed very active in child research. Then all pieces fit together. Your paper doesn't need that, because it is a memoir. You don't do that with a memoir. If it is a theoretical paper, sometimes I spend days on a page. I become extremely, almost obsessively incisive.

**MHM:** You're reading, intellectually. Interesting reading style. Quite different from mine. Yes, you pay attention to what's being said, you notice

when something doesn't quite make sense to you, or if there's something that you don't understand and you want someone else to explain it to you.

**MSK:** But let me tell you one more thing, that maybe explains why, because my culture is one where children shouldn't talk. If they talk they shouldn't occupy too much of a space. Ideally, they are expected just to listen to adults. It is a culture of deep reverence, deferring to age and experience.

**MHM:** Oh, children should be seen but not heard. That's an American idiom.

Oh, that's so sad.

**MSK:** But that pushes me to be very precise and incisive in what I say.

**MHM:** But I think you would have been incisive anyway. If you're interested and you're listening, but you're allowed to talk, it is the same thing. You're going to be incisive no matter what. That made me very sad for you.

**MSK:** Well, actually, I also had a younger sister who didn't stop talking. She would just talk, and talk, and they even said, "Are you going to become a lawyer? What kind of a person are you?" So, with the culture of the society and family then I become very careful in what I say, because I had just a very short time span when I could wedge in to say certain things.

**MHM:** Well, that does make you incisive and focused. Which is an asset to be able to be focused that way.

**MSK:** Yeah, I mean, sometimes it leads to neurotic inhibition but quite regularly it works to my benefit. I'm very gabby now, people say you talk too much, you know?

**MHM:** My brother and I had freedom. We had freedom to participate in any adult conversation. What you described, that would never ever occur to me.

**MSK:** Yeah, that's interesting, because what sounds natural now came after a long process of change. My high school friends say you didn't talk that much when in high school. I say to them "I am aware and surprised with the change too."

Anyways, that's a long story. I think you answered my question, so when you read, again, quickly, you just say "oh, this is how I did it, and that's great."

**MHM:** Well, or I'm happy with it. I could have edited that, but it doesn't matter. It is a good enough piece of work. It could have been better, but it is good enough to begin with.

When I was a young poet, I was just more enthusiastic. I would assume that everything was going to be accepted, and then it wasn't. I would, you know, I would send in, I would send it into poetry journals, and it wouldn't be accepted.

"Thank you for considering us, but we're not able to publish it for now." We young poets then, you know, friends of mine who were poets, we used to have a joke. That you could get these rejection letters, because it was before the internet, you'd get it in the mail. That you could plaster, you could put them all up on your bathroom walls until you had it as wallpaper. Rejection after rejection after rejection. (We laugh)

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**MSK:** I'm sorry but let me ask you then another question, if it is too painful, you don't have to answer this. One thing that always hits my eye in this memoir is a deep sorrow.

**MHM:** Yes. It is bearable. I can talk about it very readily without breaking down and crying. It is not too sad. It is meaningful to talk about her, so please go ahead.

**MSK:** What do you think about the undertone of grief and celebration of a life that was cut short? Because it seemed almost like it is also a partial homage to Sarah.

**MHM:** Yes, it is, very much.

**MSK:** Tell me about it.

**MHM:** We discovered these little writings of hers. When she took that memoir course and wrote those two articles. We didn't know about it until after she had died, and we were going through her papers, and we found it. So, I learned more about her. And it fit everything I knew about her. It wasn't revelatory, a surprise, but what was new is that she wrote about it, and I didn't know that she was writing.

**MSK:** You found the journals of Sarah, right?

**MHM:** Yes. Sarah was the youngest in the family, the little one. They were compositions she wrote for this memoir course. There were so many beautiful memories, for example, how she discovered she was white.

Her biological father was Italian-American. She got all the approval she needed from my side of the family, the Jewish side, but the Italian-American side, she really wanted their approval, because her father had left and she never really lived with him, he left when she was a baby, so she wanted to be the good little girl that they would appreciate. And she was a vegetarian. When her grandfather said, "in my house, you eat meat, or you don't come here" she was terribly hurt.

She eventually went on to become a private chef and caterer, and the name of her business was named "Mangia and Enjoy" That food was meant to be enjoyed, but no one could tell you what you had to eat. Mangia and enjoy. Not you're bad because you're not eating what I'm giving you.

**MSK:** She is such a presence in your paper. I am so sorry, her death is, of course so hard to even think about.

**MHM:** It is interesting that you say, yes, it frightens people. They say if your child dies, it is the worst thing. Yes, it is, but it is also reality that we must face. And they say, what did her life mean. Her life is like a treasure, a jewel that just shines in the dark.

Sarah really had so many talents and interests; she was very alive. She studied African drumming, and she took African drumming lessons and took her children to the same place where they could learn African drumming, too. So, the three of them would drum together. She had a beautiful singing voice, and she would just sing. She sang the way I

breathe. Sarah was very intrigued with a friend's belly dancing, and she learned how to belly dance. She was very talented. She didn't dance professionally in front of people, just, you know when the music was there, Middle Eastern music. She was just spontaneous. She could just get up and dance.

**MSK:** She is like you?

**MHM:** All my children are like me; goes on just the way my brother and I were. We are like our parents in some ways. It is culture is memory, and memory is culture. It is in the DNA.

She gave herself that farewell party to celebrate her life, where people came from all over. She wasn't afraid of dying, she was afraid of losing all her faculties as the brain cancer took over. And she was so scared of losing her mind, but...it was a blessing. She died without losing her mind. Her son was with her, and someone else was with her. She was held.


**MSK:** That's very, very important. Recently I was watching *All Quiet on the Western Front*. I read it many years ago, but I had not noticed that until I watched the movie. At the end, a soldier shoots the enemy soldier and when the guy is dying, he says, please don't leave me alone. So, the one who shoots, stays with him until he dies.

**MHM:** That brought tears to my eyes. I knew the story, but your description made me cry. I always imagined dying alone. I imagined myself sitting in a rocking chair, somewhere in the mountains, in front of a nice little cabin, you know, a comfortable place, watching the sunset and knowing I was dying. And watching the sun go down with me.

**MSK:** That's very nomadic. I'm half Tatar, and I'm very close to the nomadic culture. My Tatar grandpa, he used to say, "you shouldn't have a grave that is too prominent, you should disappear, that's our tradition, my son."

**MHM:** You know, that's so interesting I had a very strange dream last night. I had cut off a piece of my hair, and I was going to get a piece of hair from Les. The same length, the same amount of hair, and I was going to bundle them together. So that I could bury those two pieces of hair together. So, we would always be together.

## Section Two: “Treatment Resistant”



### **Review of: Donnelley M. (2023). *Treatment Resistance in Therapy: A Patient’s Perspective*. *Independently Published*.**

**J. Christopher Fowler<sup>1,2,3</sup>**

**M**arshall Donnelley’s book, *Treatment Resistance: A Patient Perspective* (2023) recounts a 13-year journey through outpatient psychotherapy and hospital-based treatment. It serves a sobering reflection on the challenges our field faces in providing relief for a segment of the patient population. As an “expert by experience”, Mr. Donnelley provides a first-person account of the discomfort, pain, and frustration of stalled treatment. Reflections on what he found to be the least helpful qualities of his therapists (hubris, dogmatism, rigidity, and complacency) parallel aspects of psychoanalytic debates on extending the parameters to meet the needs of so called “unanalyzable” patients who did not benefit from traditional psychoanalysis.

Historically, analysts’ dedication to treating the *treatment resistant* patient, who were not wedded to orthodoxy, spurred innovation and expansion of technique over the last century. And yet, treatment resistant psychiatric conditions persist. This article takes up three elements:

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1. Historical perspective on treatment resistance.
2. The voice of the expert by experience (Mr. Donnelley).
3. Evolving psychoanalytic theory and practice addressing these challenges.

## The Troubled Past of Treatment Resistance

The concept of treatment resistance finds early roots in psychoanalytic literature in various guises since Freud's early distinction between those adults who are considered analyzable versus those unanalyzable. Analyzability was loosely defined as "of good character", capable of following the fundamental rule of free association, and forming a workable transference—in short psychoneurotic patients. The so-called unanalyzable adults were those with character pathology and psychotic conditions for whom forming as-if transferences were considered impossible. This early effort to identify good candidates for psychoanalysis placed the burden on the patient to meet criteria for success and did not demand technical modification to meet their limitations. In the context of an emergent therapeutic field, this was a rational enough decision.

One can imagine a solipsistic historical turn in which psychoanalysts complacently adhered to the binary classification system of analyzable and unanalyzable—psychoanalysts could have taken pride in the high ratio of successful treatments, kept a more exclusive clientele<sup>1</sup>, and held rigidly to orthodoxy. And yet, early analysts (notably Sandor Ferenczi) expanded technique to meet the needs of his patients, thus introducing into the clinical discourse more complex and challenging patients, many of whom would be (in today's conceptualization) at considerable risk for treatment resistance.

Psychoanalysis and all of psychiatry's efforts to treat more severe cases of psychopathology led to the realization that there are limits to every psychotherapeutic intervention be that medication, neuro-stimulation, talk therapy, or community-based coordinated specialty care programs. And

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<sup>1</sup>Parenthetically, the business of most randomized control trials for medications and branded psychotherapies trials rely on the "ideal patient profile" to ensure a positive outcome for the trials (for a thorough critique of the limited generalizability to more complex individuals, see Westen, et al., 2004).

despite the limitations, (now reified in treatment resistance) psychoanalytic theory and practice expanded in scope and complexity thanks to the efforts of clinicians' persistence in treating individuals once considered inappropriate for the talking cure.

Consider the generations of analysts whose experimentation and willingness to expand the technical parameters of psychoanalysis to provide care to those previously considered unanalyzable. Arguably, Sandor Ferenczi and Michael Balint contributed more to the expansion of the analytic frame and technique in treating adults with severe character pathology and traumatic experiences, helping them through turbulent regressions, and opening the possibilities for growth and health. Ferenczi's recognition that reliving early trauma in an empathically-focused transference (forbearance, kindness, indulgence, transference interpretation, and proper use of countertransference) enables the individual to overcome trauma and experience a new beginning (Ferenczi, 1949). Michael Balint (1932) built upon the collaboration with Ferenczi to treat individuals with early trauma, arrested development, primitive self-other object representations, overwhelming anxiety, and vulnerability to regression under stress. Individuals with this archaic psychic structure required a technical shift away from primary reliance on defense interpretation, and rigid adherence to analytic neutrality to one of empathic attunement to the patient's affects, regressive shifts, and their need for a new object relationship born from the reparative transference relationship. European analysts such as R.D. Laing, Melanie Klein, Donald Winnicott, Harry Guntrip, as well as American *émigrés* including Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, Vamik Volkan, and Heinz Kohut are among those classically trained psychoanalysts whose theoretical and clinical contributions expanded on Ferenczi's ideas, brought greater coherence to an expanding theory of mental processes, and introduced hierarchical models of the mind to better understand and treat conditions including borderline, schizoid, and psychotic spectrum disorders.

Today psychopharmacologists, psychotherapists, families, and patients are acutely aware of the pain, frustration, and costs (economic, societal, and personal) of the treatment resistant psychiatric conditions (Zhdanova et al., 2021). The field and its patients are further plagued by the fact that treatment-resistant disorders represent a considerable proportion of all psychiatric outcomes-and this is especially true for

adults with complex, comorbid disorders (Fowler & Oldham, 2013). For example, studies report an association between comorbidity (especially anxiety, substance use, and personality disorders) and treatment-resistant depression (Fagiolini & Kupfer, 2003; Kornstein & Schnieder, 2001; Souery, et al., 2001). A large-scale meta-analysis of recovery from major depressive disorders revealed that the risk of poor outcome is doubled when patients have a comorbid personality disorder compared to those depressed subjects without a personality disorder (Newton-Howe, et al., 2006). Researchers who reanalyzed the Sequenced Treatment Alternatives to Relieve Depression study (STAR\*D: Wisniewski et al., 2009) found that despite similar medication dosing, patients *without* comorbidity tolerated medication better, had higher rates of treatment response (51.6% vs. 39.1%), and better rates of remission from depressive symptoms (34.4% vs. 24.7%) than patients with comorbidity. Of great concern is the fact that 78% of all STAR\*D participants had comorbid disorders or other traits, such as suicidal ideation, which are de-facto exclusion criteria for randomized control trials.

Most clinicians working in intensive outpatient, partial hospital programs, and residential treatment centers agree that their patients are more like the 78% with higher comorbidity and poorer outcomes (Fowler, et al., 2011). This impression is supported by the National Comorbidity Survey Replication (Kessler et al., 2003), which found that individuals with single psychiatric disorders represent a minority of patients seeking treatment.

Recent estimates across the field of psychiatry suggest treatment resistance affects 20–60% of patients with psychiatric disorders and is associated with a ten-fold increase in healthcare burden and costs compared to treatment responders (Howes et al., 2022).<sup>5</sup> The term treatment resistant and the confounding, often contradictory markers defining it (Demyttenaere, 2019) have led to greater confusion than clarity. The term “treatment resistance” is itself problematic: implicitly locating the resistance in the patient rather than considering the broader field of influences such as limits of current technologies, therapist/analyst skill, ephemeral qualities of “match” in the dyadic relationship, and the

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<sup>5</sup>For a contemporary view of state of psychopharmacologic treatment resistance see Howes (Howes, Thase, & Pillinger, 2022) and Mintz (Mintz, 2022).

degree to which both participants can engage flexibly to create the necessary conditions for growth and change. For the purposes of this paper, I offer an overly simplistic, pragmatic, patient-centered definition: the patient does not improve (experience reduction in symptoms, find solutions for conflicts, find life more manageable, experience improvement in daily functioning) after a reasonable duration and dose of treatment.

### Experts By Experience: The Patient's Voice

A former supervisor occasionally reminded me to ask, “How is the patient right?”. This dictum has proven invaluable ballast against the assumption that our difficult-to-treat patients are defensive, resistant, stubborn, and paranoid. It also serves salubrious functions of keeping curiosity and mentalizing alive in the analyst during stressful encounters, as well as learning from our patients experiences of our therapeutic presence in the real and transference relationship (Greenson, 1972). With this framework in mind, I read, with great interest, Mr. Donnelley's personal account of multiple therapies (psychodynamic outpatient and residential treatment across 13 years). While he covered a wide array of topics, I will limit my remarks to reported patterns of therapist interactions that Mr. Donnelley found most unhelpful:

1. Rigid adherence to psychoanalytic orthodoxy.
2. Complacency in waiting for change to occur in the face of great suffering.
3. Perceived misuse of Donald Winnicott's concept of “good enough mothering” a concept Mr. Donnelley coined the *Winnicottian Haze*.

Mr. Donnelley points to features of psychotherapist for whom (in his personal experience) led to breakdown in trust, faith, and hope in a psychotherapy. First is his term the *Ox therapist*—A diligent, yet rigidly dogmatic therapist that appears more attached to analytic neutrality and the fundamental rule than in relieving his patient's suffering. By contrast he recalls moments of genuine connection and interest in statements made by several therapists who related to him in a more playful, even off-color but deeply human manner. Mr. Donnelley expressed deepest appreciation for the therapist sharing ideas that seemed to jolt and jostle his perceptions, raise intriguing questions, and seemingly move him out of a position of certitude about the endless suffering with no hope or pleasure in sight.

Recounting his numerous examples the dogmatic devotion to orthodoxy struck this writer as an admixture of familiarity with hospital case conferences in which the therapist recounted sequences of dutiful analysis of defense, genetic, and transference interpretations in the ego-analytic tradition (Blanck & Blanck, 1994), as well as empathy for analysts who struggle to find a way to reach patients regressed to archaic modes of functioning who cannot make use of spoken language (Gedo, 1996), or are unable to take in socially mediated information due to epistemic hypervigilance (Fonagy and Allison, 2014; Fonagy et al., 2015).

The second broad therapist characteristic Mr. Donnelley points to as contributing to the patients experience a treatment resistance is the “*Winnicottian Haze*”, the adoption of complacency under the guise “good enough” analytic engagement in creating a holding environment. In Mr. Donnelley’s experience, “good enough” is a poor substitute for the analyst’s affectively-laden work toward reaching the patient. While not explicitly articulated, the clinical examples offered by Mr. Donnelley are suggestive of a need to create an amplified signal, or ostensive cues from the therapist to convey an affective connection to his inner experience thereby stirring curiosity about Mr. Donnelley’s fears and inhibitions. Psychoanalysts are trained to carefully manage expression of emotions, communicate exclusively in secondary process channels, and inhibit counter-transference reactions. For patients organized at the neurotic level, this approach is well-tolerated; however, for individuals organized at more primitive levels of organization (archaic modes) the lack of affectively charged, paralinguistic communication can lead to impasse (Gedo, 1996). The few exchanges Mr. Donnelley recalls as helpful and thought provoking were his therapists’ evocative, sometimes off-colored, spontaneous expressions (saturated with affect and ostensive cues).

## Contemporary Advances in Treating Adults Labeled as Treatment Resistant

Contemporary clinicians and psychoanalysts such as John Allen, John Gedo, Peter Fonagy, and Otto Kernberg continue pushing the bounds of our comprehension of what impedes progress in psychotherapy.

Greater comprehension of archaic psychic structures (Gedo & Goldberg, 1976) clarified why traditional psychoanalysis is of limited utility for those individuals with severe personality disorders, psychotic lacunae,

and regressions to archaic modes of functioning. Treating adults with severe character pathology and psychotic spectrum disorders (arguably the definition of failure to respond to treatment as usual) requires consistently monitoring the patient's mode of functioning and capacity for using customary modes of verbal communication (Gedo, 1996). A related challenge is the impairments in epistemic trust (most often born out of interpersonal and attachment trauma) that can render talk therapy (of any type) unhelpful. According to Fonagy (Fonagy & Campbell, 2014), restoring epistemic trust is particularly challenging when attachment trauma in early childhood creates the conditions for disorganized attachment style, making epistemic hypervigilance (basic distrust) far more prevalent than trust. Contributions from John Gedo and Peter Fonagy (and colleagues working at the interface of attachment theory and psychoanalysis) have made crucial strides in understanding and technical advances in reframing psychotherapeutic processes as a form of social learning.

Gedo's *Languages of Psychoanalysis* (1996) articulated the crucial role of paralinguistic communication (vocal tone, prosody, facial expressions, and body language) for adults who cannot access secondary process communication solely through words. Gedo's emphasis on understanding the patient's regressive shifts to archaic modes of functioning (within and across sessions) to determine the level and type of engagement. During periods of relative higher functioning, patients can benefit from secondary process interpretation; however, when in more archaic regressed states, paralinguistic approaches are able to reach the patients. Gedo provides clinical examples when he resorted to whistling and singing to reach the correct register of affective and semiotic capacity of his patients.

Peter Fonagy and John Allen approach the challenge of the unanalyzable adult from an attachment theory perspective of restoring epistemic trusts in patients whose trust (in self-knowledge and socially communicated knowledge from others) is severely damaged. Developmental attachment research underscores the role caregiver affective and communicative responsiveness affects the developing child's capacity to believe that information coming from another is trustworthy and personally relevant (Fonagy & Campbell, 2017). Caregivers capable of communicating affective attunement (verbal and paralinguistic), while communicating to

the child that their mind “is held in mind” instills an ongoing expectation that others are generally trustworthy. Accrual of mentalizing episodes with trustworthy sources builds a repertoire to discern under what circumstances socially transmitted information (and thus learning) is trustworthy or untrustworthy (Allen, 2021). By contrast, a caregiver’s chronic mis-attunement and mentalizing failures foster insecure attachment (Allen, 2011), creating chronic states of distrust in others, leading to epistemic hypervigilance (Fisher et al., 2023; Fonagy et al., 2004). A stance of epistemic hypervigilance is believed to thwart social learning characteristic of various forms of psychopathology, such as borderline personality disorder (Fonagy & Allison, 2014).

Therapists working with adults with insecure attachment styles are aware of feelings that they cannot “reach” their patients as they experience the patient’s conflict between desperately wanting help and the inability to trust the therapist’s intentionality in striving to help them. Further compounding this blocked receptivity to new socially mediated knowledge is their distrust of their mind (Allen, 2022). Thus, patients suffering from epistemic hypervigilance become stuck in self-perpetuating cycles of distrust in others and negative self-perception, creating a seemingly impregnable barrier to intervention (Fowler, et al., 2025). This, in my view, is the primary patient-derived driver of treatment resistance in talk therapies.

Faced with distrust and archaic modes of functioning, therapists must offer a range of paralinguistic interventions that communicate effortful mentalizing of the patient while providing an empathic attunement through ostensive cues and marked-contingent mirroring (Bateman & Fonagy, 2016). Within patient-therapist dyads, ostensive cues such as open, expressive facial features and intentional eye contact, rich vocal tone with varied prosody, and paralinguistic communication can playfully “teach” the patient about their mental states (Fonagy et al., 2002; Fonagy & Allison, 2014).

Throughout the treatment course with adults prone to archaic modes of functioning and who suffer from epistemic hypervigilance, therapists must amplify affective signals through paralinguistic channels to capture the patient’s attention and signal the therapist’s interest in the patient’s

internal state while challenging epistemic hypervigilance—when such sequences are successful, the patient’s mind may be more open to new information (Fonagy & Allison, 2014).

When the patient experiences the therapist as a credible source of information about their mind, a shift to greater trust (in the therapist as well as their mind) can begin to take hold. This accretion of experiences can then open the way to broader social learning from the world outside the consulting office. In Fonagy’s view, this is where the deeper and lasting therapeutic change takes place when the re-emergence of social learning generalizes not only to other credible sources, but also to trust in one’s mind and emotions (Fonagy & Allison, 2014). When patients shift to this mode of functioning, they have access to what Fonagy calls the *epistemic superhighway*, opening the way for enriching social learning. Perhaps most importantly, the emergent trust in their mind allows them to relate to their mind as an ally rather than a feared enemy. In my work with adults suffering from epistemic hypervigilance (the sine qua non of treatment resistance), I introduce possibility that through psychotherapy they will develop a fuller and deeper awareness of how their mind works such that they can discern when to trust their mind and when to question their perceptions and reactions (Allen, 2021).

The contemporary technical and theoretical innovations outlined above increase the likelihood of a treatment response; however, the historical and contemporary record of psychoanalysis and all forms of psychotherapy attest to the fact not all adults will benefit from treatment. Like other fields of medicine, our understanding technical capacities to treat individuals with serious mental illness has improved over the decades, and yet we must face the fact that not all patients will thrive despite our best efforts. Paradoxically, the presence of treatment resistance may be the single greatest driver of innovation in medicine and therefore is cause for hope.

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## Response to Dr. Fowler

Marshall Donnelley

**F**irst, I want to thank Dr. Fowler for giving such a careful reading of my book. That's very flattering. I found his comments interesting and illuminating.

I'm especially gratified that he's engaging so well with the problems of the Treatment Resistant patient such as myself. He seems very well read in the literature, which I am not.

However, I disagree with the way forward. As I read it, Dr. Fowler thinks the therapist, in addition to the regular talk, should communicate non-verbally, through sounds, facial expressions, and gestures, attuned to the patient's hypervigilance and sensitivity.

While this may be fruitful and powerful, I believe that even the most well-attuned gestures of compassion and empathy are secondary to direct therapeutic engagement. Rather than a new way forward, I think therapy needs to rediscover its old lessons that have been somewhat forgotten.

Speaking from my own experience, working with Dr. Kayatekin was a successful therapy. Yet even he made a basic therapeutic error, which I discuss in my book. Despite the extraordinary amount of anger, I threw at him, over many sessions, I do not ever recall him asking me about that anger. This was such a surprising omission that a friend of mine—a layman like me who read my book—was very surprised.

In addition, Dr. T who I worked with for 5 years after Dr. Kayatekin, never asked me about the manifest signs of anxiety I displayed in therapy, such as asking every 5 minutes how much time was left in the session.

These are striking omissions: the basic tenet of talk therapy is analyzing the emotions in the session itself. If that is missing, the well-attuned and sympathetic noises and other expressions of compassion, miss the basic raw material of therapeutic engagement and exploration.

In my case, non-verbal noises and gestures, no matter how well-attuned, probably would have irritated me, in my hypervigilance and relentless defensiveness.

In therapy, I was dealing with the annihilation anxiety that the therapy *itself*, the therapeutic session *itself*, brought up in me. I was hypervigilant because of my terror and also confused by my terror. I was triggered by the act of therapy itself.

What I needed was a partner—a knowledgeable partner—to explore that terror.

What Dr. Kayatekin should have done is simply ask, “why are you angry? Is it all right if we discuss that anger?” Turning my profound anxiety to a joint intellectual exploration might have appealed to me, as well as given me a sense of agency.

And later on, he might have added, “I know you’re angry, and it feels unpleasant, but, as dead as you feel inside, this anger here, in this session, is a source of energy, and even life. If we explore it together, with our minds, it could lead somewhere important.”

For a long time, I felt profoundly afraid in therapy, and isolated from Dr. Kayatekin, as he felt alienated from me, by my profound anger and verbal attacks. It is a little shocking that it remained unexamined by both of us.

For the therapist, this sort of engagement is not necessarily easy. Dealing with a powerfully resistant and emotionally aggressive patient such as I was, is exceptionally difficult and confusing, even for an experienced therapist with a strong sense of himself.

As another example of therapeutic failure, Harry Guntrip, already a successful therapist in his own right, started therapy—as a patient—with Fairbairn, when Guntrip was 48: “Whereas Guntrip could see the ‘good Dr. Fairbairn’ as the ally he needed, Guntrip was to discover that he himself lacked the basic ego-strength to enter a therapeutic alliance at the level which Fairbairn assumed he could. He felt he could not reach Fairbairn, since he lacked any solid basis in experience for a belief that such an outreach was open to him” (Hazell, J.).

One mistake therapist often make with treatment resistant patients is assuming that every patient knows, innately, how to enter the therapeutic alliance.

Moreover, therapists these days have lost the ear to read the signals that their patients’ resistance sends out, those subversive attempts at communication. The hypervigilance that Dr. Fowler talks about means that powerful lines of communication are available, if the therapist has the ability to read them and work with them. Rather than sympathetic attunement, what’s needed is engagement, which then ideally leads to a powerful teamwork and exploration.

The situation today for the treatment resistant patient is more acute than ever. Going on [psychologytoday.com](http://psychologytoday.com), one finds, in New York City, pages of PhDs, PsyDs, and social workers who are hardworking, dedicated, and ethical, but who universally assume that therapy patients have the identity and ego-strength to enter a therapeutic alliance.

Rather than the non-verbal gestures that Dr. Fowler suggests, I would try a more direct approach, but mixed with caution and empathy: “Can you tell me why you’re so angry? Or maybe, if it’s okay, we can try to figure it out together. But there’s no hurry.”

Therapists today need to remember how to be therapists, so that the treatment resistant patients among us can learn how to be patients.

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## Reference

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## Conversation with Marshall Donnelley

M. Sagman Kayatekin

*I believe what is helpful is not necessarily about getting new insights. Ideally it is especially in the context of talking with other people and working with other people, other patients other staff members. But it's more about being in the same environment.*

–Marshall Donnelley

**M**SK: I truly appreciate your giving me this opportunity to have a conversation Marshall. I see your book as a unique contribution to the field of psychoanalytic treatments. Not just because of our personal history and my affection to you, but also as an objective reader. As much as I can be, of course.

I read your book a few times. It has a memoir element and has an essay component where you write about psychoanalytic work. You've clearly given a lot of thought to psychoanalytic treatment. I have some comments and questions that I would like to talk about. And you are free to do the same, so it is an open dialogue on both ends.

Let me start with my side of it.

You have a very unique coinage of certain things such as “ox-therapist”, “fetish” and so forth. Key words, phrases, concepts that are very Marshall-esque. Then, there are still unique but familiar terms that I can easily understand their meaning. When you use the term “treatment resistance” for example, it's self-explanatory for me because I was a part of that language ecology.

Then you make some comments that I also have immediate associations too, like “Winnicottian haze”. It has been my contention that Winnicott was prominent and dominating when you and I were working together. Having said that, it is a theoretical attribution. Thus, my immediate question was “how did he understand that?” That is something I am very curious to hear about, I don't have a sense you read too much, right?

**MD:** No, not at all. Some basic papers here and there maybe.

**MSK:** Another thought is you take psychoanalytic, psychotherapeutic work seriously and I was not aware that you had given so much thought to it, on this level. So that came as a pleasant surprise. You also seem to have a solid grasp of the basics of how therapists work, how therapy works, and many similar questions. That's a pretty significant accomplishment. You, in certain ways sound like a good student with a critical mind.

But that makes it more intriguing. I say "okay Marshall has really learned from his experience in the patient role in the therapeutic community" so you've kind of learned the theory from experience. And I thought "he's taking this on almost as a scholar." Well, one can say you're a Marshall type scholar. I mean there's something that carries your imprint, as an example there is a lot of humor in your narrative. You point to how I once said that "Marshall you don't know s\*\*\* about Freud," when you were making some comments on his work, I guess. That's fine, that's your style.

There is a final question that I have. This book was published 3 years ago. How have your thoughts changed since the publication. So those are some comments and questions that I can begin with.

**MD:** Well so that's two basic questions that I heard you ask, I mean in terms of me taking it seriously, certainly. Because these are issues that I've wrestled with and we, you and I, have wrestled with, and I continue to wrestle with for long. I tend to think about things a lot especially if I know they're something that I've personally struggled with. But in a way it's not theoretical. I haven't read very much. As I said, the most I've ever read was an essay by Freud or Winnicott or Klein or any of those people. I've also read Wikipedia articles on them.

I mean a part of it is just I'm a very intellectual person and I think about things, but the other part of it is that I don't think me being intellectual about this is that unusual. Especially in the context of Austen Riggs. You may recall, we had talked about how smart the patients at Riggs were. In one of our conversations, you said that you had a lot of respect for your colleagues, but you thought the patient community was smarter than your colleagues in general.

**MSK:** Yes I do remember that and still believe in that.

**MD:** After you acknowledged that, I repeated that quote to whenever I could at Riggs. I did it as a way of being a little pompous and when I wanted to put a staff member in their place. But also, just the patient community, there was a highly self-selected group of very bright people. I'm highly intellectually intelligent but in the context of Riggs, soaking in that environment, all members, which includes you, yourself and the staff, are very intellectually inclined and think about things.

From what I can tell though, you're one of the broadest-read analyst therapists I have met. You and I worked together four times a week for three and a half years, and our sessions were very conversational sometimes. I think that's partly your nature and partly you were adapting to my nature. There was a lot of intellectual back and forth between you and me.

**MSK:** Uhm uhm...

**MD:** After you, I worked with Dr. T for five or five and a half years. He's a very smart guy but he's not as interested in intellectual aspects of psychoanalytic work as you were. I have, maybe we both have a lot of affection and respect for Dr. T but he's quite different in that regards.

My self-exploration and my intellectual bent are very much similar to the other patients I was at Riggs with. Being in that environment, having you as a therapist, and being around other patients who are sort of figuring this stuff out on their own made it more intense. The sort of patients that come to Riggs may not be smart in other ways but they're very intellectually smart. They're very self-analytical and very self-aware. Sometimes they know more about their issues from a psychodynamic standpoint than their therapists, before they ever get to the hospital. Before they walk in the door.

Many patients were very interested in psychology. They don't read a lot of the essays but they're thinking about this stuff all the time and learned many new things mostly through osmosis and through thinking about the life and the work there. And the patients also tend towards the narcissistic side. Riggs encourages you to be narcissistic in a healthy and sometimes unhealthy ways. So, they become self-assured and outspoken.

So, I mean I think I'm unusual in some sense, but at Riggs, I was more the rule rather than the exception. The other thing I would say is that in general these days, the patient, the layperson is more educated than they used to be years ago because of the internet.

I guess that was the first part What was the second question you said?

**MSK:** Hold on, let me just ask a few questions and let me give you some of my thoughts about this. What you say is new to me. If you allow me, let me be simplistic. "You already have the insight" when you become a patient at Riggs. Is that right?

**MD:** Yes, most of us when we come to the hospital. Maybe I was more so because I'm much more intellectual in certain ways and not in other ways.

**MSK:** Then if I take your thought a step further there's a disconnect. That knowledge was not "organic" as you use the term in the book.

**MD:** I'm sorry, I don't follow you. When you say organic you mean intellectually?

**MSK:** The way I understood the way you use organic is, "it doesn't translate to change."

**MD:** Oh in terms of changing, trying to make progress. Yeah, sure. Well, that's one of the things you learn at Riggs. But just to make the point, to provide a context, I will reiterate. I'm a very smart person. I'm very intellectual I have an unusual level of insight, but amongst Riggs patients there was never a time that I thought I was the smartest patient. That never happened. There are patients with genius-level IQs, higher than me. I think highly of my intelligence but even as ego-driven as I am and narcissistic as I am, I was definitely humbled.

I think one of the key themes about being a patient at Riggs is that you can already know what's wrong with you. You can already know your issues in a psychodynamic sense, but it hasn't helped. That is one of the key tragedies of being a Riggs patient.

One of the stories I tell in the book is, there was this patient named N. Big, nice guy, and he didn't talk much in meetings. One day Q, the program

manager asked him, “N, why don’t you tell a little bit about yourself?” And he talked about himself for 5 minutes and I was sitting there listening to all of these. In a very concise, everyday language, telling all of us what his life was and what his issues were, and it was just 5 minutes.

At the end his little speech I said, “N, do you realize you had amazing insights in that speech, any one of which would have been able to help out an ordinary person with your problems.” You take an ordinary person with N’s problems and give him one of those amazing insights and they’d be able to do a lot with it. And I said, “you had amazing insights and you’re still a Riggs patient struggling.”

He said, “yeah I know. Not only do I know I have these amazing insights, but I also know they haven’t done me any good or much good.”

So yes, organic. My having all these insights and yet not leading to any sort of organic change, the change in the emotional reactions, the psychological system, being a whole person, integrating, it hasn’t helped. That was very much the condition of a lot of different patients at Riggs. I mean it is a small place there’s only about 60 patients at the time, so we know each other. This is a thing that a lot of us were struggling with. A very typical profile for a Riggs patient. I don’t know if that answers your question

**MSK:** I think it does. And it also makes me think further. So, you wrote about some thoughts about me. Initially I say “please explain yourself” many times, on different issues, in different sessions. That again is a simplification but allow me to simplify it. And you get enraged and you say, “I’m just repeating myself.” Then this is the next thought of mine. Since you have the insight, my exploration doesn’t give you anything. Or maybe your reaction was then “is he trying to give me insight? I already have it. Why is he asking these questions, what’s he trying to do?”. Is that the dilemma?

**MD:** No, my struggle within my work with you is something entirely different. Therapy is extraordinarily unsettling, it’s terrifying for me. I can’t speak to your experience as my therapist, but for me it was a combination of having very high intellect but also very primitive emotional reactions. Intellectual and also extremely hypersensitive. Observing anything you were doing in the session, every word, silence, glance was

judged, everything and anything. Combine that with the emotional reactions of a scared and pre-verbal one-year-old. That combination is really volatile. I imagine you remember me yelling at you at the top of my lungs. Every less than perfect interpretation you made, any misunderstanding, is met with this very raw emotion from me, combined with this really top-of-the-line intellect. So, it's very volatile. You were being attacked, being judged, all of this anger and I imagine that can be kind of overwhelming for anyone. For you working with me because you're trying to help you're being empathic and yet you're getting attacked.

So yeah, I don't know..

I don't know if you'll take this as a compliment but in our work together I certainly reacted way more strongly emotionally to you than I did to any other therapist I've had. I've had a lot of therapists in my day, and a lot of them had experienced hostility. But the volcanic emotions I had with you were on a different level. I mean you remember Dr. B; he was in a neighboring office. The noise machines were on. And I think you told me that Dr. B was coming to you afterwards and saying, "is everything all right?" I don't know if he was afraid for your safety, but he was worried.

**MSK:** Yeah I do remember. That anger of yours was quite impressive, to say the least. Well, to be honest, in time it gets "impressive". At the moment of its happening, that is a different story. But again, one thing you're saying is high intellect and emotions can get explosive but also you're vigilant.

**MD:** Hypervigilant.

**MSK:** A scared person?

**MD:** Yeah, scared infant.

**MSK:** Almost terror, I mean fear is on the level of a terror. Something terrible is going to happen.

**MD:** Yeah, I mean you have my emotional reactions which are very one-year-old, two-year-old, pre-verbal emotional reactions combined with a high intellect. And combined with the hypervigilance. A scared infant with the observational power of an adult it's sort of this monstrous

joining of the primitive toddler with this high IQ hyper-socially aware hypervigilance. It's that's sort of a monstrous combination I imagine for the for the therapist. I don't know if you experienced me as a monstrous but.

**MSK:** Monster wouldn't be the proper word I experienced you as. Well, you left an indelible impact, let me put it that way. But it's also a fondness about you and how we survived.

**MD:** I mean God knows how you survived.

**MSK:** This now reminds me, the memory is somewhat hazy on this, but you had this image of there was this guy in the "Family Guy" or some cartoon series. This little boy with the big head. I think you likened yourself to that character right?

**MD:** I think we both did, we discussed. The baby's name is Stewie the baby in Family Guy and we both talked about Family Guy. We talked about Stewie and you said you are Stewie the baby with the big head. So that was that. Yeah, Stewie, we talked about him and we talked about how I connected with him.

**MSK:** I do remember. And I also remember, this was a funny part of it, those noise machines are for the conversations in my office. I thought well my noise cancellers hopefully they're working for other offices.

What I remember is, it didn't feel malignant. There's a difference in malignant anger. I never felt you as malignantly angry. You were saying your anger was always secondary to hurt, and I said, "that is not true, you do get very angry due to hurt, but also you have a trait of what I call ordinary, primary sadism." I clearly remember your grin and thought that was an appropriate comment on my part. I also remember saying "Just turn the volume of your yelling down so we can think about what's happening". And you abided with that.

But the second question is. Where are you now? It's some years now since you wrote this book, and this is why I'm asking. By the way, when I said to some people we both know, "Marshall wrote a book" some say, "yes I know", and some say "oh Marshall? He is quite a name in Riggs circles. He's a paragon."

**MD:** That's pleasingly surprising. I didn't think anybody was a paragon at Riggs. Although, I do go very regularly to alumni reunions.

**MSK:** Oh yeah, you are quite recognized by my colleagues, especially after your leaving, in the ways in which you are involved with alumni group meetings. To me it comes across as you are very serious about that too. It's not just you visit a home base or whatever you want to call but you also say "hey guys how are you doing. How are you being treated. And how is the hospital doing" you know.

**MD:** I mean, well with Riggs I am definitely involved and we are a very small percentage. It's actually one of the big institutional weaknesses. It appears like it isn't really that important to Riggs to maintain contact with alumni. It's not to be demeaning but the board of directors absolutely fails at this. They seem they're in their own world. I am hopeful that the people in the new development office I've worked with will do some good work and rectify this.

And to be fair Riggs patients are very difficult as well, they are not easy to be in contact with just because most of them don't want to. And some are uncomfortable with their history. I think most of the patients are very grateful for Riggs for their time there and feel very powerfully about Riggs, and yet at the same time, a lot of them don't really want to be in contact with Riggs that much anymore.

I'm very involved with Riggs and a friend of mine by the name of S is also very involved. So, it's me and S together. We go back every 6 months or so and we meet with many senior staff. Both S and I are very unusual, and S is especially unusual in that he's a very proactive. S set up the alumni Zoom calls that happen between patient alumni. That was his idea and his project, So I guess S and I are both paragons. Thus, it's not surprising to me in that sense that people talk about me and people talk about S.

I will say I'm very happy for you that you stay in touch with your colleagues, but I don't think any of your colleagues has actually read my book because Amazon tells me whenever there's a new order. So, I think it's not read by staff. I really appreciate you reading it and caring about it and my second therapist Dr. T as well. And S read it, and my parents but I think that's pretty much the readership total at this point.

**MSK:** Well let me tell you something, we're in the same boat. My book that makes some reference to Riggs didn't evoke a response, even amongst my colleagues there. I made some money overall, but where? In China. I made couple of hundred bucks.

**MD:** Oh, they read your book in China; that's interesting.

**MSK:** Because in China I train people so they translated the book to Chinese. So don't worry about that, we will be famous a hundred years from now. (we laugh)

Anyways, going back to your book. This is a good book, and some people will recognize it and that's all that matters. It is an authentic, unique book. For example, the way you describe "The daily experience of treatment-resistant depression" that's such a classic piece. The fetishes, and so forth. I haven't seen this level of intense personal descriptions other than maybe the once famous "I Never Promised you a Rose Garden", and some psychoanalysts writing about their personal treatments as patients (Green, H 1964).

**MD:** Oh thank you I appreciate that. That's very nice of you to say

**MSK:** Well if you deserve it I'll say it, in either direction. This is very good. During my final preparations, as I was reviewing it, I said many times, "whoa look at this". You have generously given a lot of yourself. Besides, you took this very seriously. This is a personal and serious book.

**MD:** I appreciate you saying that. I appreciate your appreciation because the book can read as very academic. And I actually did have one other person that read it. This therapist I was working with in New York read it and didn't get anything out of it because there's nothing super personal in there. And so, I appreciate your connection with it because I think a lot of people it would just say "well this is very academic and sort of dry."

I really enjoyed writing the book and reading the book and I'm very happy I wrote it. It's not super important to me going forward so that's nice too. I mean I really appreciate your interest in having a section in the journal on it, but it's not something that I necessarily need to be remembered about. For me it's just great having my book, because they're my thoughts and it was great having done it and it was great to know I did

this thing. And also writing it was a lot of fun. I'd be on the golf course with my parents and thinking about the book and that's a fun process to have gone through.

**MSK:** How long did it take for you to pull this out?

**MD:** About a year I think, 18 months maybe. I thought about it and was writing it and then rewriting it. I rewrote it several times and edited it, but it was a genuinely enjoyable experience. I mean I haven't had too many experiences that are similar. Where you focus and everything eventually comes together. It was it was really fun. I hope your books have been that for you.

**MSK:** Oh yeah absolutely.

**MD:** Yeah.

**MSK:** You learn so much, you say "oh this is how I think about it."

**MD:** And at the very end the best thing is, you say "I wrote that."

**MSK:** Yes, exactly. By the way, as a side note, allow me to brag now, I can say "I'm one of the very few psychoanalysts who is mentioned in literature by his patient. If you're interested there's this book, go ahead and look at it."

**MD:** I've had a lot of therapy. But you and Jim Perkins were the two best therapists. My impression because I don't know for sure, I mean obviously you care a lot but your level of you're very learned, you're well-read and you've read a lot and thought a lot. That's getting increasingly unusual but Dr. Jim Perkins in LA was a very smart guy. You're both very smart guys.

**MSK:** Hmm.

**MD:** I think at Riggs a lot of the clinicians aren't that well-read psychodynamically. I'm just going to be very frank here, but I think you and Dr. Z, it again is my impression, can't say for sure, are very erudite well-read just in terms of being book nerds about this stuff. You and I worked, and we had many intellectual conversations on the side. So, I know that personally.

With Dr. Z I know through his work with a very good friend of mine. I have a lot of affection for her, but she is also a deep narcissist, and a very difficult patient to work with. What she told me about their work together he showed a very high level of sophistication with her. So, I mean the level of erudition you and Dr. Z have is kind of unusual and then there are a number of other clinicians who were very good but were not what I call “book nerds” people interested in high level intellectual conversations, a level of erudition.

**MSK:** Oh, that’s how you formed an opinion on Dr. Z.

**MD:** Dr. T had a very different style. I am deeply attached to him, even today I occasionally call him when I need to. But you and he were different.

**MSK:** Dr. T, he is obviously a different person, so he has his own style. But he was also trained in a very different era. And that no doubt has an impact on how we all are formed as therapists. He was clinically embedded in the culture of a prominent psychoanalyst of his times. You wouldn’t know him, Otto Will. Will shifted the patient population and philosophy of Riggs significantly. They were working with people who had severe mental illness. He was from that background, people who we say are suffering from psychotic illnesses. Who experience hallucinations, delusions as they are called. I trained at a transitional time when we were shifting from psychotic disorders mostly to personality disorders. Dr. Schwartz to Dr. Shapiro transition.

**MD:** I remember you mentioning the name of Otto Will.

**MSK:** Yeah, Otto Will was a virtuoso of human interaction, very creative in dialogues with such persons. He was the psychotherapy director of Chestnut Lodge that was internationally renowned place of psychotherapy for patients with such illnesses, a famous clinic in Maryland. And then became the director of Riggs. Dr. T was trained under him so when you listen to Dr. T you can say oh this sounds like the era of Otto Will, from what I read of Otto Will; articles, anecdotes, and knowing from some other people coming from Chestnut Lodge. It was a school, and they treated serious, psychotic level pathology. And had a unique way of relating to patients.

So, in my opinion Dr. T could talk very efficiently, poetically and effectively with people. His English is extraordinarily sophisticated, and his style is deeply humane. But not just his language capacities, more so his extraordinary capacity to engage such patients in an extended therapeutic dialogue. He supervised me for years when I was a fellow in early 90's. I am fond of him; he has shaped me in significant ways.

**MD:** That's great, I mean, it's interesting hearing your take on Dr. T.

**MSK:** Yeah I know about the era he trained. If someone says to me you're as good as Dr. T, I'd be flattered.

But let me go back to my question. You have this side which is almost an ambassador to patients for the lack of better English. I mean, it's as if you're representing not just yourself, but you have a close and keen eye on what's happening. Not just at Riggs, but with your cohort and psychotherapy in general. And that looks like a sense of social responsibility or whatever you want to call it. You write a book that can be quite impactful, for example.

**MD:** I agree with that to an extent, but that observation surprises me. I am probably of the most involved patient alumni they have to a decent degree. It really surprises me because I still think about Riggs, I'm in touch with a lot of Riggs patients and a lot of Riggs patients are in touch with each other. They have their own group that they keep in touch with, but I've kept in touch with a lot of people.

At the last reunion there was something about our cohort at Riggs. The suicide rate had spiked, and I remember us talking about it at Riggs you said yeah the suicide rate has really jumped. It was a very unusual period. It started just before I got there and lasted probably around a year or two after I left. But it wasn't just the time in the hospital. That particular group of patients from that era are still killing themselves. That is what I am hearing through my connections. There were a few suicides recently, we're still losing people from that time.

And at Riggs, that era seems has ended because when I saw staff when I was back at Riggs last year, some said we haven't had a suicide in years, and they looked quite relieved of that burden. A few senior doctors said we haven't lost a patient in years, but one said I'm still traumatized by

that time. That doctor made a poignant remark, “every time I hear a siren go by Riggs my heart sinks. I think to myself I hope that’s not coming to Riggs.”

So, it was really a very unusual time, and our cohort perhaps was an unusual group of people. I don’t know what to make of it and there isn’t much curiosity about it at Riggs. Some very senior people dismissed it as a statistical anomaly. And I mean the point I made at the reunion this year was, I said “we’re still losing people and no one’s looking at this.” And the other patients from my cohort there, some said “thank you for saying something.” So, I’m not sure what it was about that particular group of patients.

**MSK:** I agree with you. It’s disconcerting whenever that happens. It evokes all sorts of responses, and the most difficult question to ask is “am I responsible for a part of this?” It is personally difficult and organizationally difficult. But again, going back to you. How do you live with that degree of vigilance about patients?

**MD:** Sorry?

**MSK:** How do you manage that? Your vigilance now is shifted to a different group. Not just the therapists but also more along the lines of social vigilance. “What’s happening to my group – the patients at Riggs?”

**MD:** Well that’s nice of you to say. I mean I’m just speaking very personally though it’s not something that’s much of a burden for me. I am emotionally shut down in a lot of ways and so it’s not a suffering. Even when I was at Riggs the suicides didn’t have as much of an impact on me as they did on other patients. This is a way in which it does act as sort of a shield. Some of my fellow patients recognized and talked about this side of me. It was very hard on a lot of patients because you had people struggling with all these difficult issues and then every so often, there’d be a special community meeting. Then you would know that someone attempted suicide and maybe had succeeded. For me the attempted or completed suicides didn’t really affect me deeply.

There was only one suicide that hit me really hard and that was after I had left Riggs.

A former patient from my times that I was very good friends with killed herself and that was very difficult. For the most part there are advantages to being emotionally shut down.

**MSK:** The patient you mentioned in the book?

**MD:** No, someone else. I mean I'm pausing just because I'm getting a little overwhelmed thinking about that patient. "J", I was in touch with her. We were texting the Sunday before she killed herself and I asked her if she was safe and she said yes and then she killed herself.

I called Dr. T and he talked me through it. But I said to him everybody lies. Just as I lied to you Dr. Kayatekin, when I was planning to kill myself. And I said she was already planning. I know that because that's just the way it happens. She already had a plan in mind and knew she was going to kill herself.

So, we were in contact and that hit me hard for a few reasons. One because I was very close to her and two because she told me she was safe and she'd just come to visit me recently and she said I'm going to have to go back to Riggs and do all that s\*\*\* again. That's when I asked about her safety.

A few days later I got a text from another Riggs patient asking whether I heard what happened to J. That struck me like lightning. The other suicides didn't really have that much of an impact on me but that was the only one that really hit hard. Still does.

**MSK:** You talk about the shield, about being shut down. Surgeons need that while they are operating and soldiers need it. Even after combat. So sometimes those shields are very helpful. Also, now we know that the universal, automatic usage of "debriefing" is debunked. Simply because the debriefing proved to be much more traumatic sometimes. I guess what I am trying to say is that "shield, cut-off ness" needs to be taken seriously as a protective layer. As you suggest in the book and I agree with, it is not a problem that needs to be eradicated. Sometimes it works for you, and you need it. Sometimes it is in your way, and you don't need it. It is a matter of when to use it and how strong it needs to be. But going back to the idea, do you think you're kind of a representative for some cause?

**MD:** Nope. I don't think so. But I enjoy the Riggs meetings. I keep in touch with Riggs patients. I feel a real kinship especially with patients that were there during the time I was there. All these hyper-intellectual people who can't solve their own problems and are sort of narcissistic and self-involved. We understand each other's issues. I guess it's similar to an alcoholic talking to another alcoholic, in a way.

But I don't think I'm a representative of anything. I think I'm part of a group of people who sort of went through the same thing together and have a lot in common. By the way, I have an impression that it's different for Riggs patients nowadays because of what I experienced being back at this last reunion. Last August I was with A and L, two alumni from my time, at a reunion meeting for all the alumni. The more recent alumni were saying things like "oh yeah I left Riggs and things are great and I'm still in touch with the nurses and I got married at the chapel right across the street and everything's great."

After the meeting, the three of us were talking about that, and we said, "what the hell is wrong with these people?" And L said that one of the patients was asking questions that more or less sounded "should I go to Riggs or should I go to college?". And I said, "if you have to ask that question you're not really a Riggs patient". Well, it is a little unfair, because some of the current patients were struggling with having to leave Riggs too soon. But the three of us were talking with each other during lunch and saying "Well what the hell is up with these people? They don't have real problems?"

**MSK:** I think I'm getting an answer. You're not going to Riggs with your mind preoccupied with the idea of how can I help these guys?

**MD:** No.

**MSK:** Okay fair enough. Good. That's good for you.

**MD:** I mean only in as much as I care about the people I know pretty much, that's it.

**MSK:** Okay, it's similar to your going back to Alma Mater just see how people are doing. A home coming, a reunion as they say.

**MD:** Yeah, exactly.

## References

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## Contributors

**Marshall Donnelley** is 56. He was a patient at Austen Riggs for 8 years from 2007–2015. He has an MBA, and lives in Manhattan and enjoys playing tennis. His main interest is Economics.



**Gary Jay Fleishman** is a professional counselor, psychoanalytic candidate, relationship coach, and founder of Solutions That Really Work™. With more than thirty years of experience in education, counseling, and personal development, his work integrates psychoanalytic thinking, trauma-informed practice, and practical strategies for emotional growth. His clinical and professional interests include early relational experience, adult relationship patterns, self-integration, and the unconscious ways individuals may work against their own desired outcomes.



**J. Christopher Fowler** completed a PhD in Clinical Psychology from the University of Tennessee. After an internship year at Harvard’s Cambridge Hospital, and a four-year post-doctoral fellowship in clinical psychology at the Austen Riggs Center, he advanced to clinical leadership positions serving as Director of Clinical Research, Clinical Team Leader, and Interim Director of Patient Care.



In 2011, he and his family moved to Houston where he served as Associate Director of Research and Director of Psychology at the Menninger Clinic. In 2018, he joined Houston Methodist Behavioral Health as Director of Professional Wellness. Dr. Fowler holds academic appointments as Professor of Psychology at Houston Methodist Academic Institute, Weill Cornell Medical College. He has over 140 publications in the areas of personality disorders, suicide, neuroimaging, and treatment outcome,

and is an internationally recognized personality researcher. He is the past editor of *The Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic*, and currently serves on several editorial boards including *Journal of Psychiatric Practice* and *Psychotherapy*.

In January 2024 he advanced to Executive Clinical Director of the Monarch Community, leading an interdisciplinary team of Houston Methodist clinicians in a fully open residential treatment program for adults with serious mental illness.

**John R. Muñiz González** is a senior candidate at the Harlem Family Institute in New York City and is certified as a Therapeutic Marriage & Family Counselor III by the International Reciprocity Board of Therapeutic Counselors (IRBO) in San Juan, Puerto Rico. He has served his community for over 30 years as a pastor, military chaplain, and community health care chaplain at a major New Jersey state hospital, where he is currently the training Diplomat/Supervisor for the Clinical Pastoral Education Training Program (CPE/T). He is presently completing a ThD degree in Clinical Pastoral Psychotherapy. He holds advanced degrees in business, public administration, divinity, and Doctor of Ministry.



**Lee Jenkins** is a retired professor of English at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY, a poet, novelist, and psychoanalyst practicing in Manhattan. He has a Ph.D. in English and Comparative Literature from Columbia University. He received his psychoanalytic training from the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis (NPAP). He has served as instructor, supervisor, and training analyst at Blanton-Peale Institute, The Harlem Family Institute, and NPAP. He is the author of *Faulkner and Black-White Relations: A Psychoanalytic Approach* (1981); “African American Identity and Its Social Context” in *Multicultural Perspectives on Race, Ethnicity, and Identity*, eds. E. Salett and D. Koslow (NASW Press, 2015); two books of poetry, *Persistence of Memory* (1996) and *Consolation* (2021); Recent articles are “Black and Blue,” in *ROOM: A Sketchbook for Analytic Action* (Oct. 2021); a review of *Jew Hating: The Black Milk of*



*Civilization*, edited by Merle Molosky, *The Psychoanalytic Review*, Vol. 110, No. 4; and “Meditations on Psychoanalysis, Race, and the Divided Self,” *The Psychoanalytic Review*, Vol. 109, No. 1.

**M. Sagman Kayatekin, MD**, graduated from Hacettepe University Medical Faculty and completed residency trainings in adult psychiatry at Hacettepe and Medical College of Wisconsin. He had a four-year fellowship at the Austen Riggs Center and graduated from Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute as an adult psychoanalyst.



He was faculty at Hacettepe, UMass, and Baylor College of Medicine, Tongji Medical College (China). He is currently faculty and former President of the Board at Center for Psychoanalytic Studies. Adjunct Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, UT Health Houston, McGovern Medical School.

In the last 40 years, he maintained a dual interest in clinical care and teaching while directing various clinical organizations. He taught, published and presented in a wide range of national and international forums. His most recent role was as the Medical Director of Professionals Program at the Menninger Clinic. All through these years he also had a small private practice on the side. Since 2022, he mainly works in his private practice and is involved in clinical work, teaching, lecturing, writing and supervision. Some of his current areas of interest are pedagogy of psychoanalytic training, ego capacities of the mind, the central role of language in understanding the mind, and the controversial/creative subjects in psychoanalytic theory and practice.

**Les Von Losberg** has been employed in the insurance business for the past 45 years in a wide range of capacities, most recently providing estate, business, and retirement planning and product expertise to other financial professionals in their work with clients. Over-arching his professional career are other interests: writing poetry for more than 55 years, writing songs sung at poetry readings, becoming a visual artist with a focus on conceptual and language pieces; a martial artist for



six and a half years studying Shorei-kan (Shorei-school), Okinawa Goju Ryu (hard/soft style) karate, and, a student and performer of Japanese taiko (drumming) music.

All of this he attributes directly or nearly so to my good fortune to have met Merle and to the openness and generosity of her family, which made it possible for him to become one of “their” family.

**Merle Molofsky, NCPyA, LP**, is a psychoanalyst in private practice. She serves on the Faculty of NPAP and the Harlem Family Institute (HFI). She is a member of the Advisory Board of HFI, and the Editorial Boards of the *Psychoanalytic Review* and *The International Journal of Controversial Discussions*. Author of articles, reviews, and chapters published in psychoanalytic professional journals and books, she also is a published poet and produced playwright.



**Julie Jaffee Nagel, Ph.D.** is a psychoanalyst, musician, and author who is a graduate of Juilliard, The University of Michigan, and the Michigan Psychoanalytic Institute. She has a clinical practice and presents outreach programs to analytic and general audiences on the intersections between music and psychoanalysis. She is author of three books: of *Melodies of the Mind*, *Managing Stage Fright*, and *Career Choices in Music Beyond the Pandemic* as well as publications in major journals. Her website details her work further: [julienagel.net](http://julienagel.net) where there is a link to a live two piano performance (bottom of page).



**J.M. Scarpati** is a fourth generation writer and is proud to follow his mother, mother’s mother, and grandmother’s mother in a pursuit of storytelling. He is an MFA candidate in Creative Writing at The City College of New York and is working on a novel and collection of short stories all inspired by family lore.



**Alexander Stein, Ph.D.** is the founder of Dolus Advisors, a strategic consultancy that leverages his training as a clinical psychoanalyst to advise senior leaders and boards in leadership decision-making, ethical governance, and the complex psycho-social dynamics that shape culture and risk in organizations. An expert in the psychodynamics of fraud and abuses of power, he regularly partners with international asset tracing and recovery lawyers in multijurisdictional fraud and economic crime cases. Additional practice specializations include human-centered cybersecurity, human-factors in enterprise risk, and the responsible implementation of frontier agentic technologies affecting human affairs. He is the Editor-in-Chief of The CAI Report, a digital publication offering psychoanalytic perspectives on the human and social dimensions of AI; is a Specialist Collaborator in the Center for Human Centered Cybersecurity (HCC) of The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and sits on several advisory boards, notably including PsiAN, a leading mental health advocacy organization. He is widely published and cited and is a frequent podcast and webinar guest, on-camera commentator, and keynote speaker and panelist at conferences, symposia, and corporate events internationally.



Dr. Stein is a graduate and senior member of the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis in NY, and a clinical member of the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA) and the American Psychoanalytic Association (APsA) in which he is co-chair of the Committee on Public Information as well as co-chair of the Committee on Corporate and Organizational Consultants.

**Tata Traoré** is a psychoanalyst-in-training at the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis (NPAP), a nonprofit leader and an executive coach with more than two decades of experience working at the intersection of leadership, organizational development, and social justice. She serves as Deputy Department Director of Affiliate Support and Nationwide Initiatives at the American Civil Liberties Union, where she supports leaders and institutions navigating growth, conflict, transition, and change.



Having lived and worked across multiple countries and cultural contexts, Tata brings an international perspective to questions of identity, belonging, memory, migration, and organizational life. Her interests include psychoanalytic theory, group relations, organizational dynamics, and the ways personal and collective histories shape human experience.

She lives in Brooklyn, New York, with her two daughters, two dogs, and an ever-changing collection of plants. Outside of work and study, she can often be found listening to music, reading, or taking long meandering walks in Prospect park!

**Mustafa Ziyalan** was born on the Black Sea coast of Turkey. He now lives in New York, where he practices psychiatry.



His poetry, short fiction, essays, and translations have appeared in numerous literary journals and anthologies, including *New European Poets*, as well as in book form. *Istanbul Noir*, an anthology of short fiction he co-edited with Amy Spangler, was published by Akashic Books in 2008.

His poetry was featured in *Letters to Distant Cities* (New Amsterdam Records, 2011), a multimedia project combining the photography of Murat Eyüboğlu with spoken word and music by Shara Worden and Claire Manchon.

His collected poems, *Kıyılarda (On the Margins)*, appeared in 2022. His most recent prose work is *Yokdilli (Nonlingual)*, a collection of essays published the same year.



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