

Healing, Rebirth and the Work of Michael Eigen: Collected Essays by a Pioneer in Psychoanalysis co-edited by Keri Cohen and Ken Fuchsman. London: Routledge, 2021. ISBN: 9780367484231.

World is crazier and more of it than we think,
Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel
The drunkenness of things being various.

MacNeice 1988

This volume has its origins in the 42nd International Psychohistorical Association Conference, which took place in the pre-pandemic New York City of May 2019, and consists of an eclectic collection of papers which were presented under the theme of *The Contributions of Michael Eigen to Human Understanding*. The book is a series of creative responses to Eigen's work, often reflecting very personal and long-lasting engagements with both Eigen's writings and his long-running Tuesday afternoon seminar. It has a global feel to it, both geographically - in its drawing together of contributions from the US, Canada, Israel, India, and South Africa - and in terms of the diversity of the contributors; between them, the authors bring vast combined clinical experience from across the fields of psychoanalysis, clinical psychology, social work, psychodrama, and music therapy, enriched and informed by literary, musical, cultural, spiritual, and maternal sensibilities and capacities. The authors draw freely, broadly, and associatively from deep and invigorating wells of spirituality, poetry, music, literature, literary criticism, philosophy, mythology, theology, and physics. And there is a sense of the book's editors, Ken Fuchsman and Keri Cohen, creatively gathering and weaving together a multi-layered collage out of all these different pieces, very much in the spirit of one of the very many influences on Eigen's work, his friend and correspondent Marion Milner.

A celebration of Eigen's own deep-rooted and deepening influence, this current collection follows on from the Festschrift, *Living Moments: On the Work of Michael Eigen* (Bloch and Daws 2015). These two extensive volumes, alongside three online international seminars devoted to the study of Eigen's work, reflect the extent to which this nurturing, enlightening, and challenging voice is cherished within the worldwide psychoanalytic community. Bagai (p.19) notes Eigen's emphasis on 'moments that count', and this book provides touching testimony to so many moments with Eigen that have counted for so much to the various authors.

Bagai contributes two moving chapters to this collection, and in the first of these he recalls his relief at Eigen's generous encouragement to him to take up Eigen's work in his own way - a way that feels both real and personal to Bagai - and to play with it, having some fun with it along the way. Uninhibited by anxieties about either getting it all or getting it somehow right, there is clearly something joyfully freeing for Bagai about Eigen's heartfelt licence-giving, and the reader is left with a powerful sense of the facilitating impact of this playful, creative licence upon the various contributors here. This impression of Eigen as someone who gives his followers both roots and wings is underlined in the collection's final chapter, in which Molofsky (p.238) notes with gratitude the permission she herself has discovered in Eigen 'to be true to myself, creative, resonant, fully engaged....' Elsewhere, Harrell (p.79) writes of finding his own voice through Eigen, whilst Masih gives a deeply moving account of the way in which her own very personal encounter with Eigen enhanced her appetite for life itself, preparing the psychological ground for the birth of new life.

The subtitle of Eigen's own chapter, on rebirth, is 'it's been around a long time' (p.3) And the same can be said of Eigen himself, who has by this stage of his life enjoyed an intensive and ongoing engagement with, and deepening appreciation of, Freud's writings for over sixty years. Fiercely ecumenical in his interests and influences, Eigen is a passionate advocate of what he refers to as 'un-dogmatic psychoanalysis, un-dogmatic psychotherapy' (Eigen 2011a: 80). With a wisdom derived from decades of clinical encounters, Eigen has a healthy openness to different theoretical perspectives and clinical approaches, which brings to mind Joseph Aguayo's affectionate likening of James Grotstein to Will Rogers, in the sense that Grotstein never met a theory that he didn't like. Eigen's deeply felt understanding of the vast complexity and sheer variety of human experience calls for a plurality of perspectives, as reflected in Walt Whitman's defiant assertion (1855: 70): 'Do I contradict myself?/Very well then I contradict myself./I am large, I contain multitudes.' Eigen represents a powerful antidote to the longstanding, damaging cancel culture within psychoanalysis, and here is joined in this by Covitz, who rails against psychoanalytic orthodoxy and narrow-mindedness. Eigen (Eigen 1986: 320) is similarly wary of the deadening impact of omniscience, and the part it plays in foreclosing experience, and he insists on the importance of making room for not knowing.

One motif running through Eigen's work is his emphasis on nurturing the embryonic, birthing, and facilitating psychic capacities, which he movingly sets out as an article of faith, 'Throughout our lives we are pregnant with our lives, pregnant with unborn selves and psychic babies, including thoughts, feelings, attitudes, modes of experiencing. A pregnancy that never stops, no matter how many births. Gestation does not end' (Eigen 2015: 102). Eigen sees rebirth as a part of daily life, with a sense of all of us being reborn our whole lives long, in ways that are both revitalising and painful. And what is crucial, for Eigen, is what he sees as the evolutionary challenges of developing and supporting our capacity for psychic experiencing, being alive to our feelings, and partnering ourselves creatively through our own ongoing experience both of life and of our own selves. Eigen's notion of the way in which the birth of self goes 'awry' (Eigen 2004: 23) resonates with MacNeice's poetic refrain, '*I am not yet born*' (MacNeice 1988: 93), and underlines the unborn potential within all of us, with a sense that no one of us is ever fully born. Within this context, therapy is seen as an incubator for the psyche, a safe space in which, suggests Cohen (p.32), patient and analyst between them may 'birth new psychic experience'. Whilst the onus for Eigen is on being alive to ourselves, and trying to be more at home with our various self states, he is realistic about the limited potential for total transformation, and his assertion (Eigen 2016: 137) that 'one never recovers from being human' echoes the words of Hamm, in Beckett's *Endgame*: '.....you're on earth. There's no cure for that!' (1958: 37). With this in mind, Eigen places great value on partial births and moments of contact with the depths, believing that in therapy, as in life, a little can go a long way, and make a big difference.

With uncanny but welcome timing, the book's publication in March 2021, came at a particularly grim point in the context of the global pandemic, with matters of life, death, healing, and rebirth very much at the forefront of collective consciousness. And there is a sense of the book offering something of a guiding light through these dark and very difficult days, faced as we are with the twin challenges of survival and rebirth, on both individual and societal levels. Eigen's work, after Winnicott, shows us that nothing is ever all one way, including these times - which are at one and the same time both deadly and enlivening, dangerous and full of potential. And one of the paradoxes of our pandemic experience has been the opening up of possibilities for vitalising human connection at a time of enforced social distancing and isolation; this last 18 months has seen Eigen's seminar suddenly accessible worldwide, reflecting his notion of the complex interplay between toxicity and nourishment, which can often share the same source. In his creative and energising going on being throughout these

dark days, in which he has consistently made himself available for use through the online seminar and the ongoing publication of new written work, Eigen has embodied Winnicott's concept of the vital spark - and this book evidences the way in which others are able to make use of Eigen, sparking off him in their own ways, similar to the very personal way in which one might respond to a poem. Indeed, Orange (2021: i) describes what Eigen provides for us as a 'poetic space', and suggests that his work is '*a perfect companion in our world of plague.*'

One intriguing and noted feature of the individual and collective response to the global pandemic has been the remarkable increase in appetite for wild swimming. Struggling to cope with the overwhelming *waves* of a deadly virus, so many people seem to have found themselves instinctively taking to what Yeats describes as the 'waters and the wild', as refuge from a world that is 'full of troubles/.....anxious in its sleep', and 'more full of weeping than you can understand' (1938: 20). Eigen himself spoke movingly, at an online event to mark the publication of this volume (on April 11th 2021), of a sense of the whole world currently crying a collective 'cry of bafflement and bewilderment at the pain of life.' This phenomenon can, of course, be thought about in many different ways, on both conscious and unconscious levels, including in terms of the straightforward physical and mental health benefits. But reading this present volume, one is left wondering about what might be going on at a deeper level there, and whether this might involve an instinctive return to the waters of the womb, and an attempt at some sort of cleansing, healing, and rebirth. At a time of dreadful loss and painful separation, in the face of awful anxiety, deep fears, and ongoing uncertainty as to when and whether the tide will turn, a great many people have taken to wild swimming, as if somehow intuiting the importance of making contact with the depths, in a way which resonates deeply with Eigen's thinking. There seems to be a powerful pull towards what Eliot (1944: 32) describes as 'The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters/Of the petrel and the porpoise', perhaps reflecting a certain faith in Heaney's encouragement to 'hope for a great sea-change', and to 'Believe that a further shore is reachable.' Indeed, Heaney's description of 'The utter, self-revealing/Double-take of feeling' captures well the sharply enlivening impact of the perennially cold waters of the Irish Sea, which often induces cries and screams from those who enter it, calling to mind Heaney's sense that, somewhere, 'someone is hearing/The outcry and the birth-cry/Of new life at its term' (Heaney 1990: 77-78).

Swimming is a metaphor which Eigen returns to again and again in his writing, including in his own chapter in the present volume, where he suggests that we 'swim in everything-nothingness. We swim in seas of pain' (p.8). And elsewhere he recounts a dream in which he found himself trying to teach an underwater patient how to swim (Eigen 2018: 187), and asserts the importance of finding 'a way to swim in the emptiness' (1996). The counter-intuitive aspect of this is reflected in Harrell's description of how, looking for 'a safe ship amidst a sea of psychosis.....looking for a ship safely above the waves', he found, instead, in Eigen, 'someone signalling me to dip into the waters.....' (p.78). And, on a bodily level, Eigen describes the shifting of focus from the surface, via a 'dip into deep, interoceptive, quasi-sensory streams', as a way of affecting our sense of aliveness (Eigen 2018: 130). Indeed, Eigen (2014b: 100) encourages us to take a deep dive into life and the unknown, suggesting that better than attempting to transcend the painful place in which we inevitably find ourselves at different points in life, it is better to 'dive into it, be with it, work with it.' As Sarin (p.143) notes, one way in which therapy, for Eigen (1999) can be helpful is in providing a space in which it is possible to take 'a dip into the original madness in manageable doses.' And though we have to live, in therapy as in life, with the inevitable limits to what we can ever express, know, understand, or bear of human experience, it is a swimming analogy which Eigen uses to underscore the importance, in making contact with what is real inside of us, of exploring aspects of that experience: 'It is like swimming in the ocean. We can never take in the whole

ocean all at once. But we do swim in part of it and the water we swim in, while not the whole ocean, is real water' (2011b: 124).

From the waters of the womb, through the first voyage through the birth canal, life is characterised by the ebb and flow of psychic energy, feelings, thoughts, and memories. Fuchsmann (p.xxi) picks up on William James' description of experience and inner life as a 'stream, a succession of states, or waves.....', whilst Golan refers to Eigen's notion of the libido as 'an erotic flowing energy' (p.82), and Teitelbaum (p.187) reminds us that Eigen himself (2014c) notes that flooding is one of the images which Freud uses to characterise primal trauma. Eigen follows Bion, one his own key influences, in reaching deep into, and drawing from, the darkest wells of human experience. And Harrell, in turn (p.78), speaks of wading in to Eigen's work, whilst Bagai likens Eigen's work to an ocean (p.92), and describes (p.20) diving in to it, both absorbing something of the waters there and opening up new channels in the process. Bagai finds something vital in Eigen which facilitates and supports his own capacity to lean into the psychic storms which throw both mind and body around 'like corks in the ocean' (p.26), an image reinforced by Masih's description (p.65) of Eigen as an 'anchor'.

Pearson (p.230) situates Eigen's work at a vitalising point of convergence between psychoanalytic, psychotherapeutic, and spiritual streams, and suggests that the whole of Eigen's work 'can be read as a voyage into the radiance and catastrophe of psychic elements', in which Eigen's own contact with the depths of both 'psyche's majesty and psyche's catastrophe' support the reader in becoming 'more fully human', and in navigating the 'muddy waters' which characterise human development. Harrell is grateful here (p.79) to have Eigen as his guide, 'showing me a way of swimming in tumultuous waters', and Schechter (p.137) echoes this sense of the turbulent waves through which Eigen wades so instructively and influentially, whilst Rothschild (p.62) adds an image of Eigen masterfully surfing those same waves. In keeping with Eigen's pluralistic outlook, there are many different ways of taking to life's waters, and of making ourselves at home with the oceanic; there is a time for surviving and staying afloat, and a time for riding the waves; a time for treading water in the shallows, and a time for taking a deep dive into the depths; a time for going with the flow, and a time for swimming against the tide; a time, even, for drowning, and for resurfacing, reborn, to face anew the challenges and opportunities of the ebbs and flows of human experience.

Harrell describes his sense of having needed to find Eigen's work in order to find something of his own voice. And it is very striking here how much Eigen means to all of these authors, and how much, when they do dive in and make contact with his work, they find plenty there to make something out of for themselves. Golan (p.183) underlines the consistent sense of Eigen's work as a rich and deeply evocative 'wellspring of knowledge and experience', whilst Cohen (p.xix) describes Eigen's creativity as a 'springboard' for others, providing a vital jumping-off point for their own originality. The reader is left with a powerful sense of the creative ways in which the contributors are able to make transformative use of Eigen to enable themselves to face into and draw from their own depths, and it is very moving to see the very many different aspects of Eigen which emerge out of these papers, including as a timeless presence, and an embodiment of the light; a soulful source of inspiration, full of vitality, and a pioneering innovator, at the cutting edge of everyday human experience; a bypasser of boundaries and borders, and an informal, associative, and imaginative explorer, opening up less explored internal vistas; a birth attendant, and a life-support machine; an absolute beginner, still learning and endlessly beginning, and a compassionately wise and greatly treasured man of experience; an artist of the invisible, and a planter of seeds; one who waits creatively, and one who stays with; a fragmented gatherer and receiver of fragments of the human mind and experience, gathering from all over, and a painter of verbal pictures of the soul; a broken, shattered man, and a man of rhythm, with a deep faith in the archetypal rhythm

of breakdown and recovery; a touching, soothing, deeply moving maternal presence, and a man on an interlocutory mission; a toucher of madness, and a nurse of damaged souls; a humanist of experience, focused on the challenges of being fully human, and a fellow traveller on an ongoing uncertain journey; a supplier of psychic oxygen, and an unexpected life raft; an emboldening, inspirational, and supportive background presence, and a sharing, generous, loving man of tears, laughter, heart, and soul.

Psychoanalysis is, at its very core, irredeemably and wonderfully pluralistic; it has to be, as psychoanalysis is about opening up, extending, and adding to the mystery, complexity, and challenge of human experience, rather than any reductionistic narrowing down of meaning and perspective. This book is both a powerful testimony to what can emerge from an engagement with both human aliveness and psychic deadness, and a celebration of the drunkenness of things being various. As his closing thought at an online event (co-sponsored by the International Psychohistorical Association and the Object Relations Institute of New York, April 11th 2021) to mark the book's publication, Eigen remarked how it had recently dawned on him, whilst struggling to peel an orange, that he was making hard work of the task; aware that there is always more than one way to approach things, he realised that there must be a different way. Shifting his attention to an easier spot to peel, he was struck by the importance of finding the place where you can work from, rather than staying with the place where you can't. And it is very much this spirit - of pragmatism, resourcefulness, and restless creativity, underpinned by an appreciation and enjoyment of things always being various - which both informs Eigen's approach to clinical theory, technique, and the challenges of being human, and infuses this very timely and heartening volume.

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