

SWEET SORROW

Love, Loss and Attachment
in Human Life



Alan B. Eppel

SWEET SORROW

Dali, Salvador (1904-1989) (c) ARS, NY. The Persistence of Memory. 1931. Oil on canvas, 9 1/2 x 13". (162.1934). Given anonymously. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.



Persistence of memory © Salvador Dali, Gala-Salvador Dali Foundation, DACs, London 2007

Alan Eppel has paid DACs' visual creators for the use of their artistic works

Edvard Munch: The Kiss 1897, oil on canvas, 99 x 81 cm, Munch Museum, Oslo

Edvard Munch: Young Woman on the Beach 1896, scraped aquatint, 285 x 216 mm, Munch Museum, Oslo

Copyright artworks: Munch Museum/Munch Ellingsen Group/SODART (Montreal) 2007

Excerpt from "When Flesh Suggests" was originally published in *In This House Are Many Women* © 1993, 2004 by Sheree Fitch. Reprinted by permission of Goose Lane Editions

SWEET SORROW

Love, Loss and Attachment in Human Life

Alan B. Eppel

"Parting is such sweet sorrow"
Romeo & Juliet Act 2 Scene 2

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2009 by Karnac Books Ltd.

Published 2018 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Copyright © 2009 by Alan B. Eppel

The right of Alan B. Eppel to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with §§ 77 and 78 of the Copyright Design and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notice:

Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A C.I.P. for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN-13: 9781855756458 (pbk)

Typeset by Vikatan Publishing Solutions (p) Ltd., Chennai, India

CONTENTS

<i>PREFACE</i>	vii
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	xi
<i>CHAPTER ONE</i> Attachment	1
<i>CHAPTER TWO</i> Love	11
<i>CHAPTER THREE</i> Formation of identity	27
<i>CHAPTER FOUR</i> Emotions and moods	37
<i>CHAPTER FIVE</i> Psychiatric disorders and love and loss	53

<i>CHAPTER SIX</i>	
Deviations of love and sexual desire	65
<i>CHAPTER SEVEN</i>	
Loss	73
<i>CHAPTER EIGHT</i>	
Suicide	81
<i>CHAPTER NINE</i>	
Meaning of time as a prelude to meaning	89
<i>CHAPTER TEN</i>	
Meaning	103
<i>CHAPTER ELEVEN</i>	
The love connection	111
<i>CHAPTER TWELVE</i>	
Conclusion	121
<i>GLOSSARIES</i>	125
<i>BIBLIOGRAPHY</i>	135
<i>INDEX</i>	141

PREFACE

Like most people, I did not learn everything in kindergarten. But I did learn something about attachment. It happened when I was four years old, on my first day at school. It was then that I first apprehended the rude shock of emotions that make up separation anxiety.

I somehow successfully persuaded my father that I did not need to stay and eagerly returned home to my waiting mother. She seemed a little surprised but unfazed to be told that the school was closed and that I didn't have to go that day.

I was first exposed to attachment theory during my psychiatry residency training at McMaster University in Hamilton Ontario. This was in the late seventies and indeed John Bowlby visited one year to talk about his theories. In 1977 two of his classical papers appeared in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* and a question on attachment appeared on the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Membership exam which I took the following year.

In those days Bowlby's ideas were vastly underappreciated in North America and it is only in the last decade that attachment theory has been recognized as central to understanding human psychology and neurobiology.

Following my psychiatric training I worked for a period at the Homewood Sanitarium in Guelph Ontario, a 200 bed psychiatric hospital and in the Arbors Day program also in Guelph. There we were faced with many patients, mostly young women but some men, who proved most difficult to treat. These patients appeared to be continuously suicidal and made frequent suicide attempts. They displayed intensely reactive moods of anger and dysphoria. They were extremely sensitive to rejection and to being alone. At that time the term "Borderline Personality" was just entering into the psychiatric vernacular. It was only in 1980 with the appearance of DSM 3 that it became an officially endorsed diagnostic entity. Consequently it took us some time to recognize these patients and to work out the best responses to their struggles. Paul Links at McMaster was undertaking some of the early studies of diagnostic stability of the BPD concept and I was fortunate to be able to collaborate with him and his colleagues Marilyn Korzekwa and Meir Steiner. It seemed to me then, as it does now, that the behaviour of people with borderline personality could best be understood using John Bowlby's Attachment theory. Over the ensuing thirty years since then, working with these patients and others with related problems, it has become apparent that people with so called borderline personality exhibit the conflicts and struggles that are universal to all human beings. It is through them and my other patients that I have learned so much about the human condition.

I have chosen to write this book in order to pass on what I have learned and experienced over these years. I have tried to develop a coherent philosophy by synthesising ideas from many sources of human knowledge and art. Certainly there is much that is speculative even provocative but I believe that each reader will be able to draw some words of wisdom and even inspiration from Sweet Sorrow.

I will start my acknowledgments with the usual humble disclaimer that any shortcomings of this book are attributable solely to the author and can in no way reflect on those who have assisted and advised me. I would therefore like to thank those who read parts of the manuscript and offered helpful feedback: Jenny Sheridan and David Abrahamson in London; Mossy Abrahamson in Dublin; my colleagues Anne Becker at Harvard, Mamta Gautam in Ottawa,

Eve Leeman from Columbia, Oonagh Zuberbier in Vancouver, Nora Jane Thormann in Porto Alegre, Anna K. Meyer in Seattle and Sarah McVanel here in Hamilton. Thanks also to Andrea McGuire who did most of the keyboarding. I extend my appreciation to the staff at Karnac for their helpfulness and expertise.

To my children and to those to whom they are attached, Ayelet, Joel, Noam, Aimee, Yonah and Amanda thank you for your love, your patience and encouragement. To Yonah also thanks for the skill and ideas you brought to the cover design. I hope you all will find some wisdom in this work.

Above all I wish to express my deepest gratitude and love to my wife Patricia Tolkin Eppel for her love, support, courage and generosity.

Alan Eppel Hamilton, Ontario 2008



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

INTRODUCTION

All of us seek to understand the meaning of life, and especially the meaning of our own lives. We struggle with the mysteries of birth and death, of love and loss. These are fundamental to our nature as human beings. But what drives us? What impels us on our daily round of tasks and relationships? What propels us forward in pursuit of what unclear purpose, what ill defined and hazy consummation?

In this volume I propose that it is the interplay of love and loss that lies at the epicentre of the human story. Support for this proposal will be taken from neuroscience, art and psychoanalysis. I will also introduce the reader to important ideas and findings from Attachment theory. An exploration of the relationship between love and loss can lead us to some understanding of the meaning of our lives. I hope to show how love and loss are inextricably bound at the centre of human experience, and form the essential dynamic of the human struggle.

The title of this volume, *"Sweet Sorrow"*, may at first appear to be a contradiction. It is easy to understand Romeo and Juliet's sorrow when they are forced to part, but why is it "sweet"?

On reflection it becomes apparent that a parting is only sorrowful when the two people in question have a close or loving relationship. In fact this is self-evident and forms part of all our experiences. The more intense the attachment, that is the love between the couple, the more sorrowful the parting. In more concise terms the sweetness and sorrow are directly correlated with each other: more of one leads to more of the other. Juliet can only experience the sorrow if she has experienced the sweetness of the love.

Kahlil Gibran (1923) expressed the same idea in *"The Prophet"*:

"And ever has it been that love knows not its own depth until the hour of separation."

Unfortunately it is part of human life that separation and loss frequently follow periods of attachment. In fact inevitably *all attachments will come to an end*, whether through physical separation or death. Not a very comforting thought but one we must look square in the eye if we wish to uncover the enigma of our place in this world.

What is the nature of the relationship of loss to love? Why is it so central to our lives? How does it shape us? How does it determine our outlook and our behaviour? These are the motifs of this book.

Through this exploration I will demonstrate that answers to these questions emerge from our biology and our psychology. I will draw on scientific and artistic sources. The scientific sources include the fields of neuroscience and child development. Where these cannot assist us, the wisdom of psychoanalysis will be consulted. The status of psychoanalysis as a science has been debated since its inception. At the very least it provides us with a heuristic language; a language of rich metaphor and analogy; as yet we have no other medium to describe and conceptualise the workings of the human psyche.

I will also bring forth the wisdom of art which contains within it the origins of another sort of truth: art is a manifestation of man's inner feelings expressed in concrete form—as paintings, poems, and in cinema.

What we call 'love' can be regarded as the subjective component of a program of human behaviour known as "Attachment". Over three decades ago, John Bowlby developed his theory of Attachment, a theory as far-reaching in its impact as that of Sigmund Freud, fifty years earlier.

We live in an age where science and technology have clearly triumphed over other worldviews and dominate the discourse of our daily existence. The reader might then question why I have drawn so significantly from artistic sources. The great scientist and humanist Jacob Bronowski spent much of his life grappling with this question: Can art, particularly Poetry, convey universal truths in a way no less valid than the pursuit of knowledge through Science? He says:

“I have no doubt now that there is a common quality in science and in poetry- the quality of imagination... the imagination reaches us, reaches into us , in different ways in science and in poetry. In science it organizes our experience into laws on which we can base our actions in the future. But poetry is another mode of knowledge, in which we become one with the poet and enter directly into his and into all human experience.”
(Bronowski, 1978, p. 4).

The same can be said for other forms of art, painting, photography, cinema, drama, and of course music. Each of the arts is associated with a different sense/perceptual modality: mainly visual or auditory. Painting, especially expressive painting, speaks directly to our own inner experiences and emotions.

Music has a unique place among the artistic forms. Music is the language of the limbic system; it is the language of our emotions and speaks directly to our emotions, bypassing the elaborate structure of our intellectual brain, the frontal neocortex. Poetry is related to music. It is also a rhythmic language that reaches deep into our emotional core.

It is quite startling to see how advances in neuroscience are consistent with the “poetic” wisdom we derive from the artistic works. The development of neuroimaging with MRI and PET scans has resulted in an understanding of the neurocircuits and chemistry underlying the experiences of our senses and affective life.

What this book is not about

*“The most important things to do in the world are to get something to eat, something to drink and somebody to love you.” **Brendan Behan.***

Brendan Behan, the famous Irish playwright and poet, shrewdly places food and water ahead of love, in his brief list of important priorities. He is correct in adducing that Love is not the pre-eminent human drive. It is preceded by the drives for self-preservation and survival. Maslow, in his universally famous theory, starts in the same place as Behan and describes a hierarchy of human needs:

Firstly there are **physiological needs**. The need for air, food and water. This implies freedom from famine and starvation.

The next level in Maslow's hierarchy are **safety and security needs** and arise when the physiological needs are largely taken care of. This includes a safe environment, and would therefore apply to freedom from war, and oppression; freedom from exposure to arbitrary arrest, detention, torture, and execution. It is only when these basic requirements are secured that there is the possibility for meaning at a level that can fulfil Maslow's **love and belonging needs**.

In our own times there are millions of people who live under threat of famine and deprivation; who are at continuous risk of death through war or environmental catastrophe. Certainly love and loss occur in dramatic and powerful ways in these societies also, but the consciousness of them is overshadowed by the urgent focus on preservation and survival.

This book will not address these societies but will focus on those fortunate enough to have the first two levels of Maslow's hierarchy reasonably and consistently met. By and large these are people who live under conditions of democracy and economic certainty and have the luxury of seeking higher levels of fulfilment, meaning and self-actualization (Maslow, 1970). Our discussion then starts at this point of reference, which in the course of history and geography has been the privilege of the minority.

This distinction between survival needs and love (as Attachment) may be somewhat arbitrary. Does the infant at birth seek attachment or food? Is it love or feeding that binds the infant to the mother? These questions take us immediately to a crucial divergence in the theories of Human Psychology. For Sigmund Freud the drive for food took precedence over the drive for care and affection. For the British School of psychoanalysis the drive for the other person was primordial. The British analyst W.R.D. Fairbairn famously expressed this as: "the Ego is Object seeking". Michael Balint would refer to this as "Primary Love".

This book is not about 'Spirituality' or 'Transcendence'. Rather it is rooted in our lived experiences, drawing from science and art.

Below are eleven propositions. I will examine the basis for these by referring to work in infant development, psychology, psychoanalysis, and neurobiology. Supporting examples will be taken from cinema, music and art. As well, some clinical case studies will be introduced to illustrate important ideas. The case studies are composites and all identifying details have been removed.

Propositions to be considered:

- Proposition #1** The drive to attach is fundamental and primary to human nature.
- Proposition #2** Strivings for attachment are the strongest motivators of human behaviour.
- Proposition #3** Identity is formed from interpersonal interaction, and emerges from the repeated interactions with the attachment figures.
- Proposition #4a** Mood is the bedrock of identity and the sense of self.
- Proposition #4b** Instability of mood gives rise to instability of the sense of Identity.
- Proposition #5** Psychiatric disorders both reflect and affect the expression of love and loss.
- Proposition #6** Disorders of sexual desire comprise the inability to maintain healthy attachments simultaneously with sexual intercourse.
- Proposition #7** The intensity of loss and grief is directly proportional to the intensity of the attachment bond and its felt component, love.
- Proposition #8** The death instinct exerts its effects when attachments are lost.
- Proposition #9** Time is relative; acceleration of time is associated with alienation; expansion of time is associated with authentic human experience.
- Proposition #10** The need for meaning is a fundamental property of human nature.
- Proposition #11** The primary drive to attach gives rise to the strongest sense of meaning in human interaction.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>