

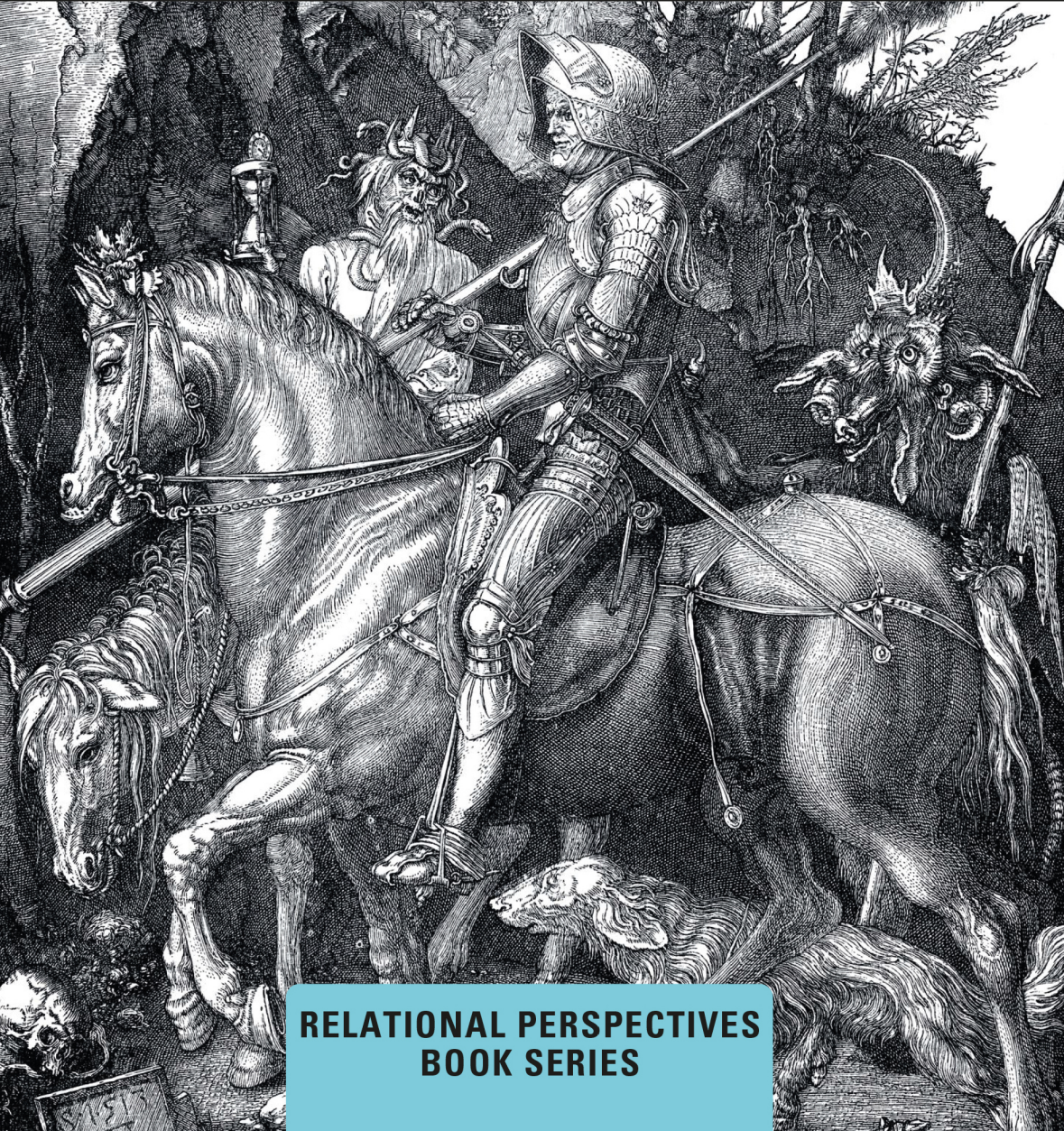


Daniel Shaw



Traumatic Narcissism and Recovery

Leaving the Prison of Shame and Fear



**RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVES
BOOK SERIES**

‘Daniel Shaw was taken by surprise when his first book, *Traumatic Narcissism*, struck a nerve not only with fellow psychotherapists, but also with the lay public. Shaw had put his finger on a source of relational trauma as profoundly destructive as it is common and poorly understood. Pathologically narcissistic people, when they are needed attachment figures, such as parents or leaders, cause untold suffering, often without perpetrating any sort of physical abuse. In this book, Shaw continues this important exploration—and this time the breadth of interest the book will arouse will come as no surprise.’

Donnel B. Stern, Ph.D., *William Alanson White Institute and NYU Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis*

‘Of all of the psychoanalytic commentators on narcissism in the past two decades, surely the most important is Daniel Shaw. It is not just that Shaw writes passionately and insightfully about narcissism, especially in its malignant and traumatic aspects, because of his own personal experiences as the survivor of a religious cult. It is also that he understands that narcissism is, paradoxically, a deeply relational concept, not possible without the participation of others. In this articulate, compassionate, and honest contribution, Shaw ranges from the micro to the macro, from the clinical situation to society in its current crisis, from the personal to the political, as he delineates the complexity of narcissistic dynamics and phenomena, both in individual lives and in society as a whole.’

John Auerbach, Ph.D., *Department of Psychiatry, University of Florida*

‘Daniel Shaw established himself as a leading psychoanalytic thinker with *Traumatic Narcissism*. The wise and compassionate essays in this book deepen his meditations on the concept of relational trauma from clinical, theoretical, personal, political, and spiritual perspectives. He gives us the loving companionship we need to sustain us on our therapeutic quests and to be able to answer Hamlet’s question, “To be or not to be?” in the affirmative.’

Peter L. Rudnytsky, Ph.D., *University of Florida and Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute; author of Formulated Experiences: Hidden Realities and Emergent Meanings from Shakespeare to Fromm*

‘This book is a brilliant continuation of Shaw’s work on traumatic narcissism. Clinically sophisticated and with a fresh theoretical stance, it bravely examines the wounds of early relational trauma and their profound impact on one’s life. Adding to his scope new ideas on cults, authoritarianism, spirituality and faith, Shaw delicately portrays the complexity of love and hate, longing and aggression, giving and receiving, life and death—as each presents itself in and outside of the therapeutic relationship. This volume offers a soulful understanding of painful journeys toward healing.’

Galit Atlas, Ph.D., *NYU Postdoctoral Program for Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis; author of The Enigma of Desire*

‘Writing in an experience-near and trauma-informed language, Daniel Shaw has crafted a penetrating and compassionate look inside the mind of the traumatizing narcissist and the surrounding relational field. The reader is taken on a passionately written journey with perspectives that span intrapsychic, interpersonal, and social psychological, including an exploration of the toxic narcissism that has taken up residence at the highest levels of government. Immediately accessible, and broad in its reach, Shaw woos the reader with uncommon sense in a no-holds-barred effort to free us from the eventual strangulation of free will and dignity by the narcissist’s unerring, amoral tentacles. Brilliant in its conception, and incisive in the exploration of case material with a quintessential two-person psychology, Shaw provides a humanistic feast of ideas. Join him at the table, and savor the meal.’

Richard A. Chefetz, M.D., *author of Intensive Psychotherapy for Persistent Dissociative Processes: The Fear of Feeling Real*

‘In his 2014 *Traumatic Narcissism*, Daniel Shaw described the cult leader who dominates by “coercive persuasion” and the effects on those who follow. Here he tangles with the relational demons, especially shame, internalized by all of us who have fallen under the leader’s spell, convincing us that we are trash, only fit to serve them. He gives new meaning to speaking the unspeakable in a humanistic psychoanalysis, offering hope and dignity through debunking the narcissistic dominator, taking relational psychoanalysis to its depths and horrors. This work is priceless.’

Donna Orange, *author of Psychoanalysis, History and Radical Ethics: Learning to Hear*

‘In Dan Shaw’s first book, *Traumatic Narcissism: Relational Systems of Subjugation*, he gave to the mental health field the inimitable term “traumatic narcissism,” new, usable, helpful, easily graspable, action oriented, and accurately descriptive—much more specific than “perpetrator” and “victim.” The term created a new vista for understanding such a pervasive, ineluctable, but often hard to describe problem.

Following his highly acclaimed first book, this new contribution does not disappoint. Here Shaw returns to the themes of relational systems of traumatizing narcissists in cults, parenting, social movements, religion, politics, and psychopathic leaders. He writes more about what he has found healing in psychotherapy, addressing complex questions such as dissociated aggression in traumatized clients, the ever-eroding impact of shame, the internalization of relational systems of subjugation within the traumatized person, the importance of self-reflection, the complicated issue of spirituality, and finally, self-alienation and the will to live.

As a writer, Shaw manifests the values he advocates to his clients: he is, himself, self-reflective, highly personal, and communicatively self-revealing, as he discusses how he has worked with challenging cases. He writes from the heart, yet from a broad source of theoretical knowledge. Not surprisingly, he possesses the knack for a pithy phrase.

This highly accessible and highly engaging book is appropriate for both clinicians and non-professional readers who are interested in how relational dynamics of subjugation are corrosively enacted in families, on the world stage, and within the psyche of the traumatized individual. I recommend it highly.’

Elizabeth Howell, Ph.D., *author of The Dissociative Mind; Understanding and Treating Dissociative Identity Disorder: A Relational Approach*

‘Dan Shaw’s understanding of relational trauma permeates the collection of his writings contained in this excellent book. How he communicates the inner experience of his patients can transform any therapist’s ability to attune to traumatized individuals.’

Janina Fisher, *Assistant educational director, Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Institute, author of Healing the Fragmented Selves of Trauma Survivors and Transforming the Living Legacy of Trauma*



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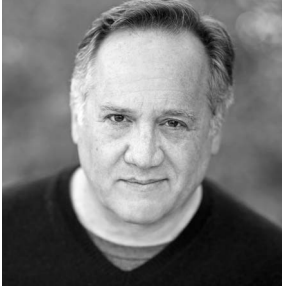
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Traumatic Narcissism and Recovery

This book looks at the trauma suffered by those in relationships with narcissists, covering topics such as surviving a cult, dysfunctional families, political dysfunction, and imbalances of power in places of work and education.

This new volume by author and psychoanalyst Daniel Shaw revisits themes from his first book, *Traumatic Narcissism: Relational Systems of Subjugation*. Shaw offers further reflections on the character and behavior of the traumatizing narcissist, the impact such persons have on those they abuse and exploit, and the specific ways in which they instill shame and fear in those they seek to control. In addition, this volume explores, with detailed clinical material, many of the challenges mental health professionals face in finding effective ways of helping those who have suffered narcissistic abuse. From within a trauma informed, relational psychoanalytic perspective, Shaw explores themes of attachment to internalized perpetrators, self-alienation, internalized aggression, and loss of faith in the value and meaning of being alive.

This book will be especially illuminating and rewarding for mental health professionals engaged in helping patients heal and recover from complex relational trauma, and equally valuable to those individuals who have struggled with the tenacious, often crippling shame and fear that can be the result of relational trauma.



Daniel Shaw, LCSW, is a psychoanalyst in private practice in New York City and in Nyack, New York. Originally trained as an actor at Northwestern University and with the renowned teacher Uta Hagen in New York City, Shaw later worked as a missionary for an Indian guru. His eventual recognition of cultic aspects of this organization led him to become an outspoken activist in

support of individuals and families traumatically abused in cults. Simultaneous with leaving this group, Shaw began his training in the mental health profession, becoming a faculty member and supervisor at The National Institute for the Psychotherapies in New York. He has published papers in *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, and *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*. In 2014 his book, *Traumatic Narcissism: Relational Systems of Subjugation*, was published for the Relational Perspectives Series by Routledge, and was nominated for the distinguished Gradiva Award. In 2018, the International Cultic Studies Association awarded him the Margaret Thaler Singer Award for advancing the understanding of coercive persuasion and undue influence.

Relational Perspectives Book Series

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The Relational Perspectives Book Series (RPBS) publishes books that grow out of or contribute to the relational tradition in contemporary psychoanalysis. The term *relational psychoanalysis* was first used by Greenberg and Mitchell¹ to bridge the traditions of interpersonal relations, as developed within interpersonal psychoanalysis and object relations, as developed within contemporary British theory. But, under the seminal work of the late Stephen A. Mitchell, the term *relational psychoanalysis* grew and began to accrue to itself many other influences and developments. Various tributaries—interpersonal psychoanalysis, object relations theory, self psychology, empirical infancy research, feminism, queer theory, sociocultural studies and elements of contemporary Freudian and Kleinian thought—flow into this tradition, which understands relational configurations between self and others, both real and fantasied, as the primary subject of psychoanalytic investigation.

We refer to the relational tradition, rather than to a relational school, to highlight that we are identifying a trend, a tendency within contemporary psychoanalysis, not a more formally organized or coherent school or system of beliefs. Our use of the term *relational* signifies a dimension of theory and practice that has become salient across

1 Greenberg, J. & Mitchell, S. (1983). *Object relations in psychoanalytic theory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

the wide spectrum of contemporary psychoanalysis. Now under the editorial supervision of Adrienne Harris, Steven Kuchuck and Eyal Rozmarin, the Relational Perspectives Book Series originated in 1990 under the editorial eye of the late Stephen A. Mitchell. Mitchell was the most prolific and influential of the originators of the relational tradition. Committed to dialogue among psychoanalysts, he abhorred the authoritarianism that dictated adherence to a rigid set of beliefs or technical restrictions. He championed open discussion, comparative and integrative approaches, and promoted new voices across the generations. Mitchell was later joined by the late Lewis Aron, also a visionary and influential writer, teacher and leading thinker in relational psychoanalysis.

Included in the Relational Perspectives Book Series are authors and works that come from within the relational tradition, those that extend and develop that tradition, and works that critique relational approaches or compare and contrast them with alternative points of view. The series includes our most distinguished senior psychoanalysts, along with younger contributors who bring fresh vision. Our aim is to enable a deepening of relational thinking while reaching across disciplinary and social boundaries in order to foster an inclusive and international literature.

A full list of titles in this series is available at <https://www.routledge.com/Relational-Perspectives-Book-Series/book-series/LEARPBS>.

Traumatic Narcissism and Recovery

Leaving the Prison of
Shame and Fear

Daniel Shaw

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Dedicated to Noah and Lila



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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiv
1 Introduction	1
2 A prison of shame and fear	16
3 Make someone happy	39
4 Double binds, unhealing wounds	56
5 Working with dissociated aggression in traumatized patients	72
6 Authoritarianism and the cultic dynamic	90
7 Psychoanalysis, meet religion	105
8 The problem of self-alienation	116
<i>References</i>	129
<i>Index</i>	137

Acknowledgments

I wrote my first psychoanalytic paper, on the subject of analytic love, in 1999 as I neared the completion of my formal psychoanalytic training. Back then I literally had to drag every word out of myself while hearing myself (in my head) asserting, very persuasively, statements such as “You can’t say that! That’s ridiculous! You don’t know what you’re talking about. This is garbage! Who do you think you are?”

Many people – my analyst, my teachers, colleagues and friends – have helped to support and encourage me since I wrote that first paper, “On the therapeutic action of analytic love” (Shaw, 2003a). I am happy to say that my internal naysayers are less disruptive now, in large part due to the recognition of others whom I admire and respect. Among those, I am especially grateful to James Fosshage, Lewis Aron, Philip Bromberg, Donnel Stern, Richard Chefetz, Orit Badouk Epstein, Donna Orange and Peter Kaufman – all psychoanalytic authors by whom I have been inspired and felt recognized and supported.

I am grateful also to Peter Lessem, one of my early training supervisors, who taught me the importance of psycho-education, even though the concept was still quite unpopular in the psychoanalytic culture. Peter described how he would explain to patients that being connected to their inner worlds, knowing and understanding what was inside, would give them greater strength and power. Over the years, I have come to appreciate the value of psycho-education more and more, rejecting the orthodoxy that dictates that direct teaching has no place in psychoanalytic clinical work.

I also wish to thank Janina Fisher, whose extraordinary work and teaching I was fortunate to experience in person during my Sensorimotor Psychotherapy training in 2016. As my work after the publication of my book *Traumatic Narcissism: Relational Systems of Subjugation* became

more focused on the struggles of trauma survivors, Dr. Fisher's teachings have been a source of tremendous illumination and inspiration.

I am grateful every day to work with the patients I see in my private practice. They inspire, challenge and move me and the things I learn from them about the capacity for human healing, growth and change are gifts I deeply treasure.

The psychoanalytic community lost two giants in 2019 and 2020, Lewis Aron and Philip Bromberg. In many years of supervision in groups led by Philip, I learned how deeply immersed in the trauma and dissociation literature he was, and I followed him there, eager to study what he had studied and learn what he had learned. I did some of my most meaningful and rewarding clinical work under Philip's astute guidance. I am deeply grateful to have learned from him, a unique and brilliant clinician, in the last years of his remarkable career.

That first paper I wrote, the one I mentioned earlier, would not have been published, and I don't know that I would have gone on writing, if not for Lew Aron. Already turned down by one journal to which I had submitted the paper, I entered my first study group led by Lew and told him about the paper. He asked to read it and shortly after I sent it, he left a voicemail for me, saying "I LOVED your paper!" I was and always remained in awe of Lew, and I was surprised and thrilled by his reaction. He suggested I resubmit to a different journal, and there the paper was accepted, edited and published. Over the years I was a member of various of Lew's internationally acclaimed study groups. It was not hard to see that the astonishing breadth and depth of his genius were matched by the overflowing generosity and kindness of his spirit. My first book *Traumatic Narcissism* would not have been written but for his encouragement – "Why don't you write a book," he suggested in a casual remark, which I brushed off as ridiculous in my email response. It took me five minutes to realize that Lew had actually communicated to me that he thought that I should write a book. I quickly wrote back to say, "Yes, ignore my previous deranged e-mail, of course I'll write a book!" And then Lew went on to edit *Traumatic Narcissism* for publication, with unerring skill and insight, and simple, authentic, unconditional generosity.

Lew's contribution to the field of psychoanalysis, always honoring the passion for relationality of his beloved friend Steve Mitchell, is