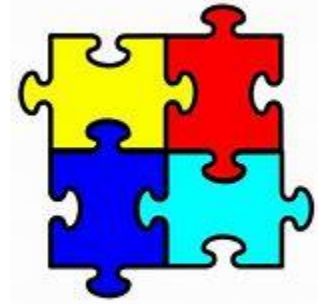


Jigsaw Puzzle



of Human Behaviour:

Correcting Imbalances



in our Lives

by Donald Stoesz

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Introduction

Have you ever put pieces together in a jigsaw puzzle? Were you able to match the shapes and colours of different sections? Were you able to relate them to the larger picture? I sometimes feel as though I am putting puzzle pieces together when I work with people. There are so many fragments scattered about that I am not sure which one to pick up first. After matching two shapes, I am stymied again because the other pieces are of a different colour. I spend hours putting two or three pieces into the right place.

Some sections of the puzzle are easier to put together than others. Pictures of faces, birds, and wagons go together because the images are recognizable. Multiple pieces of blue sky, green grass, and dark shadows are more difficult to work with. We wait until the border and familiar images emerge before tackling the larger opaque sections.

Jigsaw puzzles represent an analogy of what human beings are like. We are complex beings that come in different shapes and sizes. The reasons for our actions, relationships, and personality types are hard to understand. One aspect of our character varies significantly from other ways that we relate.

The complexity of human behaviour has been evident in my work as a chaplain. Inmates come to me because they only know the superficial reasons for committing their crimes. They do not understand the deeper reasons for acting out in such a violent and abusive manner. They regard themselves as rational human beings who have made responsible decisions in the past. And yet here they are, in prison, serving time for serious offences.

Their lives are a little bit like a jigsaw puzzle. Some aspects of their personality are well grounded. They excelled at school and kept a steady job. They fell in love and were married for a number of years. They were respectable members of the community.

These inmates' characteristics are the easier pieces to put together in a jigsaw puzzle. A mature adult emerged as the offender grew up, became responsible, and fit into the community.

Other pieces of the puzzle are hidden from view. The inmate put on a brave face when they went for a job interview. They did not know what they were doing when they said yes to a life long relationship with their spouse. Challenges of these commitments became evident as time progressed. The inmate was unable to put the knowledge that he learned in school to good use. He pretended to know how to do things. He was unable to form an emotionally healthy relationship with his wife. He felt inadequate in raising his children. His children reminded him of how poorly he had been raised, how insecure he felt as a teenager in making decisions, and how immature he still was, in his thirties and forties and fifties.

These aspects of an inmate's personality can be compared to the more difficult pieces of the puzzle to put together. The pieces remain scattered because of their obscure colours. The greys, blues, and greens all blend together. Inmates cannot put these pieces together because these aspects of their character have not yet matured.

One man that I have worked with only looked at aspects of his life in which he had excelled. He told me, "I have been a good worker all of my life. I do not know why I keep being punished." I asked him when he had committed his crime. "Well, during the week of holidays when I was binge drinking. I am not an alcoholic. I only go on a long drunk once or twice a year." This man was over fifty years old when I met him as a young chaplain. He had first come to federal prison before I was born. This was the third time that he had been in prison.¹

This man did not want to look at his alcoholism. This habit was entrenched in his life. He had learned to function as an alcoholic while getting into serious trouble every ten years. This man defined himself primarily in terms of his work ethic. He was told when he grew up that as long as he worked hard, nothing else mattered.

This conversation took place thirty years ago in the Federal Training Centre (CFF) in Quebec. The government established this medium-security prison in the early 1960s to teach trades to inmates. Inmates could enroll in bricklaying, construction, school, culinary arts, gardening, metal fabrication, upholstery, and cabinet making. It was only in the 1980s that the government made programming for alcoholism, spousal abuse, violence, sexual offences, gang involvement, and selling drugs

¹ Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace* (Victoria: Friesen Press, 2010), p. 90.

mandatory. Many of the trades listed above were abandoned in favour of a programming model. Inmates had to learn to deal with the source of their offending patterns.

The life of the fifty-year old inmate described above imitated the priorities of his generation. He was told in the 1950s that work was the most important aspect of life. This inmate decided that as long as he only binged on his holidays (and drank on weekends and during evenings after work), that he was alright. The fact that he came to jail for two or three years every decade was simply an inconvenience.

This man could not adjust to the fact that in the 1980s he had to take programming for his offences. He felt that it was no-one's business that he drank on weekends and evenings. He was doing time for his offences. That was punishment enough. He did not want to face the fact that he had caused serious harm to other people (as well as to himself).

The second example comes from the true story of a British woman executive who married an American man by the name of Clark Rockefeller. The story has been made into a movie entitled, *Who is Clark Rockefeller?*² The man claimed that he was related to the famous Rockefeller family. He invited himself to their family reunions. He told his wife that he only worked *pro bono* (for free) on architectural projects because he could not as a Rockefeller stoop to working for hire for real money.

The woman accepted his explanations. They had a child together and were married for ten years. There came a point when the woman could no longer believe everything her husband was telling her. She hired a lawyer to look into the case. The lawyer discovered that the man was originally from Germany. Rockefeller was not his real name. After the spouse filed for divorce, the husband kidnapped the girl. He claimed that he should get custody because he had spent the last ten years raising their daughter. It took the police over a month to find the man and arrest him.

In a poignant scene at the police station, the woman acknowledges imbalances in her life. Given the trauma of having her daughter kidnapped and the true identity of her husband revealed, she looks at the policeman and says, "Am I that dumb (stupid)?" The policeman continues to look at the bottom of his coffee cup without answering.

The woman's financial success as a well-paid executive blinded her to the lies that her husband told her. In fact, the woman was attracted to her husband precisely because of his so-called elite connections to the Rockefeller family. The woman

² DVD (Sony Pictures, 2010).

wanted desperately to believe that she had married into an historically rich and famous family. Her need for recognition deflected her ability to see the real facts at hand.

The woman in the story is not different from the alcoholic man that I interviewed. The older man who went binge drinking and committed crimes wanted desperately to believe that he was alright. He wanted to be accepted on the basis of the mores of the generation in which he grew up. That generation believed in the value of hard work, regardless of the personal state of one's alcoholism or marriage.

In addition to the analogy of a jigsaw puzzle, the illustration of a house explains imbalances in people's lives. I suggested to the alcoholic man that his life priorities could be compared to the four walls of a house. Work represented one wall. The man had had numerous financial successes. He became a pilot later in his life and flew around the country in his small Cessna plane (sometimes while being blacked out).

The man's family represented the second wall. The man had been married and had raised a family. Although he recently divorced, the man's ability to be part of a family represented a second positive aspect of his life. The man had a sense of belonging to something beyond himself.

The third wall had to do with the man's Christian faith. He came regularly to the worship services I conducted in prison. He expressed regret and remorse for what he had done. He experienced God's comfort and love as he spent time in jail.

This man's work, family, and faith represented three solid walls of his house. He had spent years building these walls and securing them on a solid foundation. The problem was that the fourth wall was missing. This non-existent wall had to do with the man's alcoholism.

The man's inability to acknowledge this non-existent wall allowed rain to fall and snow to blow into his house. The house could not be adequately heated in spite of the fact that he had provided a roof over his family's heads. The family could not live comfortably in the house because of this missing wall. They decided to move out because they could no longer tolerate the situation. The man also had to move out and go to jail. Living in the house was not sustainable.

The man was unable to see this missing wall. The man was so entrenched in viewing his alcoholism as normal and in maintaining the other three walls that he refused to see the "big" thing that was causing his house to crumble.

The woman described above was in the same situation. She had worked so hard to become successful that she had neglected personal aspects of her life. The love of her life who happened to be a Rockefeller represented a winfall. Not only was she now wealthy and successful. She now had status and fame because she had married into the Rockefeller family. Her need to be recognized blinded her to the real situation at hand. The lies and false image of her husband represented the fourth missing wall that brought her house of cards to the ground. The woman had to take another look at the personal aspects of her life in order to grow into a well-rounded person.

The movie, *Life as a House*,³ uses the idea of a house to portray imbalances in people's lives. An older divorced man discovers that he is dying of cancer. His ex-wife has married another man. The two younger children resent their new step-dad. The third insecure teenager is drawn to selling drugs and doing sexual favours.

The older man decides to rebuild his father's old house. He takes custody of his teenage son and recruits him to remodel the house. The older man reconnects emotionally with his ex-wife. The family learns to love each other all over again. The older man's discovery that he is dying represents a wake-up call. The rebuilding of his father's house represents a metaphor for rebuilding his own life. The story ends with his son giving the house to a young girl in a wheelchair. His grandfather was responsible for her injury as a result of a car accident.

We as an audience only find out at the end why the father had such anger and resentment in his life. We realise only at the end why it was so difficult for the father to rebuild his father's old house – perched as it was in an elite neighbourhood overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Los Angeles. The father's courage to rebuild his father's house gave him the courage to rebuild his own life – and bring some healing to his son, ex-wife, and other children at the same time.

Each of these examples demonstrates imbalances in peoples' lives. They also show that a crisis can cause people to change, to take stock of their lives, and to build a fourth wall. Acknowledging the missing fourth wall helps to put everything else into perspective. Accepting the fact that one is an alcoholic, that one has not worked at healthy relationships, and that one is dying represents the first step in healing and righting the ship that is listing to one side (to use another metaphor).

³ DVD (eOne Film Distribution, 2001).

Outline of Book

1. Imbalances in Our Lives

The first chapter names imbalances in our lives in order to overcome our skewed view of reality and unfulfilled existence. While not exhaustive, impulsive behaviours, unconscious desires, oedipal complexes, insecure identities, conflicted personalities, codependent relationships, saviour figures, delusional thinking, manufactured innocence, and post-modernity influence our lives. The nonrational aspect of our Being has a great deal to say about how we process things rationally. Reflection on each of these human behaviours helps us understand what we need to do to change.

2. Modernity Relived

The second chapter uses the enticement of the Eaton's department store to relive the modern ideals with which our parents grew up. These ideals are still real in the sense that we dream of infatuation, love, commitment, marriage, babies, families, and houses. It remains to be seen how many of these idyllic settings need to be dismantled in order for us to embrace the realities of post-modernity. Projection of the Eaton's department store as a metaphor for our desires is both real and unreal.

3. Into the Woods to Solidify our Identity

The third chapter uses James Lapine's play, *Into the Woods*, to outline the relevance of post-modernity, oedipal complexes, and a disassembled self. The play represents a post-modern tale told within the context of modern ideals. The first act follows fairy tale characters fulfilling their dreams of marriage, love, family, children, independence, and bravery. The second act dismantles these dreams through experiences of infidelity, death, insecurity, separation, fear, and self-doubt.

Lapine makes extensive use of the Oedipal complex to demonstrate the insecurity of his fairy tale characters. Fathers, mothers, witches, and parental authority figures control the future decision making of Jack, Little Red Riding Hood, Rapunzel, Cinderella, and the Baker and his wife. Each person achieves some semblance of self-esteem and courage in the face of dangers and undo influences.

The Baker's wife reveals the degree to which a person can become disassembled by subconscious desires. She is content in her marriage to the Baker and happy with the birth of her child. In spite of this situation, the wife falls into a tryst with one of the fairy tale Princes. She cannot believe that she is allowing this infidelity to happen.

She recognizes that this brief inattentive moment of a powerful wish fulfillment is unravelling everything in which she believed.

The dialogue during this scene echoed everything I heard when I listened to inmates disassembling themselves in the moment of their crimes. Offenders' crimes magnified a hundredfold the consequences of the "small indiscretion" on the part of the wife. While Lapine conveniently kills off the wife after this scene, the inmates in my office were not so fortunate. They continued to live with the consequences of their crimes while still believing that life was still worth living.

4. Resolution of Conflicted Personalities

The fourth chapter uses the movie, *American Beauty*,⁴ to illustrate the consequences of being unable to resolve conflicted personalities. Lester Burnham is conflicted between being responsible and working at a minimum wage job. He is attracted to his daughter's teenage friend because his marriage is falling apart. His wife, Carolyn, is in the same position. She sleeps with her alter-ego of a real estate agent, Buddy Kane, while dreaming about killing her husband. Their daughter Jane has similar fantasies. She tells her emo boyfriend Ricki that someone should get rid of her geeky Dad. Her father's attraction to her girlfriend repulses her. Then there is Ricki's father, Frank Fitz. He is a repressed homosexual living within the body of a macho Army colonel.

Some of these characters resolve their personality conflicts legally and morally while others resort to violence and drugs. Carolyn reduces herself to tears of grief rather than shooting her husband. Lester stops within a moment of rape when Angela tells him that she has never slept with anyone. Jane falls in love with Ricki rather than acting out her anger on her parents. Ricki takes pictures of Jane rather than escaping into drugs and voyeurism. Fitz is the only one who resorts to violence because he cannot face his attraction to other men. He ends up shooting Lester because he believes that Lester had a homosexual encounter with his son Ricki.

Inmates I have met are more like Fitz in their resolution of conflicted personalities than the other options presented. Viable pro-social alternatives presented in the movie in the face of significant emotional imbalances enable viewers to consider positive options of their own.

⁴ *American Beauty*, DVD, director Sam Mendes (Warner Brothers, 2013).

Conclusion

The conclusion outlines three key areas of growth: naming subconscious desires, solidifying identity, and resolving conflicted personalities. It summarizes the findings of the book so that the reader has a better understanding of imbalances in their own lives. Naming these imbalances represents the first step in making things turn out right.

Chapter One

Imbalances in our Lives

The time has come to name various imbalances in our lives. These lacuna represent pieces of the larger puzzle that are harder to put together. They are illustrative of the interviews I have had with inmates. They are reflective of personal experiences. Naming these tendencies and habits help us correct inadequacies.

Let me start with imbalances in inmates' lives. The divorced men that I met lived in dysfunctional codependent relationships. The older adults were conflicted between impulsive behaviours and mature responsible leadership. The middled-aged impetuous ones lived a life of fantasy and excess. The insecure young men were controlled by the overbearing influence of their single mothers.

Some of these behaviours are evident within us. How often have we acted impulsively to seek immediate gratification? How many times have we done things that are difficult to explain on a conscious level? When have we reacted like a child to the unconscious hold that our parents have over us? Why do we feel inadequate and fearful in a career in which we have excelled? Why have our decisions led us in the opposite direction from which we intended? Why are we hooked emotionally into the adult decisions that our children have made? Why are we nostalglic about the way that things once were? Why do we feel the need to reinvent ourselves every decade or so?

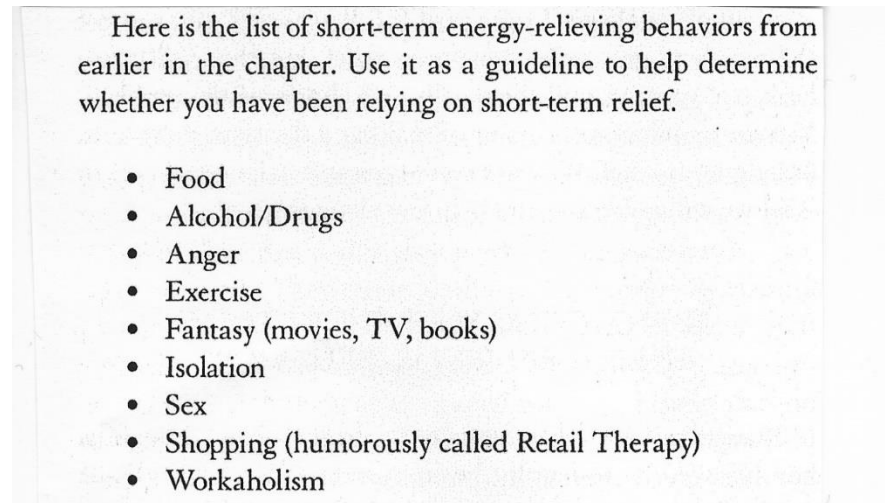
1. Impulsive Behaviours

Each of these behaviours, relationship dynamics, and personality traits have a name. John James and Russel Friedman refer to impulsive behaviours as “short term energy relieving behaviours.”⁵ Going to movies, shopping, using drugs, having sex,

⁵ John James and Russel Friedman, *The Grief Recovery Handbook* (New York: William Morrow, 2009), p. 82.

gambling, accessing pornography, or buying things at convenience stores provide us with immediate pleasures in life.

Figure 1: Short Term Energy Relieving Behaviours, STERBS



Reasons for these short term energy relieving behaviours have to do a person's inability to live an integrated life. James and Friedman speak about these STERBs in relation to people unable to grieve the loss of a loved one. People substitute their feelings of pain, anguish, despair, and loneliness with temporary solutions. They eat too much, binge watch TV too much, become obsessed about sex, going shopping a lot, or work out daily in the gym. These activities are appropriate in moderation. They become problematic when one begins to fixate on them.

Let me give examples from my own life. I focus on one of these activities when I am bored. I sit in a liminal space in which I am neither satisfied what I have accomplished nor motivated to think about the future. I dwell unhappily in the present. I am either nostalgic or goal oriented. Instant gratification is the only thing I am familiar with when I live in the present.

My challenge is to regard each of the above activities in terms of a larger whole. I become more satisfied with eating when I prepare meals, take the time to digest the food, and eat with other people.

I become more satisfied with sex when I engage in it in relation to a committed relationship. My wife and I have spent years finding the right balance of loving activities, sexual intercourse, mutual interests, visiting family and friends, and conversation.

I become more satisfied with movies and television when I take the time to debrief. My wife and I watch movies together. I pick a movie that has to do with relationships, adventure, intrigue, and suspense.

I become more satisfied with shopping when I take the time to buy something for someone else. I become more satisfied with buying things when I think about how that purchase fits into our lives.

I become more satisfied with isolation when I dwell in the loneliness that I feel. I am an intrinsically introverted person who likes camping alone in the bush for a week or two. Being by myself is the only way that I feel real. I own the emotions that I have. I am intrinsically afraid of other people. I feel as though they are looking for a way to intrude on my life.

I like exercising because it makes me understand how physically fit I am - not. Running twice around a quarter mile track gives me a precise idea of how my heart and lungs are doing.

Work is how I ground my identity. I started working full time one year after retirement because I had no idea what to do with my free time. I can only golf, swim, exercise, have coffee with a friend, and travel so much. I became bored all over again. Working at a career has given me a sense of purpose and fulfillment. My hand fits nicely into the glove of my career. I am the one who shaped the glove to fit into my life.

I am writing this book to come to terms with the way that impulsive behaviours, unconscious desires, oedipal complexes, insecure identities, conflicted personalities, codependent relationships, saviour figures, delusional thinking, manufactured innocence, and post-modernity influence our lives. The nonrational aspect of our Being has a great deal to say about how we process things rationally.

Sex is out of control if it is not connected to the body. Eating is out of control if it is not connected to being physically hungry. Watching movies is out of control if it does not connect to our actual lives. Exercising is out of control if it becomes a way of avoiding other things. Shopping is out of control if it does not contribute to our overall physical and social wellbeing.

This book concentrates on the nonrational aspects of life to show how these unconscious desires feed our conscious hopes and dreams. I am excited about the libido aspect of life because it drives our desires to be fulfilled and successful. Instant

gratification is a warning sign that not all is right with the world. The unconscious nature of our Being drives the ways in which we are fulfilled on a conscious level.

2. Subconscious Desires

Couples counsellor Harville Hendrix has written a book about the way our subconscious desires drive our relationships. Entitled *Getting the Love You Want*,⁶ Hendrix suggests that the five minutes of exhilaration we feel when we meet someone for the first time represents a falling in love that may last a lifetime. Two people fall in love because of mutual sparks of *recognition, timelessness, reunification, and necessity*.⁷ Echoes of the other person's experiences within one's own emotions, influences, and social interactions triggers these feelings. The other person can see right through us. The person understands us at a deeper level than anyone else.

Harville Hendrix uses the unconscious aspects of this attraction to help couples save their marriages.⁸ The partner expects their spouse to provide nurture and care in the same way that their parents loved them. The husband's realization that their spouses are unique and need to be accepted for who they are moves the imbalance of the relationship from a parent-child to an adult-adult one. Unconscious desires are brought to consciousness so that love can flourish again.

Sociologist Macolm Galdwell has found the unconscious helpful in explaining things. He defines intuition as "the content and origin of those instantaneous impressions and conclusions that spontaneously arise whenever we meet a new person or confront a complex situation or have to make a decision under stress."⁹

Malcolm Gladwell gives several examples of how this works. In *What the Dog Saw*, Gladwell shows that a dog's behaviour has everything to do with its master.¹⁰ In *Outliers*, he describes how the frequency of Korean plane crashes had everything to do with an unspoken culture of deference.¹¹ In *Blink*, he follows an art expert who believed on the basis of a hunch that the marble statue he was looking at was a fake.¹² Seemingly insignificant details and hidden factors have everything to do with the matter at hand.

⁶ Harville Hendrix, *Getting the Love You Want*, 20th Anniversary Edition (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1988).

⁷ Ibid, pp. 38, 50-53.

⁸ Ibid, pp. 3 – 100.

⁹ Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2005), p. 16.

¹⁰ Malcolm Gladwell, *What the Dog Saw* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009), pp. 126-148.

¹¹ Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2008), pp. 177-223.

¹² Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink*, pp. 3-17.

3. Oedipal Complexes

Oedipal complexes are another way of identifying the manner in which unconscious influences shape us. The Oedipal Greek myth tells the story of a son who unknowingly kills his father and falls in love with his mother. The moral of the story has to do with the fact that parents influence their children in unconsciously negative ways. The son serves as a substitute husband for his mother while killing off the competition.

This myth became real for me when I worked with young offenders in jail.¹³ Their single mothers had raised them without the influence of a father figure. The young men became the substitute husbands for their mothers in lieu of a non-existent adult partner. The down side of this arrangement became evident when their mothers began dating men their own age. The sons intervened in the budding romance. They did not consider their mothers' new suitors worthy enough. The mothers reciprocated by rejecting any new suitor that their sons entertained. This codependent relationship was debilitating for all concerned.

Child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim has noted the importance of the Oedipal complex in therapeutic settings. Bettelheim worked with severely disturbed children.¹⁴ These children were unable to solidify their own identity because they were hooked negatively into the emotional and social dynamics of their parents.¹⁵

Bettelheim discovered that fairy tales were invented to illustrate this Oedipal complex. Jack in the story of *Jack and the Beanstalk* could not throw off the influence of his mother until he had climbed the beanstalk, stolen some gold, and killed the giant.¹⁶ Rapunzel could not escape the co-dependent clutches of her mother until she fell in love with a prince, cut off her hair, and went to live with him in his castle.¹⁷ These stories demonstrate that children can move from a psychologically dependent phase to an independent one. They can leave the superego dominance of their parents by being attracted to their own heroes and mentors. They fulfill their dreams of becoming adult men and women by taking risks and acting on their desires.

¹³ Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace* (Victoria: Friesen Press, 2010), p. 48.

¹⁴ See Bettelheim's biography., https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruno_Bettelheim, retrieved October 2020.

¹⁵ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), pp. 38-39.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 183-193. Cf. James Lapine's depiction of this story, *Into the Woods* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1987), pp. 91-92.

¹⁷ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, pp. 16-17.

The Oedipal complex helps explain the lives of the men with whom I worked. In addition to their mothers' dominating influence, the men were hooked negatively into their fathers' absence. The young men told me over and over again that they hated their fathers.¹⁸ They never wanted to grow up to be like them. Yet here the sons were, sitting in the same place that their fathers had sat thirty years ago, in jail. These men as young children had visited their fathers in jail. They had watched their Dads self-destruct through addiction to alcohol. They were not like their fathers at all, they claimed. These young men were addicted to drugs rather than to alcohol.

These young men were hooked negatively in relationships with women their own age. They almost always referred to their girlfriends or spouses as their "baby's Mom." They treated their significant others in terms how their girlfriends were mothers to their children.

This situation mimicked their own child-parent relationship to their Moms. Their mothers considered their sons to be the most important emotional connection in their lives. This parent-child relationship skewed the adult-adult relationship that was necessary for mothers and sons to mature. Their mothers could not marry because of their codependent relationship with their sons. Their sons could not marry because of their mothers' interference.

This co-dependent, parent-child relationship of mother and son defined the way that the sons viewed their own girlfriends. They regarded their girlfriends in relation to their role as mothers to their children.

The challenge of this situation had to do these young men moving from a parent-child to an adult-adult relationship with their mothers, fathers, and spouses. The biblical quote from the Book of Genesis sums up what I am trying to say: "Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24, NRSV).

4. Insecure Identities

Dependent relationships on their mothers resulted in these men having insecure self-identities. They transferred the codependent attachments with which they were familiar to anyone else that would let them. These men would obey the orders of

¹⁸ Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, p. 48. Cf. Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual* (Victoria: Friesen Press, 2020), pp. 120-121.

their gang bosses, do favours for the stronger inmates who were protecting them, and run around in small groups so that they did not feel so vulnerable.

The men had not yet learned to stand up for themselves. They transferred the emotional and protective blanket that their mothers had provided to their new-found group or gang. Peer pressure continued to exercise a lot of influence. They defined themselves according to how other people liked and accepted them.¹⁹

5. Conflicted Personalities

These men were deeply conflicted. They had committed adult crimes and severely injured other people while remaining deeply insecure about themselves. They represented emotionally debilitated souls within adult bodies. They were passive when relating to their own Moms. They were aggressive when relating to their gang “brothers.” They told their friends that they were proud of the fact that they had sold drugs. They told their parents and girlfriends that they were ashamed and felt guilty for having broken the law. These men had to come to terms with the influence that their parents had had on them from ages 1 – 12. They had to respond to the peer pressure of their friends that they experienced from ages 13 – 21.²⁰ They had to integrate the offences for which they had been convicted into the pro-social lifestyle that they envisioned.

6. Codependent Relationships

Former alcoholic Melodie Beattie has defined codependence as a relationship in which one person lives their life through another person.²¹ The stereotypical example involves an alcoholic and his spouse. His wife spends her life pleasing her husband because she believes that this is what love is. She does not feel worthy of love herself. Her negative self image contributes to her futile attempts to have her husband pay attention to her. She enables and covers up his alcoholism because she believes that her husband will love her for her selfless efforts. It took Melodie over ten years of being an angry “dry” alcoholic to realise that she had to learn how to love all over again. Her new goal is help others become detached, find freedom, remove the victim stance, live one’s own life, have a love affair with oneself, and learn to feel one’s own feelings.²²

¹⁹ Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, pp. 91-100, 115-124.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Melodie Beattie, *Co-Dependent No More* (Minnesota: Hazelden Publishing, 1986).

²² Ibid, pp. 55-113, 119-150.

7. Saviour Figures as Part of the Problem

Inmates tried to redeem themselves by helping a person more needy than themselves. I recall innumerable examples of this type of behaviour.²³ One ex-husband who was released on parole fell in love with a woman who had four children. The man got a job and obtained an apartment in which they could all live. He took care of the children and became a husband to his new girlfriend. Within three months of this arrangement, the man fled the scene and started using drugs in another town. He could not cope with his intentions to live a normal life.

I worked with this person for the next six months after he was suspended from parole. He received parole again. This time, he contacted his ex-wife and moved her two hundred kilometers from her home into the city in which he was living. Unable to make this arrangement work, the man stole some cellphones and groceries and came back to jail. The woman was left to fend for herself. She had worked for nine years to establish a new life for herself, far from her toxic husband.

In another case, a young man was released on day parole to a half-way house in a city. Within a few hours of arriving there, his younger brother phoned him. He said that the gang was after him because he had stolen ten cellphones from them. The older brother met with the gang and paid his younger brother's bill.

A former girl-friend phoned the young man on parole in the middle of the night. She was being sexually assaulted by some men and needed help. The young man showed up at the apartment and intervened.

The young man told me these stories six months after he had been suspended while on parole. He could not cope with the codependent relationships in which he was in. He had to break close family and friendship ties in order to become healthy.

Melodie Beattie explains how this toxic cycle of becoming a saviour figures works. She uses the illustration of a Karpman triangle.²⁴ A man is attracted to his girlfriend because she needs help. The man helps her out by giving her money, taking her away from her abusive boy-friend, and moving her into a new apartment. The man represents the peak of the triangle while the girlfriend is the person being saved on the lower right hand side.

²³ Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, p. 45.

²⁴ Melodie Beattie, *Codependent No More*, pp. 83-95.

The next stage of the relationship involves the two people living together. They both feel that they have found true love. Their previous problems are over. They are living an idyllic situation represented by a form of mutuality in the lower right side of the triangle. Each person is getting something out of the relationship.

Unfortunately, this relationship falls apart within three months. The boyfriend is upset because his new girlfriend is not showing him as much love as he wants. The girlfriend is upset because her boyfriend is treating her like a child. While thankful that he has helped her, the girlfriend wants to be treated like an adult. The man looks at love in terms of a parent-child relationship. He expects love on the basis of the fact that he is protecting her and taking care of her.

The man moves from mutuality represented by the lower right hand side of the triangle to seeing himself as a victim on the bottom left side of the triangle. He is resentful and hurt because his girlfriend has not reciprocated the love that he has shown her by feeling sorry for her. He leaves his girlfriend. He retreats into self-pity and self-loathing. He isolates himself and no longer believes true love is possible.

After a period of grieving and various recriminations, the man moves from the bottom left hand side of the triangle to the top. He once again believes that love is possible. He once again finds a person more needy than himself. He establishes a new relationship with this person. The cycle repeats itself all over again: from saviour figure to true love to victim stance to saviour figure.

Melodie Beattie believes that true love is possible when each person treats the other as an adult. There was a point in the three month relationship described above when the situation could have changed. The man could have stopped seeing himself as a saviour figure. He could have decided that he really loved this person, irregardless of her circumstances. He loved this person for her own sake, not because she was needy. The true love that this couple had for each other could have diffused the way in they saw themselves as a parent figure taking care of the other person. All of us need to be cared for by others. However, we do not want to see this neediness as defining the relationship. A relationship has to move from a parent-child to an adult-adult situation in order to be viable.

8. Saviour Figures as Part of the Solution

Various movies portray saviour figures in a good light. One thinks of the film *Inception*.²⁵ A company hires a team of experts to plant a false memory into the mind

²⁵ DVD (Warner Brothers Entertainment, 2010).

of one of their rivals. As head of the team, a man recruits his wife to help with the complicated procedure. It involves putting the victim into a coma through the use of drugs. The team returns from this parallel universe once this experiment is complete. The spinning of a top indicates the transformation from the virtual reality of the experience to reality itself.

The man's wife falls in love with being on this parallel universe. She finds that life feels so much more vital and alive when she is living in a drug-induced state. Unfortunately, she is unable to tell the difference between this dream and reality. At one point, she is sitting on a window ledge and questioning her husband about whether he truly loves her. Her husband pleads with her not to jump. He tells her that this situation is real, not a dream. She jumps to her death anyway.

The man is heartbroken. He accepts the blame for having introduced his wife to these elaborate experiments in virtual reality. He remains in despair and grieves deeply.

The situation changes when he recruits a new female member to his team. This female member intuitively understands and empathizes with his grief. In a virtual reality experiment, she takes an elevator down four floors to the basement of the man's mind to visit with his deceased wife. She reminds the dead wife that she has to take some of the responsibility for her own death,

The new female character empathizes with the widower in order for him to move on with his life. She represents a saviour figure in the sense that she validates his grief while galvanizing him into living a new life.

A similar dynamic is at work in the fictional film series, *Jason Bourne*.²⁶ Jason is an American assassin trained to kill people in clandestine operations for a secret spy agency. The people he is mandated to kill represent a threat to American democracy and its way of life. Jason reaches a point when he is no longer able to carry out his assignment. His epiphany comes when he sees two children sleeping beside a foreign official that he has been sent to kill. He flees the scene and is shot two times in the back. He is left for dead in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea.

The first movie in the series, *Jason Bourne Identity*, begins at this point in Jason's life. Jason has amnesia as a result of being shot. He is rescued by a passing boat and brought back to life.

²⁶ DVD (Universal Studios, 2008).

Three movies, *Jason Bourne Identity*, *Jason Bourne Supremacy*,²⁷ and *Jason Bourne Ultimatum*,²⁸ follow Jason as he redeems his life. He retraces the steps that have made him into an assassin. He confronts his past and changes his future.

Two women aid him in this recovery. The first person is called Marie. Like Jason, she is living a nomadic existence in Paris. She moves from place to place without finding any real grounding in her life. She agrees to help Jason retrace his steps. She stays by his side every step of the way as Jason slowly realises who he is and what he has become.

An assassin mistakenly shoots Marie at the beginning of the second movie, *Jason Bourne Supremacy*. Nicky Parsons, an American agency assistant, replaces Marie as a saviour figure. She helps Jason remember an assassin assignment that he completed in Berlin. In the third movie, *Jason Bourne Ultimatum*, Nicky helps the new American director of spy operations find money stolen by a Russian oligarch. Nicky finds the location of a bureau manager who knows more about Jason's past.

Nicky Parson appears again in the fourth and final movie in the series, *Jason Bourne*.²⁹ She finds Jason earning money boxing against rivals of the highest bidder. Nicky retrieves valuable agency documents that reveal that Jason's father was involved in Jason's recruitment and training. She helps Jason escape the agency's assassins while being shot in the process.

Marie and Nicky serve as valuable saviour figures for Jason. They normalize the situation while Jason slowly regains some of his memory. They provide relief and comfort while Jason is starting a new life.

Jason's new perception of himself comes into focus at the end of the second movie. He is on the verge of killing a bureau manager who has ordered his death. The bureau executive challenges Jason to pull the trigger. Jason responds by saying that he no longer wants to kill people. He adds, "The only reason you are alive is because Marie wouldn't want me to (kill you)."

Marie's salvation role becomes clear. Jason does not know how to live a new life. Marie shows him that he can become a normal person again. Her love and care for him is reciprocated by his love and care for himself. This new validation of himself

²⁷ DVD (Universal Studios, 2008).

²⁸ DVD (Universal Studios, 2008).

²⁹ DVD (Universal Studios, 2016). *The Jason Bourne Legacy*, published as a DVD in 2012 (Universal Studios) , also includes a woman saviour figure. A woman scientist helps the chief protagonist assassin "viral off" the dependence on drugs that he is on to enhance his physical and mental capabilities.

ripples outward. Jason visits the daughter of two parents that he killed and says he is sorry. He kills the next assassin in self-defence in order to save Nicky. He continues to move forward without knowing how to live. All he knows is that he wants to be different from before.

The above mentioned movies show that there is a healthy role for saviour figures. Marie, Nicky, and the woman in *Inception* intervene in the lives of their friends and lovers by showing empathy, love, compassion, and care. These actions are carried out without the creation of a codependency relationship between the two protagonists. Saviour figures are indeed needed.

9. Delusional Thinking

Delusional thinking is yet another imbalance that affects people's ability to live a fulfilled life. I remember a conversation twenty-five years ago in Leclerc prison with an enforcer of the Hell's Angels. He had recently been sent back to jail with a new sentence. The man told me that he had enrolled in a continuing adult education course while in the community. He was trying to graduate from high school and required a few extra credits.

During one of the classes, he got into an altercation with another adult student. As the argument escalated, he pulled a gun from his duffle bag and aimed it at the other student. He was charged with threats to harm and kill another human being.

As our conversation continued, I asked man a question: "How many people do you think were carrying guns in their backpacks on that day in adult education class?" "All of them," he replied. He felt that the only way to respond to a perceived threat was to threaten the person first.

His perception of the world included the fact (sic) that many people were "out to get him." He lived in the world of the Hell's Angels gang where guns, violence, threats, and personal safety were every day issues. He himself had killed people on orders by the Hell's Angels. He transposed this experience of life onto the rest of his encounters with people. This man was paranoid and schizophrenic. He believed that people were a fundamental threat to him. It was necessary to carry a gun to "protect oneself."

This conspiracy view of the world is reserved for people who are heavily involved in gangs and crime. Delusional thinking is also present in other cases. I am thinking of the many alcoholics and sex addicts with whom I worked. The alcoholics believed

that drinking was a normal part of life. One drank beer at every meal because this is how one belonged, coped, and dealt with life.

The sex addicts, in turn, believed on the basis of their access to pornography that many women wanted to sleep with them. All they had to do is show up in a bar. The women would come flocking. These men believed that sexual intercourse was the basis of most relationships. That is what one did on a first date. That is what one asked for when a woman flirted with them.

Conspiracy theories are relevant because the above groups of men fed on that view of the world. Gang members hung out with gang members. Alcoholics hung out with other alcoholics. Sex addicts went to Sexaholics Anonymous meetings because this is where they would meet other addicts who may want to “hook up.”

10. Reflection on Saviour Figures and Conspiracy Theories

Each of us has had to decide how to respond to difficult situations. I have intervened countless times to bail someone out after they were evicted from their apartment, after they became too inebriated to drive, after they smashed a window of their apartment, or after they were arrested for drinking and driving. In each of these cases, I had to decide whether I was enabling or truly helping the person. The person that I helped returned to drinking, to gambling, to an unhealthy relationship, and to continuing the lifestyle with which they were familiar.

I would do the same thing all over again. I continue to believe in the ability of human beings to recover and get on with their lives. At the same time, I have had to decide when “enough is enough.” I have declined to help the same person again and again. I told the person that I had done everything that I could for them. It was now up to them to decide where to go from here. If they wanted live on the street, that was their decision. I stopped projecting my own assumptions about what a fulfilled life was for them. They had a better idea of what was possible, or not.

The trick is to get off the Karpman triangle of self-pity. Other people may not appreciate the help that I gave them. One becomes dependent and cares for others without becoming codependent on them. The mystery involves becoming a saviour figure without believing that one is indispensable. The story about a “grand” saviour figure has been told in order to diffuse and lessen the thoughts that we can become one. We are companions on the journey.

11. Manufactured Innocence

Two final topics are apropos to our discussion of healing, correcting imbalances, and getting on with our lives. Fiction writers in the early twentieth century came up with ideals of childhood that emphasized innocence and trust.³⁰ Children were detached from responsibilities in order to enjoy the pleasurable things in life. They played out their fantasies of real life by mimicing adult behaviours.³¹ Parents bought their children dolls and dollhouses in order to play house. The parents bought plastic kitchen sets so that their children could cook and prepare pretend meals. They bought their sons toy cars and tractors so that they could pretend that they were farmers like their Dad.

These writers envisioned a period of childhood that lasted from five to twelve years of age. One could indulge one's fantasies because one was young enough to be shielded from the harsher realities of life. A child was allowed a lot of free time to develop into the person that the parents wanted their children to become.

Frank Baum's children story, *The Wizard of Oz*, represents the quintessential journey of this fairyland existence.³² Dorothy and her friends travel effortlessly along a road that leads to a glorious city. They are told that confidence and energy are all that are needed to overcome the obstacles in one's path. The Wizard at the end of the road is nothing more than a shaman behind a curtain. He controls levers that are attached to nothing. The Wizard suggests to Dorothy and her friends that all they have to do is reach deep within themselves and access the courage and fortitude that they lack. Self-actualization in a land of plentiful opportunities are what constitute the American dream.

Children story writer Dr. Seuss was a successor to Baum and his fairy tale about Dorothy. Dr. Seuss suggests in his stories about the Cat and two young children³³ that all they need to do to be successful is learn how to control their inner desires. The house is a mess because "Sally and me" have allowed their infantile desires to run wild. Permissiveness has its place in the land of youth and fantasy. There comes

³⁰ For example, Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010); Eleanor Porter, *Pollyanna* (New York, 1912). Note William Leach's discussion, *Land of Desire* (New York; Vintage Books, 1994), pp. 244-260.

³¹ William Leach, *Land of Desire*, pp. 330-331.

³² L. Frank Baum, *The Wizard of Oz* (West India Publishing Company, 2021). Note William Leach's discussion, *Land of Desire*, pp. 56-61, 248-260.

³³ Dr. Seuss, *The Cat in the Hat* (New York: Random House, 1957), *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back* (New York: Random House, 1958).

a time when “Sally and me” exercise internal authority in order to make everything come out right.

The cat acts as a trickster in Dr. Seuss stories in the same way that the Wizard of Oz operates as a change agent in the lives of Dorothy and her friends. The cat represents a projection of Sally and me’s impulsive desires. The cat also represents a way through language and human will to control these infatuations. *The Cat in the Hat* is a moralistic tale set in a modern age that exists without Puritan religious underpinnings. Accessing and engaging one’s unconscious desires while bringing them under control are possible through the exercise of internal authority. Neither religion nor parents are needed as external modifying authorities.

William Leach has suggested that this Freudian emphasis on infantile desires resulted in the consumer driven society of America.³⁴ Material possessions represented the externalization of inner emotions and flights of fancy. Christmas parades, large toy sections in department stores, and consumerism set the standard of internal fulfillment and happiness. Clothing, household goods, elaborate homes, and cars objectified Dorothy’s search for the Emerald City. The monetary ability to buy these objects of desire represented the goal of the American work ethic. The ecstatic pursuit of these symbols of contentment and achievement enabled one to forget the pain and suffering needed to produce these goods within an assembly line of monotony and drudgery. The ends of fantasy justified the means of factory labour.

I suggested to the men in prison that they return to a second naivete of innocence and trust in order to regain their lives.³⁵ They had to relive their childhood of wish fulfillment in order to contrast that fantasy with the harsh ways in which they had tried to accomplish their desires. Their impulsive behaviours, immature decisions, and conflicted attitudes had resulted in criminal offences which made their lives and other people’s lives worse. They needed to return to the core of their being in order to separate needs and wants. They needed to recover and restore their lives in order to move on.³⁶

³⁴ William Leach, *Land of Desire*, pp. 3-38. Cf. Martin Wain’s broad philosophical treatise on this subject, *Freud’s Answer* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998).

³⁵ Paul Ricoeur refers to this experience for adults as a second naïveté, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, edited and translated by John Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 131-144. I have linked this naïveté to original righteousness and the Catholic Catechism’s reflection on a beatific vision, Donald Stoesz, *Theological Reflections on Celebrate Recovery: A Prison Chaplain’s Perspective*, unpublished manuscript, 2021, pp. 31-37.

³⁶ I have outlined the steps needed for this transformation in *Theological Reflections on Celebrate Recovery*, [Donald Stoesz, Protestant prison chaplain and published author](#), retrieved January 2022.

12. Impact of Post-Modernity

One way of illustrating this transformation is to contrast modern ideals with the post-modern reality in which we live. The self-sufficiency of a nuclear family in which husband, wife, and two children live in a modern bungalow represents an ideal middle class existence in the twentieth century. Economic opportunities and the manufacture of convenience made it possible for the husband and wife to live on their own. Separated from their parents, this couple could organize their own lives while raising a manageable number of children. Cars provided mobility. Day care centres and senior citizen homes offered parental relief from care of those on both ends of the age spectrum. Material goods, vacations, and travel became attainable for a rising middle class.

New economic challenges, increasing divide between rich and poor, impact of racism and extremism, rising divorce rates, new formations of identity and gender relationships, blended families, and an increasing lack of moral and social cohesion make it evident that we are living in a different age from the one described above. Production represented the driving engine of the modern age. Information technology and the service industry dominate the current age. Soft goods in the form of data and news define the new era. Human services for the young, old, and in between have replaced the self-sufficiency of an earlier time. Restaurants have replaced home cooking, transit systems have replaced cars, long term care facilities have replaced family care, and day care centres have provided relief for parents who want to work.

This generalized outline of societal changes in the last century pinpoints the need to redefine ourselves. While modern ideals continue to inform our thinking and actions, post-modernity has forced us to reimagine the way that we now live. This analogy is appropriate for the men with whom I worked. They had to own the losses, defeats, harm, and hurt that they had experienced and inflicted on others in order to move on. They had to reclaim the innocence and naivete of their youth in order to know what it was that was now worth living. Recovery and restoration represented a key part of this journey. New visions and ideals replaced the broken ones that they had inflicted on themselves.

All of us need to re-envision ourselves. We live in a different reality from the one in which we were born. We have to relook at the modern ideals of success, identity, relationships, and work in order to live a rich and fruitful life.

Chapter Two

Eaton's Department Store as an Ethic of Desire

Introduction

We as a family would travel every Christmas from southern Manitoba to the window display at the south-east corner of the Eaton's Department Store in downtown Winnipeg, Manitoba (figure 1). Snow was on the ground, winter was in the air, and people were crowded around the large window that housed a display of Santa's workshop. Warm in our parkas, we were eager with anticipation as we lined up to see (figure 2). Children and elves were scurrying about inside, packing Christmas presents for Santa to bring us (figure 3).

Figure 1: South-East Corner Window of Eaton's Store in Winnipeg, Manitoba



Figure 2: Lining up to See



Figure 3: Example of Christmas display



An enticing aspect of the display had to do with the fact that we were being invited into the Eaton's department store itself. With glass display windows surrounding the store on the main floor, high ceilings inside to accentuate space, escalators that took customers to every one of the eight floors (figure 4), and a restaurant called the Grill Room on the fifth floor (figure 14), these features represented a mesmerizing experience for us young children. We would ride the escalators up and down again and again, get lost from our parents' care, and be astonished at the sheer amount of goods being sold. We would wander from one aisle to another, wondering what we would find next.

Figure 4: Eight Floors of the Eaton's Store in Winnipeg



The Eaton's store represents a capsule of desire. It contains all the things a family needs, forming a hierarchy of values that leads its customers on a series of steps from desire to intimacy, intimacy to love, love to commitment, commitment to marriage, marriage to a house, house to a home, and finally to children representing a consummation of desire as well as a progenic future.

This chapter details the manner in which the Eaton's store encapsulates all of these things in an analogical and structural manner. It builds on the work of William Leach, who has shown in his book, *Land of Desire*,³⁷ how nineteenth-century commercialism in the department store industry became so successful because of

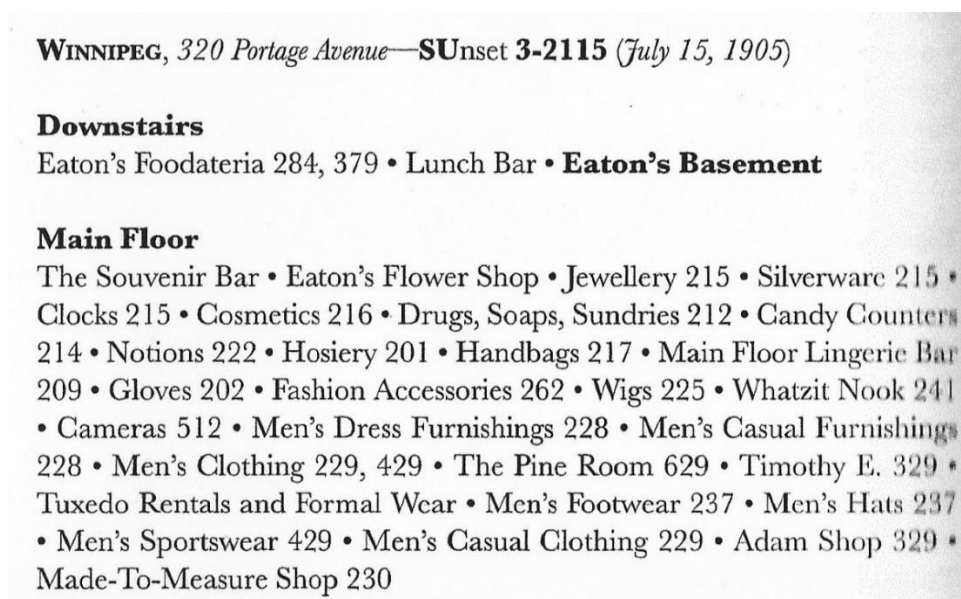
³⁷ Ibid.

things like mind cure, imagination, happiness, dreams, and fairy tales to foment the fulfillment of desire.

I. Eaton's Store as a Hierarchy of Values

The best way of showing how the Eaton's store entices customers into its hierarchy of values is to take the reader on a journey. We begin on the ground floor, where everyone starts as they meander their way to success and happiness. Most of the items on this floor are portable, easily accessible, and represent impulsive purchases (figure 5). What person does not yearn to check out the jewelry, cosmetics, wallets, umbrellas, hats, lingerie, flowers, shoes, souvenirs, gloves, silverware, watches, and other "notions" that tickle one's fancy?

Figure 5: Detailed Description of Items on First Floor³⁸



The main floor entices the imagination. Having entered the store with a subconscious urge to buy something, the store provides plenty of opportunity to do just that. The small portable items are just the right thing to buy for oneself or for one's girlfriend. A hat or wallet is needed to complete one's wardrobe. A gift card allows one's girlfriend to visit the cosmetics department, check out the handbags, and linger at the glass jewelry display. Who knows, maybe some earrings or even a ring is going to be a present soon for someone special?

³⁸ Bruce Allen Kopytek, *Eaton's: The Trans-Canada Store* (Charleston: History Press, 2014), p. 410.

The inviting glass windows with their displays all around the store, ready access through a series of large oak double doors, and the many portable items within easy reach stir the desires of the heart. Manufacturing desire is indeed a truism. Who would have thought one needed a new wallet until it was right in front of you, waiting to be picked up? Who came up with the idea of buying flowers every time you visited a friend's house? And then there are the more intimate items on display, such as lingerie and fashion accessories. The sheer availability of these items gets the imagination going.

These examples are illustrative of what takes place at any party of single peers. The women are looking their best, flashing glances at the men. The men are taking in the possibility of getting to know someone new, wondering how they are going to introduce themselves. The stage has been set for the availability, may I use that cavalier word, of fulfilling interactions between the sexes. Each exchange, suggestive gesture, and animated conversation give the parties concerned the idea that the other person is, indeed, available -- or at least, looking. Why invite all of these young adults to a party if not for the purpose of having these individuals take the interaction further?

Figure 6: Alluring Displays in the Large Store Windows



The buying of merchandise such as a skirt fulfills a desire for consumption and ownership. And yet, why dress up if not to attract someone else? Why flash one's jewelry if not to show off the fact that one might have money? And why look so

handsome and dashing if not to give the impression that one has a successful career to sustain this lifestyle?

Desire for consumption and attraction to another person are alluring because of the fleeting, momentary, and transient nature of the encounters. Tomorrow, the flowers will fade, the souvenirs look cheap, the makeup overdone, and the jewelry unaffordable. Tomorrow, one will have regrets about the one night stand, the misconstrued suggestion that one was actually interested, the misconception left of having a successful business, and the notion that one was actually available.

We gain immediate, gratifying pleasures from these momentary flings and exciting encounters. It is precisely because they are in the play of our imagination that we get so much satisfaction from them. We have let our mind wander far beyond what was intended. We believed the suggestion that the person left with us, giving us the idea that all things are possible.

These flights of fancy are fundamental to the yearnings of the heart. We all believe that love and happiness are possible, especially if we are not experiencing it at the present. The hungrier we are for love, the more impulse buying we do -- human and material -- to satisfy the emptiness of our hearts. We believe the innuendoes that the merchandise in the store suggest to us, namely that we are worthy and deserving of love. We believe the love that others tell us that they have for us, in the form of flowers, a card, a glance, or a suggestion. We have not yet come to love ourselves. We fill the void by grabbing onto as much as we can grasp.

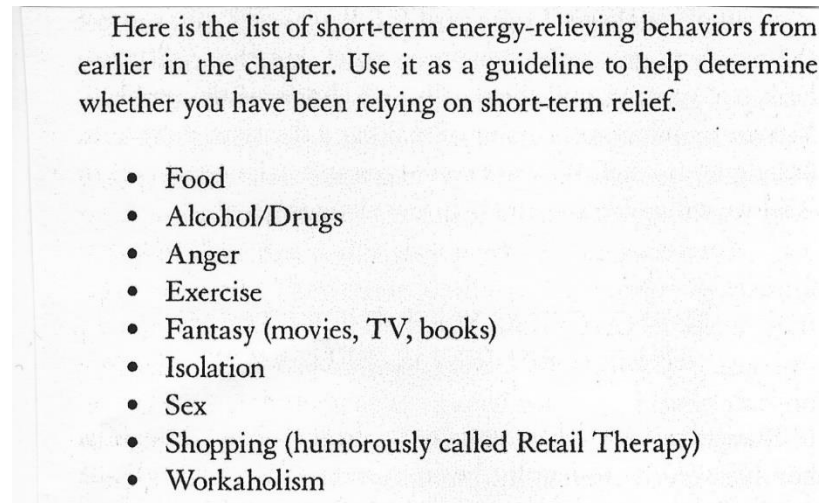
John James and Russel Friedman have suggested that these “short term energy relieving behaviours” are precisely what are needed to gratify the soul (figure 7).³⁹ Whether that refers to going to movies, shopping, using drugs, having sex, gambling, accessing pornography, or buying things at convenience stores, these activities foster the idea that many things in life are immediately available for gratification.

Perhaps we got this idea from the easily accessible items in the department store. Consumerism is alive and well precisely because we need so much of it. The sheer amount of merchandise on the first floor leads to flights of fancy. So do the fleeting parties that we attend as young people longing for a connection that is more than momentary. Because satisfaction is so hard to come by, why not indulge in what is available to see whether it will be enough?

³⁹ John James and Russel Friedman, *The Grief Recovery Handbook* (New York: William Morrow, 2009), p. 82.

Harville Hendrix, in his book on relationships, *Getting the Love You Want*,⁴⁰ and Macolm Gladwell, in his book, *Blink*,⁴¹ accentuate the role of impulsivity and intuition in finding love and gaining insight. The five minutes of exhilaration you feel when you meet someone who understands you only too well represents a falling in love that may last a lifetime.

Figure 7: Short Term Energy Relieving Behaviours, STERBS



Galdwell defines intuition as “the content and origin of those instantaneous impressions and conclusions that spontaneously arise whenever we meet a new person or confront a complex situation or have to make a decision under stress.”⁴² This statement illustrates the connection between impulse buying on the ground floor of the Eaton’s Department Store and the desires one has when one “falls in love.” Buying things on the first floor is like the beginning of a relationship that ends up at a very different place from what one consciously intended. The Eaton’s store provides a visual display of the development of relationships. Let us follow these bread crumbs to see where they will lead.

II. From Enticement to Love

The second floor always scared me as a young man. Having arrived via escalator, I was surrounded by endless rows of women’s dresses, skirts, coats, blouses, lingerie, shoes, and accessories. I fled the scene, finding my way to the third and fourth floors.

⁴⁰ 20th Anniversary Edition (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1988).

⁴¹ (New York: Back Bay Books, 2005).

⁴² Ibid., p. 16.

The fourth floor was just as scary. It replicated everything that I had found on the second floor, adding more of the same in the form of bridal gowns, prom dresses, fur coats, bathrobes, bras and panties, hairdressers, beauty salons, and so much more.

My anxiety reminded me of the time that I, as a recent college graduate, went to visit a friend of mine that I had worked together with on a farm in southern Manitoba. We knew each other casually, had not seen each other for a while, and liked the camaraderie of each other's company. On the evening in question, she appeared for

Figure 8: Items on the Second, Third, and Fourth Floors⁴³

Second Floor

Fashion Fabrics 233 • Creative Stitchery 224 • Sewing Machines • Flame and Flower 208 • Popular Price Sleepwear 209 • Popular Price Loungewear 209 • Popular Price Lingerie 209, 509 • Body Fashions 609 • Slipper Bar 238 • Women's Shoes 238 • Popular Price Dresses 345 • Popular Price Sportswear 545 • Popular Price Coats 445 • Shoe Repair • Custom Gift Wrapping

Third Floor

Seven Seas Gift Shop 270 • Impulse Shop • Glassware 252 • Crystal 252 • China 252 • The Gift Shop 218 • Bar Shop 218 • Bridal Registry • Silver Holloware 515 • Silver Flatware 515 • Housewares 254 • Creative Kitchen • The Current Electric 277 • Kitchen Country 254 • The Open Hearth Shop 276 • Mowers 253 • Snowblowers 253 • Ranges 256 • Washers and Dryers 257 • Dishwashers 256 • Refrigerators and Freezers 259 • Vacuum Cleaners 258 • Personal Care 477 • Furnaces 556 • Plumbing 456 • Pet Shop 253 • Sporting Goods 261 • Coins, Stamps 405 • Toys 271 • Third Floor Meats 281 • Fancy Food Shop 579 • Cake Counter 1108K • Char Bar • Grill Room Products

Fourth Floor

The Colony 744, 246 • Colony Dresses 341 • Young Sophisticates 341 • Mayfair Place 444 • Women's Place 446, 546 • Shoe Salon • Millinery 264 • Wigs 304 • Fur Salon 248 • Bridal Shop • Lingerie 609 • At Home • Loungewear 609 • Foundation Garments 609 • Beauty Salon • Fourth Gear 640 • Attitude 646 • No. 1 Shop 442 • Coats and Suits • The Weather Vane • Like Young Shop 611 • Mayfair Place 444 • Beauty Salon • The Trimmers • Junior Dresses 241

my visit in a dress. I was nonplussed. I had never seen her in a dress before. I realised that there was no mistaking this invitation. She assumed that I had come a courting – and that more appropriate attire was necessary for the somewhat formal occasion. I got the picture and fled the scene as soon as I could. How naïve can a young man

⁴³ Bruce Kopytek, *Eaton's*, p. 411.

be? I still remember our relationship with fondness, while thinking about how scared I was at what it could all possibly mean.

The message I received while skirting the second and fourth floors at Eaton's was that this was, indeed, a world utterly foreign to me, deeply attractive on the one hand, while utterly intimidating on the other. Women's shops outnumber men's stores ten to one, give or take. Women have so much more to choose from . . . Eaton's mimicked this trend by having two whole floors dedicated to women's fashions. Men's clothing was relegated to 20 per cent of the space on the first floor (figure 5). The disproportionate placement of gender merchandise reveals that men are lazier about buying clothing for their wardrobe. They need it readily at hand to give it some attention. Two dedicated floors to women's fashions, on the other hand, showed me that dressing up is serious business for women.

Figure 9: Window Display of Women's Dresses



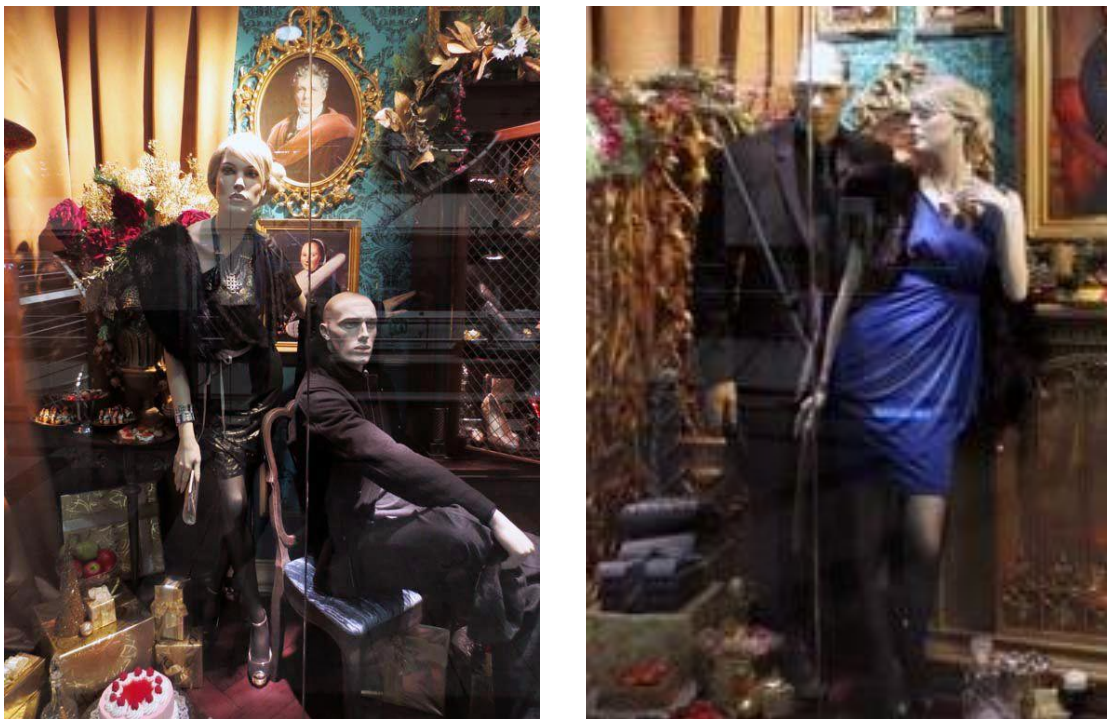
This fact was revealed to me in glaring detail when my (girl)friend showed up in a dress for our evening encounter. She was sending a clear message. We have flirted long enough. We have become friends. We like each other. You recently graduated

from college and are ready to get down to business. The attraction I feel for you could easily turn into love. I am available to be your fiancé. Why do we not start right now and move on to the next step?

This is what happens when one takes the escalator and discovers two floors of women's fashions. The friendship that I had with this woman was interpreted as something that could become more. The dress gave a clear non-verbal sign that more was intended. I descended quickly to the first floor, preferring a continuation of innuendo, flirtation, friendship, and impulse buying. The seriousness of what women's fashions meant had not yet made its impression on me. For anyone who is interested, there is a bridal shop on the fourth floor -- more about that later.

The fact that culinary items, kitchen appliances, washing machines and dryers, vacuum cleaners, and home maintenance equipment -- along with sporting goods and toys -- occupy space on the third floor should be enough of a reality check for any male college graduate. While I may want to linger among the sporting goods

Figure 10: Entrapment of Love through Fantasy



and toys for some time to come -- shall we say ten years -- there is a certain inevitability about where interactions with the opposite sex will lead. Where did I think all of this enticement and flirtation was headed, to some fairyland of never

ending foreplay? The fact that I had grown up within a family of two parents and three siblings should have given me some idea of what could happen to me, now that I was living on my own and wondering about what sorts of attachment I wanted.

The Eaton's Department Store, with its organic display of what is possible, is an analogy for life itself. I may remain a bachelor all of my life, visiting and revisiting the third floor to buy a new lawn mover, hedge clipper, furnace, and snow blower to maintain my yard. This stab at real life does not encompass the richness of relationships indicated as possible by the second and fourth floors. While heterosexual relations are assumed in this article, with gender divisions of labour implied, the steps of intimacy to love and commitment can be applied to any type of relationship. Divisions of labour can just as easily be adjusted.

A profound reality exists on the second, third, and fourth floors of Eaton's department store that is not as evident on the first floor. While I may wear a handsome outfit to the prom, I may really be a pauper living out of the back of my truck. While I may seem loving and charming and interested, the truth of the matter is that I will take whatever you have to offer without giving a lot in return.

These other realities -- masked from view by presentation -- are warning indicators that all is not as it seems when one remains on the first floor. The alluring trinkets and momentary pleasures give the impression that there is more to come, more to experience, more to achieve, more to gain.

We have arrived at the place where fiction and reality, fantasy and enjoyment, attraction and commitment come together. As long as we stay on the fiction, fantasy, and attraction side of the equation, we delude ourselves that there is actually something real to our relationships -- our flings, our mutual interests, the parallel paths on which we have ventured. Every person can name a time when a relationship went from the first to the second, third, and fourth floors -- from attraction to commitment -- and the reality checks that appeared regarding what the other person was really like.

I have offered relationship courses during my chaplaincy career because of the jarring reality that comes when we realise that our partner, spouse, lover, and confidante are different from whom we had assumed them to be. We had based our impressions on the initial, first floor experiences of infatuation, intimacy, immediacy, and pleasure.

Hendrix has written a book about relationships for couples who are on the verge of breaking up. He believes that the love experienced in the first five minutes of infatuation can, in fact, last a life time. Couples who have been jarred from their illusory perches while visiting the second, third, and fourth floors over the last number of years need to descend once again to the impulsive pleasures experienced on the first floor. What was it about the fleeting glance of fancy, endearing smile, and inviting stance that had meant so much in the first place? Can one be attracted to the same person for the same reasons ten and twenty and thirty years after the initial encounter?

The Eaton's Department Store encapsulates -- through its display of merchandise -- all of the things necessary for living. This organic whole is alluring precisely because of its non-existence in reality. Many of the Eaton's stores have been torn down. The ever expanding ranch-style malls that feature ground level access to everything has put hierarchy into question. Like the *Field of Dreams*,⁴⁴ the store with its displays on eight floors has become an organic metaphor for life because of its attractiveness to the imagination.

Dynamics of attraction, consumption, and profoundly intimate relationships are better understood through a structural analysis of the layout of the store. The displays provide visual ways of conceptualizing the nature, progression, and destiny of love. The physical accoutrements of the cosmetic department represent a foil for speaking about why anyone would adorn themselves in that way in the first place. What are these accessories but entrapments of love? Where do these entrapments lead but to the purchase of washing machines, fridges, ranges, and dryers?

III. From Love and Commitment to Babies and Families

The fifth floor represents the store's organic centre because this is where children are most protected, in the womb of all beginnings. Couples who arrive as lovers and significant others, husbands and wives, leave as parents. Far from the lure of relationship beginnings, infant apparel and children's accessories have been placed here because so many people are not ready for this next step. Ascending the escalator from the fourth to fifth floors has everything to do with the nine months of pregnancy

⁴⁴ Janice Dreese wrote a play entitled *Field of Dreams* (2020) that was made into a movie (Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2019) and was based on W. P. Kinsella's book, *Shoeless Shoe* (Wolfpack Publishing, 2020).

Figure 11: Window Displays of Love and Passion



necessary to become prepared to care for a baby. There are, of course, many couples who cannot have any of their own biological children. They may adopt or provide foster care of children who become their own. Others give of themselves in other ways, volunteering, writing books, and caring for others. Each in their own way live tremendously fruitful lives. The Eaton's store represents an arbitrary snapshot of average life, in which children are often included as part of the overall picture.

Figure 12: Items on the Fifth Floor

Fifth Floor

Hostess Shop • Portrait Studio 612 • The Grill Room • The Valley Room • The Soup Kettle

Young World—Infants' Wear 210 • Nursery Shop • Young Happenings • Children's Wear 210 • Eaton's Juvenile • Children's Shoes 239 • Girls' Wear 211 • Jean Tree 211 • Younger Crowd Shop 211 • Children's Hosiery 201 • Junior Shoes 239 • Action 5 611 • Boy's Clothing • Students' Clothing 432 • Abstract Shop 332 • 1-2-3 Boutique • Blue Tube

The fifth floor represents a transition from the mutual benefits that each person receives from the love and passion of relationships and marriage to the responsibility of caring for a third, utterly helpless baby. Parenting displaces the mutual benefits

of interactive adulthood with something called responsibility: selfless care for another human being. There are many benefits that result from having children. Some of these may only become apparent thirty years later.

Parents are caught up with the sheer enjoyment of throwing themselves into this new adventure. The fifth floor provides many opportunities to satisfy these desires: baby carriages and baby clothes, cribs and baby car seats, family pictures and mementos of this auspicious occasion, along with all the fuss that goes along with caring for this tiny little infant.

Children appear in the Christmas window display, on the cover of the Eaton's catalogue, and in a variety of promotional materials about toys. We as adults relive the innocence, excitement, anticipation, joy, and sheer embrace of life that we experienced as young children. Why take your children to the Eaton's display window if not to get some satisfaction for yourself? Why take your children on the Ferris wheel if not to relive the enjoyment you experienced thirty years ago in being lifted weightless into the sky? What does a visit to the toy department represent but an opportunity to buy adult toys for oneself, boats and trucks and furniture and paintings and rugs and dressers and snowmobiles and building equipment that one played with in miniature fashion when one was young?

Figures 13: Christmas is for Children, Dolls, Toys, and Baby Carriages





IV. Gratification of Culinary Delights

A second delight in visiting the fifth floor has to do with the opportunity to dine in fine style, with silver cutlery, cloth napkins, crystal glasses, fine china on clean white tablecloths, Indian rugs on the floor, and a sacred canopy of glass chandeliers, opulent paintings, and open space above. Every Eaton's store was furnished with one of these restaurants, personally designed and looked after by Lady Eaton.⁴⁵

While Winnipeg's Grill room was located on the fifth floor (figure 14), the Georgian Room in Toronto and the *9ieme* in Montreal were located on the top ninth floor (figures 15 and 18). An array of analogies suggests themselves. Breakfast, lunch, and supper are when family meets most often as a collective unit, agreeing on meals, disagreeing on chores, commiserating with each other about work travails, and teasing each other about possible boyfriends, *faux pas* in etiquette, and sharing news about family and friends.

Sitting around a table with family and friends represents a microcosm of society in which young and old, helpless and responsible, peers and mutual friends experience camaraderie and belonging on a deeply intimate level. We are more than the sum of

⁴⁵ Carol Anderson and Katharine Mallinson, *Lunch with Lady Eaton* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2004), pp. 50, 67, 72-73, 98.

our parts, a subconscious collective that participates in vicarious ways with all of the associations, concerns, anxieties, and joys of larger society.

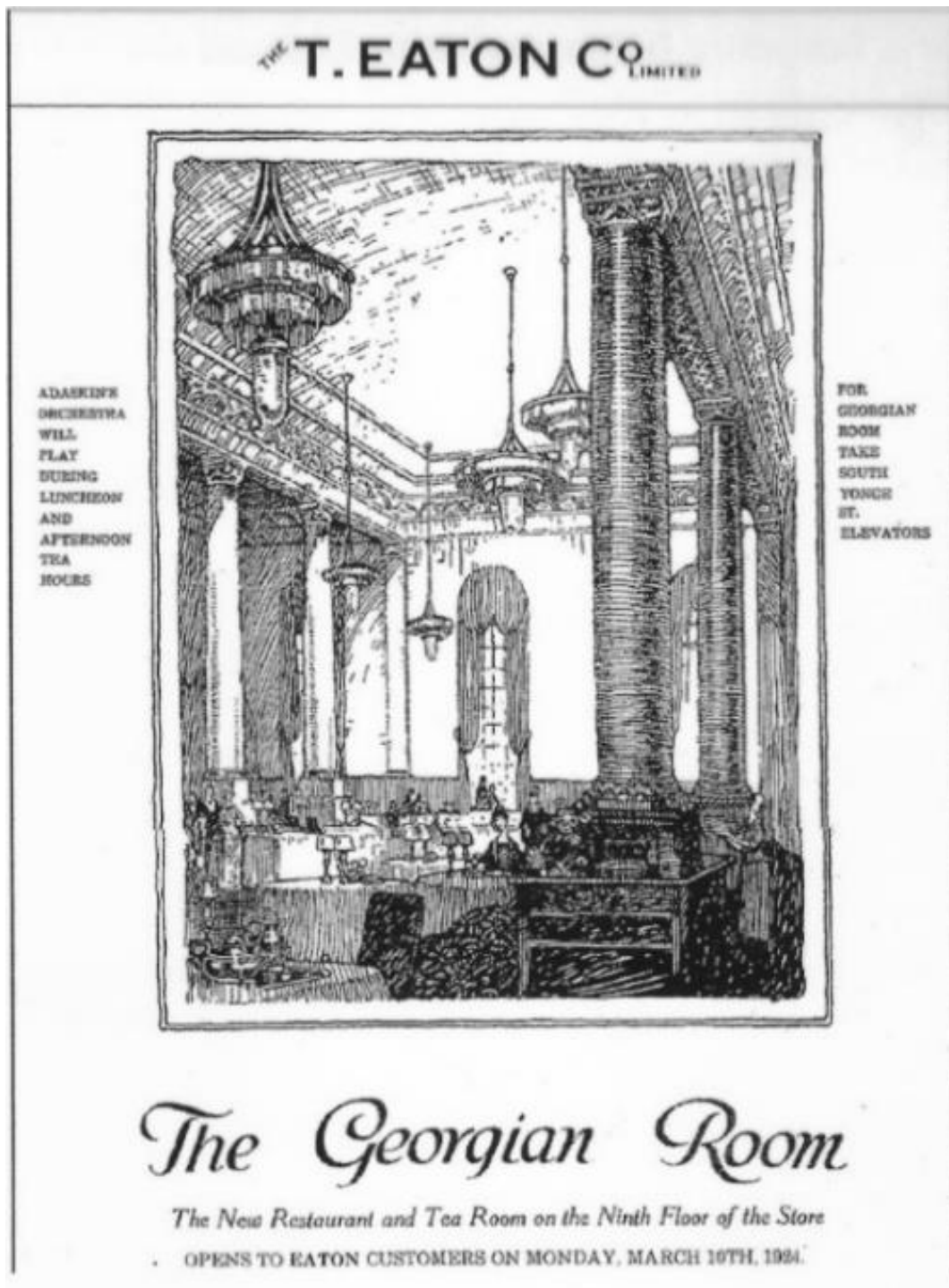
For one brief moment, we at the dinner table consume the pleasures of contemporary life as a niche market, convinced that we have arrived and are living securely. The fruits of our labour, our love, our care, our commitment, and our loyalty are evident in the sumptuous food before us, the gleaming plates off which we eat, the company of children, adults, and friends that gather around us, and the secure living space within which we dine.

Figure 14: Grill Room on the Fifth Floor of the Eaton's Store in Winnipeg⁴⁶



⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 98.

Figure 15: Georgian Room on the Ninth Floor in Toronto's Eaton Store⁴⁷



⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 50

Figure 16: Recipes of Some Dishes on the Menu⁴⁸

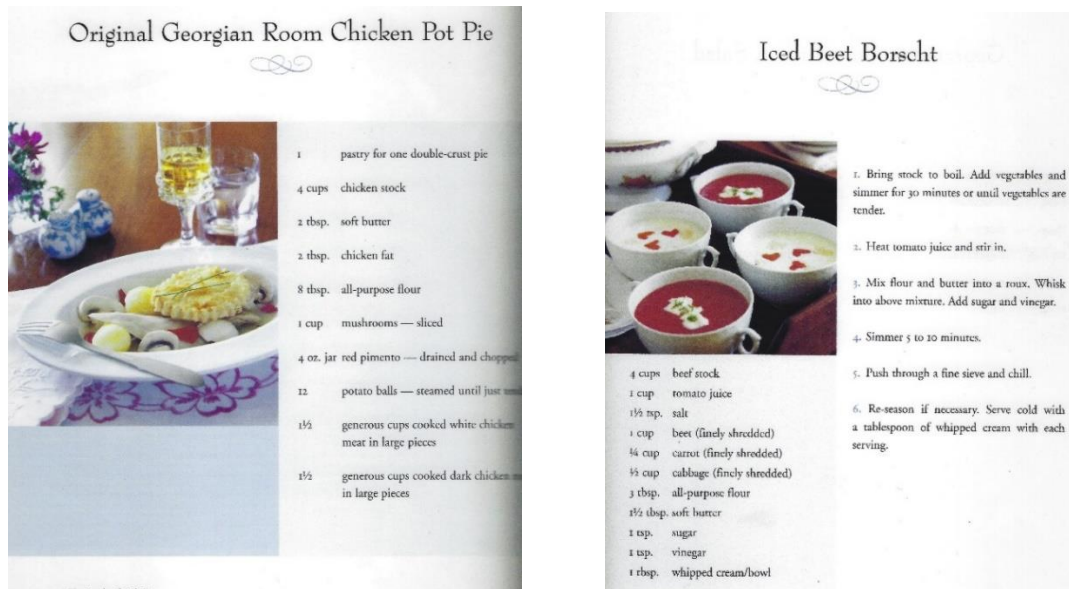


Figure 17: Feasting at Christmas



⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 158, 163.

Another explanation is possible when one considers the fact that the Eaton's dining rooms in Toronto and Montreal were placed on the top, ninth floors. Lady Eaton designed the Montreal restaurant (figure 18) after the elongated formality of the first-class dining room located on the luxury ocean liner *Ile de France*. Having just completed a transatlantic voyage from Europe to Canada on the ship, she included as many exotic elements into the design as possible:

. . . seven shades of Scotch Ruboleum tiles, *Escalette breche* to complement the use of black Belgian marble on the floor, raised balconies with railings of Monel metal, beige and pink French fabric to cover the walls, opal glass to reflect light from the windows, columns, lintels, bas-reliefs, large ceramic vases on either end of the room, and to top it off, two large murals by Natacha Carlu entitled "Amazonian Arcadia, representing 'The Pleasures of the Chase' and 'The Pleasures of Peace.'"⁴⁹

A colleague of mine explained why he went on cruises. "All the drinks and dining and entertainment and sleeping arrangements are supplied. You are served by waiters and waitresses at every turn. You live like a king. It is the only time that I feel as though I am a rich man, living at the expense and on the avails of others." How true that statement sounded to me. I was living on a similar middle class income, stuck between the responsibilities of family life and marvelling at the riches and opulence which a few people could enjoy.

The Eaton's store replicated this reality perfectly. It left the functionality of daily living on the lower floors while offering more exotic pleasures on the top floors. One could say that the Grill Room on the fifth floor of Winnipeg's store represented the middle class existence of most of this small prairie city's residents. The same could not be said for Toronto or Montreal. That (upper) society deserved so much more, a restaurant touching the sky and reflecting the richness of its (deserved) wealth. Who says we do not live in a class society?

The fact that us commoners could partake of the lavishness of the 9th floor restaurants of Toronto and Montreal, or more humbly, the fifth floor restaurant in Winnipeg, says a lot about our wish fulfillments to live the American dream. A healthy amount of imagination is needed to know what a million dollars can buy. Just ask Lady Eaton for the price of those Scottish tiles, French bricks, and Belgian marble. Their price

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 71-74.

Figure 18: Montreal's *Le 9ieme*, on the Ninth Floor of Eaton's⁵⁰



range is well beyond that of actual items for sale in the Eaton's store. The consumer items featured have been presented as attainable on a middle class salary. More luxurious items are available on the upper floors should you choose to ascend those escalators.

Similar to being served on a cruise ship, eating at these opulent Eaton's restaurants represents a momentary sense of being master of one's own universe and destiny. I bolster my argument through an illustration of some movies that feature heros and heroines. One thinks of the Indiana Jones series, in which the female heroine and supporting actress, Marion Underwood, is shown wearing a dress throughout most of the movies. What is up with that? Why would Marion be wearing a dress in the middle of the Amazon Jungle and on the deserts of Egypt?

My reflection above about the meaning of dresses gives a clue. This adventure has as much to the personal relationship between Indiana Jones and Marion Underwood as anything else. Wikipedia makes reference to the fact that the movie, *Indiana Jones*

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 72-73.

and the Temple of Doom (1984)⁵¹ presented a darker theme because of “Spielberg and Lucas’ personal moods following their respective breakups and divorces.”⁵²

Fictional characters Marion and Indiana meet in the first movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981)⁵³ and marry in the last one, *Indiana Jones and the Crystal Skull* (2008).⁵⁴ Like the merchandise in Eaton’s Department Stores, these movies speak on a structural level about the possibility, impossibility, and successful fulfilment of deeply personal relationships. The movie has to do with the wooing and re-wooing of old flames, lost loves, unrequited lovers, and the possibilities that lie therein. The wearing of a dress simply illustrates the thorough going modernity of this ideal.

V. The Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Floors

Items on the sixth and eighth floors represented surplus value to those items that appeared on the third floor. The seventh floor, on the other hand, is the one I remember the best. I rarely ventured there, for fear of being turned away in my dowdy attire. I was truly astonished when I managed the courage to find out what was there. *The Gallery of Fine Furniture, Studio of Interior Design, Colonial Room, and Gallery of Fine Art* were not arbitrary designations (as though the store had run out of superlative adjectives to name all of the nooks and crannies that were represented). An endless supply of Persian rugs graced the floor. Soft leather couches, maple dining room tables, oak desks, mahogany buffets, wrought iron end tables, and matching bedroom sets were scattered at random throughout the large space. I had arrived, while being unwilling to ask for prices and unable to imagine that I would ever be able to afford such luxuries.

This unattainability was, after all, the point. Similar to the opulent items featured as décor in the dining rooms, these unaffordable consumer goods were meant to excite the imagination. They were similar to the car salesperson who asks you which car or truck that you would really like. This knowledge of wish fulfillment gives the retailer an idea of how much you are willing to spend, regardless of whether you can afford it. The fact that the Persian rugs look so lush means that you now know what you really want. It does not matter how many *faux* imitations you will buy to convince yourself that this or that “knock-off” will do. The real thing continues to tempt, just out of reach.

⁵¹ DVD (Paramount Pictures, 1984)

¹⁴ [Indiana Jones - Wikipedia](#) retrieved November 2021

⁵³ DVD (Paramount Pictures, 1981).

⁵⁴ DVD (Paramount Pictures, 2008).

An analogy to relationships is apropos. Why settle for what has grown old when the beautiful young new relationship offers so much more? A man exclaims what it is like in Tyler Perry's movie, *Why Did I Get Married?*⁵⁵ After being married for two years to just such an idyllic person, the man comes to a realization of what his first marriage meant to him. "How can the 20 per cent that she (the young woman) offers replace the 80 per cent of love and affection and caring and loyalty and bonding that my 'real' spouse offered for the last twenty years?"

Figure 19: Items on the Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Floors

<p>Sixth Floor Bed linens 236 • Bath Linens 336 • Bath Boutique • Table Linens 356 • Entertainment Centre 248, 460 • Musical Instruments 560 • Home Comfort 356 • Draperies 267, 456 • Upholstery Fabrics 267 • Home Improvements 353 • Books 205</p>
<p>Seventh Floor Gallery of Fine Furniture 770 • Accent 7 718 • Furniture 270, 470 • Colonial Corner • Scandinavian Shop • Studio of Interior Design • Pictures 266 • Wall Decor 266 • Gallery of Fine Art 271 • Mattresses • Mirrors 276 • Lamps 377 • Assembly Hall</p>
<p>Eighth Floor Hardware 263 • Garden Equipment 280 • Potting Shed 480 • Lawn and Garden Furniture 280 • Sporting Goods 261 • Pro Shop • Rod and Gun Shop • Outdoor Shop • Paint and Wallcovering 274 • Unfinished Furniture 370 • Luggage 264 • Eaton's Travel</p>

The antique furniture and expensive paintings and luxurious rugs represent what one can buy once one has arrived. These material items symbolize a solidity, heritage, fondness, trust, bonding, and familiarity that can never be replicated, no matter how many new relationships into which one enters. The younger spouse can only offer 20 per cent of what was simply because of the newness of the relationship.

This new relationship is like buying items on the first floor all over again. These fleeting transitory treasures are immediately satisfying and immesurably pleasurable. These trinkets and jewelry and hats and gloves and lingerie, however, cannot compete on a substantial level with the fine furniture that is meant to last on the seventh floor. Fine furnishings are acquired when they come to mean something, such as the celebration of a love that has flourished and endured.

¹⁵ Tyler Perry, *Why Did I Get Married*, DVD (Lionsgate Films, 2007).

Momentos are great to have as souvenirs from the week-long trip to Hawaii. How much more does the memento of love mean when it comes in the form of durability, strength, elasticity, and firmly etched faces? The carefully selected pieces of art and carelessly arranged couches, buffets, and mantles within a breadth of space on the seventh floor shows the customer what being rich is all about. One needs so few things with an exorbitant price (of sacrifice) to say so much.

Figure 20: Celebration of Family at Christmas



Conclusion

This journey through “Santa’s winter wonderland” called the Eaton’s Department Store has hopefully endeared itself to the reader. Consumerism is alive and well. Let us celebrate its presence among us by knowing exactly why it is there. It points to the things that really matter, love and intimacy, commitment and time-honoured celebrations.

At the turn of the 20th century, the Eaton’s Store Catalogue featured a whole house in a kit that they were willing to ship to your door. How we wish that such things were possible today. Is it any wonder that tiny houses have become a fantasy item to buy and build? The world has become too large. We need it more managable, at our supper tables, in our bedrooms, in the yard, with our children, with our parents, and with each other.

Chapter Three

Into the Woods to Find Our Identity and Make Up Our Minds

1. Oedipal Complexes

James Lapine's play, *Into the Woods*, deals with ways that fairy tale characters are caught up in Oedipal complexes.⁵⁶ Jack can not fully grow up until his mother has died. Rapunzel is fated with never being able to grow up because of the stringent control that her mother, the Witch, has on her. The Baker's father, Mysterious Man, makes his appearance as a dead apparition at the most inopportune times. He makes amends for himself while complicating things for his son. Red Riding Hood can not grow up until her grandmother has replaced her red cloak with a wolf skin coat. Cinderella can not grow up until the tree by her mother's grave is destroyed and she discovers the philandering ways of her charming Prince husband.

A dialogue between Cinderella and Little Red Riding Hood toward the end of Act II sets the tone for overcoming Oedipal complexes. Little Red Riding Hood is crying because her mother and grandmother are gone. She suggests that they would be very unhappy with her. She is about to help the other fairy tale characters kill a giant.

Cinderella responds by singing the following lines:⁵⁷

Mother cannot guide you.
Now you're on your own.
Only me beside you.
Still, you're not alone.
No one is alone, truly.
No one is alone.

⁵⁶ James Lapine, *Into the Woods*. I am referencing the book while being aware of its differences from the movie version, *Into the Woods*, DVD (Walt Disney Studios, 2015).

⁵⁷ James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, pp. 128-129.

Sometimes people leave you,
Halfway through the wood.
Others may deceive you.
You decide what's good.
You decide alone.
But no one is alone.

Cinderella is suggesting that Little Red Riding Hood is not alone because Cinderella is beside her. Cinderella is willing to support Little Red Riding Hood with what ever decision she makes. At the same time, Little Red Riding Hood has to make decisions on her own. Becoming an adult means letting one's parents and friends influence you while you take the consequences for making a decision on your own.

Jack and Rapunzel go through the same experience of "deciding alone" with only "me beside you." Jack proved his worth by climbing the beanstalk, stealing gold, a hen, and a harp from the giants, making his mother rich beyond her wildest dreams, and killing the first giant. His mother nevertheless continued to treat him like a child. In the middle of the second Act, she exclaims:⁵⁸

You're still a little boy in your mother's eyes.
I want you to promise, Promise (not to leave your surroundings).

She was afraid of what the second giant would do to him.

A similar fate awaits Rapunzel. She runs hysterically off into the sunset with her two children because she cannot handle the power that her mother has over her. After telling her to "Stay here," the Witch bemoans Rapunzel's subsequent death under the feet of the giant:⁵⁹

Couldn't you listen? Couldn't you stay content, safe behind walls, as I could not? . . . No matter what you say, children won't listen, No matter what you know, children refuse to learn (You will only lose them in the end).

In spite of her marriage to a Prince, Rapunzel was unable to transfer her affections to him so that she would be rid of her mother's voice for ever.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 92.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 105-106.

⁶⁰ See, for example, the action that takes place at the end of Act I, where Rapunzel's Prince has to pull her away from her mother, *ibid.*, p. 73.

Red Riding Hood's destiny is more fortuitous. The Baker's rescue of her and her grandmother from the stomach of the wolf has the desired effect. Red Riding Hood learns how to fend for herself and become a woman. She appears with a knife as well as a wolf-skin cloak. She brandishes the weapon when Jack comes upon her at the end of Act I.⁶¹ She calls his bluff by daring Jack to climb back up the beanstalk to retrieve the harp that he gloats about. A possible budding love interest between these two adolescent teenagers is left to the imagination.

Then there is Cinderella. She dillies and dailies because she cannot make up her mind about why she wants to go to the Ball. She wants to go because her step-mother and step-sisters are going. She wants to go because it sounds so exciting to meet a Prince. She wants to get away from her drudgery.

None of these factors is enough to convince her that the Prince will fulfill her desires. The audacity of a poverty-stricken girl to wish after royalty is precisely that, delusional thinking. Cinderella decides while dithering that she will put the shoe on the other foot. The prince will have to decide if she is really worth it. She leaves her slipper as a tempting clue.⁶²

Cinderella is not happy in spite of her marriage and dream fulfillment of living in a castle. After sending the Prince off to look for the second giant, she goes back into the woods to find the missing pieces of her life. She is met by the giant. Red Riding Hood asks her to comfort her. The Baker needs someone to look after his son. Cinderella discovers that her Prince Charming is a philanderer, not only with the Baker's wife, but with Sleeping Beauty and Snow White as well.

To say that Cinderella grows because of these events is an understatement. Growing up can be defined as that which you become after that-which-you-became comes undone. Cinderella rejects the reconciling advances of her husband Prince because of his inability to grow up. She becomes a mother figure to Red Riding Hood. She becomes a willing compatriot -- significant other -- of the Baker because he needs someone to take care of himself, his son, and his house. Cinderella realises in that instance that she is indeed a cleaning woman, albeit reborn.

We turn to one of the main characters of the play. The Baker is an ambiguous figure. He dithers, unable to make decisions. The Witch's curse of barrenness was the result of his father's past actions. His father continues to appear in shadowy form as an

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 61-62.

⁶² Ibid., p. 64.

omnipresence. The Baker tries to reform his ways by going in the forest in search of four required items to reverse the curse. He tells his wife to stay home in order to protect her. He brushes off “vague suggestions” by his father figure.

The Baker finds it difficult to fulfill tasks on his own. He and his wife argue about any number of things until they realise that doing things together is better. They learn through their adventure in the woods. Their mutual objective can be fulfilled through greater respect, patience, and affirmation of each other.⁶³

This newfound focus and confidence by both parties does not last long. The future remains uncertain -- in spite of collecting all four objects -- reversing the curse by feeding them to the cow -- birthing a son -- and living happily as bakers and parents. The Baker remains unsure of himself as a parent. The baby continues to cry when he holds it. When faced with the death of his wife and defeating a giant, the Baker runs away. He tells himself that avoiding responsibility is better than facing it.

The Oedipal nature of this insecurity is revealed in the Baker’s subsequent dialogue with his Dad’s shadowy appearance. His father ran away from his guilt of having brought on the curse. He became the Mysterious Man because of his need to be invisible. The Baker is doing the same thing. He runs away from grief at his wife’s death and insecurity at having to be responsible.⁶⁴

The Baker comes to his senses in spite of it all. He returns to Jack, Red Riding Hood, and Cinderella as much to be with his son as to help them out. They decide together on a plan to defeat the giant. The play ends with the five of them becoming a family that support each other and live together in the Baker’s home. A love interest between the Baker and Cinderella, and between Red Riding Hood and Jack is left to the imagination.

2. Post-Modern Nature of the Tale

The characters overcome their Oedipal complexes and become independent of their parents in a post-modern way.⁶⁵ What do I mean by this? The easiest way to explain

⁶³ Ibid., pp., 54-55.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 123-125.

⁶⁵ Olaf Jubin explains the post-modern nature of the tale in relation to death of the Narrator half-way through Act II. After the Narrator pleads with the characters that he is the only one as an objective observer who knows “the proper ending of the story,” the Witch pushes him into the path of the Giant. According to Jubin, the death of the narrator makes the “disorientation and confusion of the characters become *our* confusion,” making their moral decisions “easier to relate to and easier to evaluate,” Olaf Jubin, *Sondheim and Lapine’s Into the Woods* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 36. We have moved from the thoroughly modern tale of Act I, in which characters live happily ever after because they have fulfilled their deepest desires, to the post-modern tale of Act II, where the unexpected malaise of a

it is to take the example of Cinderella. She fulfilled her modern dream of marrying the Prince and living in a castle in the first Act. She becomes part of a post-modern family in the second Act. She agrees to help the Baker raise his son. She re-embraces a negative aspect of her past life as a cleaning lady in order to become family and community to the Baker, Red Riding Hood, and Jack. She is able to do this after the destruction of her mother's grave and discovery of the philandering ways of her husband. These negative experiences galvanize Cinderella into reinventing and reaffirming aspects of herself. This journey represents the death of a modern fantasy in favour of a thoroughgoing mundane and contented existence.

This is how commentator Robert McLaughlin describes the process:⁶⁶

. . . at the same time the characters are moving narratively forward in pursuit of their wishes, many of them are motivated by a contrary desire to move narratively backward so as to repair their damaged, fractured families, and reclaim their prefragmented, presocialized, pre-adulthood selves, selves that are marked by a peaceful, contented, holistic unit. The unity here is connected not just to an infant's relationship with the mother but is also a complex family unit: mother, father, child, and home.

A similar transformation happens to other characters. Jack becomes more manly after the death of his mother by coming up with a plan to kill the giant. He wants to kill the Steward for killing his mother. The Baker affirms the need for the Steward to be punished while suggesting that killing is wrong. The fact that Jack listens – and evidently obeys -- the Baker represents a more mature attitude on his part to adult authority figures. Jack has progressed from an infantile Oedipal relationship with his mother to internalizing values of authority and justice.

Red Riding Hood fulfills her post-modern destiny when Cinderella comforts her upon the death of her grandmother. Cinderella acknowledges that Red Riding Hood is “now alone” and that she will have to “decide alone.” She also tells Red Riding Hood that she will be making these decisions with Cinderella “beside her.”⁶⁷

Not “being alone” does not mean that everyone is in this together. Red Riding Hood alone knows what it was like to have been raped and eaten by a wolf. There is a

routinized existence of contentment furnishes the wherewithal for characters to enter the woods again, to see what they can see.

⁶⁶ Robert McLaughlin, *Stephen Sondheim and the Reinvention of the American Musical* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), p. 171.

⁶⁷ James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, pp. 128-132.

reason why she carries a knife at her side. While sharing grief with Cinderella, Red Riding Hood alone experiences despair and loneliness at being abandoned. Post-modernity means living bravely in an imperfect world, where bad things happen to us. We have to come to terms with them in the solitude of our existence.

The Baker's grief over the death of his wife galvanizes him into responsibility after a brief bout of self-pity and avoidance. He realises that there is no one else who can defeat the giant. The Baker represents the oldest member of the group. As a recent widower and father who loves his son, the Baker inspires other members of the group to come up with a plan to defeat the giant. Cinderella calls on the birds to help them. The Baker suggests spreading pitch on the ground to get the giant's feet stuck. Jack comes up with the idea of climbing a tree and hitting the giant with a club.

After the death of the giant, the Baker accepts his compatriots' help in spite of himself. His house is in shambles. Comradery in the face of danger, companionship in the face of loneliness, and parenting in the face of death represent the post-modern nature of this tale. A blended family of solidarity has replaced the biological logic of filial love.

3. Disassembling Moments in the Context of Self-Identity

Neither an Oedipal complex nor post-modernity adequately explain how reinterpretation and reclamation of identity and purpose are actualized. What gives these fairy tale characters the capacity, willpower, and willingness to embrace common companionship with strangers when so much has gone wrong? The Baker suggests to Jack that he will have to "take care of himself" now that his mother has died.⁶⁸ How is this act of adulthood achieved in relation to the difficulties encountered?

The first answer comes when everyone is blaming each other for the arrival of the second giant.⁶⁹ The difficulty of accepting responsibility for times when we are less than good is shown in plain view. I was struck by this extended deflection on the part of all the characters. I have worked with inmates who are masters at playing the blame game. I repeatedly tell them: spread the blame as widely as possible so you have to take less responsibility for your part.

The characters do an admirable job of tracing the source of the problem to the person next to them. The blame goes from Jack who planted the beans to the Baker who

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 134.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 114-122.

gave them to him. Blame is shifted to the Witch who cursed the house and to the Baker's father who stole the beans. Fingers are pointed at the Baker's wife who pocketed an extra bean and to Cinderella who threw the bean away. Each person finds a way of linking the arrival of the giant to their neighbour.

The characters continue to circle the wagons of blame. Blame is brought back to Jack and his mother, to Red Riding Hood, and finally to the Witch who planted the beans. The Witch stops the deflections by taking responsibility.⁷⁰ She speaks about a possible apocalypse that could take place as a result of what has happened. She returns to a state of ugliness as punishment for having lost the beans. The Witch disappears in a swirl of magic. Is it any wonder that no one wants to take the blame? There are consequences for erring on the side of wrong and evil.

After the Witch disappears, some of the characters admit that they should not have "stolen from the giant," "strayed from the path," or "attended the Ball." They are willing to take responsibility for their small part in the overall catastrophe that has occurred.⁷¹

Another dimension of "no-one being alone" becomes evident. The offenders with whom I worked were unable to take other people's feelings into account when they committed their crimes. In fact, the offenders had to suspend any empathy at all to offend against their victims. They considered themselves to be the only ones that mattered in this situation. Owning up to the fact that their actions caused a ripple effect of hurt represented a beginning for inmates to understand the amount of harm and grief they had caused. The social and moral consequences of these men's actions are what James Lapine is communicating in his statement that "no-one is alone."

A second part of this transformation has to do with the fact that identities become disassembled. Life choices are ruined because of the lure of momentary pleasures. The woods represent a place where anything can happen. Innocence is lost in the case of Red Riding Hood. The Baker and his wife succeed in having a child. Rapunzel and Cinderella meet and marry their true loves. Jack and his mother become exceedingly rich. The Witch is turned into a woman of beauty because of her willingness to reverse the curse.

The inviting threshold of newness and otherness -- known as liminality -- offers opportunities for success as well as failure. The woods represent obsession, allure,

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 120-122.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 122.

danger, and momentary excitement as much as they offer timely fulfillment and happiness. The characters find this out for themselves when they are faced with a second giant who comes to seek her revenge. Death lurks in the midst of this situation. Red Riding Hood's mother and grandmother, Jack's mother, the Narrator, Rapunzel, and the Baker's wife all die. Other dark aspects of existence are revealed. Rapunzel can not live in contentment with her prince and two children. The Princes can not live with only one wife. The Baker does not know how to love his son.

We come to a character who has not been mentioned in regard to Oedipal complexes and post-modern reconfigurations, namely the Baker's wife. The parents of the Baker's wife are not mentioned. The Baker's wife does not live long enough to demonstrate her ability to live in a post-modern world. She is killed falling down a cliff after having a tryst with Cinderella's Prince.

Some commentators have suggested that the wife's death is, indeed, a high price to pay for an indiscretion.⁷² The Baker's wife's obsession about Princes and the Ball are given free rein. Cinderella's Prince interprets her interest as desire. They make love even as the Baker's wife remains confused about whose story she is in and which identity she has retained.⁷³

The affair has more to do with the pleasurable moment of infatuation and obsession than with its tragic consequences. After the incident, the Baker's wife exclaims:⁷⁴

Oh, if life were made of moments,
Even now and then a bad one --!
But if life were only moments,
Then you'd never know you had one.

The Baker's wife is suggesting that life is made up of continuity of identity (*both/and*) as well as momentary flights of disorienting fancy (*either/or*). The wife still loves her husband *and* has an affair with the Prince (*both/and*). Marrying her husband nevertheless set boundaries for her life. The fact that she went into the woods a second time to seek momentary satisfaction meant that she would lose her husband (as well as herself, *either/or*).

The woods were too alluring, too liminal, too inviting, too suggestive, too unknown, too dark, too dangerous. Red Riding Hood found this out for herself when she was

⁷² Olaf Jubin, *Sondheim and Lapine's Into the Woods*, pp. 40-41.

⁷³ James Lapine, *Into the Woods*, p. 109.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

set upon by a wolf in the first Act. The other characters found this out for themselves when they were confronted by a female giant in the second Act.

Either/or means that life is made up of *either* moments *or* a continuous existence. Living in the moment means that that moment becomes more important than anything else. I can speak to this existential reality in my work with offenders. They reduced their lives to the one moment when they killed their wives, raped a young girl, sold drugs for money, were enforcers in a gang, or robbed a bank. The Baker's wife's identity as spouse, mother, businesswoman, and care giver was disassembled at the moment of the affair. These offenders have one criminal act to remember in the face of their disassembling selves.

Impulsivity, premeditation, unconscious desires, revenge, momentary pleasure, and obsession reduced the once respectable husband, businessman, father, and community leader to nothing but the deed done. The Baker's wife's epitaph of "never knowing you had a moment" comes true. There are no moments to remember if there is nothing left of one's continuous existence called normality and self-identity into which to place that moment. It was only a moment, and a moment is all it will ever be . . . except for the remaining punishment that is now inflicted on that continuous existence and self-identity called a real offender (and the hurt that victims and society experience for a long time).

The death of the Baker's wife completes the series of losses that the four characters left on stage have experienced: Jack -- his mother, Cinderella -- the tree by her mother's grave, Red Riding Hood -- her mother and grandmother, and the Baker -- his wife as well as his father, the Mysterious Man.

The four remaining characters are brought together as much by grief as by mutual need and cooperation. The common cause of fighting the giant is what sparked the initial community affair. What keeps the story going is the fact that these people are grieving the loss of loved ones. The consequences of grief become abundantly clear in Cinderella's talk with Red Riding Hood. Cinderella exclaims that she will always be "beside" Red Riding Hood. Cinderella cannot, however, make the hard choices of life on her behalf. "Now you're on your own . . . you decide what's good, you decide alone."⁷⁵

The same scenario is repeated with the Baker and Jack. The Baker consoles Jack after the death of his mother and cautions him regarding the Steward's punishment.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 128-130.

The song sung as a communal response by the four remaining characters includes these lines:⁷⁶

Someone is on your side.
Our side.
Our side –
Someone is not
While we're seeing our side.
Our side --
Our side . . .
Our side –
Maybe we forgot;
They are not alone.
No one is alone.

Not being alone is brought home on the last page of the musical. Cinderella becomes Red Riding Hood's surrogate mother. The Baker becomes Jack's surrogate father. Both children welcome the care and affection of their substitute parents while becoming adults. Cinderella can learn to be a mother and the Baker can learn to be a father to his (their) son. It is a new role for them both.

The post-modern ending has as much to do with self-identity and the dangers of disassembling moments as with reconfiguration of modern ideals. The latter reconception is necessary in the face of losses, death, grief, and negative experiences. Assurance that self-identity will survive and flourish is not a given.

Neither the Witch nor Rapunzel, neither the Baker's wife nor Jack's mother, neither the two Giants nor the Narrator survive their experiences in the woods. I have met many people like these latter folks. Some of the men that I have worked with have survived – or not.

The play, *Into the Woods*, offers opportunities of modern success reconceived as acceptance of loss and reconfigured familial loyalties. Post-modernity flourishes in the midst of muted ideals, communal fellowship, and a growing self-identity.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 131-132.

Chapter Four

American Beauty of Conflicted Personalities

Conflicted Personalities

The movie, *American Beauty*,⁷⁷ portrays a series of characters who are struggling with life while exhibiting dysfunctional behaviours. 40-year-old Lester Burnham fantasizes about sleeping with a teenage girl named Angela. Lester's wife, Carolyn, is searching for love and fame wherever she can find it. She is attracted to her real estate idol and mentor, Buddy Kane. Daughter Jane's spoken wish to her boyfriend, Ricki, is that someone should get rid of her geeky Dad.

Then there is Ricki himself, a next door neighbour who sells drugs and voyeuristically videos various family scenes. Ricki's Dad, US Army Colonel Frank Fitz, collects Nazi paraphernalia and is a repressed homosexual. Angela, in turn, is a beautiful, high school cheerleader star who seems to have only one friend, Jane.

All of these characters are deeply conflicted. Lester fanaticizes about Angela because he and Carolyn have not had sex for years. He hates his job and does not know how to relate to his daughter, Jane.

Carolyn is deeply conflicted because she does not know how to live up to her dream of success represented by her alter-ego, Buddy Kane. She sees her life as a failure, including her non-relationship with her husband and daughter.

Jane is emotionally and socially estranged from her parents. She is emotionally dependent on her friend, Angela, whom she sees as the "perfect girl."

Ricki's father sent Ricki to a mental hospital when he was sixteen because he beat up a fellow classmate at school and severely injured him. Ricki mimics his Dad's attitudes in order not to get into trouble while selling drugs and videoing scenes of life.

⁷⁷ *American Beauty*, DVD, director Sam Mendes (Warner Brothers, 2013).

Frank Fitz, in turn, is a repressed homosexual who vilifies the gay couple living next door because he has no way of getting in touch with his own sexual identity.

Then there is Angela, who pretends that she has slept with many boys. She flirts with Jane's father because she does not know who else to turn to for attention.

Many of these dysfunctional behaviours are evident in prison. The difference is that one of the men I worked with had killed both his parents. The sex offender had assaulted a number of teenage girls. Another offender was convicted of taking sexually explicit videos of underage children. Other inmates had been convicted of killing their homosexual lovers because of their deeply seated insecurities and confusion regarding their sexual identity. Then there were the drug dealers and drug users, finding ways to medicate themselves through life. The movie's depiction of each of these scenarios was all too real for me.

The question I asked throughout the movie was whether these characters were able to resolve what I have called their conflicted personalities.⁷⁸ Events definitely get worse as the movie goes along. I was surprised upon a second viewing at the manner in which most characters were able to come to some resolution of their situation.

Upon realising the futility of his life, Lester quit his seventeen-year career as a reporter and took the lowest paying, least responsible job that he could find -- a fast-food jockey. He started lifting weights in his garage. He began to be honest about his anger toward his wife, even in front of their own daughter.

Carolyn found out how much love and acceptance she needed when she jumped into bed with Buddy Kane. She started shooting guns at the firing range. Guns throughout the movie are an indication of the latent violence lurking below the surface. The pathos of the situation is revealed when she leaves Buddy for "appearance" purposes and drives home with a pistol in her purse. She repeats over and over again in the car that she will not let herself become a victim. Upon entering the house, she throws her purse into a closet and clings to her husband's clothing hanging there.

Jane finds reprieve from her alienated existence by associating with another person who is other. Jane and Ricki fall in love because there are so few people who are like them. The relationship begins when Jane takes Ricki's hand in a show of solidarity and trust. Jane transfers the negative energy that she exhibits toward her parents by confiding in Ricki that she hates her Dad and Mom.

⁷⁸ I deal with some of these issues in Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, pp. 91-100.

Transformation for Ricki occurs when he videos a person in the context of a relationship, namely Jane. The seductive power of voyeurism's virtual reality is diffused and becomes real when Jane and Ricki are able to video each other.

Angela becomes real when she acts on her need to have sex by inviting Lester to sleep with her. She recognizes her need to be a star, beyond ordinary, in order to feel great about herself. She turned to Lester as a substitute father figure because she did not know how else to act on her sexual desires.

Angela admits to Lester in the context of being undressed that she has never had sex before. Lester realises in that moment that he can become a responsible father to this young vulnerable girl. He is reminded of his own daughter, of the love that he had for his wife when they first met, and the supreme selfishness and inappropriateness of his own desires.

The second climax occurs when Frank Fitz shoots Lester in the back of the head. Hours before, Frank showed his vulnerability by kissing Lester in the garage where Lester was lifting weights. In a perverse twist of logic, Frank believed Lester was available because his son told him that they had had oral sex together. Unable to live with the reality of what he had just done -- "come on" to Lester -- Frank killed Lester in order to erase this memory and knowledge.

I identified with the emotional turmoil of Frank Fitz. The similarity between his actions and offenders' crimes was palpable. Like Ricki's father, they were unable to resolve their conflicted personalities. They acted out violently in order to let everyone know that they could not live with themselves nor with the other person with whom they were so upset. In all of these cases, guns were meant to kill, destroy, and annihilate rather than to offer some modicum of solace, peace, security, and reconciliation.

The latent violence that guns represent points to the great potential of evil if left unresolved. Jane tells Ricki that someone should get rid of her father. After Ricki agrees to kill him, Jane says that she was only joking. The same thing happens when Carolyn goes to shooting ranges with Buddy. Representing the anger and victimization that she feels regarding Lester, she drives home with a gun in her purse. Upon entering the house, she realises that her anger has to do with what she has lost in life. She throws her purse with the gun in it into a closet.

Guns and the violence they represent are the reasons why so many offenders have come to jail. Drug dealers tell me that selling drugs is not a violent crime. They were

simply supplying customers with what they needed. My reply has always been the same. What did they do when their customers could not pay? Did the dealers call the police in order to have their debt paid? A level of violence is implied in illegal actions of any kind. People sometimes take the “law into their own hands” because they are “living above the law.”

The movie touched me in a profound way. Two young people go to live on their own. Carolyn realises what she had lost. Lester becomes somewhat responsible. Angela gets in touch with who she really is. These scenes represented redeeming moments.

The reality of violence that occurred when no resolution of conflicted personalities was possible also affected me. Frank Fitz was unable to live with himself so he killed someone else. How sad and ironic.

The only normal and content people portrayed in the movie are a gay couple who bring a bouquet of flowers to the new neighbours as a sign of welcome. They represent the new post-modern family in this state of affairs. Again, how ironic.

The question of Being is raised when Ricki and Jane watch a video of a plastic bag floating in the air for several minutes. The state of being at rest -- implied and portrayed in this viewing -- represents what Ricki, and the movie producer, consider *the beauty of America*. The question I had to ask myself is this: Is it enough?

Conclusion

Power of the Unconscious

The book began with a reflection on impulsivity and the unconscious. Offenders act on their blind emotions. They have little to no understanding of their behaviours. Short-term, energy relieving behaviours are the only thing they know, similar to the convenience of the store down the street.

The discovery that fairy tales were written to deal with Oedipal complexes came as a surprise. The statement in Genesis 2:24 that “a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh” became more pertinent than ever before. Dr. Seuss’ *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back* is but a small example of how “Sally and me” had to grow up to be adults under the influence of their Mother.

Hendrix in his book on relationships asks couples to compare their spouses to each other’s fathers and mothers.⁷⁹ I was surprised by what I found out when my wife and I completed the exercise. I was attracted to my wife because of her emotional and habitual similarity to my father’s attention to detail. He tended to be needy because he was the youngest in the family. He was unable to express his emotions. I fell in love with my wife as much because I knew how to deal with her emotional tendencies as my infatuation with her. She was the second youngest of eight children. She spent an inordinate amount of time fixing intricate items like a grandfather clock. She became very quiet when I raised my voice.

Part of my attraction had to do with the fact that she could see right through me. Other people were convinced by my divergenary tactics. I learned this defence mechanism at a young age as a result of my parents’ A-type personalities. My future spouse simply “cut to the chase” and asked what was wrong. She has continued to exhibit that type of behaviour. She knows how to stop a lot of ranting and raving on my part that has a tendency to go sideways. New insights about my wife and my father reinforced my conviction that attention to the subconscious reveals

⁷⁹ Harville Hendrix, *Getting the Love You Want*, pp. 262-267.

surprisingly helpful information. I became closer to my wife, and to my father, as a result of working through Hendrix's exercises.

Underlying messages in the Eaton's Department Store have as much to do with William Leach's reflection on this subject as anything I have discovered on my own. His long discussions of mind cure and the happiness machine, fairy tales and desire, attraction and consumerism parallel my own interest in the relationship between fairy tales, wish fulfillments, and unspoken ideals.⁸⁰

Malcolm Galdwell's reflection on how intuition leads to discovery and truth solidified my views on the matter. Galdwell goes beyond surface details and rationalizations. A dog's behaviour has everything to do with its master!⁸¹ The Korean plane crashes had everything to do with an unspoken culture of deference.⁸² The marble statue was a fake on the basis of an art critic's hunch.⁸³ Seemingly insignificant details and hidden factors have everything to do with the matter at hand. My use of the Eaton's Department Store to explain desire and relationships is but a small contribution to this way of thinking.

Solidification of Identity

Solidification of identity is a second theme that emerged in the writing of this book.⁸⁴ An analysis of the Eaton's Department Store revealed how immature teenagers tend to stay on the first floor of impulsivity in regard to consumer spending and dating situations. Compulsive purchases, infatuation with others, one-night stands, and immediate gratification were at the forefront.

Adolescent encounters blossomed into true love and commitment as these young adults discovered the joys of commitment, marriage, and children. Solidification of identity was achieved as these adults became husbands and wives, parents and grandparents.

Solidification of identity was evident in Jane and Ricki in the movie *American Beauty*. Jane transferred her negative attitudes toward her parents into solidarity with a person who was other. Ricki was able to confine his video-taping sessions to

⁸⁰ William Leach, *Land of Desire*, pp. 225-262.

⁸¹ Malcolm Gladwell, *What the Dog Saw* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009), pp. 126-148.

⁸² Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2008), pp. 177-223.

⁸³ Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink*, pp. 3-17.

⁸⁴ This theme is analysed in Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, pp. 91-100.

people with whom he had a real relationship. The depiction of these two characters as a couple at the end of the movie provides some hope for the (post) modern family.

Red Riding Hood and Jack also grew up to become mature adults. Jack showed much more courage and wit than his mother gave him credit for. Red Riding Hood had to have a disastrous experience in order to know what keeping safe meant. Each of these adolescents matured into adults as they experienced harm, grief, loneliness, death, despair, and challenges.

The Baker and Cinderella, in turn, left their broken modern life behind to embrace a new family. The Baker grieved the loss of his wife in order to provide care to his new baby. Cinderella grieved the loss of her Prince in order to become part of the Baker's family. They accepted Red Riding Hood and Jack into their new household.

Resolution of Conflicted Personalities

Resolution of conflicted personalities represents a third theme of this book. Most of the characters in *American Beauty* were debilitated because of their inability to resolve deep conflicts within themselves. Lester did not want to be responsible anymore. Carolyn wanted love without obligations. Angela wanted sex in her imagination. Frank wanted to reveal his homosexual feelings. Ricki wanted to be noticed. Jane wanted to be loved.

These characters chose substitute solutions as a band-aid to their problems. Lester took a job as a fast-food jockey. Carolyn had sex with Buddy. Ricki video-taped people. Jane fell in love with Ricki. Angela acted on her desire for sex. Frank killed Lester to hide his feelings.

Acting out is something inmates are familiar with. They acted on their desires because they could no longer live -- thinking about them. They wanted the world to know how much they were suffering.

I have told inmates to own feelings of suffering and victimization while learning to act out their feelings in more appropriate ways. I enjoyed the movie *American Beauty* because it tried to resolve the acting out behaviours of its characters while opting for criminal solutions in two instances. Ricki sold drugs and Frank killed Lester.

The other characters came within a whisker of offending while deciding in the end not to. Lester showed empathy to Angela rather than having sex with her. Carolyn recognized the overwhelming nature of her grief at a bad marriage. Jane told Ricki

she was joking about having him kill her parents. Ricki learned to love. Angela owned her infatuation with wanting to become famous.

Some of the characters in the play, *Into the Woods*, find resolution. Cinderella reclaims her low status as a cleaning woman in order to establish a mutual relationship with the Baker. Red Riding Hood becomes more mature as she admits her faults and establishes a mutual relationship with Jack. Jack grieves for his mother while not acting on his feelings of revenge for the Steward. The Baker mourns the loss of his wife and father while admitting that he needs help and companionship.

Some characters fare less well. The Baker's wife, Rapunzel, Jack's mother, the two Giants, the wolf, and the Narrator all die. The wolf and giants die because of their evil ways. The Baker's wife and Narrator are in the wrong place at the wrong time. Rapunzel dies because of her deeply conflicted personality. Jack's mother dies because of a perceived wrong.

The two characters who do not get better or worse are the two Princes. They were born to be charming but not sincere. The Princes continue their philandering ways, having learned nothing in the process of falling in love.

These scenarios are reminiscent of what I experienced in prison. Some inmates became worse. They left after a two year sentence only to come back with a "life bit."⁸⁵ Others were healed and went on to live redeemed lives. Still others merely survived, having neither the courage to grow nor the will to seek help.

This brings us back to the second chapter, in which I outlined a traditional vision of family existence. The reason that I wrote the chapter is because I wanted to know what was normal, what was "traditionally" expected in home life. This vision may not be amenable to some. This depiction of normality is nevertheless real for many people. It is only as one names what is traditionally normal that one can fashion one's own ideal.

I have lived too long with abnormality, with characters like the ones in *American Beauty* and *Into the Woods*. I could name other movies that depict even starker realities: *Monster's Ball*,⁸⁶ *The Woodsman*,⁸⁷ and *Fargo*.⁸⁸ These films are not meant for the faint of heart. Their depictions of criminal life and its after effects are much

⁸⁵ Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, p. 20.

⁸⁶ *Monster's Ball*, DVD (Lionsgate Films, 2001).

⁸⁷ *The Woodsman* (Newmarket Films, 2004). I comment on these movies in *Glimpses of Grace*, pp. 66, 79.

⁸⁸ *Fargo*, DVD (Polygram Filmed Entertainment, 1997).

more real than anything that can be found in *Shawshank Redemption*⁸⁹ or the *Green Mile*.⁹⁰

It is possible for all of us to correct imbalances in order to become whole. I have reflected on and given examples of an ethic of desire. Passions and emotions exhibited themselves through criminal acting out behaviours in the men with whom I worked. This book has been written with the hope of providing better ways of responding to deep feelings of emotion. I am offering these solutions to all concerned.

⁸⁹ *Shawshank Redemption*, DVD (Columbia Pictures, 1994).

⁹⁰ *Green Mile*, DVD (Warner Brothers, 1999).

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