

*The Theory and Practice of  
Group Psychotherapy*

The Art of Self-Disclosure

“Never has any therapist, I believe, made a more earnest attempt to demystify the therapeutic process” (201). The statement, two hundred pages into the fourth edition of Yalom’s first textbook, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, accurately describes one of Yalom’s lifelong goals. The book, first published in 1970 and now in its updated fifth edition, published in 2005, remains the standard textbook in the field. The *American Journal of Psychiatry* cited the textbook as one of the ten most influential psychiatry publications of the decade. Jerome Frank, Yalom’s mentor at Johns Hopkins, hailed the work as the “best book that exists on the subject, today and for the foreseeable future.” *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* is Yalom’s only textbook that he has repeatedly revised.

Ruthellen Josselson observed that when she was a clinical psychology intern in 1970 at the Massachusetts Mental Health Center, an “[a]ugust bastion of psychoanalytic thought,” Yalom’s textbook was “greeted with contempt” by her professors and supervisors, who regarded its radical approach as subversive to the prevailing orthodoxy of the age. The book slowly “heralded a sea change” in her generation, and it is now, she wrote in 2008, “probably the most widely read in all of mental health practice” (x–xi). It continues to be Yalom’s most widely read textbook.

Yalom admits ruefully that his primary audience when writing *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* was the Stanford University Promotion Committee. Upon being notified he had received early tenure and promotion, he radically changed his audience and writing approach. “I

put the promotion committee out of my mind; I eliminated all jargon, all detailed research analysis, and all unnecessarily complex theoretical structures; and I wrote with only one purpose in mind—to interest and to educate the group therapy student” (*Yalom Reader* 5–6).

The primary interest of *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* to practitioners lies in its hands-on approach to all aspects of the subject: a how-to book that explores in clear, jargon-free language every question one can imagine about the theory and practice of group psychotherapy. The book’s primary interest to us lies in the ways in which it adumbrates Yalom’s vision of self-disclosure and anticipates his emergence as a novelist.

Early in the preface to *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* Yalom notes that psychotherapy is “both an art and science” (xiv; all references, unless otherwise noted, are to the fourth edition, published in 1995). He returns to the statement on the last page of the book: “Psychotherapy is a science as well as an art” (532). There is an unexpected meaning to these statements. Throughout the textbook Yalom refers to *literary* art, fictional stories and plays that illustrate writers’ insights into the human condition. Two of his literary references are especially noteworthy: Hermann Hesse’s novel *The Glass Bead Game*, published in German in 1943 and in English (sometimes under the title *Magister Ludi*) in 1949, and Eugene O’Neill’s 1946 play *The Iceman Cometh*. An examination of these two literary works reveals the extent to which both psychotherapy and fiction depend upon narrative art.

### A Deathbed Confession: *The Glass Bead Game*

Yalom refers to both literary works in the chapter called “The Therapist: Transference and Transparency.” Investigating the therapist’s relationship with group members, the chapter opens in an unusual way, with a form of address seldom used by textbook authors: an apostrophe to the reader. “Do you, as therapist, play a role? To what degree are you free to be yourself? How ‘honest’ can you be? How much transparency can you permit yourself?” (189). Yalom discusses near the end of the chapter whether therapists should admit their flaws to patients. He then quotes a fellow practitioner, M. B. Parloff, who remarked that the “honest therapist is one who attempts to provide that which the patient can assimilate, verify, and utilize” (214). In a footnote Yalom offers a vivid example of the necessity for proper timing. He summarizes the theme of a thirty-one-page chapter in Hesse’s novel,

“The Father Confessor,” about two renowned Christian penitents, legendary for their gift of healing, who befriend each other and heal themselves:

Joseph, one of the healers, severely afflicted with feelings of worthlessness and self-doubt, sets off on a long journey across the Indian subcontinent to seek help from his rival, Dion. At an oasis, Joseph describes his plight to a stranger, who miraculously turns out to be Dion, whereupon Joseph accepts Dion’s invitation to go home with him in the role of patient and servant. In time, Joseph regains his former serenity and zest and ultimately becomes the friend and colleague of his master. Only after many years have passed, and Dion lies on his deathbed, does he reveal to Joseph that at their encounter at the oasis, he had reached a similar impasse in his life and was en route to request Joseph’s assistance. (214)

The story is quintessential Yalom, affirming the need for an authentic therapeutic relationship, the value of self-disclosure for both patient and therapist, the idea of a wounded healer, the possibility of change and growth, and the importance of engagement as an antidote to existential loneliness.

A brief footnote cannot capture the subtleties of “The Father Confessor,” particularly Joseph’s gift for empathic listening. Whenever a troubled soul visits Joseph, Hesse suggests, the healer “knew how to listen to him, to open his ears and his heart, to gather the man’s sufferings and anxieties into himself and hold them, so that the penitent was sent away emptied and calmed” (Hesse 490). Adept at the talking cure, Joseph never expresses impatience when penitents talk at length without revealing the reasons they have sought him out. Nor is he judgmental about the confessions and qualms of conscience that he hears. His refusal to pass judgment not only enables the penitents’ self-disclosures but also allows them to understand the significance of their words. Whatever was confessed to Joseph, Hesse declares, “seemed not to be spoken into the void, but to be transformed, alleviated, and redeemed in the telling and being heard” (491).

Yalom’s consideration of *The Glass Bead Game* appears in the first edition of *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, and he continued thinking about the novel, returning to it thirty-two years later in *The Gift of Therapy*. He doesn’t change his interpretation of Hesse’s novel, but now he recognizes something he had not seen earlier about the relationship between the two wounded healers. “Perhaps they missed the opportunity

for something deeper, more authentic, more powerfully mutative. Perhaps the *real* therapy occurred at the deathbed scene, when they moved into honesty with the revelation that they were fellow travelers, both simply human, all too human. The twenty years of secrecy, helpful as they were, may have obstructed and prevented a more profound kind of help. What might have happened if Dion's deathbed confession had occurred twenty years earlier, if healer and seeker had joined together in facing the questions that have no answers?" (10).

Yalom identifies with both Joseph and Dion, the younger and older wounded healers, respectively, in Hesse's celebrated novel, which was singled out for praise by the Swedish Academy when it awarded him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1946. Yalom also identifies with the novelist, the creator of both fictional characters. Hesse wrote the novel as a warning against the rising Nazi menace. Set five hundred years into the future, *The Glass Bead Game* cautions intellectuals not to remain isolated within academic ivory towers, a warning that Yalom reveals in his own writings, where he urges thinkers like himself to engage authentically with the everyday problems of contemporary life.

Yalom conveys in his two references to Hesse the theme of "The Father Confessor," but there is a third character in the chapter on whom he doesn't comment. A "scholar or literary man" visited Joseph and Dion and "talked long, learnedly, and eloquently about the stars and about the pilgrimage which man as well as all his gods must make through all the signs of the zodiac from the beginning to the end of every aeon" (Hesse 509). The unnamed storyteller, referred to simply as the mythologist, sees universal meanings that transcend narrow ideologies or religious creeds. Joseph cannot understand why Dion listens in rapt attention to this man whom the former characterizes as a heathen, uttering false doctrines. Dion's explanation of his interest reflects Hesse's commitment to the wisdom found in mythology, literature, and the arts. When Joseph claims that his and Dion's Christian faith is superior to the heathen's outmoded doctrines, the older healer points out that the storyteller "lives in his wisdom of images and symbols," a wisdom surpassed by no one.

On one level, the mythologist may represent Carl Jung, whom Hesse knew and admired: Hesse was in Jungian psychoanalysis, and he was especially interested in Jungian archetypes and the collective unconscious. On another level, the mythologist is the novelist, the storyteller who can provide insight, hope, and inspiration to those who may lack religious faith. Dion sees in the mythologist a younger version of himself, and he tells Joseph that those

who derive ancient wisdom from their forbears demand respect. On still another level, the mythologist is Yalom himself, who, in his development as a storyteller, will come to live in the wisdom of images and symbols, seeking wisdom that transcends narrow ideologies or religious creeds.

Dion's self-disclosure, in the form of a deathbed confession, illustrates the value of therapists admitting to the same human failings as their patients. Yalom affirms throughout *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* the advantage of self-disclosure for both patient and therapist. Self-disclosing therapists who can acknowledge without defensiveness their limitations encourage their patients to accept their own shortcomings. "Research has shown that successful patients even adopt the complex value system of the therapist" (86).

Yalom also suggests that self-disclosure benefits college students as well as psychotherapy patients. He cites two researchers, D. Medeiros and A. Richards, who demonstrated in a 1991 study that undergraduate students who anonymously shared secrets with their classmates experienced many educational and psychological benefits. The two researchers, Yalom reports, did everything possible to ensure students' anonymity: the secrets were written on uniform paper and read by the instructor in a darkened room so that no one could see facial expressions indicating discomfort. The secrets involved sexual preferences, illegal or immoral acts, psychological disorders, or family problems such as alcoholism. The atmosphere in the classroom was emotionally charged during the readings, but afterward, the students felt the kind of relief experienced by psychotherapy patients. "Students reported a sense of relief at hearing their secrets read—as though a weight had been lifted from them. But there was even greater relief in the subsequent class discussion in which students shared their responses to hearing various secrets, exchanged similar experiences, and not uncommonly chose to identify which secret they wrote. The peer support was invariably positive and powerfully reassuring" (355–356).

Yalom might have cited the groundbreaking research of University of Texas experimental psychologist James Pennebaker, who in his classic book *Opening Up* (1990/1997) has shown the health benefits of self-disclosure among college students. Pennebaker observes in his edited volume *Emotion, Disclosure & Health* (1995) that "[d]isclosure of one's deepest thoughts and feelings is a powerful social phenomenon, whether in a therapeutic setting or in daily life" (7). Pennebaker doesn't advise students to share their personal writings with others, fearful that they will regret revealing their self-disclosures. I agree that such writing is risky, but I believe that teachers can put into

place protocols that will make the classroom a safe site for sharing personal writing. Moreover, students learn a great deal from listening to each other's stories, and they are themselves good teachers. "Educators have long been aware," Yalom writes, "that the most effective teacher is often a near peer, an individual who is close enough to the student to be accepted and who, by identifying with the student's mental processes, is hence able to present material in a timely, accessible fashion" (172).

### A Foolosopher's Self-Disclosure: *The Iceman Cometh*

What happens when self-disclosure is used cynically and recklessly, particularly in a group setting? Yalom raises this question in *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*. He has in mind the faddish encounter group movements of the 1960s and 1970s, when many therapists manipulated patients' self-disclosures for selfish ends, often resulting in sexual boundary violations. Yalom cites one of the worst examples of a charismatic therapist who exploited his followers, the car salesman-turned-guru Werner Erhard, the founder of est. But Yalom chooses to discuss in elaborate detail a *literary* example of self-disclosure gone awry, *The Iceman Cometh*. O'Neill's play is about a group of derelicts who have lived peacefully in the back of a barroom for twenty years. The group has remained stable over the years because each man's life illusions, or "pipe dreams," have been respected by the other men in the group.

The group's survival is threatened by the arrival of the iceman, Hickey, a "traveling salesman," in Yalom's words, a "totally enlightened therapist, a false prophet who believes he brings fulfillment and lasting peace to each man by forcing him to shed his self-deception and stare with unblinking honesty at the sun of life." Encouraging each person in the group to attack and destroy the others' illusions, the iceman has a profoundly destabilizing effect, causing one man to commit suicide and the others to turn against each other. Only when, by the instinct of self-preservation, the group labels Hickey insane and expels him from their presence can the men reaffirm their old illusions and regain their former cohesiveness, though not without being forever changed.

Hickey ingratiates himself with the residents by calling them by their first names, buying them drinks, and pretending to take interest in their lives, but his pledge to help them give up their "damned lying pipe dreams" is nothing more than an effort to free himself from excoriating

guilt. Hickey is undone by his own admission, for he admits at the end of the play that he has murdered his wife, Evelyn, in her sleep, allegedly to release her from grief over his womanizing behavior. His confession, in the presence of the men and two police officers he has invited to the bar, and his stated wish to end his life in the electric chair, betray an impulse toward suicide that has motivated his actions. Only after a reading of *The Iceman Cometh* can one appreciate the irony of Yalom's characterization of Hickey as a "totally enlightened therapist," a healer who is both wounded and wounding. Hickey and Yalom have little in common, but it's ironic that the latter regards himself, in his first volume of psychotherapy tales, as "love's executioner," the destroyer of the false illusions of love. We may thus see Yalom as a positive version of Hickey, an enlightened philosopher, not a foolosopher.

Yalom reveals in his discussions of *The Glass Bead Game* and *The Iceman Cometh* that there is an art to self-disclosure. Too little self-disclosure, too late, as *The Glass Bead Game* shows, can result in missed opportunities for growth and friendship. Too much self-disclosure, too early, as *The Iceman Cometh* shows, can result in personal and social disaster. The art of self-disclosure depends upon many factors, including timing.

### Vertical and Horizontal Self-Disclosures

Yalom encourages careful self-disclosures throughout *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, distinguishing between vertical and horizontal self-disclosures. A vertical disclosure refers to the content about a secret and involves digging, stripping away, uncovering, excavating. By contrast, a horizontal disclosure refers to disclosure about the disclosure itself, or *metadisclosure*, the "interactional aspects" of disclosure. What is most important in group psychotherapy, Yalom argues, is how a self-disclosure affects the members of the group, the ongoing relationships, rather than the past relationships involved with the secret's contents. He offers, as an example, his patient John, who disclosed his transvestism to the group. The members' "natural inclination" was to obtain more information about the content of the disclosure: the age when John began to cross-dress, the clothes he wore, his sexual fantasies at the time. Yalom's approach, by contrast, was to obtain from John more horizontal information about the disclosure: whether it was hard for him to wait twelve weeks before sharing the self-disclosure with the group, whether he felt uncomfortable about disclosing the information,

whether he could predict that some members of the group would be more accepting of the information than others. Yalom's conclusion is that "even more important than the actual unburdening of oneself is the fact that disclosure results in a deeper, richer, and more complex relationship with others" (122).

I had an "aha" (or Eureka) moment when reading about Yalom's distinction between vertical and horizontal self-disclosures. I've been teaching personal writing courses for over four decades. I don't grade students on the content of their essays, or on the degree of self-disclosure, but "only" on the quality of their writing. (I place *only* in quotation marks to indicate the teacher's challenge to help students improve the quality of their writing.) Because students often write on dark topics, such as suicide, depression, cutting, eating disorders, or sexual abuse, we don't discuss the content of their writings, at least not directly. After a student reads an essay aloud, the three students sitting to his or her right raise questions they want the author to consider—but not answer in class. If, for example, an author has written an essay about depression, classmates might raise the following content questions: When did the depression begin? What was responsible for the depression? When did the depression lift? Or classmates might raise a different kind of question, one involving the process of self-disclosure. How do you feel about revealing this to the class? Was it hard or easy to share this self-disclosure with the class? How do you feel about your classmates' responses to your self-disclosure? Until reading Yalom, I never realized that the questions in the first category are "content" questions, and that those in the second category are "process" questions. Since a writing class has more affinity to group psychotherapy than individual therapy, horizontal questions are often more valuable than vertical ones.

#### PTOLEMAIC V. COPERNICAN CONCEPTIONS OF CHANGE

One of the humbling implications of Yalom's research on encounter groups also applies to group psychotherapy. As he points out in his 1973 coauthored study *Encounter Groups: First Facts*, those who lead encounter groups, and, we might add, psychotherapy groups, must "abandon a Ptolemaic conception of the process of change. Change does not revolve around the solitary sun of the leader: the evidence is strong that psychosocial relations in the group play an exceedingly important role in the process of change" (428). The shift from a Ptolemaic to a Copernican paradigm underscores the need for members' honesty and openness with each other along with the willingness to give and receive feedback about their interpersonal behavior.



### YALOM'S SELF-DISCLOSURES

Yalom's self-disclosures in the first four editions of *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* are infrequent, cautious, and always in the here-and-now. He credits his recognition of the importance of here-and-now therapy to a "very savvy psychologist," Dorothy Semenow Garwood, who led a group therapy session he attended at the National Training Laboratory after his army service. "I was floored when she started the group by saying, 'I want us to stay entirely in the here and now,'" Yalom told Ruthellen Josselson. "That was new for me" (39).

In his clinical vignettes Yalom usually writes in the third person about an unnamed therapist or male cotherapist who may be Yalom himself. Occasionally he writes about himself in the first person, offering negative details about the therapist that seldom find their way into psychiatric case studies. One of his most revealing self-disclosures occurs when he describes three female members of a group who expressed strong sexual attraction to him but not to the other male cotherapist. Yalom then asked the women to help him identify his blind spots that were unwittingly responsible for the patients' sexual response to him:

My request opened up a long and fruitful discussion of the group members' feelings about both therapists. There was much agreement that the two of us were very different: I was more vain, took much more care about my physical appearance and clothes, and had an exactitude and preciseness about my statements that created about me an attractive aura of suave perfection. The other therapist was sloppier in appearance and behavior: he spoke more often when he was unsure of what he was going to say; he took more risks, was willing to be wrong, and, in so doing, was more often helpful to the patients. The feedback sounded right to me. I had heard it before and told the group so. I thought about their comments during the week and, at the following meeting, thanked the group and told them that they had been helpful to me. (208)

I'm not aware of any other male psychotherapist who has admitted in a textbook, case study, or memoir that female patients were strongly attracted to him in part because of the therapist's vanity. Even if therapists were willing to make this self-disclosure, it is unlikely they would use the self-mocking words "suave perfection." Nor would therapists attribute patients'

sexualized behavior to the therapists' blind spots. To heighten the irony, Yalom acknowledges that his cotherapist, sloppy, uncertain, and willing to be wrong, was more helpful to his patients.

On another occasion Yalom refers to himself in the third person to describe his dissatisfaction with his behavior during a group session. "He felt he dominated things too much, that he was too active, too directive. No doubt this is due in large part to his feeling of guilt at having missed the previous two meetings and wanting to make up for it today by giving as much as possible" (435).

Sometimes patients' criticisms expose Yalom's human side. When, years earlier, patients asked him why he was wearing a copper bracelet, and were told it was for tennis elbow, their judgment was swift and merciless. "They felt angry that I should be superstitious or ascribe to any quack cures. (They had berated me for months for being too scientific and not human enough!) Some suggested that if I would spend more time with my patients and less time on the tennis court, everyone would be better off" (194). One page later he describes a situation when, attacked by group members for his perceived inaccessibility, he was defended by a patient who mentioned, in passing, that he had telephoned Yalom, a conversation the therapist had forgotten to mention to the group. "'Where is your unconscious?' they jeered."

### "That Seems to Be the Way We're Built": A Belated Self-Disclosure

The most intriguing self-disclosure in *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* is one that remains anonymous. The opening chapter of the first four editions of the textbook contains a section called "Universality" in which Yalom notes that most patients who enter psychotherapy fear they are "unique in their wretchedness." These patients experience relief when they discover that other members of the group have similar fears. The relief arising from the knowledge that "everyone is in the same boat" also occurs in individual therapy. Yalom then gives the following example of the importance of consensual validation:

Once I reviewed with a patient his 600-hour experience in individual analysis with another therapist. When I asked what he recalled as the most significant event in his therapy, he described an incident when he was profoundly distressed about his feel-

ings toward his mother. Despite strong concurrent positive sentiments, he was beset with death wishes for her—he stood to inherit a sizable estate. His analyst, at one point, commented simply, “That seems to be the way we’re built.” That artless statement offered considerable relief and furthermore enabled the patient to explore his ambivalence in great depth. (10)

What sets this clinical vignette apart from scores of others in Yalom’s first psychiatric textbook is that he returns to it nineteen years later, in *Love’s Executioner*, where he reveals for the first time that he was referring to *himself*. Describing a patient who was “so ashamed of being ashamed of her own father,” Yalom recalls something his first analyst, Olive Smith, said to him thirty years earlier. “(I remember it well, I think, because it was the only remotely personal—and the most helpful—thing she said in my six hundred hours with her.) I had been badly shaken by having expressed some monstrous feelings about my mother, and Olive Smith leaned over the couch and said gently, ‘That just seems to be the way we’re built’” (120).

What shall we say about Yalom’s belated self-disclosure? He was not ready for public confession in 1970, when *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* first appeared, nor was he ready in the second, third, or fourth editions of the textbook. He *was* ready when he published *Love’s Executioner*, confident enough to reveal highly embarrassing details about his conflicted relationship with his parents. He refers in his textbook to the “Taboo trio” that is rarely broached in therapy: sex, money, and death (152). Now he is ready to share two of these forbidden subjects with his readers. Just as Olive Smith used the word *we* to describe her resemblance to Yalom, an admission of her shadow side, he is ready to comfort readers of *Love’s Executioner* by admitting his kinship with them.

Those who encourage the risky art of self-disclosure must be sensitive to the lurking presence of shame. Silvan Tomkins, Helen Block Lewis, and Léon Wurmser have deepened our understanding of the dynamics of shame. Wurmser, for example, has identified three distinct meanings of shame: the fear of disgrace, the affect of contempt, and the character trait that prevents disgraceful exposures. Unlike these theorists, Yalom has repeatedly disclosed his own shame, thus serving as a role model for his patients.

Yalom’s delayed self-disclosure is a gift to his readers, assuring them that dark emotions are part of who we are. In revealing the identity of the therapist who was prosecuting himself for his base impulses, he was putting into practice his belief in careful self-disclosure. We can speculate that, while

writing *Love's Executioner*, he experienced the exhilaration of disclosing in print, for the first time, material that had been burdensome to him for years.

What has also changed about Yalom's self-disclosure is the method of expression. His prose throughout *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* is always lucid and mercifully free of psychobabble, but the language does not sparkle as it does in his later writings. (Academics know that sparkling prose impresses few tenure and promotion committees!) Yalom's gift for metaphorical language is evident when he wryly refers to himself as "laid low" by the "prosecution," a metaphor that reminds us of Kafka's *The Trial*. Yalom doesn't simply refer to his hope for an inheritance: he "greedily" anticipates it. And he captures in a few monosyllabic words his analyst's power to acknowledge and defuse the potentially deadly nature of the shadow self.

### Demystifying Therapy

*The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* announces the beginning of Yalom's lifelong effort to demystify the therapeutic process. It remains a landmark book for many reasons, including its urgent insistence upon therapist transparency. Yalom's realness comes across on every page of the book. Anything that stands in the way of realness becomes an impediment to therapy. For example, in the fourth edition of the textbook he takes issue with an article published in a 1993 issue of the *American Journal of Psychiatry* advising therapists to veer away from the "very humanness" that is the core of therapy. Written with a "high Victorian tone," the article, in Yalom's words, "warned psychiatrists not to offer their patients coffee or tea, not to address them by their first names, not to use their own first names, never to run over the fifty-minute time period, never to see *any* patient during the last working hour of the day (since that is when transgressions most often occur), never to touch a patient—even an act such as squeezing the arm or patting the back of an AIDS patient who, feeling like an out-cast leper, needs therapeutic touch should be scrutinized and documented." These admonitions, Yalom insists, are "deeply corrosive to the therapeutic relationship" (212). The coauthors of the offensive article appear in the bibliography, though a name is misspelled: T. Gutheil and G. Gabbard. The same criticism of the two coauthors appears in the fifth edition, but now Yalom updates his commentary. "To their credit, the authors of the 1993 article recognized the antitherapeutic impact of their first article and

wrote a second paper five years later aimed at correcting the overreaction generated by the first article” (226).

### Devastating Self-Disclosures

Yalom never sugarcoats the truth or rationalizes his failures. Nor does he make statements that may be too disturbing for his patients or readers to accept. But this doesn't prevent him from revealing that the “ultimate, terrible secret of the psychotherapist” is that the “intense drama in the group room plays a very small, compartmentalized role in his or her life.” Yalom exposed the secret only once—to a therapy group of psychiatric residents who were experiencing anticipatory mourning over his departure for a semester-long sabbatical. He presented to the group a fact that they knew but refused to acknowledge: “I was vastly more important to them than they were to me. After all, I had many patients; they had only one therapist. They were clearly aware of this imbalance in their psychotherapeutic work with their own patients, and yet had never applied it to themselves. There was a gasp in the group as this truth, this denial of specialness, this inherent cruelty of psychotherapy, hit home” (211–212).

Yalom could have softened this brutal truth by saying that he would return in a few months, that he still wished them well despite his absence, and that he was confident they would succeed without him. He could have said that he was simply the bearer of an unpopular message. He could have also said, quoting his former analyst, “That seems to be the way we're built.” But one suspects that by demonstrating he was a part of the inherent cruelty of psychotherapy, Yalom allowed, indeed, encouraged his patients to deidealize him, thus making it easier for them to do without him.

Ironically, although Yalom never qualifies the “ultimate, terrible secret of the psychotherapist,” his novels and psychotherapy tales present another, no less noteworthy secret. The dying psychotherapist in *The Schopenhauer Cure*, Julius Hertzfeld, needs the other members of the group as much as they need him. His wish to die in harness depends upon practicing his beloved work to the end. The members of the group, both individually and collectively, are as necessary to Julius as he is to them.

Even when he offers a radical idea, such as therapist self-disclosure, Yalom counsels “moderation in all things,” as he states in the fourth and fifth editions of his textbook. “There is a proper place for therapist concealment; and the most helpful therapist is by no means the one who is most fully and

most consistently self-disclosing” (fourth edition, 213). The literary Yalom cannot help adding, in a footnote to this remark, that many of the “wilder innovations in therapy” have sprung from Southern California. Yalom then recalls Saul Bellow’s “fanciful notion in *Seize the Day* of someone tilting a large, flat map of the United States and observing that ‘everything that wasn’t bolted or screwed down slid into Southern California.’”

### “Craving for a More Human Relationship”

After the publication of *Love’s Executioner* and *When Nietzsche Wept*, Yalom received a “deluge of letters, from both patients and therapists, attesting to the widespread interest and craving for a more human relationship in the therapy venture” (205). The constantly updated editions of *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* testify to its continued relevance. Each edition, he observes in *The Yalom Reader*, demanded two years of intense work (5). The textbook remains a superb guide for patients, therapists, and the general public. Yalom realizes, despite his best efforts, that the last word can never be written about individual or group therapy, and he urges readers to cast a skeptical eye, particularly when he tells a patient, “You imbue me with too much wisdom” (209). It is one of the few statements in the book with which his readers will disagree.