

## Chapter 4 of *Power, Love and Evil: Contribution to a Philosophy of the Damaged* (Rodopi, 2007)

### Damage: A Logic of Evil.<sup>1</sup>

I am the slayer of the soul  
destroyer of the dream  
The nightmares which recur  
and wake you up with their screams.  
I am the end of innocence  
the planting of the fear  
That eats away inside your mind and kills you year by year.  
I am the words you cannot speak  
the acts that you regret  
The twisted childhood memories  
that you cannot forget  
I am the terror in your voice  
as painfully you plead  
To fight the urges inside of you  
to end up just like me.

A “poem written by a child molester,” *Bulletin with Newsweek*  
10 August 1993, 27.

“You see, I want some good to come out of this.”

Gary to his brother Mikal in Mikal Gilmore, *Shot in the Heart* (London: Penguin, 1994).

“For those of you who doubt it this is a love story.” The narrator of Josephine Hart’s, *Damage*  
(London: Arrow, 1991), 216.

Damage and damnation (the old French *dam*, *damme* and Latin *damnum* both meaning loss supply the common root) have a logic whose key “moments” are: untimely loss of innocence, unbearable suffering, a heightened sensitivity to the presence of evil and, in some cases, a determination to release oneself from that state by finding a further sacrificial victim, just as they themselves have been a sacrificed to evil. To be damaged means to be in great pain through not being whole, being broken, often irreparably. Frequently being damaged means to act in such a way that someone will take the pain so that the damaged can leave the sphere of damnation - to feel damaged is to feel damned. To be damaged is invariably to inflict damage, to keep the cycle going, to re-enact the event, to release through re-enactment. That’s the logic. Damage is evil; evil is damaging. That’s the definition of evil for our time. And our time is one which has been preoccupied with damage. Certainly the logic has been tracked by Shakespeare and Dostoevsky and the word is not new. Gamaliel Bradford (1863-1932) wrote a book called *Damaged Souls*<sup>2</sup> long before Black Flag sang “damaged by you, damaged by me” or Trent Reznor sang “lost my faith in everything ... fuck the rest and stab it dead/ broken bruised forgotten sore/ too fucked up to care anymore,” in “Somewhat Damaged,” long before almost anything by Tori Amos, Nirvana, Smashing Pumpkins and countless other bands who have sung of their damage. I do not know if the novelist J.B. Ballard was correct in his observation that “the volatile landscape of the mid-60s ... made a virtue of psychic damage,”<sup>3</sup> but by

---

59. Part of this chapter has appeared in “Damage: A Logic of Evil,” in *Minding Evil: Explorations of Human Iniquity*, edited by Margaret Sönsner Breen (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2005), 87-108.

60. Gamaliel Bradford, *Damaged Souls* (London: Constable, no date).

61. J.B. Ballard, *The Kindness of Women*, (London: Harper Collins, 1991), 151.

the 1990s the word was part of everyday vocabulary. Its currency can be gauged by the question on the cover of *Time Magazine*, of 10 June 1991 “Does Evil Exist? Is it just the damage of a difficult world? Or something darker?” But there were two works that appeared in the 1990s which provide excellent explorations of the logic of damage: Mikal Gilmore’s autobiographical account of his family and his brother Gary in *Shot in the Heart* and Josephine Hart’s novel, *Damage*. In Hart’s case the very title of the book indicates that damage is her subject. And while Gilmore’s study does not deploy the word “damage” in the title, the word circulates with such frequency and at such critical moments throughout the book that a fairly accurate summary of the book would be: it is a study of familial and generational damage. The pivotal point of the book is when Mikal halts the flow of the narrative and contemplates a school photograph of Gary:

When I look at this photograph, I see a damaged boy. Or more accurately, I see the face of a broken angel as it looks away from the easy certainty that everyone else is looking toward and contemplates taking on the devil’s face for a lifetime fit.<sup>4</sup>

On the surface, *Damage* and *Shot in the Heart* would seem to be about two very different things. Hart’s novel tells a story of sexual obsession (which is what Louis Malle’s film concentrates on to the exclusion of the most important passages of dialogue in the book) between the unnamed narrator and his son’s (Martyn’s) lover and fiancée (Anna Barton). *Shot in the Heart*, on the other hand, is the history of how the violence of a family shapes the boy who is pushed from one violent institution (his family) to another (reform school then prison) until he, seemingly senselessly, kills two young men. He then becomes an international celebrity by forcing the state’s hand with his execution.

Different surface narratives notwithstanding, *Damage* and *Shot* are both essentially about the re-creation or restaging of traumatic events in order to find release and redemption from the hell into which Anna and Gary have both been cast. The sexual obsession of *Damage* is only a part of a deeper longing. For Martyn’s father, it is a means of breaking out of a life of sleep-walking and “exploding” into life; something in him longs for the pain, destruction, and evil that will wake him up. For Anna, sex is a force she deploys to help her restage the event that has so deeply traumatised her. She has been damaged by the suicide of her incestuous brother, and her life is ruled by the need to pass on the damage, to find a sacrifice that will receive her pain and thus release her from the hell of her existence. She is not physically violent, but she carefully discerns the fault-lines in the family she enters in order to brutally reveal the truth of the untruth binding the family members. Just as her trauma sprung from within a family, where the calm surface concealed far more turbulent energies, she enters into another family to uncoil the tumultuous energies that are just waiting to be tapped by someone who can “see” the evil behind the veneer of goodness and comfort. The novel’s horrifying denouement - the death of her fiancé when he discovers Anna and his father in bed together - is the genuine climax that she has been craving.

In Gary Gilmore’s case, the senseless and brutal killing of two young men is a re-enactment of the senseless violence to which he was subject as a young boy. The rage he had stored up at his father and the systemic control mechanisms of reform schools and prisons was released on two men as innocent as he once was. Gary’s raw aggression is as common amongst men who are damaged as Anna’s more contrived and cunning deployment of sex is among women who have been victims of incest. But what made Gary’s story such a significant one was his expansion of the stage upon which his re-enactment took place: from a small town affair, no more newsworthy than the thousands of other senselessly violent murders that take place each year, into a world-wide media event in which he would orchestrate his own murder and reactivate the killing machine of the state of Utah.

To be damaged is to experience the world as an infliction. It is to experience the cosmos in the exact opposite to Dante’s formulation “the love that moves the sun and other stars.” Receiving the rays of such love requires an openness to undeformed love (as opposed to self-deformed love) and being patient with the divine sequence of life’s gifts. Being damaged is to have been deprived of the right type of love at the right time. Hence there is no single way to become damaged. Being out of control, being deluded about one’s actions, being stupid, selfish, or all manners of inattentiveness, in addition to wanting to inflict harm, are all ways of doing damage.

---

62. Mikal Gilmore, *Shot in the Heart Shot*, 189. Also see 156, 210, 333, 339, in which Mikal emphasizes the role that damage plays in the story.

In Hart's novel, the damage suffered by Anna comes from her brother's suicide, due to her turning away from their incestuous relationship and her showing interest in another boy. Aston, the brother, may have wanted to punish Anna, though his primary motivation seems to have been to end his own agony. What he would not have foreseen is that the trauma induced in Anna would create in her the need to re-enact the incestuous pattern and destroy an entire family just as her family had been destroyed. By enticing father and son into a transgressive relationship, she has staged an impending catastrophe where the ones not knowing (Martyn, his mother, and sister) must be traumatised on the discovery of the truth created by her and the father. In Anna we see a soul whose damage has created a desolate self forever haunted by an impossible and ultimately deadly desire. Generally it is not uncommon for the victim of incest to split the self into a "too good to be true" (which is how both Martyn and his father see Anna) and an evil destructive shadow (which is exactly how the narrator's wife, Ingrid, experiences her).<sup>5</sup> Anna, in the most controlled and monstrous manner, is calmly and compulsively seeking for a sacrifice to release herself from the agony that Aston has passed onto her. The evil in this novel is bound up with every member of the field. Anna's evil is intentional, but never solitary; it is always dependent upon the reaction of others. The father's evil is due to reckless indifference and selfishness of the most vital and insatiable kind. But just as essential to the evil are the innocent sacrifices, including Anna, as a young girl, and possibly even Aston. In a tragic sense, all of the innocent are either guilty of unawareness or (in Ingrid's case) inaction. But, as inane and inappropriate as it would be to take this in terms of moral or judicial responsibility, the fact is that innocence feeds evil through its very existence and attractiveness. Innocence is the constant reminder of life before the fall: the fall into life as well as the fall of a life. To those whose experience of life is governed by its disintegrativeness, who are entrapped in the horrendous scatteredness of evil, the fragile unity of innocence is an unsurpassable temptation, a wondrous promise of a lost world. Without innocence there could no more be evil than there could be evil if creative and redemptive love did not exist. Evil is, *inter alia*, the thwarting of the hope of direct transition from innocence to redemptive love. It is always the end of innocence - innocence is a state too pure for the world's possibilities.

Evil is supra-individual. It can only exist where there is association and it makes as much sense to talk of a spirit of evil, to describe a complex of associations, as it does to talk about a spirit of a class, a group, a marriage, a friendship, a band, and so on. Evil is a vital substance that occupies a field; the paradox is that it is inseparable from the field. It is not reducible just to the one doing its final overt acts; again, the unintended acts which help form evil. The metaphor of hell fire is apposite for how evil works when it takes control of a territory; it is a conflagration devouring all in its way. Evil's course is not immediately stopped by the sheer presence of goodness. (However, an act of goodness, like an act of evil, lives beyond the time of its immediate expression.)

It is the absence of the swirling cumulative nature of "lesser or unnoticeable evils" that was so conspicuous in the first full length telling of the Gilmore story, *The Executioner's Song*, by one of America's most popular novelists, Norman Mailer.<sup>6</sup> The book came in a little under 1100 pages, and for all its detail didn't begin to answer the question of why Gary killed Max Jensen and Ben Bushnell and then demanded the reactivation of the death penalty. It didn't do this because Mailer addressed the question of who Gilmore was without any accurate information about the family in which Gary had been de-formed. Gary's brother Mikal, on the other hand, knew where the murders of Max Jensen and Ben Bushnell began. He understood the supra-individual quality of evil. The murders began before Gary's birth and were prepared for in his childhood. Mikal knows that everyone in that household was damaged, and the damage didn't start with Gary's mother, Bessie, or his father, Frank Senior. On Bessie's side there is her grandfather Alma, who "would pull off the wooden leg" to beat his wife and children so severely that at

---

63. See, for example, Sylvia Fraser, *My Fathers House: A Memoir of Incest and Healing* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1987).

64. Norman Mailer, *The Executioner's Song* (New York: Vintage, 1979). But even had he had information about the Gilmore family, Mailer's role in the Jack Abbott affair makes one doubt whether he was capable of *seeing* what Gilmore was a part of and what was making him. While Mailer was researching *The Executioner's Song*, Abbott had begun corresponding with Mailer about prison life. On the basis of his literary ability, Mailer campaigned for Abbott's release, which was secured. Within days of getting out of prison, Abbott stabbed and killed a waiter who wouldn't let him use a toilet. Abbott's *In the Belly of the Beast* (New York: Vintage, 1981), the book that briefly made him a literary star, is such a hateful, and hence powerful, yet self-pitying, work that only someone who has no idea of what damage does and what the damaged can do would have not read the intent to kill in the text.

times they had to be hospitalized and her father Will, who also beat his family, on one occasion tying his son George to a tree and beating him unconscious. As for George, after he returned home from having been one of the soldiers who liberated the Nazi concentration camps, he would entice his young nieces and their friends into a room where he forced them to look at his photo collection of emaciated survivors of the camps, of piles of corpses, and the pornographic pictures he had picked up in Paris.

On the other side of the family, Frank Senior's childhood was based on abandonment and lies, a pattern he reproduced in his adult life by continually adopting false identities and collecting and abandoning wives and children. In Mikal's description of the Gilmore family, we are not witnessing a family that is vastly different from many other families. But it is precisely through the details of the story that we are able to realize just how common and widespread the generation of evil is.

The violence in such families is so fundamental to its perpetuity that only the most extreme deeds expose how badly de-formed the association is. The moralist and jurist in us want someone to take responsibility. And while the need to break out of the pattern is indisputable, the issue of responsibility is, Sartre notwithstanding, a judicial or moral category, not an existential one. That is, it is not derived from the reality of the situation but from a hope for change. The tragedy of evil is that no *one* is responsible, but many always are. That is why Dostoevsky provides the formulation "We are all responsible from everybody" in *The Brothers Karamazov* as a means to try to overcome the damage that he sees that has befallen the Russian soul of his generation. Of course, the jurist in us responds: "This is too much!" It is far easier to blame the perpetrator or, failing that, the parents. The category error we all make time and time again is that we thoughtlessly confuse role and reality, name and outward characteristics. Alma, Will, and Frank Senior were no more able to be real "adults" or real parents, that is able to love and equip their children for life's trials, than they could fly to the moon on broomsticks. What is true of them is true of the other "parents" who brutalize, sexually abuse, and abandon their children. It is so easy to say, "People like this shouldn't have children." But they do and they will.

Unlike Alma and others, Mikal and his brother Frank acquired the wisdom not to have children, because they knew they were too damaged. Their wisdom was purchased with Gary's murders.

In sum, just as it takes many lifetimes (not discounting the odd miracle) to make even moderately good parents and children, it took many lifetimes to make Gary's parents and hence to make Gary. This hard truth of the slowness of life-forming processes is one that the ancients and tribal peoples took very seriously. But we moderns do not wish to entertain such a possibility, lest it interfere with the accelerated modern rhythms of social and economic reproduction and our moral, judicial, and political faith in individual sovereignty. However, it is this hard truth of the time required to nurture life that plays such a deep part in Mikal's book. And it leads him at one point to write: "I need to interrupt here for a moment. An important thing just happened: The murderer in our story was born." He then meditates upon the question: what separates this blue-eyed baby from the chilling blue-eyed killer on death row? His final answer is a "history of destruction." *Shot*, as I have stressed, is not a moral treatise, and, if we are forced to use a philosophical description, it is much more a phenomenological depiction of the evils that culminate in Gary's murders.

Such a treatment bypasses the metaphysical and ultimately uselessly abstract question: "Was he predetermined to commit murder?" At the same time it forces us to consider the much more concrete and hence much more important questions: "What damage was awaiting Gary as soon as he was born into the world?" and "What were Gary's responses to the cruelty and violence that were inflicted on him at such a young age?" The question of Gary's own will is really meaningless if we fail to address who Gary was and how he was formed.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps nothing so powerfully anticipates the damage awaiting Gary than the story Mikal tells of the naming of Gary. Some few thinkers, including Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, Martin Buber, and Franz Rosenzweig, have attended to the importance of naming. It is one of our most ancient creative acts. It simultaneously injects a sense of destiny already deemed into the bearer of the new name, while leaving open space for the name to take on its own significance, to make its destiny afresh in the world. We are called and re-called by our names. In Gary's case, his very name was hateful to his father, reminding him of Grady, the man who had stolen a former wife from him. In fact, Gary was the name chosen by his mother, but before he had received that name, Frank Senior had named him Faye Robert: Faye being the name of his mother, whom he hated; Robert the name of his other son, whom he not only, rightly, suspected of having an affair with Bessie, but also, wrongly, suspected was the true father of the boy. Days

later, Faye Robert had been renamed Doyle by the woman manager of the Hotel Doyle, the hotel where the family had checked in. And whilst still a baby, as if to treat the name as a laughing stock, Frank Senior then thrust the surname of Laffo upon him, as he took off from Bessie and bounced bad cheques. This left Frank Senior in jail and Gary abandoned in an orphanage. After detailing this horrible story, Mikal ruefully reflects:

There's a horribly ironic twist that comes from all this name switching: What it means is, Gary Gilmore was never born; he would only die. (Years later, in fact, the federal penitentiary system would refuse me access to my brother's file because I could not prove that any such person by his name had ever been born, or had ever had an official name change.)<sup>8</sup>

Just as the very act of Gary's naming was so loveless and hopeless, Frank's own lovelessness would beat the blue-eyed boy into the cruel and twisted shape of a chilling killer. And Frank's beating of Gary, like Gary's murders, was his own beating back at the world that had beat him. Of course, there are many other important ingredients, including personal characteristics that assist the transition. The saddest thing in Gary's case is that in any other environment, some of the qualities that helped turn him into a murderer, under other conditions, could have been virtues, namely outrage at injustice and courage.<sup>9</sup> Gary himself had said that the fateful point in his life was as a thirteen-year-old when he decided to take a short cut through a thicket of brier bushes. What had seemed an easy short cut turned into a huge, tangled and all but impenetrable mass of thorns. Instead of turning around, Gary fought for hours until he made his way, cut and bleeding, through the thick brier patch. That day he learnt, as Mikal notes, "to kill or silence the part of himself that needed to cry out in fear or pain."<sup>10</sup> The image of Gary cutting his way through the thicket of thorns is almost an archetypal depiction of a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood. Under other circumstances something beautiful and strong would have awaited him, instead of his own sad bloody monstrosity. That Gary knew that he was worth more than a beating bag for his father and "correctional" guards, and that he would not passively accept their brutality seemingly speaks of something courageous and strong. And yet, as Mikal had noted, what could and should have been courage and strength were now much darker forces: Gary "finally found the power to ruin his own life and to extinguish any other life that it might take to effect that destruction."<sup>11</sup> From that point on one could easily take as a gloss for Gary's life the line that Anna Barton offers her lover, by way of a warning: "Damaged people are dangerous. They know they can survive."<sup>12</sup>

The story of the final formation of Gary's willfulness helps answer the question that is invariably asked when one learns of the childhood abuse suffered by a killer: "But why do so few become murderers, when so many are abused?" A part of the answer is that the killer, who as a child suffered deeply from injustice, often became more defiant and more courageous in the face of injustice, and then more pathologically determined to show the world the injustice he or she has suffered. The self's need for mimesis and outward expression which is so important in human self-definition and understanding, from tribal ritual to epic to drama through to our entertainment society, is but the soul's need to express and feed off others' expressions of its loves and hates. The self that has been de-formed, unless re-formed, must express itself in the deformed way it appears in the world.

None of the other Gilmore boys was as willful as Gary, but as Mikal notes, each one was damaged and the world was very lucky that only one of the Gilmore boys turned into a murderer. Frank Junior, like Mikal, wracked by guilt by what Gary had done, was a vagrant shuffling through the loneliest haunts he could find to be spared visibility. Mikal rightly underscores the common condition uniting the murderer and his living-dead brother:

---

66. Ibid, 122.

67. Ibid, 175-176 where Mikal after saying "the outrage and unfairness of being beat that way became a sticking point in his heart" recounts how Gary would spend his entire life enacting the drama of his father's punishment challenging guards to beat him harder then challenging them yet again by abusing them. Not insignificantly, Gary's last words were: "There will always be a father."

68. Ibid, 183.

69. Ibid, 183

70. Hart, 42.

That one child killed and the other did not is, obviously, an important matter. But the fact that my brother Frank wasn't a killer does not mean he did not also suffer a damage worthy of killing. There are all kinds of ways to die in this world. Some die without taking others with them. It's a victory, no doubt, but that doesn't make it the same as redemption.<sup>13</sup>

Then there is Mikal's other brother Gaylen, who died of knife wounds inflicted by a husband of one of the many married women he slept with. His sexual preference was for women who were already in committed relationships, if possible with friends of his. Gaylen didn't damage other families and relationships by killing people. He simply, much more like Anna Barton, risked killing other people's relationships by combining that most volatile of human cocktails: desire mixed with deceit, leaving room for jealousy to do the rest.

As for Mikal himself, his damage has a special twist. Not only was he born into a family of such devastating damage, but he was singled out to be the recipient of his father's love. Perhaps this helped him focus his energies and develop his acute descriptive powers. Today we have largely become insensitive to the religious echo of professing and the responsibility before God of one's undertaking in the word "profession," though the German *Beruf* retains perhaps more starkly the religious sense of being called. But if one has any ear for what Mikal is saying, that is, if one takes him as seriously as the pain of the subject requires, Mikal was called to be the witness of his brother and what made him. *Shot* is his response to that call, the book that his profession had prepared him for, and the declaration he is called to make publicly, if not before God, at least before another of his names, the judges of the world. His book is an attempt at atonement.

The price Mikal pays for being a loved member of the family and witness to its evil is daily and nightly horror. One of the important truths that *Shot* addresses is the hauntedness of damage. Mikal's mother Bessie lived in fear of haunted houses and ghosts, and Mikal, who does not want to believe in them, cannot escape them. The fact that Mikal does not want to believe in ghosts and demons is as irrelevant to their presence as Ivan's disbelief in God is to his nightmarish encounter with the devil in *The Brothers Karamazov*. The dreams are as much a part of Mikal's life as hunger or the need to breathe. Devils and ghosts are part and parcel of the field of damage, no less tangible to the damaged than the clear objects of daylight are to the rest of us. They inhabit a different zone of our being, a zone that our reflexive discourses generally explain as unreal. It is a zone which psychiatrists, not altogether successfully, try to dissolve through drugs and therapy. But sanity is not preserved by simply saying, "I am sane." Nor do ghosts stop haunting or demons stop visiting those who say, "You don't exist." It is a difficult thing not to assume that the lines of vision that we are used to in daylight and the demarcation of the shapes of daily-life that we work with are the only lines and shapes. But being damaged opens up other lines of vision, other shapes and meanings than the ones we effortlessly, and more often than not thoughtlessly, take as reality. Such an opening facilitates a deeper grasp of reality, yet it is also dangerous, teetering on the delusional in so far as it tunnels concentration and vision upon the (potentially) evil, whilst blocking out the multiplicity of the countervailing forces of love.

That the damned would experience evil in a personified form, while of no surprise to religious adherents throughout the world, is something that those of us whose names for the processes of reality have been cleansed by the rays of the secularised spirit find difficult to swallow. Yet feeling damned and seeing the world in a damned way brings with it its own logic, its own modality of perception and accompanying objectifications. While the devil is not visible in the glare of Enlightenment, evil is more problematic.<sup>14</sup> The damaged, and those sensitised by evil, see and deal with evil as a substance, as a real force no less real than the wind. Indeed, wind and evil are similar in so far as everybody witnesses their effects. In the case of evil, those sufficiently attuned to the swirl of energies that characterises evil are able to see the evil in the behaviours between people who are carrying out or facilitating evil through their manipulations or thoughtless behaviours before the effects are manifest. Those who have not been personally awakened by evil or who have forgotten and whose attention has lapsed (that is, the overwhelming majority) have a way

---

71. Gilmore, 271-272.

72. Jeffrey Burton Russell's *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), the culmination of a number of previous books on the devil, is an excellent exploration of why it is foolish to dismiss talk of the devil as delusional, instead of exploring more thoughtfully what such depictions of the devil tell us about the collective wisdom we have gathered about evil.

of seeing that makes daily life more facile (in the best and worst sense). That is, the overwhelming majority has a shallower, but broader visual field. (Perhaps this was not always the case, especially in a more religious age when awareness of one's own sinful nature was a constant of daily life, though such a sensitivity to evil was far from being all good or healthy; evil had other ways of spreading itself). That shallow field means that the majority, most of the time, does not see evil in formation. In the main, evil is recognised after it is too late. The corollary of this is that the shallowness of most people's visual field, that makes so facile (in the best sense of the word) the reproduction of daily life, is also of great advantage to those who knowingly do evil.

We are all made and makers. The damaged, though, have been made in a certain way. They have been robbed of the world as it looks, and in many ways is, to the innocent and the un-broken; the latter, the majority, are, from under this optic, "nothing special," and *they* continually contribute to the evil of the world through their daily inattentions. The damaged know of their own lost-ness. What they are seeking is a way out of the loss, isolation, pain and sense of damnation, that is, release from the agony. To be released from the unbearable agony of the world and to see the intrinsic harmony and unity of life is to be redeemed. It is not my point to argue that there is any redemption beyond this world, but people certainly believe that there is redemption beyond the state of the world or beyond one's state in the world (it is one thing uniting secularists with faith in politics and people of diverse religious faiths). The motif of "redemption through striving" of Goethe's *Faust* captures an important insight into the human condition itself, namely that we must move and that very necessity of movement opens up the possibility of the redemption of our life's meaning. In this sense, in so far as we all move, we all potentially seek redemption, and our daily diet of television shows and films and novels is continually inventing scenarios of redemption to entertain us.

Evil and saintliness represent the two extremities of striving. And who can say that the path of the saint is not open to the damaged? Certainly, the belief is widely felt in our culture. Christianity, departing so radically from Greek ethical thinking in this respect, makes as its cornerstone the belief that we are all fallen/sinners/damaged. And sinners can be saved in an instant by surrender to his/her maker. Certainly also, in a secular age we are still nourished by stories of those who have turned around and redeemed their lives by deeds of compassionate service.<sup>15</sup> But there is one huge problem with the path of the saint for the damaged. At its most demanding moment, the saint's path is the martyr's path, not a hero's path. The difference, so often blurred in discussion of the martyr and the hero, is of fundamental importance to the point I am making. The martyr must embrace a faith so completely that his or her own death is recognized as the necessary condition of doing God's work in a world full of evil. In so far as the damaged are driven by life/ death itself to find a sacrificial victim to release them from the damnation they are driven by life's sacrificial commandment. But the saint knows that he or she must themselves be the sacrifice. Their life and death can - depending on God's timing - become an inspiration, not today, maybe not even tomorrow, to conduct the energies of life into new configurations other than those that have been de-formed and/or destroyed by the implosions and explosions of evil.

The martyr dies rather than contributes in any way to evil (just as Mikal is a witness, Frank Jr. is a martyr to the family). The consolation of surrender that is at the heart of genuine martyrdom and redemption is the antithesis to the absolute lack of surrender to, absolute mistrust and absolute defiance of life which characterises damage. Being damaged is to be death's servant rather than life's. And the greatest of questions regarding life's meaning is: which serves which - life death, or death life? Being damaged brings with it the knowledge that one is dead in life and hence the overwhelming sense that death is stronger than life.

The price for martyrdom if formed into a universal moral law, though, is extreme. Many would say, perhaps not wrongly, that it is mad or fanatical. It renounces all willingness to deploy violence on behalf of all others, including infants and the most vulnerable. All are surrendered; everyone is expected to pay the same price as the martyrs themselves - though, there is little reason to believe that Jesus believed that all would follow him as a martyr. But it is precisely the defiance of this all-encompassing command that binds together the damaged and the hero. The hero, like the martyr, risks his or her own death for something higher (God, the empire, the state, the city, the family, the beloved, and so on), but he or she is willing to use violence, and hence evil, as part of that fight. The forces of destruction are not activated by the martyr, rather they are absorbed in the faith to open up the way for God's will to come back into a

---

73. The story of Jimmy Boyle's transformation from one of England's most wanted gangsters to youth worker and sculptor (detailed in his *Sense of Freedom* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1977) is a classic story of redemption.

world too violent and evil for his presence. The martyr's faith in God's activity is absolute; the hero has faith in a cause or even God, but he or she also must act and that may require, as we have said, the expenditure of violence. The martyr and the damaged are both sacrificial victims. But the damaged have not initially chosen their status. Or to say it slightly differently, the martyr knows that the world is full of evil and does not expect people to act other than they do; there is total surrender, hence no expectation other than God's love being stronger than anyone's death. The damaged, though, have been ripped from their state of innocence, their childish expectations dashed. Their sense of injustice is first and foremost a sense of the injustice of their own suffering, understandable given the severity of injury that is sufficiently traumatic to the soul. The hero is a closer relative to the damaged than the martyr is to the damaged for another reason. The hero's survival skills must be finely honed in order to stay of heroic service.

The damaged too, as we have said, make survival of tantamount importance but, like the hero, the damaged person skirts close to the edge of death. Death is an ever-present temptation, a gaping opportunity for redemption and release. Yet survival, that is continuation in the damaged state, is the reality that can be trusted. It is purchased with the belief that there is no façade separating reality and appearance. And there is precious little that the damaged can trust apart from their own capacity to survive. To them the self is the most reliable thing, because being damaged shows that the rest of the world is not trustworthy. Being damaged means folding the self in upon itself as a protective mode against the flow of the too harsh world. Within that fold, one seemingly has control. But no one can have total control - the recognition of which is widespread amongst religions and philosophies which teach the doctrine of surrender of the self to God, Christ, the Soul, Reason, and the Tao among others. The damaged, as farseeing as they are in their sharper attunement to what is and does damage, are, nevertheless, enmeshed in an illusion, namely that they are in control.

They may have the patience, will, intelligence, tenacity, and so on to push into regions and set up situations others would not dream of doing or surviving. But they lack control in so far as their behaviours are themselves compulsive. Compulsiveness is by no means a bad thing; the greatest things come by compulsions, but it is the formation of the soul that gives our compulsions their fruit.

Damaged souls are souls whose compulsions are also deformed. Unless the damaged can heal, the damaged are damned to patterns of striving that reflect, and hence reinforce, their damage. If all striving by its very nature is striving for redemption, then the striving that increases the hold of negation over the living, that expands the nought of a self that is at once in *control* (in *freakish* control) due to its inward folding (so mystic-like, yet one abysmal step short of the mystic's total surrender), is striving into the nothing. It is a negative striving that is equally a negative redemption. That is a path that does indeed have redemptive qualities, but it is only achieved by going further into evil, by doing evil and by shattering lives so that others "suffer into truth" (to use Aeschylus' phrase). Taking our cue from Harold Bloom's gnostic apothegm that "what can be broken should be broken," we are all on earth to be broken. The only question is how and when. We call those evil who take it upon themselves to do the breaking, that is, who abandon the deeply felt belief that we are on earth to flourish. Only God or, in our more secular age, nature alone - and not nature working through men and women with careless, selfish, or destructive intent - has the right to introduce the hour and means of breakage. The damaged have usually been broken before their time, and some deep part of them knows this. The paradox of negative redemption is this: nothing better alerts us to the forces that facilitate premature breaking than an act of evil. The devastating consequences of evil force people to wake up to the evil they spawn or feed.

In Hart's novel there is an added dimension, which is the narrator's hunger to be touched by evil. A man or a woman who is hungry for life but is incapable of feeling has a particular kind of energy. It is as if they bore a mark upon their forehead and it is like a life/death line to the damaged person, a line of energy that promises a transference from one to the other. The vampire is a common way in which this kind of psychic disposition finds a mytho-poetic representation. The vampire is the damaged person who must drain the energy (drink the blood) of the living.

The importance of sexual charisma as a seductive strategy is a common way in which the energy transfer begins. The uninitiated, the victim, is drawn to the charismatic power and inner depth of the damaged soul. Damage, to repeat, gives depth because the psychic wound means that the damaged one is constantly *in* a state of being *in* pain, and not just lifelessly moving across the surface of being. What is in fact a tortured and terrible state of existence can seem to be awesomely deep, wonderfully interesting. Hart has put her finger on, or rather dug into, an important and little understood, phenomenon: that souls communicate their innermost needs at a level preceding speech, that certain kinds of people are powerfully drawn to each other to learn about life, to be in life, to sacrifice themselves and others. The fact that lives

and families are destroyed as a consequence of this kind of psychic attraction is precisely the point. That the “innocent” one doesn’t know it is happening is also frequently an essential part of the experience. This aspect of the experience is also powerfully drawn in the novel. First there is the narrator’s laughable belief that he is in control, as if there will be no serious consequences, as if this kind of action could not irrupt into the surface smashing his, his son’s, and his wife’s reality to bits. That he believes he is in control only goes to show how much he has to learn, how desperately he needs to learn, and that is the real purpose of the sexual obsession.

The experience we are talking about here is not primarily about the triumph of erotic love, but about the transmission of knowledge that uses the erotic as a basis for its possibility. Martyn’s father has sex with Anna Barton so that he can gain a wisdom; Anna Barton has sex with Martyn’s father so that she can produce a wisdom and in so doing release herself from a burden. The wisdom is generated by the death of the son, and the truth of what father, wife, and son and daughter really had exploding into existence - what they really had was not a loving constellation, but an unfeeling numbness, a dwelling incapable of protecting itself from one of the most fundamental forces of life. Sex is a force, but its end frequently has less to do with pleasure than energetic transference; in such a case as this its purpose is for the truth of a group created reality to reveal itself for what it really is. *Damage* is a love story because it tells the story of what love and its lack do. Although the erotic is the way in which the love commences, by the novel’s end Martyn’s father carries within himself a kind of love that is way deeper than the erotic. His compulsive love for Anna has been so powerful that it has destroyed everything around him. After that, sex is only a minor, if not altogether irrelevant, power.

In the stories of the “fictional” Anna Barton and the “real” Gary Gilmore, we can discern how damaged people may do evil to awaken people to the evil of the world, to a world formed by the very evil that has befallen them. Having become the sacrifice of the evil of others, they seek out some other to sacrifice. The world becomes for them a theatre in which they re-enact the damage done to them in order to redeem themselves from hell. But their (negative) redemption increases the expanding circles of hell. Evil is not transcended by them; they are, and remain, its perpetrators as well as its victims. Any transcendence that occurs after their actions is by way of the others’ love being stronger, over time, than the realm of death that has been enlarged. The awakening into evil is a brutal and cruel affair; it is no less an awakening because of that. That Martyn’s father wishes to be awoken into life, to be redeemed from his slumber, means that there is an exchange of deadly and dangerous gifts.

In Gary’s case, he shows the world the evil of the random violence of rage that he was subject to as a boy by randomly killing in moments of rage two young men. But then he ups the stakes by demanding the killing machine of the State be reactivated, thus, as Mikal notes, forcing the State to be complicit in his own murder. As he writes:

He made them (the State of Utah and death penalty advocates) not just his allies, but he also transformed them into his servants: men who would kill at his bidding, to suit his own ideals of ruin and redemption. By insisting on his own execution - and in effect directing the legal machinery that would bring that execution about - Gary seemed to be saying: *There’s really nothing you can do to punish me. Because this is precisely what I want, this is my will. You will help me with my final murder.*<sup>16</sup>

He had opened the floodgates for a mass of new killings. What, he asks, does it matter that all these rapists and murderers are going to die? For him, they all deserved to die. He had already died as a young boy because of the behaviour of men who, if not on death row, should have been (from his perspective at least). What elevated Gary’s theatrical enactment above countless other ones, which occur each day and are propelled by the overwhelmingly similar intergenerational patterns and motives, was that with his demand to be executed things stopped and people, even on the other side of the world, took notice.

In his telling of the story, Mikal shows the extent of the evil that had formed Gary and that had expressed itself in his murders. To this extent he goes somewhat towards redeeming (though not undoing) the evil by educating his readers into the truth about the role that intergenerational damage played in Gary’s evil. His redemptive act, the writing of the book, occurred years after Gary’s murders and execution. That I write of this now (thirty years after I was first strangely touched by the spirit of his name) is further testimony to the continuity of the importance of his redemptive striving and the way in which that striving

---

74. Gilmore, ii, emphasis in original.

continues across space and time. It does not make Gary's evil any less evil, any less negative. On the contrary, Mikal specifically states (and Gary agreed) that he thinks Gary would not only have escaped if he could have but he would have murdered Mikal himself and anyone else who stood in his way.

The damaged seek phantasmic redemption - and yet in their very evil they point the way to true redemption. Their lack of love points to the need for love; the terror of what they do discloses the terror that is born of the lack. The damaged point to the martyr that they are not; the unwilling sacrifice finds another unwilling sacrifice. They point to what was stolen from them: their capacity to participate in a *bond* and *logos* of mutual redemption.

Madness is the other refuge of the broken soul. While those who are lost in madness may do evil, the judicial category of *mens rea* has no bearing on the truth that madness is frequently the creation of evil, a means of becoming a broken witness to the world's evil. Indeed, apart from the transfer of evil from one to another, the expanding circle of its seriality, madness is the most common creation of that conspiracy of deliberate and mindless evil (folly). Madness (not always, of course - my point here is not about making a dogmatic denial of cases where natural chemical deficiencies may create delusion or psychosis) is frequently the enforced sacrifice that comes from evil. The chain of responsibility is a useless one for getting to evil's truth, a mere distraction from the matter at hand. And finally, the folly of indifference and blindness, to which we all at times succumb, is the medium through which evil spreads.<sup>17</sup>

---

75. There are countless literary, cinematic and televised depictions of this phenomenon, but few works in any form depict with such precision how evil and folly create madness as Shakespeare's analysis of it in *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. They conjure worlds where the powers of love have been banished (Cordelia), forced to go into disguise and hence constrained (Kent, Edgar), thwarted by inexperience and parental loyalty (Ophelia), or denied and thus betrayed (Hamlet, Ophelia). In *King Lear*, Lear is driven mad by his own folly, and Gloucester's folly creates the condition which makes Edgar have to feign madness (though in his feigning he experiences what it feels like to be deprived of everything except nature's barest and harshest, thus pushing him beyond the bound of civilisation and into the life of a mad beggar). Ophelia is driven mad by the folly of Polonius, her father. And what drives her will also ultimately lead Laertes into evil, through his conspiracy with Claudius, before losing his life through the dealing. Hamlet, like Edgar, feigns madness, only later to concede that he was, indeed, mad. Hamlet is driven mad by a range of things, which include: his mother's folly and total denial of the torment her actions have upon him; a traumatic truth conveyed by supernatural means and hence outside of the ken of the public (and legal) view; his being torn between the need to avenge his father and scruples of killing someone, made more complicated by the ir-real means by which he has "knowledge"; and above all his being surrounded by people who have betrayed him and to whom he cannot speak, or even be heard by. With the exception of Horatio, what should be Hamlet's circle of nourishment - friends and family - is populated by hearts infected by treachery. Hamlet can only catch the truth through artifice (the play within the play) in a world whose artifice is such that truth and honour are forced to flee not only the confines of the state and the confines of reason's reasonable assurances, but, what by nature should be the most honest channels of love, between mother and son, between lovers and between friends.

In *Hamlet* Shakespeare, *inter alia*, explores the servitude of folly to evil and hence the expansion of evil through its unwitting pawns. However, evil ultimately reveals itself to be foolish: Claudius loses all that he had schemed for, including Gertrude, for whose love he had, in part at least, plotted and set in motion the chain of evils with which the play deals. Likewise, in *King Lear* we see how folly creates the evil that brings about one's own doing. Goneril and Regan's obsequious and manipulative and brutal characters have all been cultivated by their father, so that when he asks the question to have his vanity stroked, they tell what he wants to hear rather than the truth, which as Cordelia (Christ-like in the purity of her folly as Shakespeare underlines) learns, is foolish to tell in the eyes of the world of her father. Having given up his power at the wrong time, Lear is forced into madness by the evil that his own folly has generated in the form of his two daughters who have cast him out, and by his overwhelming guilt and grief at the wrong he has done to the one daughter who was the very incarnation of the love that had been cultivated by what was best in Lear. Cordelia's only folly was her truth, and her banishment was Lear's greatest act of folly. His madness, then, was the abyss his own folly had pushed him into. (In *Hamlet* madness is the last refuge for one betrayed by love's usual channels of support.)

As so often and brilliantly in Shakespeare the tragedy of one family finds its mirror image in that of another. The family of Gloucester and his sons mirrors that of the family of Lear's daughters. The additional and differing element is that Gloucester's folly is not his vanity, but his indifference to the

---

significance of his own actions, in general, and, in particular, the son he has created (while he holds Edmund no less dear than his legitimate son Edgar, Edmund “hath been our nine years, and away he shall again”). He has no idea how smart and how resentful - and what a deadly combination those two characteristics are - is the son he barely knows. Just as Lear must go mad to fully experience self-knowledge, Gloucester loses his eyes in order to see what he has done. For both it is all too much. Evil and madness are the world’s all too much which extinguish its bearers as well as any others who are not powerful/ insightful/ lucky enough to escape its abyss.