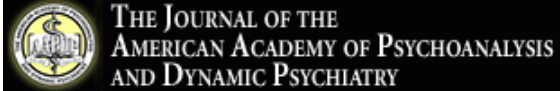


Eckardt, M. (2006). *Transforming Depression: Healing the Soul through Creativity*. By David Rosen, Nicholas Hays, Inc., York Beach, Maine, 302 pp., \$19.95...



(2006). *Journal of American Academy of Psychoanalysis*, 34:388-391

## Transforming Depression: Healing the Soul through Creativity. By David Rosen, Nicholas Hays, Inc., York Beach, Maine, 302 pp., \$19.95.

*Marianne Eckardt, M.D.* ⓘ

This book by David Rosen, a psychiatrist and Jungian analyst, professor in Jungian psychology and behavioral sciences at Texas A & M University, as well as professor of humanities in medicine, is not only of interest to students of Jung but also to therapists who wish to expose themselves to alternate therapeutic ventures.. His writing is clear and well organized. The Introduction tells you how he came to be interested in depression and suicidal ideation as harboring the potential for therapeutic transformation of the personality. Theorists, he writes, belong to two categories: they are either “lumpers,” trying to place phenomena under one umbrella, or “splitters,” who find significant differences in varying forms of depression. While acknowledging his commitment to a holistic approach, he definitely is a lumper and favors conceptual terminology, classifications, and stages. He honors respectfully many effective approaches to depression but wishes to present in this book a novel approach to treating depressed patients who want to kill themselves. This approach emphasizes the elimination or “killing” of the negative self-destructive aspects of the ego, a procedure he calls ‘egocide’ and aims at the emergence of a more integrated self through transcendence and transformation. His most important therapeutic tool is the use of partly guided active imagination and creative expression in a meditative-like state which plumbs deeper layers of our psyche. He embraces Jung’s concepts of archetypes and Jung’s belief in the transcendental healing power of images like mandalas seen as metaphors of wholeness that encompass the many paradoxical layers of our psyche.

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The crises that shaped the author’s interest in depression with suicidal thoughts are essential to our understanding his path of development. At age fifteen he landed his first job and was looking forward to a summer of fun, money, and freedom. This dream was abruptly shattered by his mother’s sudden decision to divorce his father and move with her child to another state. He had just found refuge and a substitute father in the home of a new friend, when this father suddenly committed suicide. Soon thereafter another friend, following several attempts, succeeded killing himself. The author married early, but the grueling pressure of medical school made him unavailable to his wife, and the marriage broke up in a particularly humiliating and painful way. In despairing turmoil, he drove into deserted country, ran wildly, and had an out-of-body vision of watching himself run until he suddenly heard a voice saying “leave!” a voice of his real self, of his spiritual center, a voice of self-preservation. A wise psychiatrist whom he consulted responded to his voiced sense of being a failure by saying that he was not a failure, just failed at his marriage. He began to understand this out-of-body experience as a letting go of the limiting aspects of his ego, which had defined his role as only being a husband.

San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge is a favorite site for suicidal jumps, where only a few survive. As a resident in psychiatry in San Francisco he wondered how these few reacted to their survival. Thus he interviewed ten survivors. The idea of the transforming power of egocide had already germinated as a project to be investigated. The message he received, in spite of differences, was similar. They all had wished to end their life out of a sense of despair, loneliness, worthlessness, and rejection, and all of them admitted to feelings of spiritual transcendence after the leap. They felt rescued by a higher power and given a sense of hope and purpose in life. The experience of an analysis with a Jungian therapist provided the foundations for the development of his own ideas and his own theoretical approach.

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These are some of the important concepts developed originally by Jung and elaborated upon by Rosen. “Archetypes” are ancient affectively charged motifs and predispositions toward ideas, and patterns of behavior that are common to all human beings. They are innate in the human psyche. “Transformation” means to change the nature of our personality ‘The ego,’ or our conscious personality, is a complex that is based on our personal history and that has to do with our personal unconscious and introjected parental characteristics and conflicts. If we remain unaware of this, we can limit our development by being only manifestations of our parents’ wishes and not of our true self. At the core of the transformation process is an archetypal death-rebirth experience. The Self is the force behind this sacrifice (symbolic death) of the dominant ego image that is impeding individuation.

Most of us are familiar with the therapeutic use of fantasies, creativity, and active imaginations as an aid to express the full meaning and drama of our various emotional experiences. Jung’s use of active imagination is more specific. It is a part-directed part-conscious meditative-like state that the individual uses to go deep into the unconscious to bring to light dreams and fantasies of an archetypal nature. Such a journey leads to creative acts of expressions, like painting, sculpting, dancing, and writing. It is a process of letting oneself go with the flow of the unconscious and then manifesting insights in an artistic form of expression. Transformation occurs by a radical confrontation of opposites and integrating them. The integration, that is gaining the wholeness of one’s Self, is a conversion experience using archetypal images. Art therapy is of value because it makes visible in image form the archetypal conflicts of the patient so that the patient can confront them. The therapist encourages the patient’s personal association to his artistic product and then amplifies these associations with archetypal references. Rosen writes: “Using active imagination to evoke and render archetypes of transformation is a

profoundly effective therapeutic technique” (p. 97). The healing journey is arduous and not to be undertaken lightly as it can unsettle vulnerable patients. The journey tends to occur in general stages. Three are mentioned. Each stage has many ups and downs, painful struggles and resistances. The elimination of the bad ego does not necessarily lead to an immediate experience of blissful freedom, a period of mourning occurs for the sense of loss of the old patterns of accommodation. It takes time to feel rooted in the new Self-oriented mode of being.

The second half of the book illustrates Rosen's method by a detailed account of the healing journey of four patients who were depressed and had suicidal thoughts. To write such an account is not easy. So much has to be left out and the intention of using it as an illustration of a theme is bound to affect the selection. The author succeeds well. The cases are presented in their complexity and they illustrate his therapeutic technical emphasis.

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This reviewer likes to review books that she can wholeheartedly and enthusiastically endorse and feel a kinship with. While I have always enjoyed Jung's writings, appreciated his original non-pathological approach, his sense of normal complexity, and his emphasis on creativity, individuation, his working with dreams, and his appreciation of the metaphoric functioning of our nature, I feel less kinship with his ideas of going beyond the personal to the archetypal and the deep unconscious. My reservations arising from my differing orientation concern mostly the strong interpretative aspect of Rosen's methods, which shifts meaning from the patient's personal associations to the therapist's understanding of archetypal meaning. I do not favor the abstract and often obscuring quality of terminology and thus do not find the term egocide helpful. Egocide means killing the ego, though the author means only those aspects of the ego that stand in the way of the patient's development. The term is not accurate. We need the ego, though we hope to promote the development of a more integrated ego.

In summary, however, I want to emphasize that this book is very competent, clear, concise, admirably organized, and well portrays the author's deeply held convictions which grew out of his own experiences. The book is informative and stimulating even when one has evolved a differing perspective.

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## Article Citation

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