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Review of: *The Cut and the building of Psychoanalysis, Volume II: Sigmund Freud and Sandor Ferenczi,* by: Carlo Bonomi, 2018. London & New York: Routledge.

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Following a session in which I had cried with a patient, I reflected on Irwin Hoffman’s (2009) constructivist critique of clinical detachment on the part of a therapist. In that helpful paper, Hoffman considers the problem of normative detachment as stemming from a taboo on influence that is linked to the incest taboo. Hoffman adds that a fear based, avoidant detachment loses the generative possibilities found in a loving attitude and as such may foster a deadly collusion as opposed to inspiring the sort of change that allows dissociation and enactment to diminish (cf., Stern, 2010). The sense that a personal, uncertain, and heartfelt presence is central to the texture of treatment is also at the heart of Carlo Bonomi’s *The Cut and the building of Psychoanalysis, Volume II: Sigmund Freud and Sandor Ferenczi.* It is to Bonomi’s credit that he weaves such clinical wisdom and technical consideration into a work that simultaneously stands on its own in advancing historical psychoanalytic scholarship.

Got them hesitation blues

Bonomi maintains that recognizing actual trauma remains taboo in our field, and by extension addresses the manner in which Sandor Ferenczi was ostracized for his attempt to return attention to actual trauma. As discussed in my review (Rothschild, 2017) of Bonomi’s first volume (Bonomi, 2015) that focuses on Emma Eckstein and Freud’s Irma injection dream, actual trauma centers on female castration as a terrified response to childhood sexuality. In Bonomi's focus on Ferenczi in volume two, we find Erich Fromm defending Ferenczi’s and Otto Rank’s sanity against Ernest Jones accusations alongside Freud’s reactivity to Princess Marie Bonaparte’s awareness of traumatic discontents. The material is a lot to take in not only on account of its vastness, but due to the emotional difficulty found in following Bonomi’s continued use of Ferenczi’s (1933/1980) c*onfusion of tongues* as a method to address the logic of enactment in encounters with traumatic material relating to a professional hegemony that has yet to be fully metabolized.

Bonomi writes of feeling puzzled by his “bizarre” association that actual castration had been central to the founding of psychoanalysis following his reading of the then newly published Freud and Ferenczi correspondence in 1992. The following year in 1993 at the International Sandor Ferenczi Conference in Budapest, Bonomi suggested that Ferenczi had “transformed into ‘Irma’” (p. 9) and dreamed parts of Freud’s self dissection dream that Freud himself could not tolerate. In the introduction to volume two, Bonomi writes of questioning his thesis over a twenty year period in which his concerns ranged from worry regarding potential misreadings to wondering if his argument was simply a fantasy. His research shows that in regard to harboring such fantastic concern, that he stands in good company. Bonomi’s meticulous reading draws on earlier scholarship (e.g., Anzieu, 1986 & Masson,1985), and therein finds Freud writing to Fleiss of his own concern that his work might be considered a fairy tale. Bonomi also refers to Ferenczi’s work as a scientific fairy tale that itself is a deconstruction of Freud’s system. To this end, each of Bonomi’s volumes may be read as interpretations of profound dreams.

One maddening challenge faced in Bonomi’s text is the task of situating trauma in a discipline that purports to situate and treat trauma. This task is made increasingly difficult by virtue of the fact that traumatic collusion extends in a manner that challenges stability in the present. A *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* book review (Gero, 1961, cited in Bonomi, p. 181) serves as an example. Just over 100 years after Freud encountered castration as a medical procedure, a psychoanalytic author writes that castration in women has no traumatic effect. A little further back in the 20th century timeline, Bonomi (p. 187) turns to the work of Geza Roheim, an anthropologist funded by Marie Bonaparte who wrote in a 1932 issue of T*he International Journal of Psychoanalysis* that surgical alteration of the clitoris “fosters the right attitude of women” (p.232, original). In the present, it feels outrageous to encounter this repeated denial and enactment of trauma in the recent past. Bonomi argues that what sounds bizarre to our contemporary ears may be understood in light of Freud’s failure to constructively witness the trauma endured by Emma Eckstein through her actual castration, and the need among many to maintain a rigid allegiance to a theory of castration fantasy that devalues the clitoris as psychoanalytic bedrock. In volume one Bonomi writes of Freud’s reactivity to the trauma he witnessed as leading to the view that castration was a fantasy, and that cathexis to the clitoris was a sign of immaturity. In the second volume reviewed here, Bonomi proposes that Freud created the death drive in order to fill the gap left by the absence of actual trauma, and used the death drive to then explain symptomatic behavior related to actual trauma.

 Every distance is not near

To question Freud’s use of the death drive is no simple matter. Michael Eigen (2007) considers how such questioning made trouble for Melanie Klein in her use of annihilation anxiety. For Eigen, what is central is lovingly affirming life in a manner that can work with acknowledging a sense of helplessness. I think that Eigen’s position stands in concert with Bonomi’s use of Ferenczi’s and Rank’s argument that affect had been lost in Freud’s intellectualization, and that the emotional component is the most vulnerable aspect of the human condition.

Bonomi critiques Freud on grounds of having a “lack of empathy” (p. 52), and practicing impulsively due to not recognizing what we do today: That working with trauma requires sensitivity and patience (p. 45). This is of course linked to Ferenczi’s emphasis on a living relationship as opposed to an emphasis on the authority of the analyst. Bonomi considers how Carl Jung and Ferenczi were angry with Freud regarding his refusal of analytic help, and that Ferenczi felt that Freud’s self analysis could be understood as a retreat from intersubjective relationality.

Hear him cry so loud

I began writing this review on a Friday, hours before the sunset that marks the start of Yom Kippur. Regarding Freud, that holiday is overdetermined as he died on a Saturday during Yom Kippur in 1939 (cf., Edmundson, 2007). As a Jew, Freud died on the holiest day of the year. The center of Yom Kippur may be found in the evening service in which a prayer of atonement Kol Nidrei is sung. The prayer and the holiday concern the relation of a person to their conscience, as Jews ask to be released from obligations that cannot personally be fulfilled (Goldberg et al, 2015). The obligations that cannot be fulfilled are ones that cannot be held because to do so causes too much pain. In sitting with Bonomi’s examination of founding trauma, I wonder what was consciously too painful for Freud. Was he conscious of more pain than the jaw cancer that motivated him to end his life? Might have he been compassionately aware of his aggressive and obsessional identifications in a manner that is close to what is illuminated in Bonomi’s and Ferenczi’s scholarship? I doubt that he was, but would like to think that he could have been.

Bonomi writes of Freud’s aggressive identification as a “medieval inquisitor" (p. 74) regarding Freud’s reactivity to Emma Eckstein’s erotic transference. Such a position is one that does not allow uncertainty (Bion, 1970/2004) and appears to well play a role in leaving a patient such as Emma alone with “the prehistoric, unforgettable Other” (p. 48). Although we may only speculate or project what Freud may have been able to hold in mind in making the choice to die on the day of atonement, I think the way in which we might hope that he went beyond the aggressive encapsulation found in his self-analysis says a great deal about contemporary practice.   
 The emphasis of Kol Nidrei harmonizes with a Neitzschian recognition that the highest values stand on shaky ground (cf., Deleuze, 1962/1983), and that there is much that we do not know. As we co-construct our future in making meaning of our history, we may wonder what Freud knew on September 23, 1939, and if in his holy day suicide he was paradoxically asking to be released from the traumatic hold found in his adherence to the death drive; a belief that asks too much. Bonomi’s scholarship places such fairy tale dreaming, castration fantasy, and the death drive itself in a context that demands a wide readership. It is a pleasure to recommend each of his volumes.

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