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Review Simonetta Diena: *Psychoanalysis Listening to Love*

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„Review Diena, Simonetta: *Psychoanalysis Listening to Love*. Passion and Bonds (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), Milano 2018.“

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Simonetta Diena lives and works in Milan, Italy, as I do. As Francesco Barale says in the Preface (p. xv), Diena's clinical practice "is starred with a rich repertory of literary, poetic, artistic, and musical references" to the theme of love. On the front cover, this theme is synthesized by a picture by Chagall of a couple of lovers floating through the air. Barale then reveals his orthodox Freudian orientation when he speaks of "the combination between libidinal and aggressive components" (p. xvi).

In the Introduction (p. xi-xlii), Diena lists the twelve chapters of the book. The first concerns the theoretical psychoanalytical contributions to the subject of love. The second discusses the earliest mother-child relationship. The third deals with adult love. The theme of the fourth is abandonment. The fifth explores the question of "fatal love", to which death is the final solution. The sixth is on transference love. The seventh concerns the early loss of the first love object. The title of the eighth is "Love in old age". Chapter Nine concerns adultery. The tenth chapter concerns "The incapacity to love". Chapter Eleven is on homosexuality. Finally, in the last chapter Diena discusses the theme of love in sever-

al films. In each chapter there are one or two case histories.

In connection with the early mother-child relationship, in Chapter Two, on p. 18, the author describes a prototypical scene. On a beach, a small child wanders away from his mother towards the water, then turns round and says: "Watch me".

In almost every case, the analyst reacts to some communication of the patient with a feeling or association of her own, which she then communicates to the patient, who in turn reacts. One of the most striking examples is in Chapter Ten, on p. 133. The analyst realizes she tends to doze off during sessions. On her side, the patient, Antonella, describes coenaesthetic misperceptions: she feels as if she were hovering in the air, or glued to the couch. "One day I suddenly wake up, totally lucid. I think I dreamt that the lid was being taken off a coffin and that I was free to get out. In that very moment, I hear Antonella say: 'I feel as though they have taken a lid off a coffin, I feel freer now'. The nightmare had ended for both of us". I find this is a most remarkable example of non-verbal patient-analyst communication. Another example is in Chapter Three, on p. 37. "I feel infected by



impotence. I let my mind wander and strangely enough think of a funny story”, which she then tells the patient, Francesca. Another example is in Chapter Five, on pp. 64-65. The patient, Elisabetta, reports the Italian police bursting into her refuge. “Elisabetta, eight months’ pregnant, went into labour and had to be transported urgently to hospital”. “I reacted violently. [...] I began to cough uncontrolledly”. I find that to report a reaction of her own is a sign of affection – what Alexander, in 1946, called a “corrective emotional experience”.

An example of the author’s wide-ranging cultural interests occurs when, at the end of Chapter Two, she gives a sensitive reading of two paintings by John Singer Sargent, then, at the beginning of Chapter Three, she moves to a film by Louis Malle, *Les Amants*, with the accompaniment of the Andante from the String Sextet op. 18 by Brahms. At the beginning of each chapter there is a literary quotation, ranging from Shakespeare to Goethe to Emily Dickinson.

The author fully acknowledges the importance of traumatic experience, as in the example reported in Chapter Four, on p. 48, of Alessandra, a patient who in pre-adolescence, in six months, had lost her father and her brother. Another example is reported in Chapter Seven, on p. 93. Alice’s mother died when she was still very young, but, as she stated at the beginning of analysis, she didn’t have any particular feelings about it. One day, during an interminable soliloquy about how empty her life was, Diena was surprised to find herself whispering “Stop...Stop all this suffering...” The patient heard her, and was astounded.

I thus greatly appreciate Diena as a clinician. I do not agree with her at a theoretical level. She is an orthodox Freudian, a

member of SPI (the Italian Freudian organization) and of IPA (the international Freudian organization). In addition to Freud, her main references are to Bion, in the UK, and Kernberg, in the USA. She is always using the terms “oepidal”, “libidinal” and “narcissistic”. She never mentions alternative psychoanalytic authors. In 1983, Greenberg and Mitchell made a fundamental distinction between Freud’s drive model and the relational model, which includes many authors, such as Bowlby and Fromm. None of these authors is mentioned by Diena. In the scene on the beach, Bowlby’s concept of “a secure base from which to explore” (Bowlby, 1988) is surely relevant. I find that his concept of the inverted parent-child relationship is at the core of psychopathology, but it is never mentioned. In his 1984 paper, “Violence in the family” (reprinted in Bowlby, 1988), Bowlby speaks of Freud’s “disastrous volte-face”, when, in September 1897, he denied the reality of sexual traumas.

Regarding the overall theme of her book, Fromm’s *The Art of Loving* (1956), which was a best-seller in the USA, is equally relevant. Fromm is also highly relevant for his critique of the Oedipus complex, which he carries out in *The Forgotten Language* (Fromm, 1951), where he examines not only *Oedipus Rex*, as Freud did, but the whole Theban cycle by Sophocles, which includes also *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone*. Fromm concludes that an analysis of the whole cycle shows it to be a conflict between the victorious patriarchal order, represented by Laius and Craeon, and the defeated matriarchal order, represented by Oedipus, Haemon and Antigone.

I find it useful to compare Diena with Alice Miller. Miller was a Polish Jewess who suffered severe traumas during the war. After



the war she moved to Switzerland, became a psychoanalyst and wrote all her books in German. Also she originally belonged to the IPA. Her first book, published in 1979, was *The Drama of the Gifted Child* (English edition, 1983). In a footnote added to the first printing she says: "I have become more and more suspicious of the validity of Freudian drive theory". In *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware* (Miller, 1985), the whole thrust of the book is to reject the drive theory of the later Freud. Drive theory neglects real trauma in early childhood and lays all the blame on the victim. Like Fromm, she points out that in the Oedipus myth it is Laius who is the aggressor. In 1988 she resigned from the IPA. Miller's move away from Freudian psychoanalysis is very obvious from a comparison between the two editions of *The Drama of the Gifted Child*. In the first edition, the title of the first essay is "The Drama of the Gifted Child and the Psychoanalyst's Narcissistic Disturbance". In the second edition, of 1997, this becomes "The Drama of the Gifted Child and How We Became Psychotherapists". The title of her seventh book is *Breaking Down the Wall of Silence* (Miller, 1991). The "wall of silence" is what the orthodox erect around alternative psychoanalytic writers. In her independence, Miller is similar to Karen Horney, who in 1941 walked out of the New York Psychoanalytic Institute.

To sum up, I greatly appreciate Diena's relational approach to patients, even if she does not mention the relational model.

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