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The Klein-Lacan Dialogues edited by Bernard Burgoyne & Mary Sullivan (London: Rebus Press, 1997)

The psychoanalytic landscape in the British Isles is inevitably diffuse, a fragmented corpus indeed, somewhat confused and contested. Nevertheless psychoanalysis is sustainable as an insistent cultural term of reference as one of the languages that inform our psychological and social discourse. Increasingly and damagingly congealing into institutionally fractious concerns, manifestly underpinned by the puerile entanglement with respectability and legitimization, it is always a delight when certain initiatives occur outside the inhibiting boundaries and disputations, so often over to whom does psychoanalysis belong. In London since 1988 the Higher Education Network for Research and Information in Psychoanalysis (THERIP) has established a series of Saturday morning lectures and debates concerning psychoanalysis. These are uncontaminated by proprietorial and regulatory claims, and this book commemorates a particular set of these talks which took place during the winter of 1994-95.

If only the plethora of reformationist schools, so eagerly seeking to develop their specific brand of psychoanalysis, could neatly be stacked up, with on the one hand Klein, suffused by its empirical and clinical emphasis, (“Kleinian theory...is much more based on the consulting room”, p.129) all buttressed with a chorus line of the call to the verities of contemporary practice, whilst on the other that which might converge around the name Lacan. The latter is characterized by initiatives and projects informed through a more continental reading and appropriation of Freud. Inevitably this would constitute something of an oversimplification.

Nevertheless a possible continuum might conceivably be inaugurated, with at one end a concern with more traditional therapeutic aims, whilst at the other an insistent emphasis would be placed on a ‘critique of the subject’, with the objectives of identity of identity, true self, or strong ego consigned to the dustbin. As Darian Leader says “the one term that Heimann leaves unquestioned ‘the patient’ is exactly the term that Lacan seeks to challenge”(p.84). Leaving aside the stupefying arrogance of one of the Kleinian contributors who speaks of “the way that a contemporary psychoanalyst works” (p.133), note not a Kleinian but merely ‘a’, the incorrigible implication being that there is only one that merits such a claim, no other even comes into view, let us dwell on this question of identity. What is one to make of the ubiquity of the deeply questionable identification of oneself as ‘Kleinian’, ‘Lacanian’, or whatever, all with the hallmark of officialising authority but equally embossed with a sense of some final rendezvous, a final solution, death, the last word. This is potentially and fruitfully subverted via a recognition of the fractured and multiple readings and rereadings of psychoanalysis.

How many more ‘new beginnings’ or the ‘Real Freud’ are we to be subject to, each staking his or her claim to be the sole rightful inheritor, the only legitimate heir of the Freudian legacy, ultimately rendering all such claims as utterly spurious. For some, any such identification betrays the heart of the project: the one who is

supposed to know, as the man said, is a function, he/she does not actually exist, so why paper over the yawning abyss of our being with an identification with a finite subject or with the body of their work? Perhaps this critique is particularly apposite with regard to the Lacanian initiative: surely transference onto a fictitious ideal or a grounding super-ego, pace Mikkel Borg-Jacobsen's ironical 'absolute master', is installed as a logical absurdity. There is to be no-body, no-thing, to reflect one's fragmented, disrupted and fundamentally false ego... is one not called upon to 'pass' through or cross the fantasy of a certainty of consciousness, the certainty of representation, to recognize that the anything that I take myself to be I am not, to rendezvous with an unmasterable gap within the midst of our ever spiraling desire?

But what of the book? It is a faithful enough recording of these meetings but dialogue? I think not. For those of us who were there it was possible to witness what was more of a stand off: a presentation of a particular set of beliefs and assumptions, indeed how would it be possible

to appear outside such a locus, which was then set up against the other. Steeped in an 'englishness' with its veneer of good manners, one could gaze upon an apparent civility, courtesy even, only to retire to the drawing rooms and wine bars of North London to engage in the 'aggressivity in psychoanalysis' that lurked between the lines, for far more animated conversations, so marinated in the passions of spite and malice. Intriguingly in the book we can see that the Kleinian contributors either make no mention of Lacan or engage in disclaimers: typical would be (p.43)... "my knowledge of Lacan is very limited", or (p.98) the assertion that their position was "...an unreflected adherence to a view... that was heavily influenced by Klein's work on child analysis", as if there would be no call to move outside or beyond the confines of their totalising narrative. An exception to the rule was Catalina Bronstein who at least sought, however briefly, to address the criticism that "Kleinian transference interpretation" is equated with "a sort of paranoia centered on the analyst"(p.43). On the rare occasion that some comparison is proposed there is an almost inevitable gear shift and we find ourselves within the terrain of a Freud-Klein retread. Frequently this absence of any comparison with Lacan is replaced by a relentless eulogisation of Klein without any apparent awareness of the virulent criticisms of her ideas, always propped by the aforementioned insistent recourse to clinical experience (an example: (p.17)... "the gradual widening appreciation of her contribution... is because in clinical experience her conceptualizations are so helpful in unlocking meaning.")

Now that's as maybe but the obvious circularity of the argument with the assumption that 'clinical experience' could be outside of the theoretical context or assumptions that frame it is never addressed. The Kleinian emphasis is placed on anxiety (p.8... "containment of... distress and overwhelming early anxiety."), etymologically linked to a closing off, and it is instructive to see how, in tone, there is a persistent flavor of condescension, of an infantilization of the discourse within which lurks a considerable hostility. One contributor relentlessly insists on the "normality and ubiquity... of psychotic anxieties." (p.65) without the merest glance in the direction of the Lacanian thesis that one can never be a little bit psychotic. Another contemptuously dismisses the idea that sexual difference "is the result of social construction", blandly asserting that "we do know what the difference is between men and women and we know what it's about..."(p.131) In contrast, almost without exception, the Lacanian representatives display a good enough knowledge of the history of psychoanalysis, an awareness of the debates and controversies that have so appropriately attended the unfolding of that story. What is manifest is a scholarly interest in and enthusiasm for such matters that stands up favorably in contrast to the insistent insularity and complacency of many Kleinians. However we would do well to recall the admonition of Catherine Clément in her *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan* (Columbia Univ. Press 1983) where she said that the ills of Lacan are the ills (the they) of Lacan: those who so frequently stumble in an inability to find their own words, only to engage in a diluted mimesis of their master, the Lacanians with their infinite seriousness, their infinite identification, so often with the wan look of those dwelling in a hermetically sealed universe. The contributors to this book are not entirely uncontaminated by such nuancings. The book serves as a reasonable enough introduction to some of the ideas of the assumed protagonists, but in all truth one would do at least as well to turn to Hanna Segal's *Introduction to the work of Melanie Klein* (Hogarth 1973) or to Malcolm Bowie's *Lacan* (Fontana 1991) for a more comprehensive exegesis. Probably it operates more of a souvenir, a celebration of THERIP's initiative, with a tilt in the direction of a distillation of some of the nodal points of a Lacanian

critique of Kleinian theory.

Many of the principle differences turn around the direction of the treatment, with considerable concerns congealing around the Kleinian emphasis on transference, counter-transference, and a two body psychology, rather than the Lacanian underscoring of “the construction of the signifying terms (which) will give you a platform from which the Unconscious can be discerned.”(p.61).

Nevertheless if there is to be a possibility for a more thorough dialogue between Klein and Lacan perhaps the only chance is for someone to assume that just such a dialogue is already in play, and THERIP and this book genuinely can take pride in having taken up precisely this assumption.

But curiously the book’s better moments are in its postscripts: the interview, ultimately something of a disappointment, with an influential post-Kleinian, Donald Meltzer, and an essay by an influential Lacanian, Eric Laurent. The Meltzer interview, apart from a few anecdotal moments regarding the history of establishment psychoanalysis in England (principally the Institute of Psycho-analysis and the Tavistock clinic), is singularly lacking in any grappling with epistemological concerns and there is barely a hint of any distillation of the post-Kleinian approach. However we are presented with an articulation of that which haunts the Kleinian and post-Kleinian situation, for as Meltzer asserts there is a prevailing sense “that the Kleinian work at the British Society tends to be... at the level that it was in the middle or late sixties.” Allowing for his personal bias if that stagnation is true there then in all likelihood there will be a tendency for it to percolate through to most other Kleinian enclaves. In other words, caught in something of a time warp, with little infiltration from other disciplines, or even other tendencies within the psychoanalytic spectrum. Meltzer is simultaneously conjoined with those that he critiques in a somewhat typical denigration of philosophy (“a great drawback” p.182), not something that one has any great sense that many Kleinians have much familiarity with.

Curious one might think if one were to accept Foucault’s thesis that the question of philosophy is “the question of this present which constitutes us”, a question that one might have assumed to have considerable significance for psychoanalysis. Be that as it may, he aligns himself with others such as Winnicott and Rycroft who have also drawn attention to “a certain push (by the Kleinians) in a direction which ... is extremely unpleasant, rather combative, aggressive” (p.177).

This was suppressed in these talks with all on best behavior, and barely comes through in this edited version apart from the occasional reference to (derisory) “titters” at the use of the term “signifier”, or odd moments of compulsive complacency: “I can’t understand what all the fuss is about.” (p.175).

Meltzer predicts that the British Psychoanalytic Society “will just be left behind as a little elitist organization that will be rather despised by people” and there is this sense that they are not entirely unconcerned about just such a possibility.

But let us turn to the Laurent essay, that despite considerable editorial difficulties with his shoddy scholarship, almost in itself justifies the outlay on the book. He seriously engages not only with Melanie Klein’s work with Dick and Richard but also with the psychoanalyst Horatio Etchegoyen, “he who carries the Kleinian torch” (p.202). Despite adopting a curious fawning approach, Laurent corruscatingly critiques the Kleinian fantasy that a “true interpretation... must account for the psychic reality which exists at that moment in the unconscious of the patient” with all the attendant problematic of the myth of interiority, and the reification of the Unconscious as a place where “one could know what was in it” (p.200).

However, from that moment Laurent appears to stumble into increasing thickets of difficulty. Not inappropriately he says that “one has to know from where someone is laughing” (p.206). This is a reference to a moment, near the ending of an analysis, when the patient laughs, seemingly at the realization that “the prison cell with a curving wall” has a striking similarity to the room of his analysis. Etchegoyen had made the interpretation that “confronted with the fear of ending analysis, he had to get back inside (the analyst)” which had occasioned for the analysand a sense of being imprisoned, of constricting his breathing. At this interpretation “the patient laughed” (p.204). Of necessity this is not the place to dwell on the considerations, in all their complexities, that Laurent brings to bear on this case but his assumption is that this is an anxious

laugh.

The patient is anxious “because he is busy conning him (Etchegoyen, who “did not see anything” p.208)... because he saw that the other (Etchegoyen) saw nothing. “Now a lot is at stake with regard to the “nothing” that is claimed to go unrecognized. Laurent, and these are his words, seeks to “play the game of putting on Dupin’s green spectacles...(to) ask: what doesn’t work here?” (p206) And this is precisely where the problem resides.

Dupin of that parable of psychoanalysis, of Purloined Letter’s notoriety, fits the popular image of the psychoanalyst (in as much as we are still popular) and indeed something of the image of Lacan himself, with a contempt for the naivete of those positivists incapable of recognizing the ‘truth’. But it is none other than Lacan who draws attention to the idea that this obvious identification of Dupin with the analyst is “a little too self evident” (Yale French Studies, No.48, 1972); his “self” is a little too self evident, too evidently caught in narcissistic considerations. However it is Derrida who places emphasis on Poe’s narrator (dismissed by Lacan, “...he adds nothing”) as the one who most closely takes up the place of the analyst with “the pure mirror of an unruffled surface.. as if one had to add something to intervene in a scene” (La Carte Postale, 1980). Laurent seems incapable of resisting this collapse into the imaginary of the analyst, a Lacanian analyst ultimately converging on the worn out mantra that “there is no sexual rapport” (P.210), worn out because despite Lacan’s insistence that this maxim is “the keystone of analytic theory”, he eventually concedes: “this relation, this sexual relation, in so far as it doesn’t work out, works out anyway” (Encore, p.34).

Does anything prevent the thought that we can only wryly chuckle and indeed breathe more easily at the recognition that we can never entirely free ourselves from a wish to remain ‘inside’, imprisoned within even, the supposed assurance or insurance of an(other) authority. Some appear to have acquiesced in the face of such a demand, others may allow that some final truth is always already ruled out.