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BOOK REVIEWS

CREATIVE LISTENING AND THE PSYCHOANALYTIC PROCESS: SENSIBILITY, ENGAGEMENT, AND ENVISIONING. By Fred L. Griffin. Abingdon, UK/New York: Routledge, 2016. 194 pp.

"Generative psychoanalytic listening involves acts of sensibility, engagement, and imagination" (p. 3)—Fred Griffin introduces his approach to the activity of analytic listening with those words. He would have us go way beyond the concept of the analyst as passive observer and interpreter. Creative listening includes our senses and our emotions. In the richer space of emotional listening, the experience of the patient is to be comprehended in a way that may be communicated back to him/her, so that s/he feels understood in a way that permits risking growth with less fear of annihilation or of falling into the abyss of abandonment.

It is noted that Freud's original depiction was of the analyst's unconscious as a sense organ. Therefore, a concept of *evenly suspended attention* is incomplete, and our current topographic and structural metapsychological models are insufficient to describe the creative element integral to the growth of one person through a dynamic process in the presence of another. A useful model for psychoanalysis must include a vision of an analytic space involving sensation and felt experience. It is this space that Griffin seeks to describe through the lens of imaginative literature.

The concepts culminating in this book have been formulated over a long time. Griffin began to turn to imaginative literature as an aid toward regaining a reflective capacity during a difficult period in his life that occurred many years ago. He noticed that the "emotional atmospheres" (p. 6) created by certain writers, including Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, Marcel Proust, and William Carlos Williams, could enhance his focus on an analysand's experience. He envisions *Creative Learning and the Psychoanalytic Process* as a guide for clinicians to learn and to teach how to "translate the richness of literary fiction into something clinically useful"

(p. 5). It might be noted as well that the author currently conducts seminars for students wishing to apply fiction to their analytic work.

In my personal experience, it is difficult to teach elements of psychoanalytic technique from papers and books. One selects a series of papers covering a list of topics and including a selection of theoretical viewpoints. Yet it is direct engagement with clinical material that most effectively results in the learner gaining insight. Griffin's method of intertwining clinical cases with literature, as well as with introspection, is truly enlightening.

Creative Listening and the Psychoanalytic Process is divided into three parts. The first two chapters of part I introduce us to the author's concept of active, creative listening. The nature of an analytic space and the use of imaginative literature to deepen or repair an analytic process are discussed. In chapter 3, we read of the case of Mr. M and are told that his analysis was stalemated until the analyst utilized his reveries about a certain short story as a vehicle to gain emotional access to a traumatic event from the patient's early childhood. This presentation is followed by the revelation that Mr. M is a semiautobiographical, fabricated case history, with the patient being Griffin himself and the stories having been authored by Wallace Stegner. Griffin explains how Stegner's work was a "line of communication" (p. 35), a path toward restoring his self-reflective capacity during a difficult time.

Furthermore, Griffin's creative writing of fictional cases became a form of self-analytic work. He emphasizes the caveat that the written narrative was only a starting point and that it served multiple functions. In addition to guiding him toward the path of insight, it was a defense against uncovering destructive intent toward love objects. The recognition of his use of creative writing in the service of resistance led Griffin to undertake a second personal analysis.

Griffin provides an excellent bibliography that includes studies on the pitfalls of self-analysis, in addition to descriptions of how others have approached the personal struggle for insight. Of course, an important reference point is Freud's extensive use of self-analysis in the development of his theoretical frameworks and dream analysis. Another perti-

nent citation is Silber's (1996)[1] description of writing out his associations.

Griffin brings the reader into his personal space as we learn about an unhappy time in his past, mentioned earlier. His struggle during that time resurrected an earlier traumatic period that involved his father's sudden illness when he was three years old. He explains how creative literature led him to begin to grapple with the earlier loss, which he had never had words to conceptualize. His presentation permits us to empathize with him, yet remain comfortable with the scope of his revelation. We thus participate with him as he creates this part of his narrative.

Of course, a danger of self-analysis is that the presumed insight may be used in the service of resistance. Griffin cautions that expectations of the curative outcome of self-analytic work should be modest; indeed, as noted earlier, he considers his own self-analytic process as a starting point that led him to engage in a second personal psychoanalysis. While his own narrative was an important beginning, he is clear that it also served as a way of avoiding uncovering destructive intent toward love objects.

Personally, I find it helpful to utilize my case process notes as a form of introspection and self-supervision. Mulling over notes from, say, a month previously, and writing new associations stemming from my own internal world, is frequently my first recourse to get beyond feeling blocked or confused in an analytic relationship. Additionally, this activity may be a precursor to presenting a case to peers.

Part II of *Creative Listening and the Psychoanalytic Process* is devoted to the short, semiautobiographical novel *To a Lighthouse,* by Virginia Woolf. The three chapters of this section (4–6) contain summaries of, as well as several lengthy passages from, the novel. Years after its composition, Woolf was quoted as having written: "I suppose that I did for myself what psycho-analysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and then laid it to rest" (p. 57). To fully appreciate this section, it is helpful to have recently read or reread the book. Woolf's magical way of bringing her

[1] Silber, A. (1996). Analysis, reanalysis, and self-analysis. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.,* 44:491-509.

characters' unconscious experience to the reader in an articulated form provides a wonderful example of the process described by the book's subtitle: sensibility, engagement, and envisioning.

Chapter 5, entitled "Listening for Atmospheres of Emotional Engagement," describes the reader's attunement to the voices of several characters in the novel. This process is compared with what occurs in the imaginative space between participants in the analytic dyad. A lyrical quotation from Henry James is provided to help us grasp the concept of what is happening as "a kind of huge spider web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness" (p. 64).

Chapter 6, entitled "Embodied Analytic Listening," demonstrates the trial identifications made by the principal characters in *To the Lighthouse* as they momentarily shift from *observing* to *becoming*. In a parallel manner, as the reader is emotionally caught up in the story, s/he comes nearer to a character's experience. Clinical data from Griffin's cases, as well as from those of participants in a creative listening seminar, are intertwined with excerpts from Woolf's novel to further show how embodied listening may be applied to the analytic endeavor.

The prescient work of Hans Loewald is referred to and quoted several times in chapters 5 and 6. A seminal paper of his anticipated the concept of embodied listening.[2] Loewald stopped short of attempting to develop a technique for applying his ideas; however, his use of a developmental model, incorporating the metaphor of mother–infant interaction, envisioned the analytic relationship as an "integrative experience" (Griffin, p. 95; Loewald 1960, p. 242). In Loewald's view, the application of language between the participants thus constitutes a "creative act, similar to poetry" (Griffin, p. 95; Loewald 1960, p. 242), which integrates experience and optimally leads to a therapeutic reorganization in the internal object relations of the patient.

The third and final part of the book contains three chapters. Chapter 7 introduces a failed case from years earlier in which the patient abruptly moved out of town following a separation. At that time, Griffin has been

[2] Loewald, H. (1960). On the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis. Part I. *Int. J. Psychoanal.,* 41:16-33.

interpreting the oedipal dynamics involved in her erotic transference. As he was writing this book and rereading Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, he began thinking about her again. Chapter 7 centers around his perception of a resonance between that patient and a character in the novel, Benjy. Benjy is portrayed as an inarticulate, developmentally retarded boy whose sister Caddy is the only one able to connect emotionally with him. His world collapses when he loses her to her marriage.

Griffin explains that, as he pondered the Faulkner story, the thought came to him of "what she [i.e., the patient who abruptly ended treatment] was trying to say" (p. 123). The chapter goes on to discuss primitive emotional states as communicated through Benjy's unverbalized thought fragments and actions. Excerpts and summaries of various parts of the book are included.

Griffin notes how one kind of pain (in his patient's case, unrequited love and its displacement as vaginal pain) can protect against a "bottomless anaclitic depression or a sense of fragmentation" (p. 133). He maintains that such works of literature as *The Sound and the Fury* allow the reader to better fathom an inarticulate patient's experience of such an abyss. Chapter 7 closes by noting that, for Faulkner as for Woolf, creating fiction was a therapeutic act that alleviated personal suffering.

The author is well aware that a potential pitfall of viewing a clinical case through the lens of a work of literature is that, if done in a rigid manner, it can amount to the imposition of one's theoretical perspective onto a patient. He carefully addresses the hazard that the use of a literary work might reduce "the patient's existence to someone else's invented story" (p. 160). He emphasizes that the literary voice acts as a consultant to extend the analyst's understanding, not to force the patient into the mold of an external character.

"No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shiver ran through me"; "It was into my own depths that I had to re-descend"—so wrote Marcel Proust, as quoted by Griffin (p. 147). The protagonist of Proust's semiautobiographical novel *In Search of Lost Time* frequently feels devitalized in lived life and preoccupied with the distant past. However, a memory, such as that described in the foregoing quotation, occasionally became so starkly alive for him that it

provided a link with which to integrate experiences from long ago and to feel an exhilarating sense of growth.

Chapter 8 discusses a patient of Griffin's, David, in relation to the form of memory described in Proust's novel. David had had a lengthy analysis following the death of his father when he was twenty-nine years old, but twenty years later, he remained chronically depressed and emotionally frozen. He lived with a static memory, dating from the age of four or five, of listening with his father to the tune "Claire de Lune." He was relegated to existing within that scene and repetitively hearing the tune in his head. This locked-in state, which contained only internal objects, kept him from engaging in life and blocked transference to his analyst. Yet he feared that opening his ears to a new soundtrack would mean "falling into the abyss of abandonment" (p. 156).

The final chapter, "Listening for Traces Left Behind," uses Proust's work to speculate about the personality and motivations of his English contemporary, Ernest Jones, an important historical figure in psychoanalysis. Here Griffin seeks to expand the available biographical portraits of this influential and somewhat mysterious man. While interesting, this somewhat tangential application of creative listening seems removed from the book's poignant demonstrations of emotional immersion with actual patients whose seeking and suffering become so alive through the lens of imaginative literature.

"Time is the fourth dimension that allows us to reflect upon our experience" (p. 168), notes Griffin. The passage of time is an element that pervades *Creative Listening and the Psychoanalytic Process* and is also crucial to the literary works the author discusses. For example, Woolf's *To a Lighthouse,* is divided into parts, with the second part occurring ten years after the first and the third part at a later time still. Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* follows Benjy from his painful childhood through his tragic adulthood. And Griffin's patient, whose dynamics gained clarity through his pondering about that novel, said: "I don't want to spend my life hurting. But I know that I don't want to grow up" (p. 132). Proust's remembrances are of things that are temporally past but that remain alive in the present, in parallel to the trajectory of Griffin's patient David, who had been locked in a static childhood memory.

It is a given that a psychoanalytic treatment takes time. Griffin depicts phases of the journey. He shows how an analytic space may come into

being and be filled with "music," for example, or with "spider webs"—to use two metaphors for what exists when a so-called analytic process develops. Through this process, usually over a period of several years, we hope that a patient will be able to develop enough trust, strength, and confidence to let go of problematic aspects of archaic memories and integrate new identifications. In describing psychoanalytic growth, some of us will use terminology such as the shift to more adaptive compromise formations or the formation of new ego structure; Griffin would have us use the concepts of transference and countertransference and yet transcend them. Griffin states that the analytic process develops and deepens within the transference and countertransference, but these concepts are themselves metaphors created to inform the analytic pair about the patient's internal world. Another way of conceptualizing transference-countertransference is as an active experience; in its depths, a sense of uncertainty and of deep immersion develops. There are moments when it becomes impossible for either partner to reflect or to be articulate.

Creative Listening and the Psychoanalytic Process is a beautifully crafted book. The writing is thoughtful and expressive. I approached some sections as though they were poetry—i.e., absorbing the meaning by reading and rereading in short bursts. The book is strongly recommended for psychoanalysts and psychoanalytic therapists of all levels of experience. Its interweaving of imaginative fiction with clinical material demonstrates the emotional engagement integral to a successful analytic process. Any of the book's three parts might be read separately. Moreover, the development of seminars to impart psychoanalytic technique through reading creative fiction, in conjunction with the presentation of clinical material, is innovative and exciting. Fred Griffin has made a valuable contribution to psychoanalysis.

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