

HAYMAN PRIZE LECTURE

To be read at 11 am

THURSDAY JULY 26TH. 2007 "SEPTEMBER 11 , MILITARY DICTATORSHIP ,
PSYCHOTIC EPISODE. YEAR 1973"

BY David Rosenfeld

(What a difficult task it is to put into a few words a 43 page paper!)

In this clinical history, SEPTEMBER 11, I describe the story of a young patient who could be considered a paradigmatic case illustrating the effects produced by military dictatorships that were similar in several South American countries.

The childhood and family history came up in the sessions in a confused, disordered way and was sometimes enacted during the session without words.

Throughout the interviews I slowly found out how the parents had been persecuted and terribly tortured by the military and secret services of the Pinochet dictatorship.

This clinical history begins with the patient's treatment with daily sessions in the city of Buenos Aires, which began after he was released from a psychiatric hospital following a psychotic episode.

The title refers to a historical fact that occurred on September 11th, 1973: the day when Pinochet ordered the aerial bombardment of the presidential palace, assassinating President Allende.

When the patient was 18 months old, his father and mother disappeared for many years, since they were kidnapped during the military dictatorship. A neighbor took care of the little baby. Later he was sent to his grandmother who took care of him.

One of the methods of investigation used is my theory on "autistic encapsulation": the encapsulation of aspects of good relationships and good infantile relations in the patient's mind. In the first interview, the patient, Abelard, a young man of 23 was untidy and uncombed. He started talking about his psychiatric hospitalization. His physical appearance was in total disorder: he wears tennis shoes much too large for him, thick socks that fall down around his ankles, a pair of shorts, socks of different colors, his T-shirt dirty, and a cowboy hat, with his hair falling down all over.

The patient went to a bookstore and read a few pages of poetry in a book he bought.

Then he says that the book came unbound. I interpret that it can be fixed and bound again. But I also tell him that he's also talking about his mind, his self, about wanting to put it back together again, to bind the head and the self solidly: "In the book you bring me, what happens to you inside your head, in yourself, unbound and fallen apart, you want me to put you together and bind you". He asks, "So then if something gets broken, it can be fixed up?"

In another session, the patient says, "My dear grandfather was brutally murdered by the dictatorship. They all disappeared!"

I interpret: "the most terrible disappearance is that you believe they also disappeared inside your mind; inside your mind, not just outside. My job is to try for you to recover Mum, Dad, Granddad, inside you, and for you not to feel completely empty.

Only after a couple of months the patient was able to put into words what he had heard while

listening behind a door.

He said: “But I can’t stand it. I can’t stand to know that they made my Mother eat shit, eat excrement, what she shitted they forced her to put into her mouth. I heard behind the door when she told this to her friends... that’s the sad thing. I know that Pinochet’s military tortured both of them. I know they had the Doberman dogs rape the women. And then Pinochet’s people made them eat the shit they shitted. The Doberman dogs raping, shit in their mouth... that’s what the Pinochet group did, The Condor Plan”.

I, as an analyst, couldn’t say anything, I had gooseflesh, I was paralyzed, so deep was the emotional impact, and tears came to my eyes.

The patient remains silent, as if astounded by the terrible things he said, that he is telling about in detail for the first time. The horror of the unspeakable begins to find expression in words. After a long silence the patient gets up, takes a long pillow from the couch, turns it around, smashes it on the floor, against the wall, rips the leather and destroys it.

When I recover my psychoanalytic thinking I interpret: “To get rid of the sadness, the pain, the loneliness, the intolerable, what your mind can’t contain, it gets out, it’s evacuated by smashing and crying out. You are enacting how your mind was, fragmented and scattered. But the mental pain is so great that you also asked for more medication”

The patient screams and screams, howls and curses.

And later he tells me: “You know what, Dr. Rosenfeld? I don’t remember the date when they murdered my grandfather. How awful what they did to my grandfather! How awful! How awful! I also interpreted the internal world inside his mind, for instance he tells me about a football match with hooligans fighting and the police in the stadium separating them with police dogs. At this very moment I interpret this is also what happens inside your mind day and night, it’s how you are invaded by fights, dogs, tortures of mom. This is how you experience sexual relations, as violent fights with men and dogs. This may be what keeps you from having sexual relations.

After a long time the patient was recovering lullabies, asking me to sing together like a little baby with his mother.

The autistic encapsulation opens and the first songs he sang in the sessions were lullabies. He re-creates his infantile world, lost when he was 18 months old.

And much later, he starts to sing music from his adolescence, which is Tango music.

The transference relation with me is expressed through music and songs. One special Tango music was the Tango “Volver” (in English: To Return) whose lyrics express all the suffering and feelings of the inner mind.

I will mention on some ideas regarding encapsulated autism.

In the “encapsulation model” there is a shielding of early identifications that are later found to be

fairly well preserved – in this patient’s case, the music and the lullabies. The first infantile object relations were well “preserved” in his mind, they came forward only at a moment in analysis when he felt contained, in a stable relationship. Also, in the fusion or symbiosis that is re-created by singing a duet, the patient and I recover the symbiosis with the parents, broken off and shattered when he was 18 months old.

Do you believe that only by reading words I can communicate the emotions and feelings in the sessions??

HOW CAN I PUT THE MUSIC DURING THE SESSIONS INTO WORDS?

Can states of pain, terror, suffering, and happiness be conveyed only in words?

What I want to say is expressed better by the poet, Jorge Luis Borges;

“I’ve come now to the centre of my story, and my desperation as a writer begins.

And as Shakespeare wrote:

“If music be the food of love, play on.

I want to communicate emotions, not only words.

It is not the same to mention a lullaby as to convey the emotions and feelings through music:
for instance in French:

“dormez-vous, dormez-vous, sonnez les matines, ding dang dong”

or

“sur le pont d’Avignon on y dance, on y dance”, or

in English :

Twinkle, twinkle, little star
How I wonder what you are!

Or in German:

Schlaf Bürger schlaf.
Dein Wappentier das ist das Schaaf.

Schlaf Bürger schlaf.

But the most important music and lyrics to express his suffering was the Tango Volver (To Return)

Especially one stanza:

“I am afraid of the encounter
With the past that returns
To confront my life

I am afraid of the nights
That, filled with memories,
Shackle my dreams.”

To return,
With withered face,
The snows of time
Have whitened my temples...

And now let me present the music of this tango Volver.
AT HIS MOMENT IS IN THE STAGE THE GREAT TANGO MUSICIAN FROM “SEXTETO
MAYOR TANGO”, the great bandoneonist LUIS STAZO, and he plays the music of TANGO
“VOLVER”
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