

**A SEMINAL LEADER IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN  
PSYCHOANALYSIS: RETROSPECTIVE SKETCHES ABOUT THE LIFE OF  
BERTRAM DAVID LEWIN (1896-1971)**

*“The most important discoveries one makes in psychoanalysis are those one first encountered in oneself!”*

---Quotation attributed to B. D. Lewin by J. A. Arlow (1973, p. 109).

**Born and Raised in the Lone Star State**

After my threshold examination of the cartons of the *Bertram David Lewin Papers (1883-1974)* aggregated at the *Library of Congress*, I began to ponder what lay in store for me. My aim had been to learn something about the early life of a pioneer American psychoanalyst born and raised in the ‘Jim Crow’ South. First glances at the *San Antonio High School* and *University of Texas* yearbooks unfolded before me came with the realization that “in the Texas of the day nothing limited what was done in the name of white supremacy” (Campbell, 2003, p. 426).<sup>1</sup> Aside from my initial disappointment that the progenitor (hereafter ‘Bert’ or ‘Lewin’) of the eponymous collection at hand seemed have spared his audience from any exposure to the subject which led me to his treasure trove, my interest had been ignited.

I recall remarking to myself that Leo Frank, born on April 17, 1882 in Cuero, TX (*i.e.*, 27½ miles from Bert’s future place of birth) had been lynched by an *anti-Semitic* mob on August 17, 1915 in Marietta, GA. Bert was then 19 years of age.<sup>2</sup> However Frank’s tragedy may have impacted the young Lewin, it ultimately became apparent that the Jewish aspect of his heritage seemed to manifest itself in pronounced ways throughout his life.<sup>3</sup>

Bert's mother (*née* Justine Levy) was a native-born American; his father (Samuel Lewin) was a 19<sup>th</sup>-century immigrant from Germany who soon settled in Victoria, TX. It became a popular way station for wagon trains crossing the Guadalupe River (*i.e.*, situated about 30 miles from Lavaca Bay on the Gulf of Mexico). Bert's father soon became a naturalized American citizen and a prosperous merchant. Commentary about what little is known about him came from the pen of Dr. Lawrence S. Kubie (1973):

“His father's commercial life was built around the wholesale dry-goods industry in Texas and the Mexican economy. This business necessitated many trips into Texas, on which Bert sometimes accompanied him. In fact, his father sold many things to the Mexicans, including the uniforms for the army of Pancho Villa. The only items of which he had enough in stock to clothe that whole rebellious army were green striped pajamas. Consequently, these became their standard uniform. Those of us who remember newspaper clippings of Pancho Villa and his army during General Pershing's pursuit of him in the years before World War I will remember those pajamas...” (p. 4).

Another reference about father Sam may be found in a letter Bert wrote on November 29, 1946 to his year-older high school chum 'Maury' Maverick, Sr., who---like his namesake son after him---rose to become a nationally prominent political force:

“Maury, did you know that my pa was an agent under cover during the last war? Because he was so well known in Mexico, Mr. Thompson of Austin, who I thing was minister to Columbia, got Sec. [William Jennings] Bryan to get in contact with him, and he did really secret work for the

Department, so secret that I don't know what it was. Cape and dagger!"  
(*Library of Congress*, hereafter *LC #6* [underlined designation signifies  
box numbering]).

It quickly became apparent that Bert prided himself upon his heritage as a Texan. He seemed to favor identification as a *cactus*-bred 'Westerner' rather than as a 'Southerner.' On one occasion, he (1962) noted: "I cannot remember Sam Houston, who died before I was born, but I did learn Latin from his son-in-law" (p. 35). Bert and his much of his family were *tri*-lingual (*i.e.*, fluent in English, German & Spanish).<sup>4</sup> Those of us from the *non*-Texan diaspora have much to wonder about Bert's accommodation to regional turn-of-the-century attitudes. An array of other *multi*-cultural cross-currents undoubtedly mani-fested themselves throughout the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter-century of his life below the Mason-Dixon line.

#### **'The Renaissance Cosmopolite With Tongue in Cheek'<sup>5</sup>**

Elsewhere, I (Ginsburg, 2009, 2011a, 2011b & 2011c) have endeavored to focus upon the adult Lewin's psychoanalytic legacies. Others have espoused rationales to justify their views about his 'home grown' and international roles in the politics of organized psychoanalysis throughout the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. Some have voiced controversial opinions about certain episodes---*via* an admixture of fictive and factual means---in his compelling life. Authors cited in my foregoing papers have sought to fathom the essence of his personal *credo*.

Certain aspects of Bert's encyclopedic storehouse of scholarly interests are fascinating.. They ranged from his undergraduate study of the dissection of an armadillo's carcass<sup>6</sup> to the embryology of the opossum (*i.e.*, 'possum in the local 'road-

kill' vernacular) which emerged in archival correspondence with colleague Dr. René A. Spitz (see also *Figure 1*). The transcript of a medical school 'spoof lecture' entitled "Psychosomatic Medicine: Synthesis or Integration?" is available for one's perusal. A trove of personal poetry also awaits further explication.

### When The Archival Dust Settles

Riccardo Steiner, like Bert, has been a life-long archivist of *Freudiana*; the former individual's historical attitudes toward the latter have---to date---proven derisive. Steiner (Ginsburg, 2011a, p. 1; Ginsburg, 2011c, pp. 4-5 & 11-12) has yet to temper some of his politically slanted comments about Lewin's *trans*-Atlantic career in the service of international psychoanalysis. The "irony" (*i.e.*, see use of the quoted word elucidated by Lear and others *infra*) is that it still remains disquieting to ponder the damage such unbecoming tendencies have perpetuated.<sup>7</sup>

As a layman reader of the *Bertram David Lewin Papers (1883-1974)*, little seems known about the 1961 resignation letter addressed to the *American Psychoanalytic Association* after publication of the treatise co-authored by Lewin and colleague Helen Ross (1960). He had served as President of the organization from 1946-1947. It will undoubtedly call for further scrutiny by future historians. So too might what others may construe as Lewin's lack of patience for *non*-clinically based theorizing in proposed *submissions* screened by him in his capacity as a co-editor of *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*.

Occasionally, a former analysand and/or their kin perpetuate biographical fragments of a participant in a therapeutic *dyad*. The widow of Dr. Robert Fleiss (1895-1970) mentioned Lewin as having been her future husband's first analyst (*circa 1934 et seq.*) in New York (Fleiss, 1982, p. 206). Dr. Benjamin McLane Spock (1903-1998) was

RECOLLECTING SOME ANALYSTS  
I KNEW  
Martin Grotjahn, M.D.

BERTRAM LEWIN AND RENÉ SPITZ. Bertram Lewin went once with me to a meeting, I forgot what it was and whom he wanted to hear. To my dismay we sat down in the first row, directly in front of the speaker, making it difficult for me to leave in case of extreme boredom. Bert was sitting to my right and René Spitz to my left. In the course of the evening Bert passed a note to me, indicating to pass it to René. A short while later, René nudged me to pass the note back to Bert and, sure enough, shortly thereafter it was passed to me again - but now Bert made a gesture unmistakably inviting me to read it.

I discovered that these men were working together on a Greek dithyramb, written and accentuated in something which was for me truly "Greek" lettering.

I was and still am duly impressed.

When I was in New York a number of years ago I skipped a morning lecture at the Winter Meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association to look at one of the most comprehensive exhibitions of paintings by Van Gogh.

There was a commotion in the next room and I went there to see what the noise was about. There were Bertram Lewin and Hank Brosin going forth and back across the room between two of Van Gogh's paintings, pointing and debating, which one of the paintings may have been the last painting before Van Gogh's suicide. Hank has the laughter of a horse and the voice of an auctioneer at a hog show, and he was making that noise I had heard. All people, including the security guards, stepped back to watch the debate. Since I had read the catalog the night before I did not participate in the debate and I also do not remember who won the argument. It could be that they both agreed with each other finally.



Bertram D. Lewin



René Spitz

another such analysand as well as a subject of further biographical scrutiny. His analysis “was conducted in 1933-1934 by Dr. Bertram Lewin” (Bloom, 1972, p. 71). The last cited author ascribed/tributed the following text to Dr. Anny Katan (*i.e.*, “the supervisor of [Dr. Spock’s] efforts at child analysis”):

“But Ben simply hadn’t the training to expect to be successful as a child analyst. This takes five or six years; lots of courses, intensive seminars, a personal analysis over several years, and close supervision of one’s training analysis. When we have a patient one year in analysis, we feel we even haven’t scratched the surface. All a person can get in this time is a certain intellectual grasp on problems, but not an understanding in depth. Ben didn’t have this background, so why should he be expected with shortcut training?” (*ibid.*, p. 73).

*Haunted by Parents* by Dr. Leonard Shengold (2006) contains a chapter entitled “A Literary Example of Haunting: Dr. Benjamin Spock” (pp. 1-19). The *sub*-topic “Spock and Psychoanalysis” (pp. 9-12) appears as a segment of the chapter. In it, Dr. Shengold quoted from a 1998 biography about the world-renowned pediatrician written by Thomas Maier, in part, thusly:

“One can never know what the training analysis (with master clinician Bertram Lewin) did for him, and how much it helped him to come to terms with his relationship to his parents. Spock told his biographer...that he considered his analysis with Lewin ‘principally an intellectual exercise rather than an emotional one.’ He described telling Lewin about his early life with his difficult mother. Lewin must have been dissatisfied with his

patient's 'guarded self-exploration' since Spock related to Maier that Lewin urged him to try to progress by exploring his dreams. Spock's mother had not appeared in his dreams, although he connected (at least intellectually) his nightmares with her. Spock also describes himself as realizing how afraid he had been of his father. He had previously attributed all the blame for his unhappiness to his mother. He discovered how much he blamed his father for not protecting him from her and always taking her side against her children. Spock's disclaimer of deep emotional involvement with the analysis seems contradicted by Maier's statements based on the impression of Spock's interview with him: '[His] rush of forgotten memories struck Spock like a thunderbolt. His personal analysis with Dr. Lewin illuminated dark and unexplored corners of his psyche, parts of his own character Ben had never before considered. His remaining doubts about Freud disappeared'...It is a puzzling contradiction. Spock certainly was at least partially convinced that he had an Oedipus complex. The discovery of his hostility to his father was helpful here. I speculate that it was not the knowledge of but the depth of his sexual and hostile feelings toward his parents, especially toward his mother, that was insufficiently felt. Ben's rage as a child must have threatened to become terrifying, a murderous intensity that, accompanied by terror, needed to be repressed and reacted to with 'good boy' behavior. In relation to his Oedipus complex, we also hear, and presumably Maier was told, nothing about Spock's heterosexual, homosexual, and primal

scene fantasies and connected memories that would have involved both parents. Spock, in 1937, after he had abandoned his psychoanalytic training, realized that his experience with Lewin had been 'too shallow'...and made another try at analysis with the well-known psychiatrist Sandor Rado..." (pp. 10-11).

A *post-mortem* tribute commemorating Lewin appears beneath the title at the beginning of this paper. It was articulated in a eulogy published in 1973 by psychoanalyst-colleague Dr. Jacob A. Arlow (1912-2004). Had Arlow been privy to Shengold's proposed formulations as above-quoted, perhaps it may have enabled him to draw significant comparisons between the Lewin/Spock-analyst/analysand *dyad* reaching back to Lewin's own earlier such relationship with Dr. Franz Alexander at the *Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute* and/or his self-analysis over the interim period beyond. The array of publications authored by both Lewin and Spock, which were likewise "especially interested in breast and bottle feeding, weaning and toilet training" (p. 11), speak for themselves.<sup>8</sup>

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>According to Campbell (*op. cit.*): "Between 1890 and 1920, Texans lynched 309 men, 249 (81 percent) of whom were black. Lynchings generally followed the accusation of an assault upon a white woman and involved sickening torture as well as hanging and burning of the victim...Crowds gathered to watch lynchings and gathered souvenirs of the occasion" (pp. 325-326).

<sup>2</sup>It is noted that both the *Ku Klux Klan* and the *Anti-Defamation League* thereafter came into existence.

<sup>3</sup>Bert was instrumental in *pre-World War II* American relief efforts to rescue Jewish, among other, psychoanalysts (Ginsburg, 2009, pp. 1081-1084). A few of his paternal relatives, with whom he had visited in Germany (while attending the *Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute* and earlier occasions) ultimately managed to reach Israel. Their archival *post-Holocaust* correspondence speaks for itself (*LC #1*).

<sup>4</sup>Benjamin Franklin Levy (born on July 23, 1897 in Victoria, TX; died on November 3, 1952, in San Antonio, TX) was the younger bachelor brother of Bert's mother. Again in the words of Kubie (*op. cit.*): "[Uncle Ben who lived in their home was] a loveable, relaxed, eccentric small-town salesman. At an early age this uncle taught Bert many things, but especially to drink beer and to sing popular and sometimes bawdy Mexican songs. Indeed, this uncle's benign and indulgent temperament can be recognized in many of Bert's later traits" (p. 5).

<sup>5</sup>See *sub*-title of L. S. Kubie (1973) *infra*.

<sup>6</sup>As many as 20% of which have since been identified as hosts for human infections spread by *mycobacterium leprae*. See G. Harris (2011) *infra*.

<sup>7</sup>Jonathan Lear (2011) recently described two types of "irony." According to his *psycho*-linguistic reckoning, he construes the term as either 'situational' or 'verbal' in scope. A study of Lear's text is merited in interpreting one's use of the word in question..

<sup>8</sup>See Ginsburg (2011a-c) *infra*; Spock (1963, pp. 361-364).

### References

- Arlow, J. A. (1973). "The Examined Life: In Tribute to Bertram D. Lewin---1896-1971." In: *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, vol. 54: pp. 103-109.
- Bloom, L. Z. (1972). *Doctor Spock: Biography of a Conservative Radical*. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co.
- Campbell, R. B. (2003). *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Fliess, E. (1982). "Robert Fleiss: A Personality Profile." In: *American Imago*, vol. 39: pp. 195-218).
- Ginsburg, L. M. (2009). "Correcting the Record: A Letter in Behalf of Bertram David Lewin." In: *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, vol. 78(4): pp. 1181-1184.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2011a). "Misconceptions About Bertram David Lewin (1896-1971)." Posted at <http://internationalpsychoanalysis.net/2011/05/05/misconceptions-about-bertram-david-lewin-1896-1971/>
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2011b). "Childhood Weaning As An Enduring Epoch Over The Life of Bertram David Lewin (1896-1971). Posted at <http://internationalpsychoanalysis.net/2011/05/08/childhood-weaning-as-an-enduring-epoch-over-the-life-of-bertram-david-lewin-1896-1971-by-lawrence-m-ginsburg/>
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2011c). "An *Addendum* to 'Misconceptions About Bertram David

Lewin (1896-1971)\*" Posted at <http://internationalpsychoanalysis.net/2011/11/27/an-addendum-to-misconceptions-about-bertram-david-lewin-1896-1971/>

- Grotjahn, M. (1978). "Recollecting Some Analysts I Knew." In: *Bulletin of the Southern California Institute and Society*, No. 54: p. 9.
- Harris, G. (2011). "Armadillos Can Transmit Leprosy to Humans, Federal Researchers Confirm." In *New York Times*, April 28<sup>th</sup> (p. A18).
- Kubie, L. S. (1973). "Bertram D, Lewin, 1896-1971: The Renaissance Cosmopolite With Tongue in Cheek." In: *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, Vol. 28: pp. 1-16.
- Lear, J. (2011). *A Case for Irony*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lewin, B. D. (1962). "Reminiscences and Retrospect." In: *Fruition of an Idea: Fifty Years of Psychoanalysis in New York*. New York, NY: International Universities Press, pp. 35-43..
- \_\_\_\_\_ & Ross, H. (1960). *Psychoanalytic Education in the United States*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Library of Congress (2001). "The Bertram David Lewin Papers (1883-1974)." Washington, DC.
- Maier, T. (1998). *Dr. Spock: An American Life*. New York, NY: Harcourt & Brace.
- Shengold, L. (2006). *Haunted by Parents*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Spock, B. (1963). "The Striving for Autonomy and Regressive Object Relationships." In *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, vol. 18: pp. 361-364.

Lawrence M. Ginsburg  
2574 Leslie Drive, NE  
Atlanta, GA 30345-1532  
[LMG24@cornell.edu](mailto:LMG24@cornell.edu)  
770/270-5789