

Golomb Hoffman, A. (2016). A review of *The Cut and the Building of Psychoanalysis, Volume I: Sigmund Freud and Emma Eckstein* by Carlo Bonomi. New York, NY: Routledge, 2015. 275 pp. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 52/4: 635-641.

ANNE GOLOMB HOFFMAN, Ph.D.

With this volume, Carlo Bonomi makes a significant contribution to the history of psychoanalysis. Highlighting medical practices categorized as circumcision and castration in girls and women, Bonomi asks us to consider their influence on Freud's thinking in the 1880s and 1890s. Drawing on archival research, Bonomi argues for the likelihood that Emma Eckstein underwent this kind of surgery in childhood as a treatment for hysteria. Bonomi reads the Irma dream, the specimen dream of psychoanalysis, in light of this conclusion and finds evidence of the resonances of Eckstein's childhood trauma in the complex play of identifications between doctor and patient that the dream contains.

With a focus on the years in which Freud carried out his self-analysis and began to formulate the ideas that would lead to the development of psychoanalysis as a treatment modality and a theory of mind, Bonomi argues for recognizing “(1) the generic impact of the castration of women and girls on Freud as a young medical doctor; (2) Freud's private choice not to have his children circumcised; and (3) the specific emotional resonance on Freud as analyst of the genital trauma which Emma had endured as a child” (p. 6). Arguing that Freud took a “position against the practice of female castration as a cure for hysteric women” (p. 11), Bonomi's offers a new reading of the Irma dream that takes into account Freud's unconscious reaction to Emma's childhood trauma. Moreover, convinced of the unconscious impact of medical practices concerning the pelvic/genital region, Bonomi links the inaugural Irma dream to the concluding dream in Freud's self-analysis, the “self-dissection of the pelvis.” Thus, Bonomi organizes his analytic reading around the pelvic domain as emblematic of the analytic space, an embodied space whose boundaries are vulnerable to violation.

As Bonomi demonstrates, the term “castration” runs through the titles of articles in the medical literature over the years 1876 through 1896, with 1896 a crucial moment, marking Freud's first usage of the term “psychoanalysis” (pp. 17–18). He notes there is a certain blurriness in the “anatomical criteria” for the procedure termed castration (p. 18). This blurriness enters the historical record, making it hard to discern what “female castration” actually consisted of. Bonomi cites “removal of the ovaries” (p. 18) as a treatment for hysteria and refers to extirpation of the clitoris as a method of addressing the problem of

masturbation in girls, particularly among the bourgeoisie (p. 23). Bonomi delineates the medical profession's concern about children's involvement with their genitals. (He is therefore critical of Laqueur's [2003] history of masturbation for its neglect of children in favor of a focus on the adult imagination [p. 28].)

Bonomi documents Freud's involvement in the care of children, beginning with a period of training he undertook with the eminent pediatrician Adolf Baginsky in Berlin in March 1885 (p. 31). Baginsky brought an attention to "social hygiene" into pediatrics, with a distinct focus on the sexual etiology of many childhood illnesses (p. 33). In effect, then, Freud's attention was initially drawn to the domain of childhood sexuality by prevailing medical practices in the treatment of children. For Bonomi, the neglected history of the practices known as castration leaves an "uncanny trace" in the history of psychoanalysis. By his own account, he has been committed to elucidating this uncanny history since 1993, with the goal of understanding its powerful impact on Freud's theoretical work in its formative years.

In effect, Bonomi compels us to confront the entanglement in the 19th century of concepts of subjectivity and mental life with scientific theories of the reflex arc and spinal irritation, that is, the idea that shocks to the nervous system might manifest themselves in a range of bodily and psychic symptoms. He places Freud in this context in order to trace the emergence of Freud's understanding of mental life and symptom-formation, at a moment of intense cultural anxiety, amid moralizing concerns with sexuality.

Bonomi's project therefore deepens the psychoanalytic commitment to exploring the enigmas of sexual traumas and fantasies in the lives of subjects, whether in the analyst or the analysand. In this instance, it is Freud's self-analytic work that leads Bonomi to study a rich and intricate web of relationships. He situates Freud in relation to family, patients, supervisors, the practice of medicine generally, and in the broader context of anxieties surrounding the body, sexuality and femininity. He argues that Freud's unconscious memories of his own circumcision were stirred by his encounters with the pediatric practice of female circumcision and the use of castration in the treatment of hysteria.

Circumcision is in Jewish tradition the sign of the covenant. (In Genesis 17, God addresses Abraham, commanding him and his male descendants to undergo circumcision as the "sign of the

covenant” between Abraham and God). Bonomi adds to the work of Freud scholars on this subject, as he links ritual practice of circumcision to concerns about infection that include not only the practice of *metsitsah* (in which the *mohel* or circumciser would suck on the infant’s penis to stanch the blood flow [p. 142]), but also to more general concerns about infection that included syphilis and diphtheria. Bonomi links these fears to the figure of Freud’s teacher, the pediatrician Alfred Baginsky. In a lecture delivered around the time that Fliess operated on Emma Eckstein, Baginsky (1895) referred to Mosaic law as an “anticipation of modern hygiene” (as cited in Bonomi, p. 142). The pediatrician was known as well for his fights against diphtheria and masturbation. Bonomi suggests that Freud may have identified with his teacher’s role as a savior of children. This complex and even contradictory set of identifications may have contributed to Freud’s refusal to have his own sons circumcised. (Whether or not Freud’s sons were circumcised remains a point of contention for scholars.)

The nose inevitably enters into this complex of symptoms and zones of the body. Central to this historical narrative is Freud’s receptivity to Wilhelm Fliess’s concept of the nasal reflex neurosis, a concept grounded in a more general understanding of the connection of the nose to the sexual organs. In Bonomi’s reading, the nose links Freud to his female patients, most prominently Emma Eckstein, and plays a key role in his reading of the Irma dream. In a tight weave of documentary evidence, Bonomi focuses on the years 1892 through 1895. Laying out Freud’s own cardiac symptoms during these years, Bonomi notes his depression and panic attacks, along with his introspective efforts to understand the somatic origins of anxiety. Moreover, at around the time that he first began to treat Emma Eckstein (1894) and eventually referred her to Fliess for nasal surgery, Freud reviewed the work of Alfred Hegar, a well-known gynecologist and authority on female castration (pp. 73–74). And, before Fliess operated on Emma, he performed a procedure on Freud’s nose to address stuffing and swelling, symptoms associated with Freud’s use of cocaine.

All of this material links analyst to analysand in an intimate bond that Bonomi terms a suggestive “mimesis between doctor and patient” (p. 77). This mimetic correspondence is foundational to psychoanalysis, insofar as it constitutes the analytic space and links it to an inner bodily domain that is vulnerable to traumatic disruption. The injection in Freud’s Irma dream is for Bonomi the emblem of that traumatic intrusion. What we have here is in effect a theory of the traumatic formation of the subject. Of course, that is no simple thing. Thus, Bonomi takes note of evidence in the dream that counters Freud’s feminine identification with his patient. He points out that Freud dreamt the dream at a point midway in

his wife's pregnancy with Anna, an observation that lends additional meaning to the dirty syringe and links the dream to fantasies of male omnipotence. Taking this complex play of identifications further, Bonomi links Martha's "physical pregnancy" to the "spiritual fertilization" that her husband was experiencing in the creation of psychoanalysis (pp. 99, 118).

Bonomi's speculations are suggestive. Indeed, he draws on virtually all the major interpreters of the Irma dream, as he builds his case. Turning to Emma herself, Bonomi argues that Fliess's botched surgery on her nose reawakened in her the impact of an earlier traumatic experience, the procedure she may have undergone as a child in which the labia minora and/or the clitoris were cauterized or excised (pp. 107–108). The counterpart to Emma's retraumatizing can be seen not only in the dreaming Freud's confusion of himself with her, but in the reverberations in Freud of his own circumcision and his early witness of the circumcision of his brother Julius, who was to die six months later. The conclusion to these speculations is a reading of the Irma dream as the "*analyst's introjection of the psychic reality of a patient who had been traumatized*" (p. 108; emphasis in original). Guilt is diffused throughout these proliferating associations, a guilt that Bonomi, following Searles (1966), reads as paradigmatic to the field of psychoanalysis.

In the concluding chapters of this volume, Bonomi explores the resonances of bisexuality and bilaterality in broader contexts, which engage not only Freud's relationship with Fliess and his dream of Irma, but the cultural atmosphere of anti-Semitism in which he worked. Offering his study as a critique of earlier tendencies to read Freud as a mind operating in isolation with his self-analysis a "triumph of autonomy" (p. 198), Bonomi draws on scholarship by Sander Gilman and others that links circumcision, as the "privileged signifier," that associates Jews with femininity, passivity, and homosexuality (p. 204).

Bonomi notes that readers of Freud may experience the "intrusion of foreign and alien thoughts," a valuable observation that draws our attention to the unconscious dimensions of the experience of reading (p. 134). In this volume, Bonomi has turned resolutely to exploring associations that others might disregard, in order to uncover the traces of bodily fantasies and early traumas in the analytic work that Freud carried out with his patients and in his self-analysis. The drawback to this project is its insistently speculative nature and its strategy of building on speculation to construct an argument. Consider this passage:

Freud's reluctance to broach the topic of circumcision early on in his career *was undoubtedly tied to the rampant and virulent anti-Semitism which plagued Vienna at the time. It was also joined to Freud's traumatic past and aversion towards Jewish rituals and ceremonies. Freud, moreover, had likely encountered the practice of female circumcision at the time of his pediatric training and was most likely shocked and scandalized by it. He most likely never felt fully free to denounce the practice, however, as some of the leading medical authorities in Vienna, and in Europe, vigorously endorsed it at the time. We can also surmise that Freud must have experienced similar feelings in relation to Jewish authority figures around him when he decided against having his male children circumcised. One such figure must have been Professor Samuel Hammerschlag, his childhood Hebrew teacher and father of Anna Hammerschlag, a patient he treated in 1895 and who appeared to him as the central figure in his Irma dream.* (pp. 238–239, emphasis added)

One is tempted to characterize this volume's scholarly project as a psychoanalytic fantasy, which is not simply meant as denigration. It is rather a register of the extent to which Carlo Bonomi has employed psychoanalytic modes of interpretation and a sensibility deeply attuned to the intimacy of the analytic space in all its fantasmatic variants. These variants include an awareness of the analytic space as reflective of an inner bodily terrain where gender is rendered unstable and dichotomies between active and passive come undone. Thus, Bonomi's speculations call upon psychoanalytic readers to reenter a domain in which subject and object mingle, where early experiences are reawakened through the associative processes of dreaming that are central to the work of analysis.

REFERENCES

Baginsky, A. (1895). Die hygienischen Grundzüge der mosaïschen Gesetzgebung [The hygienic foundations of mosaic constitution.] *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für öffentliche Gesundheitspflege*, 27, 465–491.

Laqueur, T. W. (2003). *Solitary sex: A cultural history of masturbation*. Cambridge MA: Zone Books.

Searles, H. (1966). Feelings of guilt in the psychoanalyst. *Psychiatry*, 29, 319–323.

Anne Golomb Hoffman, Ph.D., is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Fordham University. She is a member of the Research Faculty of the DeWitt Wallace Institute for the History of Psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medical College and a Special Member of the Association for Psychoanalytic Medicine of the Columbia University Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research.