

BOOK REVIEW

Judith Dupont. *Au fil du temps...Un itinéraire analytique* [In the course of time... A psychoanalytic itinerary]. Campagne Première: Paris, 2015, 370 pp.

by Carlo Bonomi

“The day of Ferenczi’s death remained engraved on my memory. On that May 22, 1933, I was at my grandparents. The entire house was upset, my grandmother was crying, there was a constant back and forth between the Kovács’s and Ferenczi’s house. ‘The Doctor died,’ was heard whispered or on answering the phone. For my part I was upset too by the illness of my grandmother’s little fox-terrier, Bell, who was dying of Carreé’s illness. He died the same morning as Ferenczi died. Then, I was also crying, as everyone else in the house, but I did not know well if it was for the Doctor or for the dog, or because everyone was crying. I didn’t dare to speak to anyone and I felt a little frightened by the intensity of the emotions which overwhelmed me from both outside and inside.” (p. 28; all translations by current author)

This natural blurring of the distinction between what comes from outside and what comes from inside is perhaps the narrative mark of this splendid book on psychoanalysis, history, and life that Judith Dupont has offered us. Judith Dupont’s grandmother was Vilma Kovács (1883–1940). She was in analysis with Ferenczi, perhaps even before World War I, and herself later became a member of the Hungarian Psychoanalytical Society and one of Ferenczi’s closest collaborators of (she was the one who systematized the Hungarian psychoanalytic training system). Vilma’s eldest child, Alice (1898–1939), followed in her mother’s footsteps and herself became a famous analyst. At the lyceum, one of her school friends was Margit Schönberger, who later became Margaret Mahler, and another was the sister of Michael Bergsmann, who later adopted the name Michael Balint (1896–1970). After their university studies, Alice and Michael married and moved to Berlin to undertake an analytic training with Hans Sachs. Michael was not fully satisfied with his first analysis and, once back in Budapest, had a second analysis with Ferenczi, becoming his chief collaborator. Ferenczi himself, in a note written during his last vacations before his death, wrote that Balint picked up things where he got stuck.

From 1925 to 1939, Alice and Michael Balint were members of the Hungarian psychoanalytic society and one of the most creative analytic couples. After Ferenczi’s death, in 1933, Balint took up the direction of the psychoanalytic polyclinic of Budapest. Alice, on the other hand, was especially interested in children. Together they elaborated the theory of “primary love” (in contrast with the theory of primary narcissism). In 1939, they emigrated to England. Alice suddenly died only three months later, and in 1940 Vilma Kovács also died. Olga, Judith Dupont’s mother, was deeply affected by the premature disappearances of her sister and her mother. “I felt intensely,” Judith writes, “her secret desire to see something of them revived in me” (p. 67). It was at that point that the 15-year-old Judith announced to her mother her intention to become a psychoanalyst.

“I was born in 1925. Ferenczi had just written *Thalassa*, a work that was later published in Hungarian by my father’s publishing house” (p. 66). Judith’s mother Olga had a special talent for painting. She was a pupil of Robert Berény, one of the major artists in Budapest and a friend of Ferenczi, and her first exhibition, when she was 19 years of age, was very successful. On her

way to Paris, she met her future husband, László Engel, a prolific writer who later adopted his pen name, László Dormandi Judith and her parents were living on the fifth floor of the large house belonging to her grandparents, Frédéric and Wilma Kovács, Alice and Michael Balint were on the third floor, and the Budapest psychoanalytic polyclinic was housed on the ground floor. Judith's artistic mother Olga was regularly sojourning abroad, mostly in Paris, for two or three months a year, while her father László was running the important publishing house Pantheon. Judith Dormandi grew up among books and, if she had not had to adopt her psychoanalytic heritage, she would have willingly followed in her father's footsteps. She nevertheless managed to combine the two directions by later marrying Jacques Dupont, himself a typographer.

After the Anschluss, a large part of Judith's family decided to emigrate. The event was "un vrai déchirement," a true dismemberment, of this very united family. The Dormandis moved to Paris, where Olga had solid relationships. The 12-year-old Judith was then enrolled in a "classe des étrangères" (classroom for foreigners) (p. 32). After the war, in 1947, she made a journey to Budapest. The family house had been completely destroyed, as had a large part of the town. Judith was surprised to find that many dear friends were still alive, such as Marie, her best friend and the daughter of Imre Hermann. Yet in Hungary she felt a complete foreigner. She had lost full mastery of her mother tongue, which she never recovered. Later, however, she would develop a special passion for translating.

In 1949, Judith spent a few months in England, with her uncle Michael Balint, who had already moved from Manchester to London. He had become a respected member of the Middle Group and was actively working for the rehabilitation of Ferenczi. On one occasion, he took Judith to a meeting of the British Society of Psychoanalysis. After the meeting, the president called Balint aside to say that he was not supposed to bring his girlfriends to these meetings. When Balint said, "But she is my niece!," the president replied, "I know that you have many nieces, but please, do not bring them to the meetings of the association ..." Both uncle and niece were highly flattered.

In the following years, Judith's father published nine novels written in French, and her mother began again to paint portraits and be exhibited. Judith finished her medical studies, completed her internships – having learned much from René Diatkine, but finding Serge Lebovici "very brutal" – and applied for psychoanalytic training. This was before the first split of the French psychoanalytic society, and she had interviews with several training analysts, among whom were Jacques Lacan, Françoise Dolto, and Daniel Lagache. Judith chose the latter and began her analysis on June 4, 1954. The date remained engraved in her mind because Lagache asked her about her problems and she answered that she had no problems except one: married for two years, she had not yet become pregnant. Exactly nine months later, she had her first child, Hélène. "My analyst was enchanted to see the extent to which our work had been fertile" (p. 49). Apart from a few details, Judith did not retain a clear memory of her analysis, but four years later, when the analysis was finished, she found that her anxieties had disappeared and she had been liberated from her paralyzing timidity. Moreover, she was no longer affected by her chronic hay fever.

Ferenczi's *Thalassa* was Judith Dupont's first important translation. Ferenczi originally wrote it in German, but Judith translated it from the Hungarian version, which her father had published. The French edition was elegantly prefaced by Nicolas Abraham and had tremendous success (because of its subtitle "Psychanalyse des origines de la vie sexuelle," it was sold even

on railway station news-stands, where it was confused with a pornographic book...). In 1969, Judith created the journal the Coq-Héron, a psychoanalytic journal conceived as a forum for discussions, and included on the board psychoanalysts of all orientations. Its basic rule was that, to be published, an article had to meet the approval of at least one editor. How revolutionary this was can be understood by remembering that the “veto rule” of the International Journal of Psychoanalysis (that an article could not be published if it received a veto from just one editor) was abrogated only in 2008. Another characteristic of the Coq-Héron was a very strong translation team. Thus, texts by Ferenczi, Alice, Michel and Enid Balint, Masud Kahn, Margaret Mahler, Imre Hermann, István Hollós, and many others were published alongside texts by French authors.

This team and translation group proved to be very precious when, after the death of Michael Balint, in 1970, Judith Dupont became the literary executor of Sándor Ferenczi and Michael Balint. The latter strongly wanted to publish Ferenczi’s Clinical diary jointly with the Freud–Ferenczi correspondence but this was not possible during his lifetime, owing to Anna Freud’s opposition. Judith Dupont took the decision to go on ahead with the French translation of the Clinical diary, which was then published in 1985. This event, we know, paved the way to the so-called “Ferenczi Renaissance.”

The same non authoritarian atmosphere that characterized the team of the Coq-Héron is present in Judith Dupont’s reflections on psychoanalysis, for instance on the question of training. Already Michael Balint had criticized the dogmatism of psychoanalytic training, which he found similar to the primitive ceremonies of initiation. Instead of developing a strong ego, capable of criticism, psychoanalytic training is aimed at creating a strong superego that dominates the individual in the course of his or her life. This situation is made even worse by the competition among different schools, which tend to select candidates faithfully bound to the principles of the school in question. According to Judith Dupont, “the training of an analyst cannot be achieved under the pressure of a power... I rather think that there are a certain number of people who arrive at becoming analysts despite and against everything” (p. 75).

Judith Dupont also follows Balint in stressing the necessity of creating a friendly atmosphere where the analytic patient can feel secure. She describes the possible ways to create and manage such an atmosphere, and discusses in a light manner –“avec un ton léger”–several debated questions such as the length of sessions, the key elements of the cure, and the end of an analysis.

Chapter 2, the longest, is entitled “About Ferenczi,” and Chapter 3 “About Balint.” In these two main chapters, the presentation of theory is never superimposed but springs out in a natural way from personal memories, concrete situations, and clinical vignettes. In Chapters 4 and 5, a great variety of texts and short annotations are collected, which are never banal or predictable.

In short, this is a great book written with modesty by the heir of one of the most important dynasties in the psychoanalytic world, a person who developed a special predilection and sympathy for marginality, perhaps to compensate this not easy position. She has succeeded in combining psychoanalysis and real life, and the reader closes her book with the feeling that something has been restored. This is also why I wish her book might be translated into English as soon as possible.

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