Maniadakis, G. (2016). Review of: Carlo Bonomi, *The Cut and the Building of Psychoanalysis, Volume 1*: *Sigmund Freud and Emma Eckstein.* Pp. 275, Routledge, 2015. *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, 24(4):254-257.

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This book, the first of a two-volume work, aims, according to its author Carlo Bonomi, at constructing a more integrated narration of the origins of psychoanalysis. The idea of *building*, appearing in the title of the book already implies integrating, while the *cut* most probably refers to trauma and its aftermath. Its subtitle (*Sigmund Freud and Emma Eckstein*) points towards a relationally oriented narration. The second volume of the study will bear the subtitle *Sigmund Freud and Sandor Ferenczi*.

Carlo Bonomi is a supervising analyst and a faculty member of the Postgraduate School of Psychotherapy at the Sullivan Institute in Florence. He taught History of Psychology and Dynamic Psychiatry and is a former president of the Centre for historical studies of Psychoanalysis and Psychiatry. He is also founding president of the Sandor Ferenczi cultural association and an Associate Editor of this journal.

The book is based on decades of arduous research by the author (who has already published a book on part of his research). This research was spurred by his puzzlement on the lack of a credible narration of the origins of psychoanalysis; also by a fantasy he had that the entire psychoanalytic edifice rested on a catastrophic event related to real castration. The research led him to several findings, namely: A. Castration of women and circumcision of children was an important if not dominant medical practice, for curing hysteria and masturbation in the second half of the 19th century. B. Freud most likely did not have his sons circumcised. C. One of the first women patients of Freud, Emma Eckstein, had most probably suffered the trauma of circumcision as a child. The questions emanating from the above findings form the basis of *The Cut and the Building of Psychoanalysis*.

The book is organized in three parts. Part 1, The Medical Context (chapters1,2) reconstructs the practice of castration of women and girls in late 19th century. Part 2, Withstanding Trauma (chapters3, 4) presents Freud's positions in 1895-96 and a rereading of the Irma dream. Part 3, Topography of a Split (chapters 5-10), attempts a reconstruction of Freud's self-analysis.

A first, important question Bonomi seems to ask in the Introduction of his book concerns the scotomization of the abovementioned facts by the psychoanalytic community as a whole, a scotomization acting in two ways: First, by keeping facts secret (for instance, in the first edition of Freud's correspondence with Fliess, the passage concerning Emma's possible circumcision was "the subject of heavy censorship by Anna Freud", as were "all references to Emma Eckstein" - p. 91); Second, by ignoring (as a synonym of denying) their possible impact, by dissociating them –cutting them off- from the origins of psychoanalysis.

This phenomenon goes together with the "canonic" (p. 1) idealized account of the founding of psychoanalysis, which, Bonomi argues, has never really been questioned. For instance, according to Ernest Kris's view on Freud's self-analysis, it was Freud's personal conflicts with his father Jacob that had led him to the idea that seduction by adults was the cause of neuroses. Freud's self-analysis was consequently considered as a heroic emergence of his ego functions "from involvement in intense conflict to full and supreme autonomy". This "myth of an isolated mind" (p. 197) seems to overlook the countertransferential element, i.e. daily interactions with patients as an important source of Freud's fantasies, dreams and theorizing. Bonomi observes that

"Freud [had] created a regressive setting where patients were [] led to revive and relive [the ir childhood experiences] [] repeating and reliving something from their past which had traumatized them. [] However [he] did not expect that [] he himself, as analyst, would be so deeply impacted by his patients conscious and unconscious communications" (p. 199).

The abovementioned deep impact could be no other but the reactivation of Freud's childhood traumas. Then, Bonomi holds, one could hardly consider Freud's self-analysis just as introspection. On the contrary, writing down his dreams, fantasies, associations, theories etc could be also seen as a "relief valve and drainage device" for Freud (p.199). Turning away from the overwhelming products of this particular overwhelming situation, experienced traumatically more or less by every analyst and yet probably denied, can defensively lead to the myth of one person psychology, or to the impenetrable analyst.

According to Bonomi, Emma Eckstein was the patient who most influenced Freud's theorization, through the impact her communications and her trauma had on him, in the years he was struggling to start building psychoanalysis. Her name became widely known posthumously because of a near fatal surgical operation on the nose performed by W. Fliess, as a cure for masturbation and with the compliance of Freud. According to Max Schur, she is the patient Freud refers to in a 1897 letter to Fliess:

"Imagine, I obtained a scene about the circumcision of a girl. The cutting off of a piece of the labium minor (which is even shorter today), sucking up the blood, after which the child was given a piece of the skin to eat …" (Masson, 1985, p.227).

Concerning Emma's impact on Freud's thinking, Bonomi seems to link it with the difficulty Freud had in withstanding and containing her trauma and with his identification with her, facilitated by the similarity of their reactions to childhood trauma. So, for instance, she played an important role in Freud's theory about women's fantasy of having a penis; that is Freud adopted as a universal doctrine what was the Emma's reaction to trauma, i.e. the hallucination of having a penis. In the author's words, "the fact that Freud had become the depository of the salvific penis which Emma fantasized was [] the unconscious true source of Freud's phallocentric doctrine" (p. 7). The idea of bisexuality also seems to come from recurrent dreams of gigantic snakes, dreamt by Emma , and reported by Freud to Fliess, who put forward the idea that "repression stood as a product and consequence of the bisexual constitution of human beings" (p. 178). Freud immediately adopted the idea in a modified version, and "would till the end keep [] this simple formula", repressing the fact that it was coined by Fliess. The author thinks that, although Freud had interpreted the fantasy on a clinical level, he did not link it with Emma's mutilation, but chose to adopt Fliess's universal theory , which served Freud "to distance [him] from his [] concern with traumatic experiences and memories" (p. 179).

For Bonomi, Emma Eckstein's circumcision has an important position in Freud's Irma dream, which is regarded as the initiating dream of Freud's self-analysis (we now know that Irma was identified as Anna Hammerschlag, but also functions as a collective figure). In this dream, Freud has to look down to examine the throat of an intrusive female patient – and he "becomes scared and confused, unable to [] grasp the meaning of what he sees" (p. 90). For Erikson and Lacan who reinterpreted the

dream, the throat examination stands for an exploration of the female procreative inside; they spoke of a horrible discovery. Bonomi believes that what Freud faces in his exploration of Irma's throat could be Emma's mutilated, circumcised labia, her "unnamed and unnamable trauma" (p.4).

The author draws attention to the trimethylamin formula that Freud sees in the dream, printed in heavy type. He observes that the word "trimethylamin might be read as a nearly literal transcription of *brith milah* (Hebrew for circumcision)" (p. 8). This could lead not only to Emma's trauma (which Bonomi attempts at reconstructing, p. 111), but also to Freud's own *brith milah*, and probably a childhood trauma of his. Freud's trauma may be linked to the circumcision of his younger brother Julius who died just a few months after he was born, before Freud was two years old. In a letter to Fliess , Freud had confessed feelings of jealousy and subsequent guilt towards his brother. The author goes on noting: "With regard to the childhood situation we must note that [Freud's mother] went on to have five more children after Julius". So Irma, reluctant to open her mouth in the dream, could represent Freud's mother, "always pregnant and thus unavailable to him" (p. 130).

Returning to the trimethylamin formula, the author links it not only to trauma, but also to a "sudden revelation of a new doctrine and a new belief", as a new solution "which materialized, for Freud and for us, in the founding dream of psychoanalysis (p.91)".

One wonders, along with Bonomi, if, apart from being a product of Freud's genius, the "jump from the earliest image of the body to an abstract mental space [was not] a mark of trauma [] or traumatic progression". In other words, the author proposes that we imagine Freud as a "wise baby" that "managed to overcome his inhibitions and grew wise by developing a vision which led him to see [] far ahead of his contemporaries" (p. 195).

Bonomi thinks that Freud's traumatic progression "involved an unconscious exploration of Emma's mind" (p. 9), especially her circumcision trauma and her reactions to it. This could account for her role in Freud's theorizing (especially his phallocentric doctrine), which "he came close to equating [] with fantasy, introducing the image of [] 'witch metapsychology' " (p. 208). The author considers the figure of "witch" initially a response to material produced by Emma ("the broomstick they ride is probably Lord Penis", wrote Freud to Fliess).

Bonomi also explores Freud's turning from the theory of the father to the Oedipus complex. He notes that, as many authors have pointed out, it was a way of "dissociat[ing] himself from his Jewish identity" marked by circumcision "by [] embracing the Oedipus myth" (p. 203). One can here remember that Freud most likely chose not to have his sons circumcised. The author's thesis is that "the traumatic scene which Emma related to [Freud] during analysis served to reawaken [] memories bearing on the circumcision of his [] brother Alexander (and, behind it, of his dead brother Julius), and, by embracing the Oedipus myth, Freud not only managed to distance himself from [this] mark of his [] Jewish roots, but also bury and preserve them within the Greek script of the phallic hero whose destiny is bound to castration" (p. 205).

Let us remember that the aim of this book is to offer a more integrated narration (one could say: reconstruction) of the origins of psychoanalysis. In his approach of Emma's analysis and of Freud's self-analysis and theorizing the author makes use of an impressive wealth of psychoanalytic sources, from Anzieu to Erikson; also cultural, historical, medical and religious material. These elements form a complex network of narrations that converge into a convincing main narration of the origins of psychoanalysis which takes in mind trauma and reaction to it. The narrative element gives to the whole of the book the quality of continuity, fluidity and pace; in this sense the book is indeed "at once a scientific study and a fairy tale" as the author sustains (p.1). The notion of fairy tale could also be linked to unconscious fantasy, which, according to late Freud influences theorizing activity– an idea which informs Bonomi in his effort to reconstruct the origins of psychoanalysis (p. 208). His overall approach is obviously inspired by Ferenczi, especially his ideas on traumatic progression and the "wise baby".

I believe that Carlo Bonomi's absorbing work has the merit of tackling issues of major importance in contemporary psychoanalysis, such as the impact of the patient's trauma on the analyst , by pondering on the origins of psychoanalysis. I would also add that it succeeds in building a convincing narration of them, using as its cornerstone "the stone which the builders rejected", that is Emma Eckstein's unnamed cut.

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References

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