'Splintered Innocence'

Peter Heinl

Brunner – Routledge, approx £15

Review 1

This is a helpful and rewarding book by a senior practitioner of psychotherapy.

It is partly a textbook, with many 'how I do it' pages and partly a sharing of his long experience of using his technique.

He has a great deal to say about how to recognise, acknowledge and work with the trauma of war, and with the affects of war trauma on succeeding generations. Though his personal experiences are from post Second World War Germany, he goes on to acknowledge the global and ever-present experience of war trauma in history and up to the present. Obviously everyone involved in war, at any level, cannot help but be affected, and all war is traumatic. Unfortunately I found his continual use of the phrase '(post) war trauma' throughout the book somewhat irritating.

I attended Peter's day workshop on the issue of post war trauma last year and in the smallish group were social workers and therapists whose fathers had fought in Indo-Chine (later to be fought over also as Vietnam) Algeria, Belize, Solomon Islands, Belfast, and several other wars including the First and Second World Wars.

Peter goes on to make clear that war trauma for combatants and their relatives and families, goes on to directly affect second and third generations of the families concerned.

In this particular book Peter obviously writes of war trauma specifically, but his useful and clear model of working through buried or unacknowledged trauma applies to all our work. As such it is a refreshing reminder of what we seek to affect with our clients and encourages the acknowledgement that any trauma needs to be worked through.

A major part of the book is given over to the use of 'Object Sculpts,' where Peter chooses and places a series of objects on the floor of the therapy

room. This is in order to make a sculpture which he feels can represent important issues in the client's early life. He then invites dialogue with the person working as to what the objects and the overall sculpt represent to them.

However, as a Humanistic Psychotherapist I struggled with Peter's directive use of his intuition in the 'Object Sculpts'. I could only see the sculpts as similar to an off-the-cuff Rorschach test, and found myself uncomfortable with the amount of 'guidance' that Peter employed. The resulting work seemed sound, but the presentation of it would not do for an aficionado of Person Centred work or of Relational Gestalt therapy.

Interestingly, later in the book he described presenting an object sculpt for a group member. He then allowed the remaining group of watchers to describe their own individual responses to her sculpt. The responses were naturally rich, emotional and obviously completely different from all the others.

I felt that if each person had been given a box of objects they could have each made a sculpt of their chosen objects and worked through the issues raised with help from Peter and other group members.

If you find Peter's clearly described 'working through' of early and forgotten traumae alive and interesting, then this book will grip you, if not, I think it would be easy to find it irritating.

At the end of the book there is a thorough roundup of the effects of War Trauma on the adults and children, with many examples of the results of growing up in a family led by at least one parent, often both, suffering from PTSD as a result of what they have been exposed to.

A good read, somewhat contentious for some of us in how directive Paul's style can be, but one that definitely offers insight and pointers into the working through of deep trauma.

Rex Bradley

Review 2

Splintered Innocence is in a sense four different books in one. There is the book about working with the trauma of war; the book about the role of intuition in psychotherapy; the book about respecting and valuing children; and the book about the pervasive impact of war on human society. Each is useful and interesting; but they don't entirely fit together.

Peter Heinl has personal experience of post-war trauma; and he has worked with many survivors in Germany and in Britain. The book is full of moving cameo descriptions of how clients

have been permanently, and often unconsciously, shaped by the horrors of their wartime experience. As Heinl points out, new generations around the world are growing up having suffered the psychological impact of war, which 'represents all that is damaging for children in terms of emotional trauma, deprivation of growth-enhancing structures, and interference with the formation of their personality, self-esteem and potential' (p. 150). He suggests that the only answer is 'to establish a new order in which the supremacy of obedience is ended and in which children are given an equal place, an equal status, an equal degree of respect in society, and a share in … power' (pp. 150-1).

These ideas are radical and admirable, but, it has to be said, not exactly novel. The work of Alice Miller is only one place in which similar thoughts can be found. Without in any way wanting to patronise Heinl – after all, if a truth is important it needs to be stated again and again – I personally found the sections about his therapeutic approach more interesting.

Heinl works from his intuition and spontaneity, often without any sense of what he is doing, or why, or where it might end up. He shows great courage and trust in yielding to his unconscious processes in this way – for example, working for half an hour or more in a group silently arranging objects in the room, without a clue as to what he was doing. He seems to operate as a channel for the client's unconscious, facilitating expression of key traumatic events and issues.

Unfortunately, as so often in the therapy world, Heinl seems to have no knowledge of other therapists working in similar ways (perhaps most notably Process Oriented Psychology). Psychotherapists and counsellors spend a lot of time reinventing the wheel; but at least that means it is *our* wheel, and we have a deep understanding of its workings. To rely on intuition in this way is risky, especially if, like Heinl, we actively intervene and even take over the whole process of expression. It is perilously easy for a charismatic practitioner to impose their own agenda under the justification of intuitive truth.

Heinl comes across, though, as a person of humility and sensitivity. The work he describes is powerful and liberating; and tells us a lot about how trauma operates as an organising force in people's lives. I'm not sure why he decided to isolate war trauma from the whole spectrum of traumatic experience - perhaps it was because of his own resonance with the theme; but certainly the stories he tells have a very wide application to trauma as a general human problem (including the ways in which trauma can be inherited by further generations). This is not really a theoretical book, however: it is a personal testament, the distillation of one wise psychotherapist's work over many years with wounded individuals.

Nick Totton

Wool Gathering or How I Ended Analysis

Dan Gunn

Brunner- Routledge 2002 £30 hb

Dan Gunn has achieved a *tour de force* : Not only has he brought his six year long analysis to an end, but he has also narrated the last few weeks of his journey in a style where emotions are imbricated in an endearing contiguity: Love, hate, grief and humour are concocted in a scintillating mix. But then, the characters of the plot aren't just any ordinary human beings: Gunn, highly trained in manoeuvring amongst the texts of Proust, Kafka and Beckett exercises his firing skills on his French Canadian analyst, Renato Sergeant, of Lacanian descendance. The Sergeant – as he is referred to – remains silent and aloof and aborts sessions at any point between fifteen and twenty five minutes. The plot is set in Paris, against a background of public transport strikes, which leaves the author to negotiate the traffic on a bicycle, in a state of unsteady balance (real and symbolic). And as though that was not enough, his flat is in ruins after a series of leaks, and his love affair is in tatters. Add to all this, dreams triptychs, which he analyses *a capella*, decoding English and French words with admirable humour and dexterity,– and we have a book full of wit but with a poignancy close to despair: The author's Oedipal quest, the search for his voice and path (homonyms in French: *la voix* and *la voie*), his ambiguous sexuality and his impossible paternity.

One is puzzled throughout the book, by the duration of the analysis and by the resilience of the author. What makes him go back to this silent – mute– analyst? Is he really silent or is he turned silent by the reality of the transference, which gives him the coldness and frigidity of Gunn's dead father? (Gunn was five when his beloved father died suddenly of a heart attack). It seems that this book, adresses in an unconventional way the question of truth and memory: The author appears to be constantly searching to draw the line between perception and reality and seems to dis-locate truth from its pedestal : He lets it oscillate between fiction and fact. Past and memories need to be dis-membered before they can be re-membered: '*The past* (is) *not stable but* (it is) *constantly rediscovered, even reinvented, by the present'*(P. 13).

Although this book is about Gunn's tangible experience of analysis, it is also a tribute to an experience beyond intelligible words, the truth of which belongs to some mysterious language, made up and understood exclusively by two people. It is no wonder that ending analysis is such a poignant experience; in fact, the wit which peppers the text, paradoxically accentuates its poignancy.

The end of the book brings us full circle to its title: The "wool" the author has gathered through his analysis is now a protective fleece – even though he feels he has been " fleeced" in a different way by his analyst!

Dan Gunn is a fascinating and endearing patient. His book is a rare amalgam of wit and passion. You will think of it long after you have finished it.

Marlène Bensimon