

Book Review

Transferring Despair to Hope: Reflections on the Psychotherapeutic Process with Severely Neglected and Traumatized Children

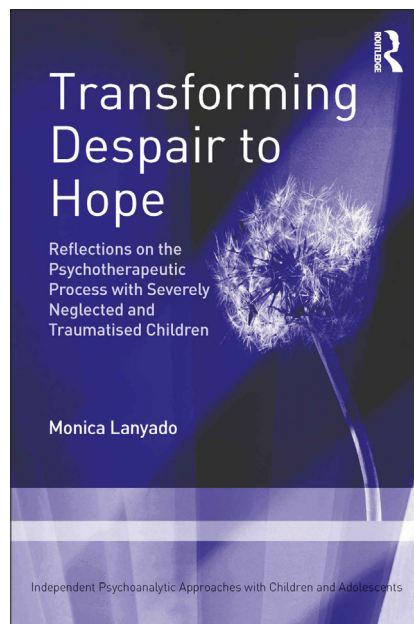
By Monica Lanyado, Routledge, Abingdon, 2018, 196pp,
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Reviewed by **Jane Barclay**

The title 'shouted' to me from the pages of *Therapy Today* magazine in January. 'Yes, I'm on to it.' It was the word 'Despair' that hit home – I hadn't even 'seen' the subtitle. I'd recently emerged from three years' despair myself – bereavement unlocking 'complex losses' (Introduction, p. xx), which I reacted to by emotional cut-off, sentencing myself to the prison of desperate-lonely-sad. Only when I began reading did I register 'severely neglected and traumatized children', and immediately recognized these children within many, if not all, the adult clients I work and have worked with (the only word open to 'question' being 'severely'. Some inner conflict here: in practice, I don't judge and rate experiences I'm asked to bear witness to – except, I realise, my own...). Two 'hooks'

Reading about torment of children and challenge to therapists, underpinned by analytical as well as neuro-scientific theory, demanded that I take care of myself. Case studies, both informative and affirming, bringing the text to life, are also painful to read.

There are plentiful references to and some quotes of Bowlby's work, starting in Chapter 2, 'Historical and Social Context': "affectionless child"... who has 'suffered maternal deprivation'" (p. 25); and Winnicott: '(Bowlby's) emphasis was too much on the external behaviour of the child... not indicating that the child had become "affectionless" as a defence against the vulnerability' (p. 25). The author also refers to Freud regarding attachment needs, and the impact when children are neglected, treated brutally. Quotations and references are interspersed throughout, some



familiar to me, many not, as are the case studies Lanyado chooses.

Reading 'institutional abuse was often known about but a blind eye was turned to it' (p. 24) hit home, relating directly to personal experiences – of being a co-Director of Boarding Concern, of specialized training and subsequent work with former boarders and having boarded myself. My heart opened a little further – 'wow, she gets it.... me'.

In Chapter 3, subtitled 'Neglect', Lanyado claims, 'neglect is the idea of an *absence* of something that is needed. And at the core of thoughts about trauma is the idea of the overwhelming *presence* of something that is harmful'. (her italics) This was a concept to consider, digest.... She ponders, 'What is needed when a child is being neglected...

how does this almost inevitably open the door to the presence of trauma?' (p. 33).

Next comes 'Complex Traumatic Childhood Losses', in which the author illustrates with the case study of 'Connie' (she was supervisor with Connie's therapist), who was deemed 'too little to understand' her drug-addicted mother's fatal heart-attack, how 'controlling' and 'tantrum-y' behaviour (p. 57) can be met and understood by a therapist who's open to bearing and holding the child's pain.

It was Chapter 5, 'Playing Out, Not Acting Out' and Chapter 6, 'The Playful Presence of the Therapist', that opened my heart

fully, the child-in-me allowing myself to feel held by Lanyado as I read her recounting her own work with 'Sammy'. I was reminded of the relationship I developed with the therapist I worked with over six years, who has since died: in remembering, I've felt re-connected to him more deeply still.

Understanding-with-compassion, together with persistence and commitment, lie at the core of this book. Chapter titles move through 'Transition and Change', 'The Impact of Listening on the Listener' and 'Moving from Despair to Hope', with plentiful accounts of therapist client work.

All the way through, each time I paused to reflect I was aware of 'parallel process', externally and then, 'of course', internally... – from recognizing 'call/response' – exciting; to forming relationship

– tentatively, with increasing moments of 'yes', to connect-y, warming-satisfying; and of now sharing – spacious gratitude spiced with excitement. This process reflects my approach to connecting with emerging parts of myself and thence with the wider world in and beyond my therapy rooms (as therapist, as client). My experience, too, of belonging to both AHPb and AHPP.

Monica Lanyado's book offers recognition and support to therapists in their work with children *and* with adults, and to adults who, as therapists, clients, both or neither, sense their 'inner child' knocking.

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