

Some Reflections on Hanna Green's I Never Promised
You a Rose Garden

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Debhora in the Old Testament is a prophetess, and the true function of a prophet is not to magically foretell the future but rather to show that which is hidden in the present. Such a revelatory experience is had while reading this work. For, when studied within a psychoanalytic framework, this work helps us to understand - a little better than we do - the phenomena of schizophrenia.

The drama revolves around the problem of autonomy. What we see with Debhora is a struggle with who she is, who she was and who she is to become. What causes this is difficult to analyze - what the text relates is a sensitive child living with role playing relatives and some deceit in the world around her; we see a child burdened with fulfilling an old man's dreams; a child living with a mother's ambivalence not only toward her husband, but toward her child as well. The book sketches in broad strokes this family background. It shows, by the very fact of its having had to be written, that Debhora never developed in her early years that ego autonomy necessary to secure not only consistent bodily function but also intellectual and emotional creativity in the world. However, the text does not situate this loss solely in view of the family history. That imponderable factor - personal sensitivity - is seen but not fully understood, beyond a descriptive title. Thus, instead of maturational integration, with psyche, soma and mind working in relative harmony, as D. W. Winnicott

has indicated, we have lack of integration evidenced by the two worlds of earth and Yr, in sharp opposition and under the law of no communication between them. Instead of mind working with intellectual problems and a psyche giving personal reflexive self-identity to both mind and body, we get a total confusion of all three (the Pit) when Debhora is threatened by the anxiety of personal self-delineation or when she experiences a situation as a judgment or manipulation of her. What happens in these "pit" states seems to be that, in Winnicott's division, mind reverts to primary process (condensation and displacement in symbol thinking); psyche withdraws personal identity from body and mind, and (apparently) attaches itself to a symbol/fantasy construct. In light of self-identity being thus displaced from her body/mind to symbol/fantasy, that is, from earth to Yr, there is no wonder that this little girl considered her substance (her ngnon) bad and corrupting. Historically Debhora, in her confusion, had fled from the deceit and rejection which she experienced in the world to her inner kingdom: first, in the hope of relief, later - as with all who serve two masters - she found herself in bondage to her gods.

Somehow Debhora had not experienced her parents' love for her as encompassing or strong enough to unite Debhora's good self and bad self; consequently her inability and unsureness in uniting and loving good mother/father and bad mother/father. Thus the retreat to the gods of impulse and punishment, of primitive desire, to the furies of love and hate. What the text indicates, although not in a developed manner, is that what for the schizophrenic are gods become -

on a higher level of the continuum of the psyche - the elusive ghosts that neurotics do battle with in their struggle for identity, autonomy and creativity.

Two factors of the analyst's stance should be noted. One is Dr. Fried's willingness to enter into the fantasy world of the patient - to enter it without fear or condescension and without compromise of her own autonomy. Second, her refusal of "phoniness" of any kind. For example, the phoniness of pretending Debhora was not severely sick, the phoniness of excusing those in authority (doctors who lie to children) or, most important, the phoniness of allowing the patient to pretend health rather than achieve it. Thus Dr. Fried offered only the evidence of time and the reality of slow personal growth, rather than assurances of health and suggestions or prohibitions of courses of action for her patient. She gave not pretense at her own power - or Debhora's power; rather Dr. Fried showed a yearning to reach the inner strength of her patient. And to do that she did not substitute her strength for the patient's; rather she let her strength and autonomy accompany without fear Debhora's own search for and implementation of herself.

The neurotic must light the cellar chambers of his past and dispel the ghosts. The schizophrenic must let the gods die. The therapist must try to help the patient realize he doesn't need his ghosts or gods any more; and, of much more consequence yet most delicate of all, the therapist must help the patient not to want his ghosts or gods any more.