

On Becoming A Grandparent

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Dr. Bond has written a rather puzzling book; charming in its apparent candor, educational in its attempt to convey some useful psychoanalytic insights, but ultimately disappointing in its discoveries - familial and personal. Dr. Bond, a psychoanalyst who belongs to a prestigious psychoanalytic society, is a clinician interested, in particular, in dream interpretation. She is a mother of three, one elder son and a pair of twins - male and female.

As her diary unfolds we are led into the beginning pregnancies not only of her daughter, Janet, but in quick succession of her daughter-in-law Wendy as well. We are privy to what would ordinarily be understood as the private musing of the author's excitement, fears, jealousies and dreams about these respective pregnancies, as well as memories of her own pregnancy. All these musings, cast before the public eye, have some interest and hopefully some applicability. Dr. Bond is a pleasant writer and her profession, which I share, can offer insights into the human condition. Her single-minded devotion to Freud, however, does cast her psychoanalytic reflections within a rather limited framework. Contemporary analysts, while acknowledging a debt to Freud, recognize that there are many more rooms in the mind, so to speak, than oedipal conflicts, sibling murder and the revelatory function of dreams.

While I recognize the "casual" mode that the book intends to convey and the highly personal quality of the reflections it contains, I found the author's constant self-preoccupation with her role as a psychoanalyst and as a writer troubling. While speaking of herself as mother, she seemed to function more as teacher and dream diviner. Dr. Bond's continuous reference to her childhood conflicts are laudatory in their honesty, and yet the emotional shadow of these events falls shallow. I heard more of the self aware writer than I did the pained human being.. While any analyst can appreciate the import of Fred's Interpretation of Dreams it does seem somewhat exaggerated to speak of this text as the source that made the author the person she is. Analysis, as I am certain Dr. Bond knows, addresses many levels of the human condition in its attempt to heal the inevitable pain which colors our lives. It is, consequently, more than a prolonged course in Dream Interpretation, a rather precarious endeavor at that. Yet Dr. Bond speaks as if her primary clinical intervention with her patients, and her family, is dream interpretation.

Throughout the text one can sense her involvement with her dead husband, Rudy Bond - an actor. But here again her level of discourse is rather limited: her observations that he was, when they first met, sexy and that after their marriage he was helpful with her profession and her mothering because of his devotion to her belie a more complex range of emotions which the text only hints at. Dr. Bond's concerns with the financial success of her future grandchildren, her ambitions about who in the family line will be a "genius" suggests a puzzling superficiality, particularly in a person who has dealt with a range of human problems. For example at one point she muses about contacting Victoria - a caretaker from her childhood. When she shares this desire with a fellow analyst she was told: "What would you do if you found her?" Whereupon Dr. Bond drops the idea.

Why? What she "could do" were she to locate her would be to thank her for the constant good care and love she provided to a needy child who had major difficulties bonding with her own mother. I am sure that Dr. Bond appreciates the importance of gratitude in human interactions; as well as our capacity to resolve, in a good enough manner, the competitive jealousies particularly among siblings. Yet such awareness does not pervade this text. Repeatedly throughout the book I felt a rather reductionistic reading of the human experience. Dr. Bond has a laudatory quote from another analyst, Dr. Kurt Eissler, wherein he speaks of "a woman reaching the maximum of her creative potential in the moment she gives birth to a living child." Really? Would it not be closer to the truth of our human experience to say that birth is the beginning of a task of coming to be as a mother which last many years and whose creative achievement will have to stand the judgment of history rather than the eventfulness of biological processes?

Finally, while the cursory acknowledgment of one's own personal death, which the birth of grandchildren highlights, is acknowledged I would have hoped for a more profound struggle with this angel of darkness, with all his various presence's in our lives, particularly from a psychoanalyst who has had her share of pain. The joy of grandparenting is rather obvious; the complexities are not. Nor do I think they can be single handedly decoded, no matter what the analyst's talent, by dream interpretation. That Dr. Bond has brought to the attention of the lay public the importance of a grandparents own childhood in this new experience is certainly helpful. That she apparently chose to expose us to a rather narrow view of her family dynamics is unfortunate. The family seems both more interesting and more complex than the text portrays. Yet can one argue with an individual's journal entries? Should we not just

accept them for what they are? Or does the publication of a private journal entail more responsibility to the reading public?