



BOOK REVIEW

Title: *The Quiet Profession*

Author: Anne Alonso

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The question is, can one get through the miasma of platitudes that oozes through the first part of the 143 pages of text, even after one is reconciled to the author's psychodynamic viewpoint. One finds such statements as: "The awesome privilege and the enormous burden of parenting the young come to fruition in the moment when they set forth carrying our visions of the truth and our dreams into posterity." "Borges describes an emperor who built the Great Wall of China at the same time that he ordered the burning of all the books that had existed before him. If the clinical field is to avoid the trap of ignoring the past as it builds its present structures, the supervisors must be recognized for the vital role they play in carrying the wisdom of the past into the state of the art." "The androgynous aspects of supervision are developed in the myth of Mentor. . . . Pallas-Athena, the goddess of wisdom, descends to join with Mentor to save the day. She enters his body. . . . Taken symbolically, we might see the merger of science and art as represented in the two aspects of the effective Mentor, then and now." Even the selections from the great metaphorist Erik Erikson teeter on the brink in this book.

Saving the day are the author's twenty-five formal "Examples," sociodramatic vignettes illustrating mini-crises in the lives of the professionals this book is for and about—psychotherapy supervisors. One of them illuminates the chronic impossibility of the psychotherapy field. We might have thought that experienced supervisors really knew what's what, but the author lets us know otherwise. In an example regarding five supervisors who had attended the same presentation and discussed what they thought of the speaker, they said: "A brilliant and

articulate young man. He'll be a big name in the field some day." "He has no heart, is the trouble!" "Hasn't he come a long way! He used to be impossible in the emergency service." "Not bad, not great. They all sound the same after a while." "This is an inappropriate case . . . so no wonder it's so hard to understand the presenter."

Still, the vignettes are compelling, even the ones embedded within paragraphs: One supervisor traveled many miles at the invitation of a former trainee to present a paper at a formal gathering, which the trainee had planned not to attend. Another spoke with dismay at hearing a former trainee report greater success with new methods from a new supervisor. Another expressed painful ambivalence at seeing a recent trainee's fourth publication appear in less than a year. Many of the author's examples of supervisory goofs make us feel better, even though some of them sound like things we might have done without the proportional ability to bail ourselves out.

Among the things I object to in this book is the presumptuous and gossipy way the trainees get evaluated: How does the trainee relate to you? Fun to be with? Argumentative and challenging? No mention of: Did this person's patients get better? Will any of this trainee's patients ever get better?

The problem here is that this book is interested in some kind of developmental maturation on the part of the patient (and the trainee) in which effective behavior and the reduction of psychological signs and symptoms are an afterthought, a side-effect of maturation. This perspective cannot be maintained on the tumultuous street, the distracting, authority-divided, and inefficient ward, or the raucous psychodrama stage. In the author's polite world of genteel chuckles, fresh shirts, and (do they still smoke?) delicately aroma'd pipes, everybody has time, and everything gets worked out. The trainee changes and grows. But in none of the twenty-five formal examples nor hardly anywhere else do we learn what problem brought the patient in in the first place.

The author's formal content is found in chapters such as *What Is Supervision?* "It is as difficult to define supervision as it is to define psychotherapy." Supervision serves "the needs of the administration, the therapist, and the patient." Supervision can be seen both as cognitive and as emotional. *Who Are the Supervisors?* "Supervision might better be thought of as . . . a collaboration between the supervisor and therapist to stretch and adapt to and enlighten one another." "One's supervisees are often perceived as a ticket to posterity." *What Do Supervisors Do?* Didactic teaching (defined nebulously), demonstrating "listening with the third ear," mapping out a treatment plan (I have no idea what one would sound like here), and imparting by means of

modeling a “nonjudgmental stance” toward the trainee (as if the supervisor would not be sought out continually for critical evaluations of his trainee forevermore), plus many more interesting elements that cut across different viewpoints.

The Supervisor in Developmental Perspective is just that. Polarities: Young/Old, Destruction/Creation, Male/Female; Nurturance, Competition, Intimacy; Levinson, Erikson. The “negotiation and maintenance of a healthy relationship with the training institution.” Heavy stage-of-life/maturation theory here. Kernberg is cited: “One must accept that there is indeed badness in the world in which one lives. One must live by one’s own ego ideals and accept the fact that the final responsibility is to oneself.” Moreno might say: “to the world.” I would say, “at least, to one’s reference group.” The author perpetuates a cliché about the desirableness of a fellowship for two years in the exotic tropics studying the influence of leisure, whereas Morenoists are in the tropics, Arctic, or desert, or all three, wherever they are.

The Supervisor at Impasse. “The supervisor is expected to be a teacher, a mentor, an administrator, a role model, a disciplinarian, and parental-like in his/her regard for the supervisee.” The supervisor has to manage personal needs to be admired, to rescue, to be in control, to compete, to be loved, to work through unresolved prior conflicts, and to handle intrusive stress spillover. *Some Special Circumstances of Supervision* considers supervising across age and gender barriers (includes the author’s slap at sexists Freud, Jung, and Bettelheim). Although the author acknowledges that “another may employ psychodrama to help the student ‘live’ in the patient’s feelings and dilemmas,” the author is clearly most comfortable in dealing with the trainee based on the trainee’s verbal recapitulation of the session. Morenoists are not as concerned about the transference within the dyad and readily become their trainees’ directors, protagonists, auxiliaries, audiences, co-therapists, and patients for teaching purposes.

The Supervisory Encounter, like therapy with a patient, is the “learning diagnosis.” “Toward the end of the incorporation phase, the supervisor is apt to be hurled down from a shaky pedestal with some force.” During “identification,” “the trainee moves from ‘slave’ to ‘apostle.’” At the end is evaluation (“one approach is to ask the student to write the first draft of the evaluation”). Both supervisor and trainee express appreciation and affection, discuss the disappointments, and forgive the nearly unforgivable. Finally, *A Model Program for Psychotherapy Supervisors* includes forming an association.

I loaned this book to my own current clinical intern who used the occasion to provide a critique of elements in my style of supervision. This

led me to realize a use for this book in providing actual and prospective trainees a guide to help themselves design a more effective training situation. On the other hand, I had occasion to inform that same intern that if we did things the way the author wanted, the internship would take ten years.

Were it not for the invitation to review this book, I ordinarily would not have read it, but now I'm glad I did. The author, Anne Alonso, apparently gives workshops at professional conferences, as she will at the 1986 American Group Psychotherapy Association annual meeting. It would probably be a delight to meet and work with Dr. Alonso, especially if in her personal work one would find the warmth, attentiveness, patience, love, exceptional powers of observation, and optimism one finds in this book. And it might even be a good idea to get regular supervision from someone with another viewpoint, especially if that person had at least a little of that which is lacking at every level of the mental health establishment—wisdom; the real thing.

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