

“LOVE THAT IS NOT ALL PAIN IS NOT ALL LOVE”

Antonio Porchia (1)

When disturbed Vietnam veterans began to appear at psychiatric hospitals in the 1970's they were generally regarded as anxiety disorders if their symptoms were not gross, or if their symptoms were more serious, as psychotic, often as paranoid schizophrenic. However it was not until 1980 that a new diagnosis was admitted to the Diagnostic Manual of the American Psychiatric Association - largely under pressure from veterans and veterans' advocates - namely "Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, Delayed". It first appeared in that manual in 1980. By now I do not think it necessary to review its psychiatric description here, as you will see I do not believe it does justice to the phenomena and to the context in which they have emerged.

Although I had been a psychologist in a government hospital for veterans for twenty years, it was not until 1982 that I first realized the uniqueness of what is now termed, for short, "PTSD". The recognition occurred in the course of my conversation with a former professional soldier who had been a prisoner of war in North Korea in 1953. When he came to the hospital he pleaded for electroshock to keep him from remembering the nightmare of his life in the prison camp. But instead he and I began to talk together daily. After several months, one day right in my office I felt I was in the prison camp with him. I felt and saw what it was like. Then everything he had been talking about was perfectly clear, whereas earlier it had seemed exotically unreal, more like fiction or a TV documentary. That is probably when I also began to realize the extent of past conflicts and associated feelings involved in my own military service from 1942 to 1945. After six months the veteran was ready to leave the hospital. When leaving, he said, "When I came here I wanted more than anything to forget what I had experienced. Now I realize that it was part of my life and I do not want to forget it." And he added, "You have to know what death is in order to live".

From that time on I was able to listen to and understand the distressed Vietnam veterans who showed up at the hospital. At the same time I incurred the mistrust of other staff members who had not to cross the abyss between the world of war and the world of peace, and so could only see these men as merely sociopathic or psychotic. Still I was upheld in my belief that my understanding was at once correct and therapeutic by the veterans's appreciation of my interest, their meaningful response to it, and the signs of its productive effects, both in our work, and in their lives.

Now what I was hearing from them through the pain of their helplessness and rage? I heard their belief that they had gone to Vietnam for a just cause, but that after arriving they discovered all they could hope for was to save the lives of fellow soldiers. If they had a life it was only to give it to keep others alive. Typically plaintive was the observation of a soldier who had been a medic: "They didn't tell me in medical school that I would have to kill a dying man to relieve his suffering". This difference between what these men believed in and what they actually suffered rendered them inwardly helpless and enraged. Today they continue to be torn apart by an internal feud between the tendency to let it all out and hold it all in. The former succumb to violence, the latter to suicide. That they were rejected or ignored by Americans who abhorred the war, or who wanted utterly to forget it when they returned, only exacerbates the deadly psychic shrapnel they now carry within them, and which steadily over the years has been working its way out. Many have killed themselves, many are in prison, while still others keep moving in and out of short term treatment

programs. Many have insisted on living on a regime of medication, many others have sought to flee human company, seeking nonhuman nature and the company of offenseless animals.

Recently the following words came together for me:

The soldier kills
His country thrills
To see him do
What they have sought

The soldier kills
himself
His country chills
To see what love abused
Has brought.

In the August 21, 1988 issue of the New York Times Magazine, under the title of “The War Within”, an assistant to Lyndon Johnson in 1965 reports the observation of the men around the President as he single-handedly took his decision of escalate the U.S. involvement in Vietnam:

“The President’s conduct during 1965 was, on occasion, markedly, almost frighteningly different from anything I had observed previously. My conclusion is that President Johnson experienced certain episodes of what I believe to have been paranoid behaviour. I do not use this term to describe a medical diagnosis. I am not term to describe a medical diagnosis. I am not L. B. J.’s psychiatrist, nor am I qualified to be. I base my judgement purely on my observation of his conduct during the little more than two years I worked for him. And this was not my conclusion alone. It was shared by others who also had close and frequent contact with President Johnson.” He recalls the President’s words:

“On July 14, 1965 Johnson walked into a staff meeting, took a seat, listened a while, then said: “Don’t let me interrupt. But there’s one thing you ought to know. Vietnam is like being in a plane when all the engines go out. If you jump, you will probably be killed, and if you stay in you will crash and probably burn. That’s what it is.”

“Love that is not all pain is not all love” in such a context means: to the extent that love of country involves sensitivity to the multiple claims of our mortality, with its careful consideration for all concerned, it falls short of “all love”. To the extent that love falls to do justice to the claims of our mortality it falls short of “all love.” To the degree that love acts in denial of its potential for death, we are given over to enacting Narcissus, not abstractly but in commemoration of the myth of selfconsumption. This relation between love and pain (Freud’s “psychic pain”), or between a pain of which love is aware and to that extent does not fear, and death which - as Gabriel Marcel knew so well, when during World War I he had the task of informing relatives of soldiers of their death-death which most deeply means the loss of the loved one as if loss of love itself, and with that the possibility of going on living. Now trauma is choked-off mourning.

When I have spoken before about the wounds of war I have been asked “Where is the ego?” I have not been able to answer the question. The best I could do was to refer to the extent to which

there is a transparency of love and death, living and dying to each other. I have called this the “sense of mortality”. Maybe this is something like what Freud meant when he referred to the “ego” as “the true locus of dread (Angst)” and in his cryptic formulation: “Where it was there shall “I” be” (2).

Trauma now is how we refer to the suffering of the opacity experienced in the way of attaining that transparency which the ancient Greek Stoics referred to as the orthos logos, the right, direct, upright logos or word, speech, meaning. When I use the word “suffer” I intend both its meanings: to be under pain but also to bear up under it, to feel it while allowing it, allowing it while feeling it. This orthos logos is what Ludwig Binswanger understood as “the soul’s self-increasing Eros” and what Erwin Straus grasped as the import of the human “upright posture” in its opposition to gravity, and in its self-established distance to the earth. The difference between the troubled ex-soldiers with whom and of whom I have been speaking and the psychotic sufferers to whom I have made implicit reference is that the words of the former afford a window through which I can see into (besetzen, “cathect”) their encapsulated, and encapsulating world, whereas the muffled speech of the psychotic is an opacity dividing us, each into an idios kosmos out of the possibility of realizing the koinos kosmos of the self-increasing Logos/Eros. The transparency of the koinos kosmos is the telos of psychoanalysis insofar as it is grasped through and beyond a suffering of the embrace of eros and thanatos, an integral mortality which realizes the meaning of “being in the world over and beyond the world” (Binswanger). This is what I take to be import of the heavy words of Antonio Porchia, which allude more to the Way itself rather than to the constant source or sought-for end: “Love which is not all pain is not all love”.

Once again, in the thought of Binswanger, only to the extent of the transparency of the meanings of “Steigen” and “Fallen” (ascent and falling) to each other is there realization of the inseparability of Eros and Logos. This, it should be recalled, is also the late Goethe’s “Polarität und Steigerung”, the polarity of light and dark, of bios and thanatos as a logos and selfincreasing eros. This I believe is also the sense of Freud’s orphic doctrine of the impulsions of life and death, of eros and thanatos, in which each term is both, and in whose riddles all we human sufferers of love are entangled - “In Geschichten verstrickt” (Schapp) (3).

The veterans I have spoken of have had to love too much in order to bear what their love exposed them to so that their mortality has become indifferent to the minor concerns that rule our everyday lives as intrinsic to our mortality. In contrast, the “psychotic” person has suffered a breakdown or failure in developing an ordinary sense of mortality. (Blankenburg’s “natürliche Selbstverständlichkeit”) earlier in life. These men and women – the nurses in Vietnam - took on the challenges to their love to keep alive the subjects of their love, and yet what they sought to keep from happening happened anyway. To this day they have been unable to allow (“suffer”) happen what actually happened. They try to deny to themselves what they participated in, one way or another, be it only as witnesses. Now they are repeatedly called on to witness what they cannot bear to have witnessed alone. Another is called to bear witness with them. They cannot allow to happen what they were part of, and yet they cannot acknowledge the love provoked to keep it from happening, fearful they could be swept away by its unleashed pain. Their love is never entirely successful and the “all pain” is never quite attained. Only the love of another might make it possible for them to bear the pain which will make it possible for them to withdraw, as across a bridge, to withdraw from their threatened forward positions (Binswanger’s “Verstiegenheit”). The love then

with the helper may enable a bridge to be realized, one of the compossibility of living and dying, a crossing over which is also that of our mortality, and which I take to be Ego (das Ich) for Freud which is the actual site of dread (“die eigentliche Angststätte).

One of my veterans remains haunted by his memories of first having had to remain out of sight, helplessly listening to the human sounds of a massacre, then in the morning having to witness the grisly spectacle of its waste along a bridge, now “besetzt” (cathected) with that experience and its antagonistic emotions. It is that bridge which is now the site of his own inner war. It is like the plane of Lyndon Johnson, which portends death in either case. But with this difference. While the plane is bound to crash, the bridge remains.

REMARKUES

(1) Antonio Porchia-born in Italy, 1886, lived in Argentina from 1911 until his death in 1966. His sole work is Voces (Voices), first published in 1943 in Buenos Aires, a collection of some six hundred aphorisms. There have been several editions since the first, the most recent in 1966. Roger Caillois published a selection from them in French translation in 1949. The current English edition is Voces (1988), translated by W. S. Merwin and published by Knopf, N.Y.C.

(2) Of course the “Soll” in “Wo Es war soll Ich werden”, as well as having the imperative sense of “shall” also has the connotation of “said to be” - perhaps alluding to the autologous character of the speaking “I”!

(3) Wilhelm Schapp - 1884-1965. Philosopher and jurist. Began his philosophical studies with Rickert, Dilthey, and Simmel and continued with Edmund Husserl in Göttingen. “Hier” legte er 1909 seine Dissertation “Beiträge zur Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung vor, die zu den Hauptschriften der klassischen Phänomenologie zählt”. Weitere Schriften sind: Philosophie der Geschichten (1959), In Geschichten verstrickt. Zum sein von Mensch und Ding (1953), Wissen in Geschichten. Zur Metaphysik der Naturwissenschaft (1965). “In diesem Denken, das selbst – besonders in “Philosophie der Geschichten” - epische Züge besitzt, lösen Geschichten, unser Verstricktsein in Geschichten und wir als In-Geschichten-Verstrickte die überkommenen philosophischen Konzepte ‘Welt’, ‘Sein’ und ‘Mensch’ ab und weisen Denken und Sprechen neue Positionen zu. Schapps Ansatz ist ohne Vergleich in der neueren Philosophie, ist konkret und poetisch zugleich”.

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