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Dialogues on the Place of Creativity in Existential Therapy

2023. Gianfranco Buffardi & Yaqui Andres Martinez Robles with a foreword by Ernesto Spinelli. Trans. Danilo Serra. London: The Society for Existential Analysis.

This is the fifth dialogue published by the SEA, and in my experience has a lot to live up to as the four earlier offerings, and the one next, have been thought-provoking and challenging. The book fulfils expectations. It also marks the return of Buffardi to the series, having originally corresponded with Ernesto Spinelli for the initial *Dialogue*, with Spinelli also contributing to this with a short foreword.

In the current climate of February 2025, I feel honour-bound to declare my interests in this book. I am probably positively disposed to a small publishing house that is trying to do good with its income than a conglomerate that services shareholders. I am involved in ways with the SEA so will likely be positive about anything under their brand, but if anybody's talked to me in the past year or so about UKCP knows, I'm not backwards about coming forwards with a critique of a house of which I'm involved with. However, I feel moved by the text itself to try and disclose myself and the pressures and desires that impact me as Martinez says:

I like to tell my students that the best I can offer my patients is not called phenomenology, nor hermeneutics, nor empathy, nor existential therapy. The best I can offer them is called Yaqui, just as I am sure the best you offer the people who rely on you for their journeys into existence is called Gianfranco.

(p64)

The best I can offer you, dear readers and dear authors, is Ben and my sense of this work.

This is something akin to the archetypal SEA dialogue format; a short

foreword by an editor followed by ten chapters, untitled, with contributions from each author in each and clearly meant as, I assume, emails to each other. I want to mention the translator, Danilo Serra, as I forgot very easily at times that this was not written in English, with references to the authors locations being the primary give-away. As such, and only speaking English, to my shame, I can only praise Serra through not noticing their work, unless things have really been missed in translation and the authors humour, style and care didn't come across in their mother tongue! In general, the authors do address the points they are responding to, but not at the detriment of the experience, I assume theirs, as it doesn't feel mechanical or forced.

I really enjoyed the style that the two authors have with each other. In Dialogue 7, Buffardi starts the dialogue with: "Dear Yaqui, As you can see, I cannot be as quick as you. The fault, however, is also a bit yours. You are a volcano of ideas and prompt me to so many topics, all so important." (p56).

This disclosure is met similar when Martinez begins his contribution

Dear Gianfranco, Conversation with you is very stimulating for me. That is why, as soon as I receive your email, I begin to feel the urge to read it and reply to you. Forgive me for bombarding you with ideas, but I think the topic of art in/of existential therapy is itself very rich and complex so much so that I could devote hundreds of pages and many hours of reflection and conversation to it (and if it is with a good beer or coffee, in the company of a good friend, all the better).

(p60)

This is indicative of the ease with which the two communicate, the creativity they bring to their dialogue, which reaches over the potential of formality and into a way of being where I can really get a sense of their very being. I get a sense of their way of being in relation to their creativity.

I feel a need to offer something of a critique to show balance. Am I totally clear on the place of creativity in existential therapy because of reading this? No. Yet, I experienced this work as a piece of creativity in and of itself, something many books do not get close to, and for me that speaks of something greater. In the foreword, Spinelli ends by noting that

like all great expressions of the creative, we cannot 'get' jazz unless we are willing to enter into it as active participants willing to remain in it's flow, wherever it may take us and regardless of its uncertainty...I encourage readers to engage with these dialogues as expressions of a verbal 'jazz'.

(p iii)

He is right. Normally, I think, I am loathe to use too many quotes from a review book, as I want you to read it (or not) and taking things out of context isn't necessarily likely to encourage you to do so (or not), but my experience of this form of 'jazz' demands something more of me than most books have before. Not better, not worse, but different. My sense reading this work is that creativity is something experienced, that reading this is a creative endeavour rather than an intellectual pursuit, and as such it is what it is talking about. I'm conscious I'm selling my dear book review editor short in terms of my word count, but I feel moved in a way akin to seeing a work of art or listening to poetry; too much analysis removes the very experience that was had and tries to reduce the whole to its parts but it's the whole which is necessary.

This resonates with my experience of my work, now with some clients really long-term as I realise I'm quickly approaching my tenth anniversary of sitting with people as a therapist, and to look at some interventions is utterly pointless without an appreciation of the whole of our relationship together. This dialogue gives an insight into the authors relationship with each other, but also this thing we all call existential therapy that we experience differently the world over, and to see it as a creative endeavour is necessary; this book helps with that. I would recommend this to all; it's accessible, provocative, striving to want to foreground the experience between two people and joyous to read. I would recommend a sunny Sunday morning with a coffee with these two friends to all. Read it.

Ben Scanlan

Facing Down the Furies: Suicide, the Ancient Greeks and me

2024. Edith Hall. New Haven: Yale University Press.

The tragedies that hurt the most are those that sufferers have chosen for themselves.

(Sophocles' *Oedipus the Tyrant*)

A messenger arrives to report that Jocasta, queen of Thebes, has killed herself. To prepare listeners for the terrible news, he begins with this announcement.

This deeply personal memoir by Edith Hall, professor in the Department of Classics and Ancient History at Durham University, is about how her own life and psyche have been shaped by suicides in her family – her mother's grandfather, mother and first cousin, and how the Ancient Greeks have enabled her to come to terms with this inheritance.

Her inspiration for this book was to help herself and others understand