

has shifted to the role of the parent–child relationship during infancy as a significant casual factor in attachment security and later relationships.

Considering that so much current research is increasingly documenting the power of the parent–child relationship, it is remarkable that psychodynamic principles other than attachment theory have not been represented in greater depth by intervention practitioners. Both these volumes, despite their different orientations, illustrate that psychoanalysts are in a unique position to develop primary and secondary prevention programs with children and their families, each promoting a more adaptive bond between parent and child to help parents help their children master the inevitable conflicts that occur throughout the life cycle.

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REVENGE: NARCISSISTIC INJURY, RAGE, AND RETALIATION. Edited by Salman Akhtar and Henri Parens. Lanham, MD/Plymouth, UK: Jason Aronson, 2014. 200 pp.

In April 2013, the 44th Margaret Mahler Symposium on Child Development was held at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; it was entitled “The Wounded Self: Narcissism, Rage, and Revenge.” I begin this review of this new and interesting collection edited by Akhtar and Parens, entitled *Revenge* (with the subtitle *Narcissistic Injury, Rage, and Retaliation*), because the majority of its chapters come directly from the presentations in Philadelphia; and because anyone picking up this volume would be well advised to expect it to speak to the original title of the symposium.

As a disquisition on revenge per se, this book is likely to be experienced alternately as delightful and disappointing, but as a study of the wounded self in which narcissism, rage, and revenge figure, and with a particular emphasis on fascinating clinical child cases, it is likely to be experienced as very satisfying. Put differently, the contributions in this book seem cobbled together under the rubric *revenge* (one of the chapters never uses this word, and in another it appears but once), united also by a gratuitously gruesome photograph of a bloody hand on the cover, which mislead the reader as to what to expect and actually do an injustice to the complexity and nuance of many of the presentations.

The volume begins with a wonderful piece by Akhtar entitled “Revenge: An Overview,” which I recommend to anyone curious about the phenomenon of revenge. After tracing the somewhat meager psychoanalytic literature on the topic, from Freud through Kohut, Searles, Horney, and a variety of other writers—and traveling from the Freudian drive-based notion of revenge as a reaction to oedipal loss, through a more Winnicottian notion of revenge, or an antisocial tendency as a reaction to early childhood deprivation—Akhtar creates a diagram of *good enough revenge*, on the one hand, and *vindictive revenge*, on the other, with their respective characteristics. He makes it clear that revenge exists on this continuum, and that it is possible for the desire for revenge to be a healthy defense when it does not become obsessive or sadistic.

Revenge can be thought of from three perspectives (with the first two perhaps more obvious than the third): defect, discharge, and defense. Defense seems the most interesting, and in fact, the theme of revenge as a defense permeates a number of the subsequent chapters. Here is Akhtar, about this dynamic:

From the perspective of defense, revenge constitutes the ego’s attempt to reverse humiliating passivity into triumphant activity, to restore traumatically depleted narcissism, and to extrude a malevolent “interject” . . . that is, an object that has been violently inserted into the self. Revenge, insofar as it carries the hope—mostly unrealistic—of permanently erasing the trauma one has suffered, also acts as a preserver of the good internal object and a defense against sadness and mourning. [p. 11]

Unfortunately, the concepts of a continuum and of healthy revenge are not further adumbrated in the remainder of the volume, and the focus becomes pathological revenge.

Following this introduction are clinical papers with commentaries. Kerry Novick depicts a remarkable, four-times-weekly child analytic treatment in a chapter entitled “Green Wounds: Revenge as a Preserver of the Self.” She recounts her heroic effort with Ali, an out-of-control 10-year-old boy who had been subjected to a kind of *soul murder* in which his mother encouraged him to be like the girl she wanted, and his father rejected him for his feminine identification. In effect, says Novick, “Ali constructed a creature who was neither boy nor girl . . . not like anyone

else in his family; he met no one's expectations, and disappointed everyone's hopes in order to avenge himself" (p. 25).

The case hinged on an incident to which every child therapist can relate. At one point, Novick had finally had enough, and she told Ali

. . . midway through a flailing tantrum that he was fired. He looked at me in shock, shaking his head in disbelief when I ushered him right out of the office and to his startled mother's car. His parents and I told him that he would have to earn back his treatment. [p. 29]

I will leave it to the reader to discover the results of this surprising and unplanned development, which appears to have succeeded because the fear of the possible complete loss of a loved object disabled the revenge "defense."

Barbara Shapiro's commentary on this case points out, among other things, that there was a certain strength in Ali's rageful attacks, which employed aggression and self-agency, as contrasted to the selfless compliance and conviction of unworthiness that may afflict adults and children who are traumatized. She also describes different kinds of revenge: *hot*, *cold* (as in calculating), and *malignant*:

Revenge is on a spectrum of hot to cold. Hot revenge . . . doesn't involve much executive function. It is immediate, stormy, impulsive, and poorly planned. Cold revenge is carefully planned and executed so as to have the pleasure of getting back at someone without getting caught. This requires a higher level of executive function. [p. 36]

And then she adds a third category, malignant revenge:

Finally, malignant revenge is sticky. It has a life of its own This makes the therapeutic work very slow and difficult, and prone to negative therapeutic reactions It is difficult to give up chronic vengefulness toward a particular person or group without a terrible loss of pride. [p. 37]

Shapiro's vivid metaphors have much to recommend themselves because they will be recognized by all of us as essentially true.

A second clinical presentation, by Daniel Freeman—of two child cases—is equally compelling and remarkable, and also uses a vegetative metaphor as a title: “As the Twig Is Bent, So Grows the Tree.” The first case is of a nine-year-old boy, Chris, subjected at six months to a separation from his mother, which led to her alienation from him. It is a beautifully described case, replete with early childhood traumatic memories, the use of a ventriloquist dummy by Chris as a latency child to contain his splitting, and his struggles to deal with aggressive desires unacknowledged by his mother. The case is so complex in many ways, however, that one is hard put to think of it primarily in terms of revenge.

The same can be said for Freeman’s next case, that of Ruth, born with strabismus in one eye, which required an operation and hospitalization at the age of two, attended by separation trauma. Ruth was also afflicted with a mother with unacknowledged sadism. Her mother decapitated her daughter’s pet chicken, served it for dinner without telling her, and then teased her as she was eating by asking, “Where is your pet chickee?”

That Ruth grew up with psychosomatic symptoms and feelings of terrible rage was more than understandable; and the narrative and angry cries reported by Freeman from Ruth’s treatment, as she works through her feelings during the analysis, are heart-rending. Her mother’s statement to her at one point, “Spare me your rage,” and Ruth’s unfortunate identification with her mother and that statement, tell the story.

Frederick Fischer, in commenting on Freeman’s two cases, highlights the separation-individuation attempts of Chris, but only when speaking of Ruth does he distill from the treatment the theme of revenge, doing so in a vivid manner: he compares aspects of her psychopathology to that of Shakespeare’s *Richard III* and of Ahab in *Moby Dick*. He makes a very poignant reference to Freud’s discussion of Richard III’s character in his paper “The Exceptions,”¹ in which a bodily defect becomes the focus of the need to take revenge (just as the loss of a leg does for Ahab). In Ruth’s case, the strabismus and attendant traumatic childhood operation are comparable to Richard’s deformed body.

¹ Freud, S. (1916). Some character-types met with in psycho-analytic work. *S. E.*, 14.

Otto F. Kernberg contributes a chapter on “The Spectrum of Narcissistic Transferences,” which is replete with examples of different types of narcissistic patients, running the gamut from those who function on a “high, stable level,” to those who are at a “fluctuating, borderline level,” and finally to those who express “extreme non-depressive suicidality and self-destructiveness” (p. 88). Kernberg’s descriptions of these different narcissistic types are masterful, and one is likely to recognize, particularly, the narcissistic patients of borderline quality through Kernberg’s description of a combination of aggressiveness, arrogance, and incapacity for cognitive reflection.

For these and more disturbed patients, Kernberg recommends his approach of Transference-Focused Psychotherapy, or TFP, “whereby the therapist points out, at every point, the kind of relationship the patient’s experience is activating in the transference” (p. 85). The reader is more or less expected to be familiar with TFP; in fact, the strict parameters that pervade this form of treatment are not explained here. And, as fascinating as Kernberg’s article is, it does not focus on revenge (in fact, this is the chapter in which the word *revenge* does not appear), although rage, envy, and destructiveness are central features of the patients about whom Kernberg elaborates.

What follows are two applied psychoanalytic chapters concerning revenge. The first, by Eve Howell, is entitled “Three Literary Characters in Search of Revenge.” The author examines Euripides’s *Medea*, Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*, and Melville’s *Moby Dick*. Howell admits that any choice of representative literary works risks being arbitrary, but one would have hoped that *Hamlet*, such a central drama to Western culture, might have been one of them.

Regardless, Howell nicely begins her piece with a Freud quotation: “If you want to know more . . . enquire from your own experiences of life, or turn to the poets.”² She distills out of these character studies the common psychodynamic element of rage as a consequence of narcissistic injury, and she ends the piece with a quotation from Kohut, which says it all with reference to the pathological desire for revenge:

The need for revenge, for righting a wrong, for undoing a hurt by whatever means, and a deeply anchored, unrelenting com-

² Freud, S. (1933). *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. S. E., 22, p. 135.

pulsion in the pursuit of these aims which gives no rest to those who have suffered a narcissistic injury—these are features which are characteristic for the phenomena of narcissistic rage in all its forms and which sets it apart from other kinds of aggression. [Kohut quoted by Howell, p. 117³]

Of course, none of these literary character studies depicts the type of early childhood and developmental steps—explored in the child clinical studies in this collection—that lead to personalities in which narcissistic injury gives way to the desire for revenge. Instead, the characters appear as adults already full-blown in their revengeful tendencies.

A second applied psychoanalytic piece, by Rama Rao Gogineni and April Fallon, “The Ubiquitous Nature of Revenge,” explores the topic from a “biopsychocultural perspective” (p. 119). This free-ranging summary, which invokes everything from ancient Greek myths to Judeo-Christian traditions, to honor killings to romantic killings to school shootings, also brings in evolutionary speculations, brain studies, and chimpanzee studies (to name just a few). It is rather turgid and overwhelming, and concludes in a way that is somewhat grim and disturbing: “We view revenge as a deterrent of harmful behavior serving an evolutionary function. There is accumulating evidence for a biological and genetic basis Studies from social psychology suggest that the appropriateness of the revenge response varies depending upon perspective” (p. 142).

Because Gogineni and Fallon throw so many elements together, the clear exposition of a continuum from healthy to pathological revenge, with which Akhtar began the collection, is not apparent, and the authors’ conclusions are neither cogent nor entirely convincing.

Last, Henri Parens, in a synopsis of the book’s articles, returns in a refreshing way to theoretical concerns about the genesis of revenge as a characterological feature in early childhood development. He favors his own theory, which he calls “the multi-trends theory of aggression.” This theory posits as one of its trends that “*hostile aggression/destructiveness* is generated by (*excessive*) *psychic pain*” (p. 146, italics in original).

³ Kohut, H. (1972). Thoughts on narcissism and narcissistic rage. *Psychoanal. Study Child*, 27:360-400. Quotation is on p. 380.

While this seems to clothe the obvious in new language, it derives from a project begun in 1970 that incorporated 1,350 hours of observation of a group of ten psychologically healthy mothers and their sixteen newborns. The study extended over seven years, and the subjects were later followed up at nineteen, thirty-two, and thirty-seven years of age!

In reviewing the clinical cases in this book, Parens emphasizes the physical and psychic pain endured by the children described; he then challenges whether Freud's model of the "death instinct," favored by Kernberg, is explanatory of aggression. Not only does Parens contend that there is greater validity to his own theory of psychic pain, but he also suggests that, as a theory, the "death instinct" merely confirms the belief of some parents that an angry and aggressive child is "evil"; it fails to help them see that the child suffers from psychic pain and has a need to grow.

In this respect, Parens makes much of the importance of the child's development from birth to two years of age, contending that we have yet to fully appreciate the child's capacity to wonder and learn at an early age, and that traumas occur that can best be understood using a Mahlerian model (as in the case of Freeman's child patient, Chris, whose separation from his mother at six months threatened his sense of object constancy). However, Parens fails to leach out the particular phenomenon of "revenge" from the aggressiveness that can follow from such early narcissistic injury.

He then ends his essay by pulling back his lens and focusing on man's societal tendencies that speak of revenge, referencing Freud's discussion with Einstein on war.⁴ And on an optimistic note, Parens concludes that there is an upward trajectory in our social lives, so that the phenomenon of "an eye for an eye" is giving way to forgiveness. As an example of this, he cites an improvement in black/white race relations in the United States, as described by civil rights leader Julian Bond. It is very nice to read a psychoanalytic chapter that even mentions the Civil Rights Movement (this has happened much too infrequently in psychoanalytic literature, in my opinion) but, unfortunately, Parens's sense of a general upward trajectory—for which he cites only this one example—may be overly optimistic.

⁴ Freud, S. (1933). Why war? *S. E.*, 22.

The fact is—pulling the lens back further myself—I am writing this review shortly after the Charlie Hebdo and Jewish supermarket murders in Paris, the barbarous burning to death of a Jordanian pilot and the beheading of reporters by ISIS, the continued killings by Boko Haram of civilians in Nigeria, and the seventieth anniversary of the freeing of Holocaust survivors from Auschwitz. All these are symptoms of revenge acted out on a broad social scale.

The Kouachi brothers who killed at Charlie Hebdo were orphaned at twelve and fourteen when their mother died, their father having died years earlier; they grew up in a French orphanage under impoverished circumstances.⁵ Undoubtedly, early psychic traumas ensued for both of them. The studies in this book suggest how such trauma can lead to the desire for revenge. When a social movement or segments of a society (or even the majority of it) give way to aggression for perceived wrongs projected onto vulnerable people, those for whom revenge occupies an intrapsychic space can be pulled along and enlisted. Their need for revenge and the desire to act out their vengeful fantasies become increasingly and brutally malignant.

Revenge: Narcissistic Injury, Rage, and Retaliation is a significant examination of the effects of early narcissistic injury that leads to rage and sometimes to revenge. As such, and with its excellent case examples, it is to be recommended to clinicians. Although it also touches upon the broader societal forces that ensnare those whose developmental psychic traumas make them susceptible to vengeance, it does not succeed in truly addressing this process. It does try, however, and that is an important step.

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BEAUTY: CREATION OF A BEAUTIFUL SELF.

By Ellen Sinkman. Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, 2013. 173 pp.

In *The Psychology of Beauty: Creation of a Beautiful Self*, Ellen Sinkman draws on her years of clinical experience to highlight the complex nature of beauty and ideals surrounding it. She argues that fantasies about

⁵ Callimachi, R. & Yardley, J. (2015). From scared amateur to Paris slaughterer. *New York Times*, January 26, pp. 1, 14-15.