

To Dare or not to Dare? Questions about Terror in the Psychoanalytical field, or Goldilocks meeting Scheherazade¹

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*Q: I am wondering if there is a psychoanalytic way to the truth /
Bion: None whatever. Psychoanalysis is only a technical instrument, something we can make use of for any purpose we want...
It all depends on who is making use of it (Bion, 2005b, p.87)*

Robespierre, the father of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, declared to the French National Convention (1794) that ‘if the basis of a popular government in peacetime is virtue, its basis in a time of revolution is virtue and terror – virtue, without which terror would be barbaric; and terror, without which virtue would be impotent’. The bottom line seems to be: as long as there is *the way* of virtue, there will be a way to terror... or the other way around – ‘How is one to know what is growth-producing and what is poison for the mind?’ (Bion, 1990, p.47), when, ethically or insanely, each side believes in its own justifications, built on their perceived circumstances and felt emotional states?

Whenever any given culture feels its foundations and fundamental tenets seriously questioned by any other, it tends to consider itself a victim of terrorism and reacts to it with some kind of terror also, no matter how civilized or sophisticated it may

¹ Presented at the **XIX International Forum of Psychoanalysis**, 2016 (May 12-15), New York - **VIOLENCE, TERROR and, TERRORISM TODAY: PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVES** - hosted by the Post-graduate Psychoanalytic Society and the William Alanson White Society, under the auspices of the International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies.

seem. There's no monopoly on terror: each side has his own share of hate for the threatening stranger; each side projects their own fears to the unfamiliar other. In some way, and delusional as it may be, each side is always counter-attacking, and the other side's victims are always collateral damage, unfortunate but arbitrary means to justified ends. There's no monopoly on terror but human nature, and there's not really much one can do about this fight/flight basic assumption of human functioning (Bion, 1961), but to work as a group for cultural development – the one thing 'we may rest on the assurance [of] working against war' (Freud, 1933, p.215).

Working on 'Thoughts for the Times of War and Death' (Freud, 1915), Amaral Dias (2005a) regards Freud's concept of humans' cultural disposition, as forged on what he calls 'an ethics of the desiring subject': 'there's no ethics outside the erotic. The cultural disposition can only exist for those who are able to build an erotic link with reality' as only a 'transformative love opens up the subject to knowledge' (p.144-45), and goes on to conclude that 'true kindness is eroticizing the unknown' (p.147).

Thus, it is not any kind of cultural development that would work against war, as Freud (1933) attested to Einstein, but one that keeps on engaging in making love processes: that is, one crafting a triangular relationship between love, hate and knowledge (Amaral Dias, 1998, 2005a, 2005b), and daring to love the unknown, both in the sense of tolerance and care, but also having as a model the sexual relationship between minds – a container, a contained, and the transformed product of their intercourse, where emotional experiences can flourish in unpredictable ways, as different thoughts merge to germinate new ones (Bion, 1962, 1963, 1991; Ferro, 1998, 2006, 2009), resulting in a constant expansion of the mind which empowers a culture of reverie able to placate the culture of evacuation (Ferro, 2005).

In a dynamic field perspective, this culture of reverie develops primarily at, and is constantly evolving from, the bi-personal level of the analytic situation: *a two-way affair* (Bion, 1990) between analyst and patient, 'dealing with what occurs *between* the two instead of *about* [them]' (Momigliano, 1992, p.8), and requiring from the analyst 'a way of being in the session whereby [he/she] shares with the patient the 'construction of a meaning' on a strong dialogical basis' (Ferro, 2006, p.1).

As Bion reminds us, the psychoanalytic experience is about exploring 'what we do *not* know, not what we *do* know' (Bion, 1990, p.4). As such, both personalities present at (and forming) the analytic setting are facing each other's windows to the unconscious: the unknown atomic nucleus of the analytic field, from where turbulent protoemotions inevitably irradiate (Bion, 1976a, 1979) by projective identification,

in search of a container and transformation into dreams (Ferro, 2015). By this means, it is not possible to say accurately *who is the dreamer who dreams the dream and who is the dreamer who understands it* (Gortstein, 1981), as there is no substantial difference between analyst and patient – that is, other than the analyst’s responsibility for the process, keeping the field’s breathing in good shape, and doing his best not to impose his nightmares onto the patient, due to his lack of containment and negative capacity, which would result in negative reverie and transformation in hallucinosis (Barale & Ferro, 1992; Ferro, 1999, 2005, 2013), promoting evacuation.

GOLDILOCKS MEETING SCHEHERAZADE

To illustrate this radical bi-personal cultural process in the psychoanalytic field, where characters may be cast as functional aggregates (Bezoari & Ferro, 1989, 1991, 1992) – the shared product of both parties’ interaction, coming neither from the analyst nor from the patient alone, but rather being a creation of the field, and having the property of signaling its functioning at a given moment and location – let us resort to slightly transformed versions of two special fairy tales (Bettelheim, 1975): Goldilocks and the Arabian Nights.

Goldilocks is a stranger from the beginning to the end of the story: nothing is known about her but the fact that she comes out of the woods and to the woods she returns, scared by the Bears after daringly trespassing in their house and saucily using its contents. In between, we get to know her curiosity and considerations about what suits her best in the Bears’ house: some things are too big, too hot, too hard; others seem to be too small, too cold, too soft; but sometimes it hits the spot! On the other hand, the bears seem to be a well-structured group – or a well-defined personality – with its different aspects all in the right places, each one well aware of their position in relation to the others, and all of them knowing very well how they like things to be; they seem quite perfect, if not for their apparent lack of curiosity and revealed intolerance towards the little outlandish.

As for the Arabian Nights, they represent Scheherazade’s efforts to survive an Emir’s murderous projections: suffering from a love disgust, the Emir takes for himself a new virgin each night, never to let them see the light of the day again; to save herself, Scheherazade tries to keep the Emir interested in her stories, which she does not finish but rather transforms into a new story each night – one thousand and

one, as many as necessary for some transformation to occur. Scheherazade ends up healing the Emir, not only by her laborious storytelling, but also by allowing herself to become a part in their story, transforming the Emir's mistrust and hate for women into a passionate love for her.

Let us consider Goldilocks as a patient, lost in a dark and chilly place of fearful shadows – the primitive virgin woods of protoemotional states: not only a place from which she tries to come out, but also a place that, although without knowing it, she brings within herself and, as such, a place that she keeps on bumping into wherever she flees to. In her continuous (compulsive) unconscious self-search – which she calls wondering about, drifting away, or just running for no apparent reason – she finds herself at the door of tidy Dr. Bear's cozy house. Things are already pretty unbearable for Goldilocks, and she feels like she has nothing to lose: she might as well try Dr. Bear's promising nutritious competences and holding capacities – it might be seen as an abusive trespassing, but she hopes Dr. Bear can bear it, taking it just as a desperate sign of a need to be welcome. Curious, hungry and tired, she steps in uninvited, spreading unsolicited seeds from her dark woods into Dr. Bear's tidy world.

Dr. Bear, who has already everything in its due place, has no virgin soil available to bear the cultivation of a new and unknown seed. Rigidity doesn't allow him to tolerate Goldilocks' protoemotional projections: her need to be fed is felt as unbearable voracity; her need to trust, as a destructive envy; her need to dream, as attacks on his thinking capacity... Dr. Bear does not bear Goldilocks' trespassing in his structured and neat setting: he wakes her up from her dream with too much reality, unable to dream her *undreamt dreams and interrupted cries* (Ogden, 2005), pushing her to a flight back into her dark woods again, which are now even darker; terrorized, she can't but project and act in and out this unbearable nameless dread (Bion, 1962, 1984).

Let us now suppose that Goldilocks eventually meets Scheherazade, an analyst willing to use the *divan* not as a *place of custom*, but as one *from which to tell stories and collect poems* (antithetic meanings of the ancient Persian word *devan*, and later Arabic *diwan*). By facing Goldilocks' dreadful protoemotions and, although trembling inside, consenting herself to take them in, she tries to figure out an unrepresented void (Botella & Botella, 2005) left in her by Goldilocks' expressions of her unbearable nameless dread. Scheherazade's partaken storytelling sagacity allowed for a place where 'dense violent dreams, dreamed with soul and body' (Levi, 1993, p.10) could be re-dreamed (Ogden, 1997, 2005), and rendered in detoxified lively

narratives, permitting Goldilocks to signal (Bion, 1970, 1976a, 2005a; Ferro, 1998, 1999, 2006) whether it was too hot, too cold or just well-adjusted for her 'to return, to eat, to tell the story' (Levi, *ibid.*).

In a way, analyst and patient are both like Goldilocks coming out of the woods, hoping to find a place to rest and curiously trying out what suits them better of the other's equipment. There's one difference though, which comes with the analyst's responsibility for the analytic process, as mentioned above: the analyst has to be a kind of Goldilocks able to hold his curiosity, weariness and hunger, and wait at the patient's door for his invitation to get in; nevertheless, he should let his Goldilocks explore his own Dr. Bears' house and, at the same time, holding back his desire to kick her out. In the same way, both analyst and patient can act Dr. Bear's fearful neatness, trying to leave things just as they always have been: loving what they already know, disdaining the unknown.

As for Scheherazade, she will be present on the field accounting for the analyst's and patient's constant expansion of their minds, *alpha-dream-working* out (Bion, 1991; Amaral Dias, 1998), the emotional experience of their meeting, and transforming it into elements suitable to feel, dream and think, mutually developing a culture of reverie.

FRED

I would like now to introduce Fred, a 15-year-old boy at the time we met. He was sent to me by a forensic pediatrician after some episodes of violent bursts of rage against his school's staff, whom he accused of being unfair to him, although he offered no explanation concerning how or why they were being so. The pediatrician apologized for sending such a case with a high probability of disruptive acting in incidents and of dropping out. Nevertheless, she assured me that my physical appearance of a strong man would be a good help to restrain him; she was also sure that I would not be afraid of him – I was not... until then.

In a previous interview with Fred's mother, I was told that he came with her from an African island at the age of six, under the pretext of finding a better education; his father could not join them due to not having a work permit – or so Fred was told at the time. In reality, as he accidentally came to discover later, his father was caught raising another family, and for that he was expelled in a way from their island by

Fred's mother's clan, almost at the same time of Fred's departure. Although Fred's father's way of life was kept a secret from him, his mother's family displayed an open animosity towards any kind of connection between Fred and his father, namely their shared interest in drawing.

Fred seemed a grumpy boy indeed. Very tall for his age, with a pleasant complexion, he displayed tense facial expressions and uncanny movements that somehow gave him a wild, primitive look. Nevertheless, he usually kept his face shut down, avoiding eye contact, and scarcely reacting to my attempts at communication with laconic roars for no, howls for yes, and something in between for whatever.

For a long period, there was almost nothing going on in the sessions but a turbulent silence – at least that was my indigestible sensation, because silence seemed to be a light meal for Fred. With this uproar on my guts, I did begin to feel a kind of childish belly ache when Fred's hour was approaching, and it was not uncommon to find myself wondering if he would come to the session... Not surprisingly, Fred started to arrive late, and occasionally missed some sessions. One of those days he looked me in the eye and asked, in a calm and clear voice, if he could come only every other session. Recognizing a peculiar unison in our feelings, I answered laughing that he indeed could say more than yes and no after all, even if it was to say no to a session, but yes to another; I was happy to know that our time together was not totally lost and that there was still space for us to improve. Then I asked him what would he do on those times he would like not to come, and Fred told me how sometimes he would lose track of time while drawing... I asked why we couldn't use our time together to draw? And we did.

Fred was very meticulous and cautious with his drawings, almost not even scratching the paper, and would frequently use the rubber to retouch what was almost imperceptible. Each drawing would take days to get done... but in time, smoothly overlapping layer after layer, his traces would become thicker and darker, and something perceptible would emerge on the paper. I realized that this would have to be my approach to him as well: with the lightest and unsaturated touches, giving us time and space to gradually scratch our emotional experience of each other, letting them get thicker in our minds, until something meaningful would evolve (Bion, 1970; Ferro, 1999; Levine, Reed, & Scarfone, 2013).

From Fred's history, I had a fairly good idea of what sharing his drawings with me could represent to him. But I also felt that any mention of it at that time would be felt like a sharp pencil tearing up the paper where things were still being forged. It would

have been like roughly waking him up from a longing dream to the harsh reality of his painful void (Grotstein, 1981; Ferro, 2015; Civitarese, 2014; Ferro & Civitarese, 2015); once again, a sudden *diabolization* (as an inversion of *sym-bolization*) of his idealized father – a too cruel truth given in a too crude manner, like a paradisiac island abruptly polluted by a ship that could not contain its oil, causing its conditions to bear life to be catastrophically lost. To transform those oily killer contents (Ferro, Civitarese, Colovà et al., 2010; Ferro, 2011; Civitarese, 2014) into lively components of a dream-land, would require of me to nestle them, keeping the turmoil to myself, safeguarding our shared experience (Momigliani & Robutti, 1992) – and so I silently stood by him.

Fred's first drawing was a portrayal of the actual window in front of our working table, with its view to a long hotel frontage full of small windows – actually we can also see a square between my building and the hotel, but Fred's representation of it was only of windows face-to-face. My first impression was that it represented his wish to go out, as if he was feeling enclosed behind the window; but why, then, would he draw it closed, why wouldn't he just do the street, why the inside facing the outside? It was really my own thoughts that were enclosed in my mind; it was hard to figure it out and to contain my wish to comment on his drawing and ask him questions about it... It then came to my mind that maybe Fred was showing how he saw me – the face-to-face of windows, where I would be a (too) complex mind full of windows to look through, each one leading to different thoughts and emotions... or was I a kind of hotel where he could rest, but also having his intimacy unsettled by lots of other guests unknown to him? This idea somehow brought my attention to an almost invisible (negative) aspect about the window: it is a metal container framing an inner core of glass which, while giving the appearance of fortitude and rigidity, could easily get broken into countless cutting pieces if too much pressure was made upon it.

Hitchcock's *Rear Window* came up to my mind: terrorism happens when our projected fears find no transformation outside but are, instead, confirmed by reality and, thus, returned intensified as terror – an explosive nameless dread (Bion, 1962, 1984). I told Fred how his drawing reminded me of Hitchcock's movie; he hadn't seen it, so I told him the plot. And then, our rear window gradually introduced us to other views, and we began to tell each other stories about being pursued and carrying inside the pain of others' emotional distress and unavailability. It was as if a window was being opened to let in some fresh air and renew the heavily saturated ambience of the fight/

flight dynamics (Bion, 1961, 1970) which Fred had felt almost his entire life – including our pre-history, since not only my initial talk with his psychiatrist had contaminated my soil, preventing Fred's seeds from springing out, but also some elements of his history clashed with some aspects of mine... It was not only an exhausted soil but also a heavy frost we had to deal with to sow our crop.

Sometime after, Fred started talking about the things he most liked to do, besides drawing. One of those things was playing poker, although he had only tried it on the computer. The consulting room became a kind of casino where we tested our nerves bluffing and daring deadly *all-ins* – it was an opportunity to experience and express aggressiveness without violence, and to integrate competition with cooperation, as we would try and discuss different strategies to defeat each other. It was also a smooth way to get in touch with *bad hands*, deception and disillusion; learning to wait, and to foster our tolerance for the unknown (Britton, 2011; Bell, 2011)... but most of all, we were learning to get inside each other's heads, figuring out each other's mental functioning, and having fun with it!

But Fred's secret treasure – which he confessed to be a kind of addiction censored by his mother – was to watch the adventures of the Japanese *anime* character Naruto. As he explained to me, Naruto was born in a village threatened by a nine-tailed monster fox, whom his father, a martial arts champion, dared to fight for his fellows' protection. The monster was too strong to be fought conventionally, and Naruto's father had to cast a dangerous magic transference of the monster's powers to his new born son. He succeeded in killing the fox, but at the expense of his own life, as he died of exhaustion, and condemning his son to be the carrier of the nine-tailed fox's sign – earning not the villagers' respect and gratitude, but their disdain. Naruto grew up surrounded by his fellows' mistrust, always feeling rejected and misunderstood, no matter his efforts to become a masterful warrior fighting against injustice to earn their admiration. Fred cried, deeply touched and beholden, when I acknowledged the links between Naruto's history and his own.

A new phase of drawings came afterwards, mostly portraying Naruto and other *anime* characters, whose adventures he would tell me. But in one of these animated sessions, Fred drew a different kind of scene: on the right side of the paper, a frontal cut of a jungle, where we could see a medley of roots growing into trees that seemed to be fighting for their place in the sun; the jungle was divided by a river which ended in a water fall, flanked on the right side by trees, but with nothing on its left side but a white shore. For weeks on end, Fred seemed distressed, anxiously trying to draw

something on the white shore, but nothing seemed to be good enough to hold the waters of his jungle's suspended river. As I said to him that the void side would be for things yet to come, Fred left the drawing aside and started a new one: in a childish style – unlike his usual technique – he made a tropical island drifting on a calm sea at sunset/rise; on the island, under a palm tree with coconuts, a little monkey was being fondled by a smiling lion. Without scavenging the past nor the present's yet unbearable feelings, violent protoemotions were able to be contained, detoxified and transformed – sublimated, instead of dominated or even domesticated – and then gradually integrated into a narrative able to re-signify Fred's sign of the fox into a calm and a secure island where child-like emotions could grow safely again.

One of Fred's last drawings – before he assumed a more conventional *talking-cure* mode – is a good representation of our shared process of daring to try emotional contact, of daring mutual exploration and to transform (re-tell) his history from our stories: in a comic-like plot, Fred drew several characters, in different scenarios and actions, with blank dialogue balloons coming out from their mouths and heads. Fred's void – a black hole soaked up with rage and revenge feelings by his father's double murder – could finally come to shore and be transformed into a smaller and more containable *emptiness*, in the form of unsaturated blank dialogue balloons, potential carriers of thinkable emotional experiences, available for publication.

Daring to go *all-in* in this poker game of dreams, Fred's blank balloons soundly illustrate 'an analysis that looks to the future, focusing not on the past and on content, but on the transformation of the patient's apparatus for thinking – I care little about what' (Ferro, 2011, p.9).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I believe that in cases such as Fred's, *voidish* sufferings are caused by their brittle roots – social and cultural roots, but mainly the feeling of having, or not having, flourishing affective roots in the other's internal world – and are compounded by the weak container and transformative skills of their macro and micro cultural environment. This makes them dangerously vulnerable and susceptible to the influence of perverse organizations, such as gangs and fanatical groups. Such organizations can offer them a sense of value and virtue (Wright-Neville & Smith, 2009): a kind of defensive exoskeleton, built on feelings of resentment and anger, making up for their

friable identities, in exchange for a permit to use their violent potential for the latter's treacherous purposes.

Pablo Picasso once said that if everyone would paint, political re-education would not be necessary (Ashton, 1972) – and painting is but only one way of dreaming. He also said, speaking about his *Guernica*, that painting is not for decorative purposes; it is a defensive and an offensive weapon against the enemy (ibid.). Well... dreams may also serve – and fortunately they do it a lot – to make life better looking and more interesting; and just for the sake of satisfaction, as pleasure gives us the strength to carry on the hard work of living.

But dreams' wish fulfillment and aesthetic functions (Grotstein, 1981, 2007, 2013; Civitarese, 2013, 2014) do not diminish in any way their fundamental defensive and offensive uses, as illustrated by some of Bion's war memories, which came later to be central in his formulation of a theory of thinking and on his model of the container/contained: it suffices to recall his description on how bombardments have the purpose of attacking the soldiers' capacity to think and to stand together, and how later he described similar processes in psychotic functioning (Bion, 1961, 1984; Brown, 2013; Szykierski, 2013) – by attacking the emotional link between objects, emotions and thoughts (Bion, 1962, 1984, 1970), psychotic functioning does not bear any other principle than a evacuative blind obedience – fanaticism, as it were, a dogmatism averse to cultural diversity (Amaral Dias, 2005b; Britton, 2015).

Notwithstanding all the demographic, sociological, economic, political and religious ingredients from which a terrorist (or fanaticism, radical rigidity) may be cooked, the essential ingredient, the one that blends them together, is a deficiency or absence on the dreaming function of the mind – the fundamental instrument to transform the concrete reality of *an eye for an eye* into an eye for community service, restitution, reparation, a ball game.... The chance to develop a psychoanalytic function of the mind (Bion, 1962, 1963), daring to go on dreaming and constantly expanding the unconscious (Ferro, 2002) ought to be our contribution, as psychoanalysts, to a cultural development that works against war: a culture of reverie, where the love for the unknown is not only possible, but indeed cherished and nurtured.

In our psychoanalytic micro culture, as well as in our macro socio-political stage, it has been, and may continue to be (will probably be forever and ever more), a long, long time coming, but we know a change is gonna come (Cooke, 1964) whenever one dares to shout 'I have a dream!' (King, 1963).

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Resumo / Abstract

To Dare or not to Dare? Questions about Terror in the Psychoanalytical Field, or Goldilocks Meeting Scheherazade

From a dynamic field's perspective, the presence of terror in the analytical encounter should be faced as a product of both parties' interaction on a stage where their mutual projective and introjective identifications interplay in such a way that it is difficult to say precisely who the terrorist is and who is the terrorized. At different levels of experience and by different ways of expression, both patient and analyst will be facing the unbearable and the unknown of terrifying emotional experiences about their potentially catastrophic (transformational) encounter; both having to decide either to evade it, giving way to terror, or daring to transform it telling the story (Primo Levi). Goldilocks and Scheherazade are proposed as fairy tales' characters that can be casted by the analyst as useful instruments or metaphors to think over his/her responsibility in this process of telling the story, fostering the process of working through the analyst's position in the field both, as a terrorized and as a terrorist, enabling the field's capacity to transform terrifying experiences in fairy tales.

Keywords: Terror, terrorist and terrorized, terrifying emotional experience, analytic field, storytelling.

Ousar ou Não Ousar? Questões acerca do Terror no Campo Psicanalítico, ou Cachinhos Dourados Encontrando Scheherazade

A partir da perspectiva de um campo dinâmico, a presença do terror no encontro analítico deve ser encarada como um produto de ambas as partes em interação, num palco onde as suas mútuas identificações, projetivas e introjetivas, interagem de uma tal forma que é difícil dizer precisamente quem é o terrorista e quem é o aterrorizado. Em diferentes níveis de experiência e por diferentes formas de expressão, ambos, o paciente e o analista, irão confrontar o insuportável e o desconhecido de experiências emocionais aterrorizantes, acerca do seu encontro potencialmente catastrófico (transformacional); ambos tendo de decidir ou evadir-se, dando caminho ao terror; ou desafiando transformar isso, contando a história (Primo Levi). Cachinhos Dourados e Scheherazade são propostas como personagens de contos de fada que podem ser selecionadas pelo analista, como instrumentos ou metáforas úteis, para pensar sobre a responsabilidade dele ou dela neste processo de contar a história; forjando o processo de trabalhar a posição do analista no campo, no duplo sentido, como um aterrorizado e como um terrorista, e possibilitando a capacidade do campo para transformar experiências aterrorizantes em contos de fadas.

Palavras-chave: Terror, terrorista e aterrorizado, experiência emocional aterrorizante, campo analítico, contar histórias.