

More Than a Second Hand Emotion: Pedagogies of the Heart and Head ¹

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Preliminaries

A couple of points need to be made before I begin the paper proper. First, I do not have any particular expertise in psychoanalysis, and therefore my presence on the panel is necessarily as an outsider to the discipline. I was a primary teacher briefly before becoming a university teacher and researcher, and my engagement with teaching has therefore been mainly with adults. My focus on gender and racial inequalities in education has led me to seek for political and material (rather than inherent or psychic) explanations and solutions. Also or perhaps as a consequence, my response to the ‘I’ word (as in love) has been bounded by cynicism; as I write, heightened evermore by the romantic gush and Hallmark mentality of forthcoming Valentine’s Day.

Two autobiographical events offer exemplars of my perspective thus far. First in my late thirties and having “fallen in love” not for the first time but perhaps more reflectively than previously, I sought to look for scholarly explanations for the emotions I felt. The book that I turned to because it seemed best to reflect my political standpoint, was the wonderfully entitled *The Left and the Erotic*. This is a 1983 collection of essays which examines the relationship between political activism and personal relationships, and between sexual politics and left politics. Significantly, the book draws on literature, and historical and political writing rather than psychoanalysis, which is rejected as generally failing to address inequalities in power relationships. The book was neither erotic nor particularly revealing so I put it to one side, though was persuaded by its general message, which was to understand the self - and love - as a social (and hetero-normative, Raymond, 1986) rather than authentic, personal process. Like Lather, I rejected the “romantic view of the self as unchanging, authentic essence” in favour of “a concept of the ‘self’ as a conjunction of diverse social practices produced and positioned socially, without an underlying essence” (Lather, 1991: 82).

The second event is more recent, and concerns a different kind of love; that of the mother. A couple of years ago I attended my son’s wedding. Overall it was a lovely occasion – the sun shone, the bride was beautiful and all went as planned. However, one problem was the speech that I gave. I offered to do it because in the UK at least, these are generally undertaken by male family members and I wanted to challenge this. Also I wanted to offer a ‘loving’ tribute to my son. There seemed to be little problem with this request, though a slight puzzlement as to why I wanted to do it – others prospective speakers were more reluctant. I made the speech as planned but was all the while aware of how wrong it sounded – my son was embarrassed, no-one knew quite how to respond and it seemed to cast a shadow on my enjoyment of the rest of the celebrations. Only recently did I have the opportunity to see the “wedding video” with my speech in full, and was able to revisit that uncomfortable experience. What I saw was a well-crafted and well-presented, “loving” speech, perhaps a mite too long, but otherwise the best of a not too brilliant bunch. My interpretation of my discomfort was that, as a female talking about love, I had indeed interrupted the predominant wedding discourse

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of fathers and male peers talking “laddishly” mainly about men or soon-to-be-given-away daughters. But, after reading *Love’s Return*, and related literature, other explanations come to mind; for example, perhaps I wanted to maintain a hold on a relationship that seemed to be slipping away or to take centre stage in an event for which I was marginal.

So, following these two personal encounters with the ‘I’ word, which situate me so-to-speak within the particular discourse of this panel, I now turn to my task which is “to re-center questions of curriculum and pedagogy in relation to the subjective lives of children and teachers”, using psychoanalysis as one lens “that allows us to engage a complicated view of love, hatred, passion, aggression and learning”. As instructed, I draw in particular on the forthcoming book *Love’s Return: Psychoanalytic Essays on Childhood, Teaching and Learning*², as well as the film *Born to Brothels: Calcutta’s Red Light Kids*, and other readings including *The Left and the Erotic* and my own forthcoming book on using and interpreting auto/biography in educational settings (with Lucy Townsend). My presentation may in fact be seen an extended book review of *Love’s Return*.

Previous Doubts

The first thing that happened, on reading *Love’s Return*, was an encouragement to revisit my own childhood and life experiences (hence the above stories). I decided to re-read *The Left and the Erotic* which offers a perspective on my recent past, and an ideological positioning seemingly long gone. Sexual freedom for men and women is the central interest. For example, the feminist sociologist Elizabeth Wilson argues that the Freudian view of the intensity of passion as arising out of taboos aimed at its prevention, poses a problem for feminists. “Such an idea is an anathema to modern feminism, which has been based on the belief that female sexuality should be unleashed and should be no longer taboo, no longer repressed” (Wilson, 1983: 47). Generally, discussion of eroticism and sexuality in the book draws on Marxist discussion of sexual libertarianism, and women’s right to sexual expression and freedom. Freud’s ideas tend to be interpreted somewhat simplistically, for example: “[men are seen] as looking for their mothers in their lovers, while women remain unsure whether they are looking for their fathers or their mothers” (Phillips, 1983: 27).

Cook, in the same volume, suggests that psychoanalysis and Marxism are antithetical, presenting a “clash between utopia and melancholy, between the hopeful and the fed-up, between those who think there’s still more to be done and those who think too much has been done already” (Cook, 1983: 88; see also Craib, 1994). Cook further sees the history of sexuality as the history of its repression, and best challenged in the work of Lacan and Foucault. For example, Foucault’s notion of repression as a stimulus is “one amongst many ways in which we have learnt to be garrulous about sex” (Cook, 1983: 89). Cook concludes that sexual liberation, was, perhaps, the main, ultimately disappointing, outcome of the ‘revolutionary times’ of the 1960s and 1970s insofar as “liberating sex, then, becomes the bad faith of a radicalism incapable of delivering its social and political tasks” (Cook, 1983: 110).

I also reflected on Kate Millett’s (1971) crushing critique, read decades earlier, of Freud’s representation of women as mentally and physically inferior to men, and essentially defined by their lack of penis. “Is that all there is” (to be said about psychoanalysis), as Friedman (1963) famously wrote about being a woman. Or could there be, I pondered, a possibility of theoretical restoration? Certainly Millett missed out on much of might be considered radical and potentially liberating for women (and men) in Freud’s writings, such as Freud’s generally

² Page numbers for *Love’s Return: Psychoanalytic Essays on Childhood, Teaching and Learning* are taken from the manuscript sent to me at the beginning of 2006

positive disposition towards women; the openness of psychoanalysis to women as a profession at a time when many were closed; and its interesting “new” ideas about women, mothers, and childhood (Milton, Polmeier and Fabricius, 2004). In fact, Milton et al suggest that, disappointed with their movement’s conscious-raising techniques, feminists are now turning to psychoanalysis as a more powerful conceptual tool for understanding how patriarchal forces and unequal gender relations become *internalised*.

My reading of *Love’s Return* has also led me to re-consider recent work on pedagogy. I argue that given what I see as the “ruined”, fragmented but still productive state of feminism and the insight that it offers us, feminist principles of practice or specific strategies aimed at democracy and empowerment, are untenable. Instead, I suggest that we can only approach pedagogy in terms of aspiration and imaginary, and develop dispositions which bring us closer to that imaginary. These dispositions resemble what Bourdieu (1993) terms “habitus,” that is, a means by which individuals produce action that is both predictable, arising out of specific social and cultural contexts, and unpredictable due to the variety of circumstances that confront them. For feminist educators, therefore, dispositions are premised on their positioning – including the form of feminism each aspires to, the structural inability of teachers to give away power, the situatedness and perceptions of students, and the importance of resistance and risk-taking (Weiner, forthcoming). What light can *Love’s Return* cast on these notions of disposition and pedagogy?

Current Excitements

In trying to give a sense of the broad range of articles in what is a lengthy book, I here pick out a number of themes in *Love’s Return* which have particular relevance for me in the light of the issues raised above: on psychoanalysis itself, the role of the mother in teaching, pedagogy as productive, and the left’s relationship to psychoanalysis.

On psychoanalysis

I have learnt that psychoanalysis is not a unitary body of knowledge but rather beset by schisms and divisions which both send it in many different directions and also enrich it as each disagreement and new perception are fed back into the mainstream. An attraction also, is its rich potential for self-analysis and autobiography. This is not seen as self indulgence or overly subjective (and therefore unscientific) but rather, as indispensable to the training of practitioners who need to experience the process of therapy if they are to be effective with their clients. However, my own life’s pathway does not easily lend itself to psychoanalytical theorising. I was brought up as an only child by a single mother, with an absent (though not dead or estranged) father. If the Oedipus complex indeed leads the daughter to seek to get rid of her mother and take her place with her father (Eng: 173), what can psychoanalysis offer to my understanding of my own sexual and emotional development, which lacked these structures and male presence? However there are other concepts raised in the book that seem more fruitful.

First, psychoanalytic perspectives on *narcissism* (self-love) suggest how actions may be selfish and unselfish simultaneously. Boldt (204) argues that “narcissism” in psychoanalytic theory is a positive attribute: “It is, in fact, an absolutely necessary prerequisite to the possibility of loving or even being able to perceive others. Narcissism is the possession of an internal self that allows us the possibility of connecting externally or, in other words, of having a relationship”. So, a strong, confident and loving sense of self is important to the maintenance of relationships, and attempts like mine at the wedding to take centre stage may

be interpreted also as an attempt to hold on to an important relationship that is in the process of changing.

Second, *object relations* theory offers interesting insights, for example, as a means of understanding a child situated within a field of relationships of which the child is a part. It is not associated with objectification, as I thought previously, but rather, according to Grumet (281), enables the focus to be shifted “from [inherent] drives to the social fields that surround the infant, offering relationships that anchor the infant in the world.” So since, in my own work, social and environmental influences have been paramount to successful (or unsuccessful) learning milieus, this branch of psychoanalysis seems to be supporting a shift in emphasis from individual drives, and cognitive and emotional developmental approaches to more social forms of learning and being.

Third, *transference* and *counter-transference* are key concepts in psychoanalysis involving love and desire. As Cohler & Galatzer-Levy (334 & 335) note:

Desire in analysis is usually discussed in terms of transference – the meanings that analysands attribute to analysts – and counter-transference – the meanings that analysts attribute to analysands... Transference presents a paradox: it is the dynamic underlying the analytic treatment...but often leads to enactments of the analysand’s experience of the analyst (repeating early life experience in the analysis)... than remembering and working-through early experience”

Erotized (or erotic) transference refers to the analysand’s conscious desire directed at the analyst, which Cohler & Galatzer-Levy (338) argue, can be source of resistance or of encouragement to participate in analysis. As they say “Love... is dual edged” The aim for the teacher, guided by the analytic context, is to develop “good analytic listening” involving the capacity to listen and respond emotionally *without being overwhelmed* [original emphasis]”. Cohler & Galatzer-Levy (342) suggest that transference and countertransference are everywhere in teaching and learning and are “often at the heart of the student’s desire to engage and learn”. As several others also point out in the book, it is difficult for students to learn anything in passionless, de-eroticised and undesirable settings, as in many schools today. In fact, the opposite provides greater opportunities for learning but also perhaps greater risks and dangers.

Role of the mother in teaching

An important emphasis in *Love’s Return* is that, at least to some extent, teaching as women’s work should be viewed as a phenomenon meriting exploration rather than as a naturalised assumption; that is, that they are “naturally” more caring and nurturant. The latter was a viewpoint that I was deeply critical of while in Sweden (Weiner and Kallós, 2000; see also Fischman, 2000). As Salvio points out “the metaphor of the ‘good enough mother’ is inadequate for educators because neither the mother nor the teacher can remain continually attuned, placid, contained, or unflappable.” Nor can the student learn “without experiencing conflict, and a loss of equilibrium” (Salvio:114).

Significantly, Pitt uses the concept of “matricide” meaning the killing of one’s mother, to convey in a psychoanalytic sense “an act that belongs to fantasy but is no less violently felt than if an actual murder has taken place” (Pitt: 119). Pitt argues that matricide involves both the “trauma of history that inaugurates women’s social status as inferior and subject to the laws and knowledge made for and by men” (121), and the trauma of subjectivity tied up with

the fantasy of the loss of the mother (drawing on object relations and the role of mother in infancy). So, my reading of this suggests that the female teacher is beset with both a gender-subordinate status and as the target of a whole set of emotions, concerning the separation of the child from the mother. Thus, it can be argued that, in theoretical terms, the woman teacher occupies a space wholly different from her male counterparts, not only in terms of status but also as a replacement, substitute or erased mother. This is a substantially richer interpretation than has been available previously.

Pedagogy as productive

Given my suspicion as denoted earlier, of prescriptive principles for pedagogy, what does psychoanalysis offer here? A number of possibilities are proposed in the book. For example, Salvio suggests that Anne Sexton developed a pedagogy of “reparation” as a teacher engaged in the study of her own problem attachments. Because her pedagogy was overlaid with emotions drawing on grief, sorrow, guilt, rage and horror, it is argued that Sexton offers her students an alternative way of thinking about pedagogy as merely presenting “familiar images of ‘good enough mothers’ who care for and nurture their students at the expense of their own subjectivities” (Salvio: 113-4). A pedagogy of reparation allows us the glimpse of the darker side of the human spirit which nevertheless offers an important window on the world, as well as on individual subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

Pedagogies are also seen as associated with love. For example, Cohler & Galatzer-Levy (328) maintain that “the best teachers love what they teach and love working with students” while Grumet says that if “we love to read... we also read in order to love...[because] the absence of the beloved creates the space that texts fill” (282-3). So, pedagogy may involve a passionate commitment to filling, emotionally and intellectually, spaces left by loved ones, and also a boundary crossing between the child and adult/parent. Gus, the teacher in Grumet’s story, occupies a space that is “both private and public, home and office...He gives her (the child) the symbolic power to create the transitional object that spans the distance between utter presence and total absence. He is the one who shows her how to encode the relation that has given her the word” (301-2).

Pedagogies also address loss. They fill the spaces vacated by loved ones as we have seen, and only gain potency when they exceed norm-based expectation. In literacy, for example, Silin (306) maintains that “the curriculum as text, becomes pleasurable when it exceeds social utility, leaves behind the familiar and well-rehearsed, and moves into uncharted territories, where loss, discomfort, playfulness – even sexuality – can be fully expressed”.

Psychoanalysis and classroom education are thus viewed as similar in several ways. “Both rely on the emotional bonds to promote development” (Cohler & Galatzer-Levy 327); and in both, passionate learning can lead to transference and positive narcissism.

The left’s relationship to psychoanalysis

I have a long-term interest in understanding how practice and politics intermesh, in particular, educational progressivism, feminist and left politics. As indicated earlier, the ideological left of *The Left and the Erotic* exists now only in the historical imagination. Ideas expressed seem naïve and outdated. A recent BBC television series *Lefties*³, which focuses respectively on

³ In the three-part TV series, Vanessa Engle revisits the era when the extreme Left was a serious and significant political force that believed it could change the world for the better. Weaving together interviews and archive footage, each film relives a different aspect of the Left in Britain in the 1970s and 80s (BBC, 2006).

the revolutionary squatters' movements, radical feminism and the Left press mainly in England in the 1970s and 1980s, likewise offers a nostalgic impression of the unrealisable politics and idealistic views of the period. Such views, I find highly redolent of the passions of my youth though no longer seriously tenable as a present-day politics. I favour now complexity rather than simplistic rhetoric, including that which refers to the mind; and also social democracy as opposed to revolution.

As Boldt points out, love has an ideological dimension. Whether one is in love with a person or with a group, falling in love is falling into ideology where "ideology provides the very foundation for an individual to conceive of him/herself in relation to a community" (Cheng: 156-7, quoted in Boldt:195-6). Significantly, psychoanalysis seems to have responded to the criticism of its failure to address unequal power relations in the therapeutic setting, by showing a greater concern "about sexual exploitation arising from unequal power relationships" (Cohler & Galatzer-Levy: 341).

Milton et al (2004: 89) point out that, depending on ideological viewpoint, psychoanalytic theory and practice have been seen as variously liberating, authoritarian, conformist, radical, patriarchal and sexist, revolutionary, reactionary and/or elitist, though Frosh (1999) adds that this is as much to do with which version of psychoanalysis is preferred as the social and political implications of a unified science or discipline.

The Marxist criticism that psychoanalysis is non-political and inaccessible to the practice of progressivism, in terms of aiming to improve the world, remains. As Cook wrote over twenty years ago:

Psychoanalytic sexuality remains inaccessible to practice.....as the dialectic between knowing the world and changing it. In so far as the conception is, or should be, at the core of a marxist politics, psychoanalytic sexuality is outside politics. It is not amenable to a political will, although it can take that will and make it into a vehicle of its own sublimated expression (Cook, 1983: 88).

Summing Up

My response to *Love's Return*, then, is first that it challenges (my) previously held conceptions of love as merely an outcome of socialisation, hetero-reality (Raymond, 1986) property relationships and inequalities of power; and nothing more than a second, third or fourth-hand emotion. Rather, here love (and hate) is presented as a presence or absence, a passion, embodiment and/or displacement, and an erotic which has a place in learning, whether in pre-school, elementary or high school, university or in therapeutic situations. Second, the book has strengthened my realisation of pedagogy as in one sense as an impossibility, particularly if limited by the latest specifications of government policy. But pedagogy can also be a fundamental force for good, if it is able to persuade students to aspire to the unknown in their learning.

My (provisional) evaluation of psychoanalysis as presented in the book is therefore that is something educators should know more about, though seems more a philosophy than science of the mind, which also offers a rich source of narratives and interpretative possibilities for educators in their task of understanding the child's (and student's) relationship to his/her teacher, and the settings in which teaching and learning take place.

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