

Thinking about preoccupations with the holocaust in the life of a child-analyst

Erna Furman Popper 1926-2002

Erna Furman, born in 1926 in Vienna was a distinguished child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, admired as a teacher, supervisor and a productive writer of many articles and several books on normal and pathological early child development and parenthood. As a prominent member and later president of the Association of Child Psychoanalysis, the ACP, she contributed on the world wide spreading of child analysis.

Her psychological-medical-analytical career started after the war at the London University and her training with Anna Freud at the Hampstead Clinic. In 1952, invited by Anny Katan, she moved to Cleveland Ohio, where she met her future husband Robert Furman, and where she worked for almost 50 years at the Hanna Perkins Center for Child Development.

Titles of some of her books: *A child's parent dies; Helping young children grow; On being and having a mother.*: as a sixteen years old adolescent girl she was captured in the Theresienstadt (Terezin) concentration camp where she arrived from Prague in October 1942 and left May 1945, from age 16 to almost 19 working as 'Betreuerin' (caregiver) in a children's home, L 318. Terezin was a Nazi showcase of peaceful and intellectual living that screened the continuous deportations to the exterminations camps. In Terezin Erna's mother died, her aunt and grandmother were deported and murdered in Auschwitz.

In Terezin she met the Bauhaus-artist and art therapist Friedl Dicker-Brandeis who gave lessons to the children till the date of her deportation to Auschwitz, Oct.1944. The two women became close friends. Erna, who loved painting and drawing, assisted Friedl's teaching and helped to keep the children's work carefully signed and dated. She preserved her personal sketchbook and diary – with many annotations of the *Freizeitgestaltung* (cultural activities) and drawings from Terezin all her life. Those materials show her undeniable artistic talent, particularly for portraiture. Only during the very last years of her life she came to speak about the so far hidden period. She even joined Elena Makarova in Cleveland, 2001 who curated a world-wide exposition about Friedl. Not only she brought her drawings to Makarova and gave permission to show them, she also came out with her recollections and only a few months before her death even consented to publish them.

The extremely complicated life of Erna Furman- Popper shows up many phenomena that are symptomatic – even in the life of a psychoanalyst - for the working through of holocaust-experiences and gives rise to many questions.

--First of all those questions consider the choice of her profession, - her (pre)occupation with experiences of loss of little children.

--What we can learn, re-evaluating Furman's work on the child-parent interaction, about the inter-relational effects of personal history on scientific development in general.

--How can we consider the psychobiographic factor in the life of Erna Furman in the context of common post-war symptoms of late-western society, - the many forms of friction, caused by transgenerational traumata.

Many materials (drawings, photographs, texts) and theoretical points of view can be presented to give support to this discussion.

summary

Erna Furman-Popper (1926-2002) a well-known child-analyst, focussing on loss-experiences, worked at Hanna Perkins for almost fifty years.

In the last year of her life, being very ill, she came out with holocaust-experiences, from Theresienstadt, drawings she made with children, diary-notations.

What can we learn from her hidden life-story in the psychic and scientific developmental sense?