

COWAP Conference - September, 2012, Genoa

Lesley Bell, Lesley Caldwell and Julia Utting (BPA candidate) attended a conference sponsored by the IPA Committee on Women and Psychoanalysis, COWAP, on the topic of “Women and Creativity” in Genoa. The event was a lively coming together of approximately 250 psychoanalysts from all over the world. It had been planned in a thoughtful way by the Italian host society. The main panelists – Juan Eduardo Tesone (Argentina), Frances Thomson Salo (Australia) and Irma Brenman Pick (UK) – brought different perspectives to the conference theme. Pick focused on clinical material through which she set out to demonstrate how important it is that an analyst differentiates between authentic and inauthentic creativity in their patients and in the relationship of the analytic couple. Frances Salo gave a very interesting clinical paper in which she suggested that when creativity has been repressed, negated or undervalued it can emerge in our patients in strange and less than obvious ways, which as analysts we need to be alert to if we are to avoid repeating the original trauma. Tesone gave a more academic paper. Drawing on Shakespeare’s *Much Ado about Nothing*, he developed his line of thinking whereby a woman’s sex organs have come to represent the negative of having a phallus, i.e. of having” no-thing”. He argued that both sexes should accept that “no-thingness” concerns them equally since it includes the mystery of life and death for both sexes in the same measure. Alongside a phallic order he suggested a “nothingic” order and asked us to consider the hypothesis that the possibility of creativity in both sexes involves sustaining within the psyche a never-resolved tension between the phallic and the “nothingic” order.

The afternoon workshops were interesting and varied. Particularly inspiring was a film viewing followed by a discussion of the film “Brodeuses” (The Embroiderers, France 2004, Dir. Eleanore Faucher). The film traces in a complex and delicate way a teenage girl’s psychological journey in coming to terms with a pregnancy, a moving and visually beautiful film which

provoked a discussion about the role in the pregnant woman's psyche of partners and mothers.

There was discussion about the universal tendency in psychoanalysis to use the parental couple as the prototype of human creativity in the unconscious and the need to broaden the model of creativity to include other sexualities and other ways to theorize creativity.

The conference was an enjoyable event and the local colleagues especially had worked very hard to make it so. Genova is a fascinating city and the conference was held in the Palazzo Ducale, a wonderful space now owned by the local council.