

The Power of the Unspoken

PÖTHE, Petr. *Síla nevysloveného: příběhy z psychoterapie dětí a dospívajících*. Praha: Portál, 2020.
ISBN 978-80-262-1589-9

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The unexplored corners of the human soul have fascinated readers around the world for decades. Intricate fates, old traumas and current problems of the main heroes find their way into readers hands in a form of a psychological thrillers (the one in front of me, Devilish games), autobiographical works on psychiatric treatment (**Sylvia Plath** – Under the Glass Bell, **Barbara Gordon** – I Dance As Fast as I Can) or in many fictional bestsellers by Irvin David Yalom (When Nietzsche Cried, Treatment with Schopenhauer, or Lies on the Sofa). **Torey L. Hayden** deals with the issue of therapy with a focus on the child client (Brat: The story of a child that no one loved, She-dragon and the fair-haired boy, The girl they didn't want).

This year, in the colorful cover of “**The Magician**” by Veronika Holcová, the Portal publishing house provided us with a title with a mysterious title: “**The Power of the Unspoken**”, which captures the fates of five children and adolescents in the process of psychoanalytic psychotherapy.

Through individual sessions, we delve deeper and deeper into the fates of these children, whose natural behaviour in the form of game transports us into the middle of the battlefield of inner emotions of loss, betrayal, sadness and self-blame. In the majority of cases, the battles last for many forlorn years and destroy not only the landscape of the children's souls, but also disrupt the functionality of relations with those around them. So where to look for a safe space in which one can discover, put into present, and find a way to manage your inner doubts about your own worth?

Peter Pöthe, the author of this book, a trained physician and psychoanalytic psychotherapist, sees the starting point in creating a secure therapeutic relationship that will allow creating space for negotiation with the seeming enemy. He considers observational ability, empathy and imagination to be the most important tools of cognition, which he tries to implement as much as possible in the presence of a child.

In the company of three-year-old whippet Whiskey, he describes to readers the course of individual sessions in understandable language, which combines professional psychoanalytic terms and easy to understand narration, and provides the professional and lay public the opportunity to taste the “daily bread” of his many years in the field. The continuity of the stories, captured in the working week, allows the reader to observe the development of the relationship, its progress, stagnation or premature end of cooperation for various reasons.

The introductory dialogue with the thirteen-year-old client Veronika, with whom he reflects on the course of therapy and the intention to process the content of some sessions into a literary work, together with the internal monologues form a preface of this work.

The first client to visit an old tenement house in Malá Strana is a 16-year-old high school student, Alice. Although at first glance it seems that the main problem is the gradually deteriorating school performance, during the first sessions, a not very happy family history begins to unfold. Long-term cohabitation with her stepfather from an early childhood co-created the conditions for the emergence of states of anxiety and panic, which manifested themselves in situations in which various aspects of intimacy were disrupted. During 37 sessions as the sword of Damocles hangs not only the unresolved trauma from the childhood, but above all a violation of trust in many areas of life.

In the case of the supervision of eleven-year-old Oliver, in which the author positively evaluates the possibility of professional accompaniment of beginning therapists, the problem of defining the function of a psychologist and therapist in a facility for institutional and protective education arises. The staff of the children’s home, i.e. educators and teachers, have different expectations and the management itself recommends that the beginning therapist defines his own role. The boy Oliver, who has lived in the children’s home since he was seven, has already experienced the pain of losing his mother during his lifetime and at the same time experiences permanent rejection by not only his classmates but also adult authorities, including his own father. Due to serious behavioral problems, the boy is in danger of being transferred to a facility for young offenders, in the best case scenario to a psychiatric hospital. How demanding is the implementation of a therapeutic relationship in conditions in which both the worker and the client experience existential uncertainty associated with determining their own place in the children’s home collective?

Eight-year-old Roman was awaiting examination and subsequent therapy due to his aggressive behaviour. An integral part of working with a child client is an interview with a parent or guardian. When faced with the question: “What good came out of your child?”, they answer: “...none...”. In Roman’s case, however, we meet very loving and accepting parents. The unclear origin of maladaptive behaviour is gradually being uncovered by an insidious disease that turns the life of this family upside down. With the suspicion of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, Roman literally

throws himself into a struggle with feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. The threat of losing a loved one throws Roman's world into chaos, from which the only way seems to be to learn the Israeli fighting style Krav maga, with which he is able to defeat even the strongest enemy.

Even the best interests of a child can become means of scramble between hostile parents caring for a child in residential custody. Two mutually devouring worlds abuse a child's love to achieve their own destructive goals. With the identity of a false double agent, Sandra lives a double life without the possibility of openly expressing the need to be with both parents. In an effort to suppress her emotions and keep her parents' favour, 12-year-old Sandra always tries to be an obedient daughter and meet wishes and demands without any opposition. Will the therapy provide a safe enough environment for Sandra to express her feelings openly without having to remain in a reconciling self-preservation position?

Rejecting your own family is an extremely stressful situation, especially when you see your place being replaced by a younger step-sibling. Honzík, a six-year-old blond boy with blue eyes, was taken to a children's home by his biological mother three years ago, and after two years he received foster care. He is still actively seeing his own mother, but he is still unable to find a secure bond with an unconditionally accepting person. Recurring rejection of foster families due to uncontrolled behaviour prevents Honzík from entering into relationships with confidence in creating strong and lasting bonds.

Many of these stories can leave us with strong feelings of hopelessness and skepticism towards the family system that has surrounded these young clients. Manifestation of negative emotions within a psychotherapeutic relationship and in a safe environment of therapy becomes a healing means to correct an unsatisfactory quality of life. Due to the standard length of therapy, not all stories are definitively closed, leaving readers with no choice but to create ending scenarios to their own liking.

If you are interested in stories from the environment of psychoanalytic psychotherapy, another publication from the same author can be recommended: "Emotional disorders in childhood and adolescence", which will enrich the reader not only with further case studies of child clients, but thanks to its theoretical focus, complement the theoretical basis of this psychotherapeutic field.

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