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CONNOISSEURSHIP GONE AWRY: A MICRO-TRAUMATIC STYLE OF RELATING

Abstract. In a style of relating I call “imparted connoisseurship,” one person acting as a hyperdiscriminating “master” inducts another in the role of eager “disciple” into a preoccupation with the finer points of a mutually compelling interest or endeavor. In its unhealthy version, instead of enriching and strengthening the other, this form of relating coercively co-opts the psyche of the disciple. It generates self-critical shame in the disciple, or evokes a wafer-thin feeling of superiority that defends against a heightened unconscious sense of personal insufficiency and self-contempt. The damaging version of imparted connoisseurship belongs within the set of intrapsychic and interpersonal phenomena I call “micro-trauma,” an insidious if subtle psychic bruising that gradually erodes one’s sense of well-being, efficacy, and/or self-worth. In this article, I explore destructive connoisseurship as it plays out in various configurations—between two peers, mentor and protégé, parent and child, analytic supervisor and supervisee, and analyst and patient.

Keywords: self-esteem, idealization, perfectionism, trauma, connoisseur, ego-ideal

THE CONNOISSEUR’S MINDSET—a preoccupation with seeking ever greater refinement in one’s knowledge, mastery, or level of appreciation—is generally regarded as a favorable thing. Yet I will argue that connoisseurship can be both blessing and curse. The blessing lies in its capacity to enhance one’s sense of competence, effectiveness, and maturity. The cursed part lies in its potential to daunt, oppress, dishearten, and diminish. Although there is much to celebrate in connoisseurship, in what follows I concentrate on articulating its capacity to injure. I explore destructive connoisseurship as it appears in a variety of configurations—between two peers, mentor and protégé, parent and child, analytic supervisor and supervisee, and analyst and patient.

Let me start by reviewing some terminology. A “connoisseur,” according to Merriam-Webster, is an expert who comprehends the “details,

technique, or principles of an art and is competent to act as a critical judge.” In addition, it refers to a discriminating individual whose enjoyment hinges on an appreciation of subtleties. “Connoisseur” is derived from the Latin word “cognoscere” (to know), which implicitly raises the question of what it means to know or to know something better. What competency or power does having a highly refined knowledge grant us? What status does it confer? How does being “in the know” play out in one’s relationships?

Having a connoisseur’s perspective can sometimes lead to a form of relatedness wherein one person—for better or worse—inducts another into the intricacies of a given subject matter, field of endeavor, or way of being. The aim may be circumscribed and pertain only to a specific sector, or it may involve attempting to make the other person over into one’s own image. I call this type of interplay “connoisseurship,” or more specifically, “imparted connoisseurship,” which draws attention to its unidirectional influence from patron to protégé. (When the tutelage is two-way, an even interchange between two peers, we could consider it “shared connoisseurship.” This too can have both favorable and unfavorable aspects for both parties.)

Imparted Connoisseurship as a Form of Micro-Trauma

The damaging version of connoisseurship belongs to the set of intrapsychic and interpersonal phenomena I call “micro-trauma” (Crastnopol, 2009). I use this term to refer to an insidious psychic bruising that gradually erodes a person’s sense of well-being. Micro-traumatic experiences generally accrue in the context of an ongoing significant relationship, most often in a familial context but sometimes in a long-term vocational or social setting. This form of destructive relating involves a series of injurious actions or communications that disrupt the other’s sense of goodness, efficacy, or cohesion. Because one does not see the “cuff” coming or fully register its impact, one does not or cannot defend oneself adequately. Nor can one take the reparative steps that might ease the injury in its aftermath or guard against its recurrence. The interpersonal or “interpsychic” interaction that delivers this small jolt to the self can take many guises, some seemingly benign, others more explicitly punitive.¹

¹ This paragraph paraphrases parts of a forthcoming book, tentatively titled *Hidden in Plain Sight: On Micro-Traumatic Relating*. In it I also explain why I retain the term “trauma” (qualified by “micro”) even though the subtle psychic assaults I describe are indeed not in

Micro-trauma is what it is—undramatic, hidden, cumulative (Khan, 1963, 1964)—in part because it occurs in the context of other “good enough” relating. It is the presence of some good with the bad, some pleasure with the pain, that keeps the damaged one connected and coming back for more. Besides imparted connoisseurship, examples of micro-trauma I have described elsewhere include “uneasy intimacy” (untoward closeness), “little murders” (offhand psychic slights), and “unbridled indignation” (self-righteous relating) (see Crastnopol, 2007, 2009).

The type of micro-trauma I concentrate on here involves the teaching, exposing, or influencing of one person by another. The paradigmatic version of healthy connoisseurship is exemplified by a parent educating the child in such a way that the child is drawn into ever greater engagement with the world, both receptively and expressively. The child is invited to experience something more deeply, to appreciate this experience’s finer points more fully, or to perform some action more expertly. Most teacher/student, master/disciple, and other relationships based on a training function involve some degree of healthy connoisseurship. But when the coaxing turns into a sort of coercion, when the guiding person’s motive is more narcissistic than generative, or when it occurs compulsively as a misguided replacement for more benevolent guidance, connoisseurship can seriously deplete the one to whom it is imparted.

A Closer Look at Destructive Forms of Imparted Connoisseurship

In broader terms, negative connoisseurship involves having a hyperdiscriminating person trumpet his or her special knowledge of excellence to another person. In so doing, the “knowledgeable one” implicitly or explicitly offers to share his or her greater sophistication with the other. The mentor’s tone may be snooty and self-satisfied or even self-congratulatory. There is a continual rating of a targeted person, place, attribute, or thing, and a constant comparison of those ratings. The connoisseur is the arbiter of what is better, and sharing this perspective confers special status on the partner or protégé as well. Where once the protégé was “lost,” he or she now is “found” (to borrow the redemptive, sinner/saint terminology of the American spiritual, “Amazing Grace”). Acquiring this higher level

and of themselves singly or massively undermining of the self, as the term “trauma” often connotes. In my view, the gradual distorting of the self has a characterological effect that can itself be enormously destructive in a way that is cognate, if not equivalent, to extreme psychic blows.

of cultivation may generate an elation that can feel like a “high.” In the process of refinement, one heightens one’s sensitivity to the gradations in an outer object, or improves one’s own skills or attributes.

The urge to perceive and evaluate an object’s qualities partakes to some degree of perfectionism. In connoisseurship, however, this perfectionism takes the form of a continual striving for nuanced growth and advancement, rather than for a fixed, idealized end state. This expansion of finesse may rebound to one’s credit and lead to higher social or professional status. It invariably offers a narcissistic boost to one’s sense of self-worth, not least because upgrading one’s competence, little by little, increases one’s sense of mastery in the world. Thus, pursuing connoisseurship can be a defense that is adaptive, while also being an adaptation that is defensive. Being on the receiving end of imparted connoisseurship can reduce the anxiety and shame of feeling insufficiently cultivated. However, it can instead—or even simultaneously—generate further anxiety by drawing attention to how much more there might be to learn.

We can separate out two components in connoisseurship relating—one being the subject matter of shared interest, and the other the emotional tie that develops between the two people as a result. The quality of that emotional tie can be cooperative or competitive, generous or withholding, genuine or false, concerned for the other or ruthless. Sometimes the supposedly shared interest is just an excuse for two persons to be intimate (when there are healthy motives) or to “glom on” to one another (in the presence of pathological ones). In an unhealthy situation, relating via a shared immersion in connoisseurship becomes a “look-alike” (Ghent, 1990) for closeness, or what Khan (1966) called a “technique of intimacy” rather than the real thing. The artificial role-playing of wishing to enhance or be enhanced by the other replaces a deeper, more genuine self-nourishment. Other times, there is such a rich fascination with the subject of note that promoting its understanding is really the main point; the emotional bonds or narcissistic needs of those involved are of lesser significance. That is, sometimes when we point out a particular constellation to someone else on a starry night, we do it solely out of our awe for the magnificence of outer space, rather than to garner admiration for being astrologically savvy.

So far I have emphasized the interpersonal manifestation of imparted connoisseurship. But the patterning also occurs within the microcosm of one’s own internal world. We relate in a teaching, refining mode not only

toward others, but at times toward the self. We urge ourselves onward to greater appreciation, attunement, and skill. In so doing, we may lift ourselves by our bootstraps—or trample ourselves under foot. Having internalized past connoisseurship bonds with significant others, we teach ourselves as our mentors taught us. We then re-project our internal self-relating onto new mentorship relationships in recursive fashion. Of course, we may be either supportive or contemptuous towards ourselves, with either constructive or damaging consequences to our psychic well-being and, down the line, to the well-being of others we presume to influence in turn.

Being made aware of a higher degree of refinement in some dimension can become a source of envy and/or humiliation. If one can glimpse but not attain that higher/better/deeper level, one can come to feel diminished and devalued. Becoming sensitized to more exacting standards can call forth “envy upward” or “scorn downward,” terms used by Fiske (2010) in her research about the impact of comparing oneself to individuals in higher or lower social brackets. In deleterious cases, the one “in the know” may projectively identify with the “novice” in relation to the latter’s lack. Feeling shamed in the process, the knower defends against his or her own unconscious sense of inadequacy by proxy, through an overbearing coaxing of the protégé in the direction of increased sophistication. In other words, the aim within the knower may be to quell his or her own shame and anxiety at any perceived insufficiency by overcorrecting for it in the other. In addition there may be an unconscious agenda to spoil another’s good inner feeling as a means of self-elevation. (The latter can be further understood as an expression of Kleinian envy and perhaps Bionian attacks on linking.)

As part of a destructive connoisseurship dynamic, an intimate bubble may be established that elevates the two parties above the *hoi polloi*. The disciple implicitly feels bound to the master, while people with blunter sensibilities are jointly disdained. This mechanism traumatically heightens the potential for feeling inferior should the disciple deviate from the standards set by the “one who knows.” Even if the learner recognizes the lesson’s arbitrariness, he or she feels graced. The other’s finickiness is masked as a finesse that seems all to the good. It becomes hard for the protégé to think differently from the patron or to leave room for the views of others, much less to pay significant attention to other sectors of life besides the one targeted for connoisseurship. So in the process of “drilling down” into the area of shared fascination, the protégé-

g e's life experience can paradoxically suffer a degree of impoverishment.² His or her circle of constructive interpersonal connections may shrink as well.

Ambivalent Connoisseurship in Action: A Clinical Example

A highly anxious young woman, Charlotte, began therapy reveling in an intense shared connoisseurship dynamic that was underway with Sam, her former boyfriend. Though as you will see it didn't take long for her to catch on to the shame-inducing and sadomasochistic properties of their ongoing bond, Charlotte had to struggle long and hard before she could ultimately renounce it.

Early in our work, Charlotte began a session in a blaze of excited insight. "You know what," she exclaimed, "I realized just after I left last time what the issue is. It didn't make sense at first, but now I get it!" She proceeded to explain that the reason she was still obsessively tied to Sam was that he was the only one in her constellation of family and friends who "got" her. He, unlike anyone else, understood that her relentless drive did not *enslave* her, but rather was something she thrived on. Charlotte needed to go from success to success, to keep busy, to do as well as possible at everything she touched. At 24, this engaging young woman had garnered top honors from an elite university in California that served the best and the brightest biochemistry students. And so had Sam. They were "partners in crime," despite the cessation of their romantic involvement. Each encouraged but also goaded the other onward to the next height. He was the only one who could and would go that far, that compulsively, with her. Though in some senses the connoisseurship was shared, it appeared that Sam was on the higher pedestal and suffered much less shame and self-doubt in the process. Sam was prone to preening about his own while minimizing Charlotte's achievements (which of course made her anxious and demoralized), whereas she not only refrained from minimizing his successes, but quietly berated herself for any way in which he seemed to surpass her.

² As legions of high school students prepare themselves for college entrance, many may narrow their activities to academic and extracurricular pursuits that they feel will make them maximally appealing to the college admissions "connoisseurs," only to find themselves increasingly homogeneous and ultimately less rather than more compelling as unique individuals. It is even more unfortunate if their internal worlds become constricted and their psychic horizons narrow in the process.

In short, Charlotte experienced Sam as both alter ego and (in her words) nemesis. They had kept daily—and sometimes hourly—tabs on each other's progress throughout their high school, college, and early professional years. If he got a prestigious internship in one location, she had to get one that was more special in another. If she received an honor he did not get, he minimized her success as being only due to reverse gender discrimination. (Charlotte insisted that this explanation did not offend her, it merely spurred her on to prove its fallacy.) Their shared drive fed an intellectual hunger that kept Charlotte feeling challenged and directed. She was so bound up in this dynamic with Sam that she ended up specializing in the particular areas that he himself thought important, rather than following her own inclinations. (She could excel at both, so it “didn't really matter”—it was fun proving to him she could do well in whatever he found valuable.)

Another compelling aspect was that Sam played the “stars” game with her. In this game, Charlotte awarded herself stars if she performed well in the various spheres of her life (e.g., work, socializing, an artistic outlet, physical self-care). Not only was it critical that the total number of stars be high enough, but they had to be balanced: it would be great to have a “5” in her professional life, but better still if all the other realms were at least “4s.”

Charlotte expressed her own understanding of the reasons behind her thirst for striving and the competitive ratings of herself and Sam in the following way:

In my home, they all knew I could do whatever I tried to do, so my achievements never seemed to impress them much—they just took it in stride. They meant well when they said, “you're fine as you are, calm down, you don't have to push yourself.” But it was so frustrating! They didn't seem to recognize that I *like* pushing myself! And, we were a polite family, so small tasks you did for the family got huge, out-of-proportion praise. Make a meal—“great job!” Load the dishwasher—“that's fantastic!” It felt silly, beside the point, not what I needed. I ended up expecting congratulations for all the inconsequential things I did. At the same time, I got no real attention for the amazing ones. I couldn't tell what made my actions worthy or how they stacked up against anyone else's. Sam's approval, on the other hand, is completely conditional—which makes it much more satisfying for me. So now, it's very, very hard to give that up, even though I don't actually want to be his girlfriend anymore.

Why had Charlotte ended their “boyfriend/girlfriend status?” It was not that their mutual competitiveness had gone too far—there was no such thing as too far. Rather, it had started to bother her that Sam was always more critical of her than she was of him. Even more important, she had come to grasp that his emotional range for other facets of life was severely constricted. He was unable, for example, to join and support her in mourning a mutual friend’s death (which they suspected was by suicide). After trying her best to help Sam understand and sympathize, if not empathize, with her own despair at the time, Charlotte recognized that Sam would not be able to be there for her through life’s emotional twists and turns in even the most rudimentary way. So she changed their romantic status, but not the constant contact and mutual contests. It felt addictive—but so constructive! She was hooked on the constant challenge of scaling new heights together, however anxiety-provoking this often was.

Over the course of our work, Charlotte came to understand not just theoretically, but also viscerally, what the bond meant for her—it was a formulaic effort to provide exciting standards that could direct her growth in the absence of properly attuned attention from her parents. She realized that making Sam the designated arbiter of her worth, although in some ways satisfying, tended to swell rather than diminish the underlying current of anxiety that permeated her daily life. Perhaps, she mused, she could tolerate a longer stretch between their heretofore daily phone calls or texts. But, then, where would the support, direction, and camaraderie come from? Who would nourish her creative imaginings and spur their actualization? During this period in the work, Charlotte was at times almost manically active—some of this was constructive energy, and some extreme anxiety. With Sam fading from the picture, she did not know how to discern what her own actual desires and needs were within the sea of potentially accessible goals (all likely to be reachable, given her extreme giftedness).

I began forming a picture of how this young woman might have developed such a strong craving for a connoisseurship bond. Charlotte’s early childhood was moderately happy, but family life was conducted with some odd, rather depriving arrangements and habits that could not be challenged. The parents, for example, did not cook regular dinners at home, but instead ate haphazardly throughout the week, or on weekends convened for a meal at her aunt’s house. Her mother, also quite intelligent, had grown up being abused in some unspecified way. She had

married multiple times (a fact that was unknown to Charlotte until later childhood) before marrying Charlotte's father, and she had suffered from some form of heart disease during Charlotte's childhood that the mother herself and the family minimized. Charlotte's mother was so preoccupied with her own professional life and private concerns that she was uninvolved with Charlotte's life from childhood onward. It was taken for granted that Charlotte was responsible enough (even as a preschooler!) to choose creative, constructive activities for herself. Charlotte was closer to her father, whose thought process and work interests were more like her own. He was responsive to her overt needs and, if asked, would offer opinions about her life direction—in a detached, disinterested sort of way—but he largely let her forge her own path. Charlotte's parents, while not unloving, did not register and track her emotional life. In effect, they forfeited their role as engaged, responsive protectors and models.

Charlotte's early development was therefore one of cumulative micro-traumas (Khan, 1963, 1964), because her parents' psychic limitations disrupted their ability to address feeling states of any kind, and thwarted their capacity to respond sensitively to Charlotte as a specific individual. In Khan's (1963) words, there was an early "premature and selective ego development" spurred by her precocity and the "impingement" of her parents' relative absence and suppression of information and feelings. Charlotte was left too much to her own devices. Though she tried to recast this in her mind as an expression of her parents' faith in her maturity, it was actually an abandonment.

The one bright spot was Charlotte's father's availability as a role model, albeit one limited by a degree of emotional absence. His high standards shaped her own, but, as noted above, he offered little true intimacy or hands-on direction. The connoisseurship-type following of her highly admired father was a replacement for a more thoroughgoing emotional involvement with both parents. Because it could not suffice, especially in late adolescence, Charlotte needed someone like Sam to come along and offer a more daily, minute involvement with her efforts to raise herself during the all-important years of early adulthood. An addictive but ultimately false identificatory oneness—a state of mutually imparted connoisseurship—was established with Sam to stand in for the fuller emotional engagement that did not occur in the familial nexus of her childhood. I will return to the psychic implications of Charlotte's connoisseurship bonding below when I consider various theoretical formulations of micro-traumatic connoisseurship.

With this example in mind, let us return to some hallmarks of destructive connoisseurship. In contrast to a healthier sort, the emphasis in micro-traumatic connoisseurship is often on excessively nuanced degrees of refinement and matters of style over substance. The degrees of learning appear to involve overfastidiousness and sometimes a “misplaced precision.” The upgrading can seem arbitrary and may not enhance the skill or attribute in any meaningful way. The emphasis is on boosting the prestige and cachet of the mentor, rather than on the growth of the one being mentored or on the domain of shared interest itself.

Sometimes one individual in a dyad has unusually high standards for himself whereas the other does not. The first one’s connoisseurship may spread to his or her evaluation of the other, with painful and divisive consequences. A male patient was obsessed with further hardening his already taut musculature. He recognized that this obsession went “a little overboard,” but largely viewed it as a good thing. One day, smiling ruefully, he told me that his girlfriend had asked him about his perception of *her* body (specifically, her weight fluctuations) over the course of their relationship. Though usually careful to express only praise of her gorgeous figure, he’d let something slip like, “I can remember you at times being *somewhat* less thin than you are now.” His effort to temper the wording was to no avail. She shot back, “Ah, you’re saying I’ve been fat!” Indeed he *had* been evaluating her body with a connoisseur’s eye, just as he related to himself. Now, for better or worse, she had registered and confirmed this exacting side of him. (Her initial question was probably far from innocent—it is likely she had already sensed in him the potential for a harshly discriminating attitude.) This judgmentalism strained their nascent relationship, just as it had already taken an intrapsychic toll on the man’s inner relationship with himself. His slip highlighted an aspect of his love that involved appreciating the girlfriend as a commodity, a trophy, a narcissistic enhancement of his ego. He had hoped to mask his own hypercritical, narcissistic connoisseurship, but his unconscious willed out. The young woman in question, in testament to her own emotional maturity, became a most active and adamant partner in helping the man work through his overly exacting connoisseurship tendencies.

The Full-Scale Connoisseurship Effect

An extreme version of imparted connoisseurship occurs when one individual tries to remake the other “whole cloth” into his or her own image.

One of the earliest representations of this relationship is the Greek myth of Pygmalion and Galatea described by Ovid. Pygmalion is a Cypriot sculptor who falls in love with an ivory statue of his own creation. He prays to Venus to make the sculpture come alive, and Cupid's kiss of the statue accomplishes this, creating the young woman Galatea. In a familiar elaboration of this myth, George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* (Shaw, 1916) tells the story of a phonetics professor, Henry Higgins, who enters into a bet with a friend that he can transform a simple flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, into a lady so refined that she can pass as a duchess. Higgins succeeds at this by teaching her the superficial gifts of proper speech and manners. In the process, he falls in love with Eliza, but continues nonetheless to treat her with condescension and disdain. Now possessed of an impeccable style that simulates lifelong high breeding, Eliza no longer feels obligated to submit to the professor's dominating haughtiness. At the same time, her underlying purity, goodness, and integrity remain uncontaminated by her newly acquired refinement. Eliza struggles with her attachment to her "Pygmalion" Higgins, but eventually breaks free and rejects him. She vows to go forth into the world and make her own way, teaching the phonetics she learned from him.

It is noteworthy that Eliza's participation in the connoisseurship relationship with Higgins, despite its having been damaging and restrictive, has also apparently strengthened her trust in her innate gifts and in her capacity to learn and grow. She has been enlivened by being the object of intensive instruction and influence from a more sophisticated elder, notwithstanding the narcissistic and self-serving motives that (at least initially) fueled his investment in her.

The moral of Shaw's *Pygmalion* for our purposes is that overwhelming another with the elements of one's own presumably more desirable breeding, aesthetic, expertise, or what have you enslaves the spirit of the other under the guise of elevating the person or conferring greater advantage. The gains in self-worth and prestige for either the Pygmalion or Galatea will ultimately be discounted by some degree of psychic damage.³ But the attachment of the patron and protégé to each other may

³ Perhaps also relevant here is the "Pygmalion Effect," described by Robert Rosenthal (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992), in which a teacher's expectations vis-à-vis a particular pupil appear to influence that student's actual performance in the classroom. In this case, the unconscious or subconscious fantasy about the protégé sways the direction of influence (perhaps through projective identification) either upward as in imparted connoisseurship or downward, in what we might call "imparted philistinism" (that is, lowering one's standards for oneself).

have a positive side that can make it a vehicle for some degree of true growth (as it was for Charlotte with Sam, and for Eliza with Higgins)—if the implicitly humiliating, addictive qualities of connoisseurship can be obviated.

Jane Austen's novel *Emma* is another masterwork that epitomizes while critiquing a Pygmalion/Galatea dynamic. Early in the work bearing her name, the character Emma is heard denigrating the "coarse" people with whom her malleable friend Harriet wishes to associate. She decides to take Harriet's fate into her own hands: "*She* [Emma] would notice her; she would improve her; she would detach her from bad acquaintance, and introduce her into good society; she would form her opinions and her manners. It would be an interesting, and certainly a very kind undertaking; highly becoming her own situation in life, her leisure, and powers" (p. 20).

Emma acts as a connoisseur not only of Harriet's aesthetic choices, lifestyle, achievements, and so forth, but disturbingly enough, of what sort of self her friend should be. Austen exposes this folly, as Emma vastly misjudges the situation and narrowly escapes steering Harriet's life in a damaging direction. It is only through the good offices of someone less narcissistic than herself (in the form of the aptly named Mr. Knightley) that Emma is eventually able to realize her wrong-headedness and its potential for psychic damage.

The trope of elitism's overwhelming toxicity is of course commonplace in the arts. *Pygmalion* and *Emma* are just two of many works that elucidate the destructive dynamic of imposing successive refinements on someone else in the guise of enhancing his or her well-being. These two works also show how connoisseurship often goes hand-in-hand with the elitist assumption that a manner or taste associated with an upper social class is necessarily a better form of human existence per se. Connoisseurship vis-à-vis improving one's *persona* as opposed to one's *person* is more likely to be poisonous than healthy.

Relating via Connoisseurship across the Generations

Imparted connoisseurship plays out frequently across the generations, as members of one age group try to instill a greater sense of discernment in the other. There is a common tendency for parents to expose their children to higher degrees of refinement in appreciating life's various dimensions, and also in helping their children develop their capacities to the

utmost. But sometimes this can lead to narcissistic or even competitive tensions between parent and child. It is easy for a child and his or her mother, who in most cases were literally part of one other during the nine-month gestation, to experience the other as no more than a physical and emotional extension of the self. The child can readily become the container of the mother's own projected feelings (positive or negative) in the self-advancement process, rather than the child being experienced as someone more fully separate, whose success or failure is his or her own and not the parent's. When the parent (as teacher) is insecure or otherwise narcissistically challenged, a motive that appears salutary easily becomes poisonous. The parent with a connoisseur-like attitude may consciously intend to stimulate growth and improvement, but may instead end up being internalized as an exacting identificatory figure whose standards cannot be met.

Imagine the parent who is overzealous in teaching his or her daughter (or, of course, son) the social graces. Say the task is to learn to write a proper "thank you note" for a gift. After each draft is rejected for one flaw or another, the child could come to despair of being able to strike the right tone of gratefulness with just the right degree of panache. How much worse this child will feel on entering the teenage years when, still carrying the exacting parental introject within, she confronts the task of writing her college application essays. She might believe she has the necessary tools, but at the same time envision falling short of her parent's and now her own internalized standards. The very thought of tackling those essays generates dread and self-doubt. The hyperacute awareness of her own insufficiency under the gaze of the other can create a stronger dependency on the other's "special" tutelage toward making the mark. The parent thus confirms his or her position as the superior arbiter vis-à-vis the child. This would be an instance of Winnicottian impingement, in which the self-disparaging mother experiences the child as a narcissistic extension rather than a separate object. Projecting her own weakness into the child, she seeks to "cure" herself by overcritiquing her child. In Khan's parlance, she fails as a protective shield, and may in fact undermine whatever preexisting shield (that is, protected sense of self-worth) the child already has.

Imparted connoisseurship thus often trumps an attunement to the uniqueness of the individual. This occurs from parent to child, but can happen in reverse, as when adult children foist ever newer technology on their older, less tech-savvy parents. Absent a solid enough psychic

foundation, the elder parent may not be immune to the shame this can provoke.

In a grandparent's connoisseurship vis-à-vis the grandchildren, the attempt at an inculcation of values—aesthetic or otherwise—can elevate or disparage the grandchild, while simultaneously “settling old scores” with the parent sandwiched in between the older and younger generation. Fondness and aggressive intent join forces, but strike out in different directions.

Or a parent and grandparent may get into struggles to determine whose child-rearing attitudes are optimal or the most *au courant*. These views may shift over the years, which further complicates matters. Grandparent and parent may vie with each other as to who should have the upper hand in deciding such values on the children's behalf. The proper hierarchy of power can be confusingly hard to establish. Which one is to be the impartor of wisdom, the connoisseur of child rearing, whose views should be absorbed and hold sway? Michelle Obama, the U.S. First Lady, complained about her mother's greater permissiveness at mealtimes with her granddaughters than with Michelle herself as a young girl. Her mother's altered way of grandmothering seemed to create frustration, jealousy, and even envy in Mrs. Obama (Burros, 2009). “My mother, who is now a grandmother—and that's a whole ‘nother person—seems to believe that she never, ever really made us eat anything that we didn't want to eat,” Mrs. Obama said. “It's just a lie. I'll get my brother here, and we can spend hours railing about how we hid lima beans in our napkins. And for the days we had to eat liver, we were gagging over it.” But Mrs. Robinson, the strict mother, became the quintessentially indulgent grandmother: “She thinks I'm strict in terms of food,” Mrs. Obama said, “but really everything I learned, I learned from her. It's just now, these are her grandchildren.” “She thinks Malia and Sasha should have dessert every day, three times a day. When I remind her that the girls had ice cream after school, she says, ‘Why can't they have pie now?’ I'm like, ‘Who are you? What did you do with my mother?’” It is unclear whose attitude is the most healthy and whether that makes it more “correct,” while it is also unclear who should be instructing whom. Mrs. Obama and her mother are undoubtedly battling with deeper stakes than the appropriate daily ration of sweets for the presidential family. It appears to be a displaced struggle to affirm worth in the face of their complicated, demanding roles and stations in life.

Imparted Connoisseurship within the Psychoanalytic Field

In psychoanalytic circles as well, we may fall prey to the narcissistic gratification of fostering connoisseurship too intently or insensitively vis-à-vis our colleagues and trainees. We can feel called on to hone their formulations just a little more precisely, with just a little more nuance or supposed depth. We engage in what Freud called “the narcissism of small differences,” a pitfall within our field that has been decried for decades (for example, Levy, 2004). The effect is too often that of diminishing and demoralizing the other. Poland (2009), in a keynote address at a meeting of the International Psychoanalytic Association, notes the dialectic in our field between “self-aimed forces of narcissism and outward-aimed forces of curiosity.” We may sacrifice open-minded curiosity to promulgate our own “rightness” by virtue of a need to bolster self-worth or shore up a faltering identity. Psychoanalytic connoisseurs of the negative sort may take the attitude that they should not sully their customary theorizing by considering alternative perspectives from a “lesser” school of thought. As Poland observes,

The air of superiority spreads broadly. It is evident in collegial consultations when a supervisory tone replaces mutual respect (Gabbard, personal communication), and it appears in our literature when a writer's own thinking, presented in its greatest strength, is contrasted with contrary views presented in their weakest light. Our debates are rife with such straw men. . . . Unsure of ourselves, we demean the other. When thus defensively self-serving, we serve neither our science nor ourselves very well. (pp. 253–254)

The training process itself—by definition a tutelary situation—is of course ripe for playing out perilous forms of connoisseurship. Ever refining one's clinical armamentarium, attuning one's capacity for reflection even more closely, is the joy of receiving feedback as a candidate. But the risk of having one's self-doubts activated beyond a constructive level goes hand-in-hand with this joy. Buechler (2008) aptly summarizes the factors that predispose toward shame-induction during psychoanalytic training:

. . . we might shame candidates when we make implicit comparisons between their clinical acumen and our own, or between one candidate's

skills and another's, or one class of candidates and another. . . . [But then even] though it is an understandable response to the constant examination of their psychic functioning candidates undergo, we imply there is something wrong with them if they feel uncomfortable. (p. 246)

There is a paradoxical double jeopardy in the connoisseurship of clinical training—we purposively highlight candidates' weaknesses with the conscious intention of refining their work. But we criticize them as insufficiently solid should they become distressed at having their deficits noted. Self-disappointment in proportion is perhaps a healthy and inevitable response—but what of shame? Need there be some stimulation of “optimal shame” in analytic training for learning to occur? Does a candidate's sense of shame imply she or he has insufficient self-esteem or is actually underskilled? Undoubtedly much of this shaming is an unfortunate artifact of supervisors being narcissistically insensitive or too exacting to use tact, or to curb their own misdirected connoisseurship.

Goldman (2007) suggests that learning is in a sense inherently violent, a view he draws from the writings of Castoriadis, Laplanche, and Levinas. For one thing, Goldman points out, learning confronts us with “otherness” per se, and that which is alien is almost always deeply jarring. But even more important, learning creates the demand that we alter the self, become something “other than what we were” (Goldman, personal communication, 2011). One must sacrifice one's customary way of knowing in order to sense or do something truly different.

Consider, for example, the philosophy of master pastry chef Jordi Butron (Gopnik, 2011). Here he speaks to Adam Gopnik about instilling a connoisseur's sensibility in his apprentices:

The development of a pastry chef is not the development of techniques. It is the slow, careful development of a catalogue of savors and flavors, which you can develop the way you develop muscles. There is a logic in every dessert worth eating. . . . We must be conditioned not by sight but only by flavor, the tongue, the nose, and the feel in the mouth. . . . It is to avoid these errors that we do so much of our teaching and learning blindfolded. (p. 52)

The surprised interviewer repeats “blindfolded?”, wondering if he had misunderstood. The chef replies in the affirmative, tosses some silk eye masks on the desk, and continues: “It is important to be able to work

with the sensations of the nose and mouth alone . . . taste, taste, taste—that is what matters. So I keep people blindfolded for much of the work, which is devoted to the marriages of taste” (p. 52).

Clearly, Butron is trying to break through his apprentices’ aesthetic prejudices in order to foster creativity, and this requires breaking down old linkages and understandings that might hamper a fuller apprehension of tastes. The chef’s quirky technique has an admirable seriousness of purpose, and probably does generate novel apperception in his students. But I take issue with his apparently extensive use of a blindfold and the somewhat haughty attitude that seemed to accompany it. To blindfold another is in fact to handicap him or her, and while this might indeed heighten the other senses, it could well also disrupt the apprentice’s sense of basic competency and exaggerate the power differential between student and master. I guess training in psychoanalysis is not alone in falling prey to such potential pitfalls.

By the same token perhaps there is always something implicitly self-abasing—or at least, humbling—in a training process. All the more reason that, whether making a pastry chef or a psychoanalyst, it behooves the trainer to consider whether the advantages of a given teaching approach truly outweigh its disadvantages. The psychoanalytic supervisory dyad, as well as the analytic teacher/student dyad, can guard against the destructive elements of imparted connoisseurship by taking time to reflect on each party’s motives and needs. They can ponder whether either person is unduly motivated by the narcissistic wish for the other’s validation or adulation, rather than by the learning goals per se. Fortunately, there are external referents—imperfect, but viable—that can be used to gauge whether the material being taught is well absorbed and productively used. An honest evaluation of the therapeutic process—its progress or the lack thereof—should have a grounding effect on whether we are learning simply in order to play with niceties or to truly enhance our clinical helpfulness.

Once as a young candidate I remember struggling to implement an especially rigorous, highly “abstinent” approach suggested by a highly regarded supervisor. In the end, it was only to have my efforts shot down by the patient, who made it clear that he would *not* be treated in such a fashion, no matter *who* had prescribed that approach, or *how* prestigious my training institute might be. I could have ended up with a successful analytic process but no patient to treat. It seemed best to forgo the supervisor’s advice in this case and reserve it for a patient

more willing to trust that the benefits of greater analytic formality would outweigh its drawbacks.

It is increasingly customary (and of course salutary) that clinicians in advanced training feel empowered to evaluate their training institution and faculty in return, rather than simply being the subject of the institution's evaluation. However, a defensive clinician-in-training may take the stance that the supervisor's offerings—even when in keeping with current practice and standards—reflect only minor stylistic differences, are arbitrary, or are insufficiently persuasive to be worth trying. By making only a half-hearted effort at implementation, the trainee will confirm his or her own doubts as to psychoanalysis's value. We could describe such a candidate as acting with destructive connoisseurship toward the supervisory process.

The same may be said of candidates who enter psychoanalytic training more for the credentialing prestige it confers—the status-boosting aspect of connoisseurship—than for any actual refinement of skills. Lacking the inherent motivation to suspend their qualms and attempt the unfamiliar, the trainees will repeatedly fall short of giving analytic methods a good try. The potentially constructive aspects of imparted connoisseurship are subverted as the learner gets the secondary gratification of trumping the teacher, teachings, and the field itself.

Of course, connoisseurship as a micro-traumatic element within the therapeutic relationship itself is of special concern. The analyst should be a connoisseur (in the constructive sense) of psychic self-relating, an “expert” (according to Sullivan⁴) in obtaining relevant information about and exploring the patient's internal and interpersonal life. The analyst strives to help heighten the patient's capacity for self-attunement, mentalization, self-interpreting, insight, and the ability to free associate, among many other things. But doing so can teeter on being overexact. We need to be conscious of how generative we really are (or are not) in our efforts to impart self-attunement and a capacity for self-reflection. How is our

⁴ It is interesting that Sullivan (1954) views being a connoisseur as inherently negative, and (as he uses the term) the *antithesis* of being a true expert. Addressing the destructive aspects of this character tendency, he groups the connoisseur with those like the “merchant,” “collector,” or “fancier” who use their skill to further their personal interest. Sullivan further cautions that the psychoanalytic expert must be “keenly aware” of the power inherent in having expert knowledge of interpersonal relations and personality problems. The clinician is “estopped [*sic*] by the cultural attitude from using his expert knowledge to get himself personal satisfaction, or to obviously enhance his prestige or reputation at the expense of the patient” (p. 13). He thus deplors the countertransference narcissism and personal longings that can potentially confound or contaminate clinical expertise.

patient registering our interventions within the rapid-fire crosscurrents of transference and countertransference? Are we unconsciously fine-tuning the patients' self-understanding too closely, thereby arousing performance anxieties in them? Or might they at times project a destructive connoisseurship onto us, which we may fail to recognize due to countertransferential blind spots?

I have a patient who routinely censors her dreams, discarding those she considers "garbage," and relating only those that meet her standards for creativity. She fails to realize that the censorship itself is a resistance for which (if I myself were engaging in destructive connoisseurship) she could be judged even more negatively than for clichéd dream material. She projects her own inner connoisseurship onto me partly to forestall my potential disapprobation. No amount of interpretive reassurance can persuade her to relax her standards. This woman's self-disparaging judgment is itself a micro-trauma; it is also a defense against the possibility of discovering even more profoundly "garbage-like" qualities in her self, should she accept her own dream life, however rich or sparse it may be.

Destructive Connoisseurship from Ogden's Fairbairnian Perspective

In an imaginative rendering of Fairbairn's (1952) thinking, Ogden (2010) revisits the intrapsychic bonds between the libidinal ego and exciting object, and between the rejected ego and rejecting object. His recasting of the relationship between the paired internal images of an excited (or tantalized) self with an exciting object would seem a good analogy for imparted connoisseurship. This intrapsychic bond forms the basis for mutual projective identifications that are enacted in the actual patron/protegé relationship. The excited libidinal ego (or self) is gratified by the instructional attention of the tantalizing, exciting object that is "in the know." The excited learner absorbs the imparted fine points and is grateful to the expert object for its enrichment of the self. As Ogden notes, there is an addictive quality to the love between the libidinal ego and the exciting object. It creates a kind of mutually dependent bondage that can characterize imparted connoisseurship gone awry.

The mutual dependency can be problematic in and of itself, but the feeling of being addicted to the powerful other can become even more troublesome where it coactivates the negative tie between the rejected (self-sabotaging) ego and the rejecting other. As Ogden suggests, the mutual resentment between the rejected ego and rejecting other causes

them to feel contempt for the seeming “love affair” between the excited self and exciting object. What this looks like in effect is that one begins to disdain oneself for delighting in one’s own connoisseurship. Sharpening one’s apperception often implicitly points to it having been (relatively) duller beforehand, which activates one’s self-disdain (stemming from the hostile, spoiling alliance of rejected ego/rejecting object). Seeing the flaws in one’s former level of sophistication can generate a feeling of inadequacy, as one realizes that a more advanced “other” would deem one underdeveloped. The excitement of the addictive tutelage may thereby be undermined, as the achievement comes to feel hollow or insubstantial. And all the while, the libidinal ego is dogged by concerns of never satisfying the exciting object, or of never getting enough approval from the object to attain worth. These intrapsychic elements and the scenario itself are projected and externalized onto outer relations with an other who invites the “exciting object” role. The intrapsychic dynamics are then played out interpersonally with all the attendant desires, anxieties, and frustrations.

Applying this scheme to my earlier case example, we can think of Charlotte as having internalized split-off aspects of her unsatisfying parental figures, with her “exciting inner object” representing her ambivalently loving parents’ potential regard for her. She projected this exciting inner object onto Sam, who readily introjected it and played it out with her as they incited each other to new heights of professional development and accomplishment. But the darker side involves Sam as “nemesis,” judgmentally playing out the internalized rejecting object that is a distillation of Charlotte’s parents’ dismissive, detached side. Hence the addictive connoisseurship bond of “excited self, exciting object” easily activates a “rejected self, rejecting object” state. Here *discernment* shades into the harsher state of disdainful *judgment*—the painful side of shared connoisseurship. Charlotte had let herself be drafted into an exclusive addictive relationship that substituted for a more benign, richer set of influences and a more fluid internal growth process.

Ogden’s (2010) conclusion is an appropriate desideratum for Charlotte and others trapped in a problematic shared connoisseurship:

Self-acceptance is a state of mind that marks the (never fully achieved) relinquishment of the life-consuming effort to transform unsatisfactory internal object relationships into satisfactory (i.e. loving and accepting) ones. . . . In order to take part in experience in a world populated by

people whom one has not invented, and from whom one may learn, the individual must first loosen the unconscious bonds of resentment, addictive love, contempt and disillusionment that confine him to a life lived principally in his mind. (p. 117)

The implication is that in a relationship structured around the teaching of discernment, both individuals need to accept and tolerate inadequacies and imperfections in themselves and in each other while working to alter these. They must beware of overblown excitement on either side. They must guard against mistaking such excitement as promising a vindication of the imperfect self, because the human self is inherently a “work in progress,” for which one need not apologize.

Destructive Connoisseurship from a Kohutian Perspective

Kohut and Wolf (1978) proposed that a firm sense of self is comprised of a “tension arc” between one’s “basic strivings for power and success” (that is, one’s ambitions) and one’s “idealized goals.” An intermediate area of talents and capacities gets “activated” by the two poles of ambition and goals. The developing individual needs consistent interactions with two kinds of selfobjects: those who provide mirroring of the person’s basic capacities and those who act as idealizable models for the direction of his or her ambitions and ideals. The so-called “grandiose self” of the developing individual can be healthfully affirmed both by the mirroring and the model offered by the two types of selfobject. Perhaps the seed of a connoisseurship mode of relating develops—healthfully or not—in situations where the idealizable authority figure both implicitly sets goals and also offers admiration for reaching them. Moreover, the attitudes may be divided up within a relationship such that the young protégé looks for that which is idealizable in the older mentor, while the mentor looks for an admiring attitude in the protégé. (Kohut and Wolf are quick to clarify that such narcissistic tendencies are not necessarily pathologic.)

When parental selfobjects are too attached to their own prized gifts or harbor deep doubts about their own capabilities, they may defensively embrace ideals that are not suited to or viable for their offspring. This may occur if the child does not possess the innate attributes necessary to subserve those ambitions and goals. (I refer here to Kohut and Wolf’s [1978] “intermediate area” of talents and skills, which lie between the

ambitions and goals; see above.) Here connoisseurship can become injurious, and the child may become severely disheartened as a result. A poignant and concrete instance of this involved a female patient of mine who grew up in an upper-class South African home where physical charm and refinement were a particularly valued part of the feminine role. During her childhood, this woman's hair was extremely curly and, in the eyes of their community, it made her unappealing. The mother in particular was horrified by the unruliness of her daughter's hair, and lost no opportunity to disparage her for it. As part of a toxic intimate mother/daughter connoisseurship, the girl developed complicated rituals for straightening and styling her hair, but these efforts always fell short of controlling it sufficiently to silence her mother's criticism. This was just one arena among many that characterized the girl's demanding induction into the "ways of the world" by her mother.

The impact of her mother's intensive, hypercritical connoisseurship vis-à-vis the daughter carried forward into the patient's adulthood. She was now enormously proud of her capacity to discriminate, but was simultaneously hampered by her own exactingness, by the large range of considerations that had to be honored when making decisions. She obsessed endlessly over possibilities for a personal career path, the optimal sink design for her remodeled kitchen, or a good math tutor for her child. In the end, she was often stuck in the "research" phase, unable to make a choice for fear of its being faulty, or of there being a slightly more sophisticated or advanced version to be found that was not *yet* within her grasp. The preoccupation was not only with the end goal, or in its being some ideal of perfection, but more in the process itself of learning about refinements and of engaging others in extensive exploration of the possibilities.

This sometimes led to friction within the therapeutic relationship. When asking for my recommendation of a medical practitioner, for example, she once became enraged and insulted because I did not give a minute analysis of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the various individuals I suggested. She was in a sense demanding that I be the "imparting connoisseur" with her, whether or not I had the capability—or the inclination—to make such exact distinctions in this matter. The patient's resulting aggravation with me led to an acrimonious berating that felt micro-traumatic to me, as someone trying her best to be helpful in the way I believed was best. It is painful to be on the downside of such a demanding judgment—even though I did not share the view that this is

the sort of input the analyst should be obligated to provide. (In fact, I could be taken to task by colleagues for having engaged in an unhelpful enactment in the first place, by agreeing to offer such recommendations.) Further, in a sense, the patient was acting as the connoisseur of our treatment relationship, setting up a standard for my performance and finding it wanting. No doubt I was projectively identifying with her vis-à-vis having a sense of inadequacy in the connoisseurship dynamic.

But returning to the patient's early connoisseurship interactions, let it be said that some of the connoisseurship values her mother imparted were a constructive part of the daughter's development. Others, as I've said, were destructive in that they activated ideals that the girl could not possibly meet because they did not jibe with certain innate attributes (like having curly hair). The shame and anxiety surrounding her hair was so severe that it cast a shadow over many different areas of her identity, beyond directly damaging her body image. As her analyst, I found myself thinking that if only the social norm in her country had been for a curly coiffure, she might have been spared the micro-trauma that shaped her psyche—but of course it is more likely that the injurious connoisseurship motive would have found another target.

Connoisseurship as a destructive element in Milanese society is elaborated in the film, "I am Love" (Alberti, Cotroneo, Fasano, & Guadagnino, 2009). As the story develops, the female protagonist is transformed from a gorgeous mannequin-like person, inhabiting a constricted role, into a living, breathing, complex woman. We watch as the woman emerges out of her rarefied wealthy milieu of style and art into the real world of full sensuality. It is interesting that the things that draw her out of the sterile connoisseurship of Milanese society are her passion for an ethnic-based, lower class cuisine and also her illicit sexual passion for a master chef—a life-affirming connoisseurship, *par excellence!*

A Loewaldian Perspective on the Developmental Underpinnings of Connoisseurship

Loewald's (1980) thinking suggests a developmental trajectory that might undergird a connoisseurship mode of relating. He reminds us that Freud postulated a successive progression during early childhood: from an ideal ego to an ego-ideal to the superego. The ideal ego is a pre-Oedipal state representing "a recapturing of the original primary-narcissistic, omnipotent perfection of the child by a primitive identification with the

omnipotent parental figures” (p. 46). This identification has a “hallucinatory wish fulfillment” quality, as the nursery-school-aged child savors a fantasied, magical, undifferentiated merger with the powerful other.

Over time the ideal ego evolves into a more differentiated and elaborated form, the ego-ideal. Through participation with the parents’ perfection and omnipotence, the child now moves out of the present to envision, however vaguely, a more evolved future for him or herself. Loewald explains, “No stable internal structure representative of the ego’s self-transcending exists as yet; the self-transcending is dependent on a magical communication with an ideal authority and model taking an intermediate position between external and internal” (p. 47). I see in this the early anlage of embracing the other as connoisseur.

However, once the magical relationship with the parents has been partially relinquished and internalized, the superego of the Oedipal period takes shape. More structuralized (in Loewald’s view) than the ideal ego or the ego-ideal, the superego holds within it explicit aspects of authority figures whose values and virtues the child admires. (Though perhaps some vestigial sense of magic remains from the proto-superego stages.) At this Oedipal juncture and beyond, fine distinctions might crystallize along a spectrum of “good/better/better yet/best/ultimate.” These are based first on what has been internalized of the parents’ ideals and values. Later, they come to be influenced by extrafamilial sources from whom the child may learn self-refinement and growth.⁵

This psychic progression of early childhood seems an apt metaphor for the unfolding of connoisseurship. The “ideal ego” captures a person’s magical absorption in the “wonderfulness” of the older and wiser figure, the connoisseur. The protégé in effect takes the position, “I feel strong and excited—life is marvelous—when I am absorbed in this new field of endeavor with its charismatic leader. We are both part of one great thing.”

In the course of childhood development, the ideal ego evolves into a blurrily separate “ego-ideal.” This again has both developmental and metaphoric significance. The adult protégé is in some sense incompletely differentiated from the authority, with the latter’s ideals seeming to prom-

⁵ I posit that this is how a connoisseurship attitude proper arises during the late childhood and preteen years, when having things be “just so” begins to preoccupy the child, and teenage idols loom large to offer their implicit connoisseurship-based connection. The child copies his or her idols in ways large and small, and from that process begins to believe in his or her ability to become admirable to others as well. This strengthens his or her sense of security in the world.

ise an enticing future. Now there is something to strive for and accomplish, via immersing oneself in the presence of the idealized “knowing” other.

Eventually, just as the superego crystallizes in childhood, the learner wants to become something of a connoisseur him- or herself. One holds oneself accountable for embodying those knowing characteristics. One no longer necessarily depends on an external authority for refining oneself. But one may nevertheless voluntarily seek other idealizable models outside the family orbit to firm up or enhance one’s capacity for connoisseurship.

Of course, destructive forms of connoisseurship in later life would reflect a childhood experience of cumulatively traumatic relations with overly demanding, excessively insensitive parental figures. If those figures were too flawed, overbearing, or too needy for admiration, the child might be left with a lingering hunger for a healthy version of dependent tutelage. In other words, the child might not have absorbed enough strength and knowledge from those figures to be able to internalize unambivalently the figures’ attitudes and values and transform these so they become more fully his or her own. Therefore, in adulthood the child may court those kinds of connections that are compelling enough to replace the missing internalization of healthier authorities. Harkening back to Charlotte, a child in that situation who is smart and resourceful might somehow salvage enough of the goodness of her early childhood and in current relationships so that she can eventually break free and make her own judgments and choices, basing these on her own idiosyncratic values and self-expectations. In Charlotte’s case, steady psychoanalytic efforts to enhance her attunement to her own inner world allowed her to discover what truly felt good and meaningful to her as an individual. This eventually let her renounce the competition with Sam, which freed her to reshape and enjoy her own pathway. (And incidentally, this allowed her to enjoy their continued friendship on a new footing). She was delighted to find herself significantly less anxious in her daily functioning as a result.

A Self-Reflexive Instance of Editor/Author Connoisseurship

Connoisseurship dynamics can occur in spades in the writer/reviewer/editor interface. That some of these very issues arose in the process of my drafting and redrafting this article can be no mere coincidence. One

reviewer (who I thank for generously encouraging my sharing of the following interchange) complained upon reading an earlier draft that I used too many words that were excessively unusual (“redound?” “anlage?”). Some of those words seemed to her too obscure, and others inapt or imprecise vis-à-vis my intended meaning. I responded to this feedback with dismay and shame. Here I stood, being accused of being grandiose, pedantic, and stilted—and foolishly off-base at that! I double-checked the words in my own dictionary. *Some* (at least) seemed suitable and not gratuitously fussy. We had a further polite exchange, each of us attempting to be open to the other’s view. With my anxiety sufficiently lowered, it now dawned on me that we were enacting the very subject matter of my article.

Once made aware of the mutual enactment, the reviewer was equally amused. She wrote back saying that underneath her critical tone, she had also felt embarrassed at not having previously known some of the words whose use she had challenged. Our revelations enhanced our mutual respect, but perhaps more important, reinstated our respect for *ourselves*. Ultimately, we were able to clear up most if not all of my “over-the-top” language, while not depriving me of some creative license in places where I felt that a particular word she had questioned was nonetheless most apt in conveying what I meant. We were relieved and pleased (if ruefully so) at our having recognized and curbed our defensiveness before it damaged our teamwork, and we agreed that the productive dimension in our connoisseurship had come out on top. What helped, I believe, is that we each realized that we could be fallible *and be open about our fallibility* without feeling that doing so discredited our basic competency in the roles we were occupying. This, I believe, is an important key to preventing connoisseurship from becoming cumulatively micro-traumatic.

Relishing the Good while Remediating the Ills of Relating via Connoisseurship

So how are we to get the most benefit from imparted connoisseurship? Because benefits there are. Adam Gopnik, whose reportage on the subject I drew from earlier, asked Bill Yosses (the White House pastry chef) to help him recreate the soufflé he remembered from childhood. The blissful side of connoisseurship is reflected in the exquisite moment when the soufflés emerged from the oven. In Gopnik’s (2011) words,

They were perfect. The apricot intensity shone; the egg whites' neutrality and airiness softened and lifted it; the hotness gave an edge of taste delight that is always allied to danger, even tiny danger. A thousand small adjustments turn rules into skills, and then three smaller ones turn real skills into art. With Yosses's help, I had taken something elaborate and made it something that seemed elemental. The primate instinct—get sweets at any price—had been turned into this polished performance. (p. 57)

Now this is connoisseurship at its best! If only it were always so constructive, so palpably enriching to the student, so rewarding to those enjoying the results of the learning process.

Such is the paradox of imparted connoisseurship: it can enrich or impoverish. As psychoanalytic clinicians, it is up to us to sharpen our own—and our patients'—awareness of the signs that connoisseurship has taken a destructive turn. We must become sensitized to indicators of the sort of oppressive, aggressively tinged, master/apprentice dynamic that actually depletes the psyche of the learner. Understanding the dangers as well as the glories of connoisseurship can help us maximize its fruitfulness as a vehicle for the mentoring relationship and a medium for individual growth.

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