



BALINT MATTERS

Psychosomatics and the Art of Assessment

BY JONATHAN SKLAR

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This book explores the life and theories of Michael Balint, who kept alive Ferenczi's analytic traditions in Budapest and brought them to London, where they became a vital part of the Independent Group's theory and practice. Balint's theoretical understanding of regression, 'new beginnings', 'basic fault', as well as his profound impact on medicine, are all described. The work in the Balint groups by general practitioners, psychiatrists, and physicians are explored. Whole person and psychosomatic medicine, championed by Balint, is contrasted with today's more compartmentalised approach to medicine, including the increasing separation of the GP from the family. In the second part of the book Dr Sklar reflects on the complex tasks involved in psychodynamic assessment. Vignettes illustrate the importance of understanding the forces in family dynamics, the value of an early memory and a dream, and the sexual life of the patient. The author argues that Balint's ideas are of particular significance to us today, in our world of quick fixes and the overspecialisation of medicine.

'Michael Balint is now less understood than referred to. This radically important book shows how the different inter-related aspects of his work still matter: his work with regressed patients, his ideas about training (of the doctor as well as psychoanalyst), the relation of mind and body, the basic fault, and so on. Its final section on assessment is exceptionally helpful, disciplined and alert to listening to the unconscious. Jonathan Sklar is a leading figure internationally in a tradition running from Freud to Ferenczi, through the Balints and Winnicott. One of his book's many strengths is the way it uses Enid Balint's work to elucidate and extend her husband's. In keeping with his tradition Sklar is committed to authenticity, freedom, independence and the uniqueness of psychoanalysis, the psychoanalyst and the patient. Throughout his book he shows an enviable lightness of touch worthy of Balint himself.'

—Ken Robinson, British Psychoanalytical Society, Visiting Professor of Psychoanalysis, Northumbria University

Contents

- Regression and new beginnings: Michael, Alice, and Enid Balint, and the circulation of ideas
- Training and supervision: between learning technique and developing authenticity
- Balint groups: a history
- The psychoanalyst and the psychiatric clinic
- An experience of a discussion group with HIV medical specialists in South Africa
- Why a model of psychodynamic assessment?
- The beginning of the assessment
- An early memory
- The dream in the assessment
- The sexual life of the patient
- Thoughts on the ending
- Some conclusions

About the Author

JONATHAN SKLAR, MBBS FRCPsych, is a training analyst and fellow of the British Psychoanalytic Society. Originally trained in psychiatry at Friern and the Royal Free Hospitals, he worked for four years in adult psychotherapy at the Tavistock Clinic in London. For many years he was consultant psychotherapist and head of the psychotherapy department at Addenbrooke's and Fulbourn hospital in Cambridge. He now works in fulltime analytic practice in London. He teaches and supervises at the Institute of Psychoanalysis; taught an MSc course for many years on "Ferenczi and Contemporary Psychoanalysis" at University College London; and teaches regularly in Chicago.

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