

Book Reviews

Edited by César A. Alfonso, M.D.

***Freud at 150: 21st Century Essays on a Man of Genius*, Edited by Joseph P. Merlino, Marilyn S. Jacobs, Judy Ann Kaplan, and K. Lynne Moritz. Jason Aronson, 2008, 193 pp., \$29.95.**

Sigmund Freud quipped to Carl Jung on their transatlantic voyage that his American audience wouldn't be so excited if they realized that he was bringing them the plague. *Freud at 150: 21st Century Essays on a Man of Genius* is a collection of brief papers offering an appreciation and critical review of "the plague" with which Freud infected mankind. Since Freud and psychoanalysis are inextricably bound at the hip—unlike any other "science" and its founder—the essays cover both the history of Freud and the history of psychoanalysis.

On September 15, 2006 the Austrian Embassy in Washington, D.C. hosted a symposium on the occasion of Freud's 150th birthday (b. May 6, 1856). The afternoon speakers were representatives of the Psychoanalytic Consortium consisting of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry, the American Psychoanalytic Association, the American Psychological Association, Division 39 (Psychoanalysis), and the National Membership Committee for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work. Other speakers were featured in the evening. This symposium, titled *Freud's Place in Our Minds: A Day of Reflection on Sigmund Freud's Significance in the 21st Century*, inspired the publication of this book.

Freud at 150 consists of a preface by Heinz Fischer, the President of Austria, an introduction by Eva Nowotny, Austrian Ambassador to the United States, essays by a number of Freud scholars, the Consortium presentations, and 21 selected photographs of Freud, his family and contemporaries.

In Part I, Edith Kurzweil, sociologist and emeritus professor at Adelphi University, presents an overview of Freud's life and the development of psychoanalysis. She covers Freud's relationship to Judaism, gives a lucid summary of Jacques Lacan's contribution to psychoanalysis, and offers her answer to the question "Why are Freud's Ideas Valid

Today?" quoting Freud's prescience: "Biology is truly a land of unlimited possibilities. We may expect it to give us the most surprising information and we cannot guess what answers it will return in a few dozen years. . . They may be of a kind which will blow away the whole of our artificial structure of hypotheses" (p. 24). Kurzweil's two chapters (she also has a later essay) are well-researched, provocative and, like a dream, are condensed, juxtapose the past with the present, are colorful, and leave one with a sense of wonder that reflects what has made psychoanalysis so attractive to so many of us.

Part II consists of seven chapters written by Helmut Strutzmann, owner of the PR agency Multiart that coordinated activities for Freud Year 2006 on behalf of the Austrian Foreign Ministry. He describes the historical context within which psychoanalysis developed and its impact on literature and art. He offers another overview of Freud's life, the development of Freud's major ideas, brief descriptions of key figures around Freud and some of Freud's more well-known patients. Strutzmann draws an interesting analogy between psychoanalysis and the digitalization of information. He also tells us that the subliminal motto in many civilized countries is "Make war, not love" and "the sexual libido is undergoing a transformation into a lust for violence" (p. 59). There are multiple references in the book to the Holocaust and current world conflicts—beginning with President Fischer and Ambassador Nowotny—and the efforts of psychoanalysis to understand them. Strutzmann and others in the book offer Freud's well-known quote in this regard on the soft voice of the intellect that does not rest until it is heard. Strutzmann's critique of psychoanalysis is original and rings true. He concludes that "The political system must confront Freud's insight that nationalism and xenophobia derive from primal urges, unconscious fantasies, and also from the insight that limits must be set on desire and the economy's striving to increase profits. . . The manifesto is a challenge to take Freud's insights seriously" (p. 64).

Part III contains the Consortium essays and the September 15th evening presentations. The essays are organized under the following rubrics: *Freud's Legacy and New Challenges in Clinical Treatment*, *The Application of Psychoanalysis in Non-Clinical Domains*, *Freud's Model of the Mind and Its Significance for Modern Life*, and *Psychoanalysis and Society: Can Psychoanalysis Help to Understand Modern Conflicts?* These essays understandably reflect particular interests of the authors. For example, Ann-Louise Silver gives us a condensed history of the decline of psychodynamic hospitals in the U.S. and the loneliness, isolation and now anxiety—with the murder of Wayne Fenton—that has ensued for many of us in this already impossible profession. Other essays, to mention a few, address the integration of psychoanalysis and neuroscience,

the ubiquity of Freud in culture, psychoanalysis in Russia and Eastern Europe, the neglect of the importance of sublimation, psychoanalysis and the visual arts, and a prediction of what Freud might say about the 21st century. They are uniformly informative and well-written. Several that pertain to the ability of psychoanalysis to influence modern political conflicts are quite pessimistic—echoing Freud himself in this regard—especially the contributions by William Granatir and Nancy McWilliams. I had found Dr. Granatir’s spoken presentation to be the most moving—and chilling—at the September conference.

The final papers in the book are excellent. Eli Zaretsky, the symposium’s keynote speaker and Professor of History at the New School for Social Research in NYC, asks whether Freud’s thought is primarily of historical interest or relevant to our lives today. He discusses psychoanalysis as a therapy, as a theory of culture and as an ethical current in everyday life. He rapidly covers the fate of each of these three threads up to the present day. His thinking is wide-ranging, fascinating and too rich for me to attempt to summarize here. Sheila Hafter Gray takes on evidenced-based treatment and points out that “people . . . are returning to TAU (Treatment As Usual), in which one forges a specific treatment for each patient” rather than relying on standardized treatment manuals (p. 161). This is because researchers are finding that TAU “worked much better than the experimental (manual driven) treatment.” Harold Blum is optimistic about the future of psychoanalysis and predicts that “Freud’s theories, his ideas, and his discoveries about human nature will persist, until the human genome changes” (p. 163). He reminds us of the Oracle at Delphi adage “know thyself” and tells us “that maxim remains valuable for all of us, to the present day and beyond” (p. 167). Nancy McWilliams discusses *Freud’s Voice* literally and figuratively. She is only mildly idealizing of Freud as she remarks that “in his effective use of parable to tell subtle and sometimes unpalatable truths, he was second only to Jesus” (p. 171). Miriam Pierce gives us a brief treatise on the history of social work and child developmental research.

Freud at 150 concludes with Thomas Aichorn’s “The Analytic Revolution is a Revolutionary Force.” He is grandson of August Aichorn and a member of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society. He discusses why psychoanalysis remains so closely connected with Freud’s name, reemphasizes the importance of infantile sexuality in the human psyche, and concludes that although “the influence Freud and his followers has yet remained marginal in the course of history” psychoanalysis still hopes “to be ready to work on the fundamentals of a more blithely objective and peaceful world” (p. 183).

Eric Dolphy, one of my favorite jazz musicians of the ‘60s, spoke on one of his albums, “Music, after it’s over, it’s in the air...you can never

capture it again." Had it not been for Joseph P. Merlino, the organizing force behind the publication of *Freud at 150*, we would not have captured these thoughtful essays in book form. Consortium contributors to *Freud at 150*, in addition to those named above, include: Judy Ann Kaplan, H. Michael Meagher, Marilyn S. Jacobs, Golnar A. Simpson, John S. Kafka, Stanley R. Palombo, J. David Miller, Jaine Darwin, Katherine Brunkow, Cesár A. Alfonso, K. Lynne Moritz, Usha Tummala–Narra, Miriam Pierce, L. Gordon Kirschner, James Kleiger, Richard Ruth, and Audrey Thayer Walker. Ambassador Nowotny set a tone for the September 15, 2006 symposium reflecting that "Probably, going back to a time 'before Freud' is as unimaginable as going back to 'before Newton'" (p. xiv). We are indebted to the Austrian Embassy for its imagination in organizing the conference out of which came *Freud at 150*.

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