

EDWARD TIMMS AND RITCHIE ROBERTSON (eds.), Psychoanalysis and its Cultural Context. Austrian Studies III. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992. Pp.xi + 209. ISBN 0-7486-0359 -X.

Sigmund Freud died on the eve of the Second World War leaving only his last work, An outline of Psychoanalysis, unfinished. Yet the intellectual world is far from finished with him. In response to his legacy -- 24 volumes in English translation of psychological works in the 'standard edition' alone, not to mention many thousands of letters, not all by any means published or available -- an industry has arisen, given over to vigorously defending or attacking his ideas, and uncovering the myriad details of his active if sometimes secretive life.

This has led to two extreme, contrary views of Freud the man. One sees him as a genius working against the received wisdom of his day and he alone having the insights which gave us a radically new way of talking about the unconscious mind. The other is of a ruthlessly ambitious and self serving guru who demanded total loyalty, took personal credit for others ideas, and altered his theories to make them more palatable. On this view he initiated the myth of his own genius and exploited loyal adherents to perpetuate it.

The present volume of contributions avoids both of these extremes but enhances our understanding of how each has arisen. It comprises a number of original articles, a translation, an abridgment, some review articles of other recent literature and a large number of individual book reviews. Many of the contributors are German scholars and have been able to read Freud in that language and to have access to previously unpublished material. Its availability provides a continuing opportunity for reexamining the origins and development of psychoanalysis.

Edwards Timms's translation of Klaus Theweleit's 'Object-Choice' provides the English speaking world with an original analysis of the available portion of the voluminous correspondence between Freud and his fiance Martha. Theweleit suggests Freud married his analyst to escape his humble Jewish origins and to assimilate to the more intellectually prestigious Bernays family, which counted amongst its number two university professors -- one a classical German scholar, who had worked on Goethe and Shakespeare, the other a philologist with some seventy publications on the Aristotelian notion of catharsis. Their ideas were to prove invaluable source material for Freud's 'discoveries' of an appropriate rationale for therapy and a model for dream analysis. Did the marriage result in a mere fortuitous coincidence of like minds, or was it anticipated from the start? Whatever Freud's intentions towards Martha's family, it would appear he was ultimately disappointed by her refusal to remain his analyst after their nuptials -- 'Not in front of the children, Sigmund dear'.

Timms's editing of a hitherto unpublished memoir by Fritz Wittels (shortly to be published in full) gives us a first hand account of Freud's difficulties with Wilhelm Stekel and raises disturbing questions arising from the suppression of this document. Stekel had expounded his own theories about dream symbolism and fetishism and Freud drew upon both in his own accounts. But because of a disagreement about the publishing arrangements for the Zentralblatt fur Psychoanalyse Freud refused to have anything to do with him, and relied on Wittels to provide him with information about Stekel's work. When trying to publish this memoir in 1950 Stekel's widow was informed that this would not be possible for fear of upsetting 'Jehovah's children'.

Paul Roazen's review of the historiography of psychoanalysis also attests to Freud's negative view of Stekel and to the fact that Wittel's had to change portions of his biography (the first written of Freud) because it portrayed Stekel too favourably.

In chapters by Martin Stanton and Andrew Webber, the roles played by other figures central (Otto Rank) and marginal (Otto Gross) to the psychoanalytic movement reveal that while they were often taken seriously as individuals, their ideas were not. This leads the volume's editors to the view that the history of psychoanalysis to date has been partisan and repressive, and to an ironic forecasting of the movement's more orthodox followers who, while so ably uncovered the hidden sexual tensions within their patients, often denied their own.

This volume stands as a welcome addition to the rewriting of this history, one which will not be complete until at least all restrictions on Freud's and his followers's correspondence have been lifted.

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