

## Book reviews

EDITED BY SIDNEY CROWN and ALAN LEE

### **The Cradle of Violence. Essays on Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis and Literature**

By Stephen Wilson. London: Jessica Kingsley. 1995. 250 pp. £14.95 (pb). ISBN: 185 302 306 X

There is a pleasing straightforwardness and elegance to this collection of essays by Stephen Wilson, written as papers over a period of some 15 years. They have been shaped, so he tells us in his Preface, by his daily, professional, clinical and research work in a number of doctorly capacities and by the enduring passions of literature and psychoanalysis.

The form adopted is that of the essay, or 'essai' a form of 'trial', a literary term invented by Montaigne, in the 1580s, in order to test his own response to different subjects and situations; and this is what Wilson himself does here, inhabiting a world of multiple identities – as psychiatrist, psychotherapist and literary critic (all within a context of philosophical inquiry) – yet integrating them not only within the collection but mostly within individual essays. He seeks to illuminate, by showing how one particular experience is like another; what Wittgenstein called "the understanding which consists in seeing connections", the use of analogy, to make us see what may be an old chestnut in a new way.

He is at home equally on subject matter ranging from Multiple Personality Disorder (Disassociative Identity Disorder, DSM-IV), drug addiction, the therapeutic community movement and general practice on the one hand; via the theoretical writings on individual and group psychology of Freud, Klein and Bion; to the deconstruction and analysis of texts of George Eliot, Hans Andersen, Sylvia Plath and Robert Louis Stevenson, on the other. Questions of a forensic nature are never far away: they include for example, infanticide, murder, guilt and responsibility in George Eliot (Chapter 13), of perversions of the mind ("crooked" thinking) and of language – the way we talk to ourselves as well as others – as the necessary precondition for acts of violence (Chapter 6). Wilson, in his Preface puts it well: "none of this could be described as mainstream forensic psychotherapy, yet almost every essay touches on the subject – the murderous impulse in a dream, a novelist's work, a

GP's surgery, a small child's play, a poet's mind... contrary to popular belief, the encounter between psychological medicine and the law is inextricably bound up with the generality of human kind. It is the underside of our 'thin veneer of civilisation', with which both psychoanalysts and writers (as well as *many* others) have been concerned, and it surfaces when conflicts come to be publicly adjudicated" (i.e. in the Courts).

The tone is necessarily personal, partly because of the chosen form. Have we not all admired, and envied, the apparent freedom with which Montaigne produces in a few pages essays with titles like "On Idleness", "On the power of the imagination", "On cruelty", "On smells" or "On books", and so on – and always without references? Although Wilson provides a range of apposite, and for me quite new, references he is refreshingly free of any exigent need for comprehensiveness or oppressive expertise.

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**Christopher Cordess** Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist, Three Bridges Regional Secure Unit, Southall, Middlesex UB1 3EU

### **Love Relations – Normality and Pathology**

By Otto F. Kernberg. London: Yale University Press. 1995. 203 pp. £19.95 (pb)

In the preface of this book, Kernberg, a leading American psychoanalyst, describes how he was asked after all his work on borderline and narcissistic patients, why he did not write about love. He said that everybody has the impression that he was only concerned with aggression. He goes on to say that in his study of couples and the nature of love relations "It did not take me long to discover that it was just as impossible to study the vicissitudes of love without the vicissitudes of aggression in the relationship of the couple as in the individual. The aggressive aspects of the couple's erotic relationship emerged as important in all intimate sexual relationships".

He says, with uncharacteristic humour "So, despite the best of intentions, the incontrovertible evidence forces me to focus

sharply on aggression in this treatise on love. But, by the same token, the acknowledgement of the complex ways in which love and aggression merge and interact in the couple's life also highlights the mechanism by which love can integrate and neutralise aggression and, under many circumstances, triumph over it".

These statements do sum up the main themes of this book which deals with the unconscious fantasies with their roots in infantile sexuality which permeate a couple's relationship. The most central and important theme is the importance of a couple being able to contain aggression. He also focuses on the tolerance of ambivalence in the battle between love and hate in the couple as well as the relationship of the couple to the surrounding group and culture.

It is an extremely wide-ranging book, spanning from a biological perspective to the socio-cultural, and it is interesting to read both personally and professionally. However, as with all Kernberg's writing, it is not easy to read as it is so dense and technical. It is jargon-filled and tends also to be repetitive. There is a lack of detailed case examples despite a number of case anecdotes. I do think, though that it is worth battling through this to reach Kernberg's insight, particularly about our ubiquitous bisexuality and the struggle towards mature sexual love.

His discussion of sexual inhibitions and psychopathology, particularly perversion, is very interesting, especially in relation to the lack of integration of aggression in the couple. His writing on triangulations in relation to the couple and others, and the group or in society is also convincing. The section on masochism and teasing, where he describes the interplay between seduction and frustration, had a strong resonance. There is something very important to be understood in this book, but it is also very "teasingly" hidden behind an over-use of jargon.

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**Ricky Emanuel** Consultant, Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Royal Free Hospital, Pond Street, London NW3 2QG

### **Psychological Aspects of Depression: Towards a Cognitive Interpersonal Integration**

By Ian H. Gotlib and Constance L. Hammen. Chichester: John Wiley. 1995. 330 pp. £17.99 (pb)

If a determinedly positivist and research-oriented view of depression is required, you