

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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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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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

should look no further than this modestly priced volume. It does two things well. Firstly, it examines and reviews research findings on depression as pathology, the efficacy of a variety of psychometric assessment methods, the cognitive functioning of depressed people, and the link between depression and social factors and function. The conclusions reached should by now be relatively familiar to clinicians: the evidence fails to support the biological-psychological differentiation of previous categorisations and the notion of differing aetiologies therefore has to be abandoned. In clinical reality, we are talking about diverse types of depression, differing in origin and course, and in which social influences are prominently associated with depressive symptoms. Secondly, this book reviews the current state of thinking and research on cognitive therapy as a treatment for depression. The focus is not only on adult depression, but also on depressive symptoms in children and teenagers.

The discussion of these topics is admirably clear and succinct, as is the authors' stance on these subjects. Their book is part of the current idealisation of cognitive-behavioural approaches, and of the view that anything which cannot be touched and pinned down by hard evidence is suspect. Hence the neglect of alternative approaches and conceptualisations, which could have added to this work and the ideas presented in it. However, this ethos clearly fits the social climate in which we currently operate, where spending needs to be justified and resources are scarce.

This situation often leads to concrete solutions and a lack of imagination, which is not, however, a fault of this book. As a coda, Gotlib & Hammen produce their own conceptualisation of the origins and causes of depression. This is a complex model, incorporating social and interpersonal influences, and which seems to verge on an object-relations viewpoint, where "schemas about the self and others" sound similar to internal objects, albeit with the complex content of internal object conceptualisations removed. Needless to say, however, the authors maintain their empiricist position, clearly separating themselves from object relations approaches which they criticise as vague and untested.

This is an excellently clear book, and a good overview of research on depression and the results of cognitive therapy. The clinician will find it useful, but, since it is not a treatment manual, will need to consult other texts which provide more information on therapeutic approaches and techniques.

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Handbook of Child Behaviour Therapy – In the Psychiatric Setting

Edited by Robert Ammerman and Michael Hersen. Chichester: John Wiley. 1994. 512 pp. £70 (hb)

Approach this large book with caution. If you are familiar with the DSM classification of psychiatric disorders and well versed in the jargon of behaviour therapy, then some out of the 40 or so contributors, mostly American psychologists, may have something useful to say to you. You will be told about aetiology, clinical features, assessment particularly using standard questionnaires, drug treatment, clinical management and behaviour therapy, of a selection of child psychiatric disorders. Some more general chapters on assessment of childhood problems are also provided. The quality of contributions varies a good deal. Some, such as those on separation anxiety and obsessions, are concise, well-written and informative. Others, such as those on soiling and wetting, phobias and conduct disorders are poor by comparison with most of the current standard textbooks on child and adolescent psychiatry. The chapters on eating disorders and tics come somewhere between.

If you hope to obtain a sound knowledge of cognitive-behavioural approaches to management in a child psychiatric setting I believe you would be best looking elsewhere. To someone used to reading standard texts and journal articles, this book has an unaccustomed feel to it, making you feel uncomfortable with the style and disappointed with the coverage, despite its considerable length. One unusual feature is to separate what is considered to be ideal methods of assessment and treatment from what you would be more likely to do in practice.

The attractions of behaviour therapy for clinical practice in child and adolescent psychiatry are many and it is to be hoped that, with its increasing use, a more solid scientific foundation based on randomly allocated controlled clinical trials will be laid. In the meantime, books which aid the practitioner to understand the theoretical basis and acquire proficiency in the various techniques are to be welcomed. Unfortunately, this one falls far short of what is required.

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Clinical Handbook of Anxiety Disorders in Children and Adolescents

Edited by Andrew R. Eisen, Christopher A. Kearney and Charles E. Schaefer. Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson. 1995. 606 pp. No price available.

This useful and timely book brings together a collection of experts in child and adolescent anxiety disorders. It aims to provide mental health practitioners who work with anxious children with a comprehensive coverage of all the anxiety and anxiety-related disorders of childhood. It succeeds very well.

The book consists of 19 chapters and is divided into four parts. Part I, Introduction, deals with the thorny issues of diagnosis and classification. This section is too short. Much more could, and should, have been said about the sub-classification of childhood anxiety disorders and, in particular, the evidence (or lack of it) for the validity of the numerous different sub-types. In Part II, intervention strategies for specific problems and disorders are covered. This is the meat of the book, and I found most of the chapters interesting and helpful. Each chapter includes sections on assessment, and there are helpful vignettes that bring the subject to life. Part III discusses related intervention strategies that are not disorder-specific. It includes chapters on psychodynamic play therapy, family therapy, cognitive-behavioural therapy, and pharmacotherapy. The book concludes with a final chapter that addresses future trends in intervention. Here the authors highlight the increasing role of families in treatment, cultural differences, and developmental considerations.

This is a very useful resource book for mental health professionals working with children and adolescents who present with emotional disorders. It is, on the whole, well-edited and contains lots of useful practical tips. My only major criticism is that not enough time is spent dealing with the evidence for the efficacy of many of the techniques described in this book. Nevertheless, this book would be a useful addition to the departmental library.

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Psychiatry and Religion, Context, Consensus and Controversies

Edited by Dinesh Bhugra. London: Routledge. 1996. 236 pp. £50 (hb)

This book is a collection of presentations made at two conferences on Psychiatry and