Book Reviews

Edited by Jeannine Zoppi, Ph.D.


When Robert Motherwell interviewed Joan Miro, he said of the painter, “Miro is a brave man, of dignity and modesty. He has the advantage of liking his origins... He believes that one’s salvation is one’s own responsibility and follows his own line of grace and felt satisfaction, indifferent to others’ opinions. One might say that originality is what originates in one’s own being.”

It didn’t surprise me that I kept recalling this quote as I read The Unknown Karen Horney. One can read these collected essays in the way that one might read an abundantly illustrated monograph that focuses on an artist in any medium. This is not to say that Dr. Paris is attempting a form of psychohistory. Rather, in his introductions to the essays he gives the reader a glimpse of how a creative person uses her own life to make something new.

As we read the essays in the order in which Dr. Paris presents them, we see how Dr. Horney’s life informed her work. Without belaboring the point, Dr. Paris suggests how Dr. Horney’s concerns originated in the particular life that she lived as a woman, as a person who moved from one culture to another, and as a practicing psychoanalyst in what was a very intense time in the history of psychoanalysis.

He has, in what seems to be a companion volume to The Therapeutic Process: Essays and Lectures, let Karen Horney speak for herself and from her own experience as she moved away from orthodox analytic generalizations and toward ideas rooted in the particularities of individual experience. That some of the individual experience was her own, originating with her and transformed by her into ideas that spoke to many is evidence of her bravery as well as her creativity.

For the Horneyan analyst, some of the essays will be familiar but remarkably fresh seeming despite the time that has passed since they were written and first read. For those less familiar with Horney’s work, they will enjoy, I think, what is characteristic of her, the expression of complex ideas in clear language and graceful prose.

Martha Sermier, R.N.

The Power of the Inner Judge is a thought-provoking book that offers a new approach to working with what are commonly known as borderline patients. Wurmser is a psychoanalyst who teaches in West Virginia, maintains a private practice in Maryland, and is a member and supervisor of the New York Freudian Society, obviously a man who gets around. He has written numerous books and articles dealing with such subjects as addiction, shame, guilt, and resentment. His latest book focuses on the long-term psychoanalytic treatment of severely disturbed but not psychotic patients.

Wurmser “gets around” figuratively as well as geographically in his use of a wide range of literary references—from authors such as Blake, Popper, Plato, and Shakespeare—helping to place psychoanalysis in a wider cultural environment. The most striking quote is from Kant: “Experience without concepts is blind, concepts without experience are empty.” (He also quotes Confucius along similar lines: “Learning without thinking is empty, thinking without learning is dangerous.”)

Wurmser has both concepts and experience well in hand, and he uses them in this book to offer a different slant on many familiar psychoanalytic terms. However, Wurmser focuses too much on how he is different as opposed to similar to other clinicians. It is interesting how he can find similarities that illustrate so many disparate areas of written culture—from Chinese philosophy to Shakespeare—yet does not do so across psychoanalytic orientations. For example, he uses the term severe neurosis instead of borderline, and he refers to acting in as “acting out” sensu strictiori. His discussion of defenses also takes some getting used to as he gives them his own unique twist. Thus, he describes splitting as being: “Not an elementary form of defense but rather the result of multiple defensive processes.”

Wurmser’s central focus is on the superego and, specifically, its role in the severe neurosis. He rejects the terminology “borderline,” which he claims has developed a derogatory connotation and “judgmental spirit.” In terms of treatment he emphasizes the careful analysis of the defenses, particularly those erected in relation to the punitive superego. Wurmser insists that a noncondemnatory analytic attitude is critical with such patients.

Perhaps Wurmser’s most interesting discussion involves his concept of acting out. He emphasizes the use of action to convey meaning, sometimes resorting to terms from the theater. For instance, in referring to a patient of his who several times placed her life in danger, he states: “It was not understandable to me or to her before it had been repeated many times in action (as externalization), in action outside of the analysis as ‘neurotic action’ and in action within the analytic situation?