

### Book Reviews

thematic claim that Freud should be understood primarily not as a “pure psychologist” but as a “biologist of the mind” is hardly new. The neurological and evolutionary inputs into Freud have been traced and accepted by most recent scholars.

Second, Dr. Sulloway offers his book as “comprehensive”. Despite its 600 pages, it certainly isn’t. The development of Freud’s views after about 1900 is quite sketchily treated. In particular the biological matrices of later preoccupying interests such as the death-wish do not receive anything like the in-depth investigation accorded to earlier concepts such as the origin of the neuroses, or to hysteria. And above all, Dr. Sulloway’s book is not “comprehensive” in that he has relatively little to say about the central concern of Freud’s project: psycho-analysis as a clinical practice, as therapy. He offers no close analysis of how far Freud’s scientific, biological, commitments determined how he would interpret patients’ statements when on the couch. Freud’s practice focussed upon associations, slips of the tongue, jokes, dreams. He was primarily sensitive to the meanings of words (and word-blockages: e.g. his fascination with aphasia). Probably Freud’s practice as a clinician owed less to natural science than to his life-long passion for symbols, mythology, comparative religion, art, etymology, linguistics, and a whole range of hermeneutic disciplines.

It would be silly to reduce our understanding of Freud to the question of whether he owed more to biology than to other, more “humanistic”, intellectual “influences” (or how much was “pure genius”). Yet Dr. Sulloway’s crusade for Freud the biologist fails to give so many other sides of his multi-faceted mind a fair crack of the whip. Biology will explain many themes in Freud extremely well (e.g. his understanding of neurosis). But when trying to contextualize his interest, say, in parapraxis, the literary, religious, and mystical roots of the unconscious, as charted exhaustively by Ellenberger, are a better guide.

Moreover, Dr. Sulloway is occasionally in danger of losing sight of Freud’s real originality in trying to pin him down as a biologist. He correctly notes, for example, that one important source of Freud’s information on infantile sexual arousal was Fliess’s observation of his son’s stimulation at the sight of his naked mother. Fliess’s communication triggered off in Freud an awareness of similar experiences of his own. But what such recollections *meant* to Freud the adult; how his *adult* sexuality and neuroses were a consequence of infant experience – these issues go beyond mere biology. That was how Freud’s psycho-analysis took off from and transcended Fliess’s studies of infantile sexuality; but this point is rather lost in Dr. Sulloway’s discussion.

Dr. Sulloway has written a substantial study which constitutes what will be for many years the definitive analysis of the natural scientific context of late nineteenth-century psycho-analysis. But his provocative attempt to displace Freud the pure psychologist with Freud the biologist of the mind is merely to substitute one myth for another, and arguably to throw out the baby with the bathwater.

**WILLIAM B. OBER**, *Boswell’s Clap and other essays: medical analyses of literary men’s afflictions*, Carbondale, Ill., Southern Illinois University Press, 1979, 8vo, pp. xv, 291, illus., \$17.50.

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“Medical biography” is a well-established genre. Almost a century ago, Paul

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Möbius coined the term “pathography”, and since then, many practising doctors have used their clinical knowledge in attempting more fully to understand historical figures. The results are sometimes one-sided and smug, but if used sensitively, as by Sir George Pickering or Lord Brain, the medical biography can be an exceptionally interesting historical exercise.

William Ober belongs with the first-class practitioners of this genre. The present volume collects essays which he has published in medical journals over the past decade. In addition to the opening essay which gives the book its title, Ober has written on Swinburne’s masochism; on the relation of Lady Chatterley to D. H. Lawrence’s mental and physical state while composing his novel; on Keats and opium; on three “mad” eighteenth-century poets (Collins, Cowper, Smart); and on Chekhov, William Carlos Williams, the Earl of Rochester, Thomas Shadwell, and Socrates. The essays vary in quality – Dr. Ober does not have much new to say about Chekhov or Socrates, but he is exceptionally interesting on Boswell, Lawrence, and the mad poets – but the volume itself is distinguished by three sterling qualities.

First, Ober has researched his subjects exceptionally well. He has immersed himself in the literary productions as well as the biographical details (published and unpublished) of his group of literary men. His essay on Boswell, for instance, contains a wealth of detail about Boswell’s many attacks of venereal disease, culled from the massive private record which Boswell left behind. In other studies, Ober successfully uses art to illuminate life, and vice versa.

Second, Ober writes with a witty and elegant style. His essays are pleasant to read; the volume is ideal bedside reading and frequently entices the reader to move from the essays to the actual works of Dr. Ober’s subjects.

Finally, Dr. Ober approaches his theme with a sound combination of psycho-history and retrospective physical diagnosis. Generally, Ober is Freudian in his interpretations, but he is never dogmatic and has a splendid sense of the difference between speculation and fact. He approaches his figures as complicated human beings, not simply as collections of symptoms. His collection of essays deserves to be widely read.

L. J. RATHER, *The genesis of cancer. A study in the history of ideas*, Baltimore, Md., and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, 8vo, pp. xi, 262, £12.25.

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*The genesis of cancer* is, quite simply, intellectual history of medicine at its best. In four long chapters, Dr. Rather examines theories about the origin of tumours from the Greeks to the end of the nineteenth century. Although focused on what A.O. Lovejoy called a “unit idea” – the tumour – Rather’s exposition involves him in a number of issues: humoral versus solidist theories of disease; notions of the roles of lymph and blood in the body economy; the relationship between inflammation and disease; and the impact of the concepts of tissue and the cell on clinical medicine. Rather’s concern is primarily with the nineteenth century, when microscopy, embryology, cellular pathology, and clinical diagnosis permitted fairly sharp and consistent distinctions between benign and malignant tumours, and between the various forms of carcinomas