

Book Reviews

Another example of the inadequate, indeed mistaken, discussion of a partly medical question of practical importance is that of witchcraft. The belief that most witches were women who suffered from melancholic delusions is central to Johann Wier's extremely influential *De praestigiis daemonum*, and Jean Bodin's refutation of it hinges on the denial that women are prone to melancholy. All this is omitted with the remark: "Except in technical treatises on witchcraft, it is rare to find mention of sorcery in connection with woman"; but where else would one look for such a mention?

In spite of the above shortcomings, this book does provide a useful collection of testimonies to its main, true but not new, thesis: that the traditional view of woman as inferior to man in nearly every respect survived, with very few dissenting voices, until the early seventeenth century.

FRANK J. SULLOWAY, *Freud: biologist of the mind*, London, Burnett Books, 1979, 8vo, pp. xxvi, 612, illus., £11.95.

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Dr. Sulloway has set out to divest the historiography of Freudian psycho-analysis of its myths (hence his subtitle: *Beyond the psychoanalytic legend*). The principal one is of Freud as the heroic, isolated genius who single-handedly created the new science of the "talking cure". In refutation of this Dr. Sulloway demonstrates the key role, in the evolution of psycho-analysis and in the development of Freud's own thought, played by figures such as Breuer and Fliess. Fliess in particular is shown to have had theories about the inherent nature of infantile sexuality far in advance of Freud's own conception that early sexual arousal was a consequence of actual seduction by adults; theories which Freud himself, with deep embarrassment about his own errors, eventually took over. Another myth is the widespread claim that Freud created "pure psychology" as an autonomous science, largely as a product of his own self-analysis. By contrast Dr. Sulloway convincingly shows in great detail how Freudian psycho-analysis originated in, and continued to be sustained by, the matrix of late nineteenth-century biology: the bio-energetics of Fliess, Haeckel's emphasis on the parallelism of ontogeny and phylogeny, Darwin's studies of instinct in animals and man, neo-Lamarckian concerns with the inheritance of adaptive features, and so forth. Psycho-analysis was not born as an independent science when its prophet looked into his own soul. Rather, with its roots in neurology, sexology, and evolution, psycho-analysis was a "biology of the mind".

Dr. Sulloway traces the origins of these myths (and twenty-four others listed on pp. 489-495) to Freud's own autobiographical writings and to the hero-worshipping legend creation of his disciples. He demolishes them with massive erudition, sound judgment, and meticulous scholarship (though the book does have its errors: e.g. Karl Abraham was not an embryologist). One wishes sometimes that the iconoclasm were more constructive, and that Dr. Sulloway had been more interested in the positive uses of these myths. Nevertheless, this book will undoubtedly become – and deservedly – the major source for Freud's intellectual life (particularly up to about 1900).

Dr. Sulloway writes in his Preface that he hopes his work will prove a "watershed" in Freud studies (having dismissed the myth of Freud as hero, he is doubtless aware of his partridic tendency to set himself up as one). This is unlikely. For one thing, his

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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