

Paul Schimmel (2014). Sigmund Freud's Discovery of Psychoanalysis: Conquistador and Thinker (London and New York: Routledge), pp. 165, ISBN 978-0-415-63555-4.

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Abstract: *This book is an attempt to discover the conceptual structure of psychoanalysis and relate it to the history of psychoanalysis. It however attempts to do so from the point of view of Sigmund Freud's fantasy of being both a romantic 'conquistador' and ascientific 'thinker.' These two co-ordinates serve then as a form of 'essential tension' in Freud's attempts to formulate the theory and practice of psychoanalysis since, as the founder of the analytic discourse, he had to both discover and deploy psychoanalysis effectively in his attempts to find a place for it in the world. In addition to setting out the main theoretical themes and clinical techniques in psychoanalysis, the book also examines the important role played by Freudian meta-psychology in not only defining the conceptual structure of psychoanalysis, but in situating Freud's status as an important thinker for our times.*

Keywords: *Conquistador, Essential-Tension, Fantasy, Rationalism, Psychoanalysis, Thinker*

I. Introduction: Preliminary Questions

What is the history of psychoanalysis from the point of view of Sigmund Freud's own fantasy structure? That is the question which this book seeks to answer. The co-ordinates of Freud's professional fantasy are related to the terms 'conquistador' (the Spanish term for 'conqueror') and 'thinker.' The burden of this book is to demonstrate the relationship between the main developments in psychoanalytic theory in a chronological sequence, and how Freud's fantasies of intellectual conquest spurred the growth of each of these stages. It also relates the different forms of professional transference that Freud was subject to in Austria and France when he was a student; and subsequently, a clinician. The term 'conquistador' is also related to the fact that psychoanalysis has always been an international movement and the geographical spread of psychoanalysis can be compared – as Freud himself does - to the conquest of the mind-space of different nations including those that may seem at first glance to be outside the orbit of Freud's influence in Europe. Schimmel is not only writing this book for those interested in the history of psychoanalysis, but also for those who want to relate psychoanalytic theory to the history of ideas. Though Schimmel doesn't talk explicitly about the history of ideas, the technique that he uses to organize the material in this book is commonly used in the history of ideas. So, for instance, Schimmel wants to re-think the conceptual structure of psychoanalysis by relating it explicitly to the terms 'conquistador and thinker' that are invoked in the subtitle of this book. Would the conceptual structure of psychoanalysis have been different, Schimmel wonders, if Freud had a different kind of fantasy of what he was trying to accomplish? Are Freud's own fantasies 'for' and 'about' psychoanalysis essential or contingent properties of psychoanalytic theory? Is it even right – for a historian or a psychoanalyst writing the history of his own profession - to invoke Freud's fantasies in order to situate Freud's theories? Another way of posing this question is to ask whether Freud's fantasies are internal or external to the history of psychoanalysis? Are doctrinal differences in the history of psychoanalysis related to the fact that Freudians were propelled by different fantasies of what psychoanalysis should amount to as a theory of the mind, or are they disagreeing about how to interpret the clinical data in any given instance? It is also worth asking whether Freud's own attempts at a history of psychoanalysis were free of fantasies; or, whether they embody his own fantasies 'for' and 'about' the place of psychoanalysis in the clinical and cultural domains? These then are the sort of preliminary questions that come readily to mind while reading this book. Though it may not be possible to answer all these questions here, it is worth asking these questions since it will make it possible for the reader to go through Freud's own exposition and histories of the psychoanalytic movement with a greater sense of clarity and purpose.

II. Finding A Place For Psychoanalysis

Those readers who take readily to the fantasy of the conquistador will emphasize the fact that what mattered for Freud was finding a place for psychoanalysis in the world; his anxieties about its Jewish origins; and the need to make it acceptable in an increasingly Christian and scientific world. Readers who are

preoccupied with Freud's status as a thinker will probably be more interested in asking questions about whether psychoanalysis is, or will ever become a science; and whether it is merely a substitute for religion even as it tries to knock the 'illusions of religion' and proclaims itself to be a superior discourse. A more challenging way of reading the history of psychoanalysis – as Schimmel tries to do in this book – is to argue that the tension in Freud's theory is related to the simultaneous invocation of the terms, 'conquistador' and 'thinker'; since, as the founder of psychoanalysis, Freud had to do both – i.e., he had to both discover and deploy psychoanalysis. The former relates to the fact that – as literary critics have tried to demonstrate repeatedly – Freud was an incurable romantic who suppressed his poetic side in order to protect and enhance the reputation of psychoanalysis as a science, or as a form of rigorous thought, that would be taken seriously by the scientists and psychologists of his time. But the fact that Freud is read by both literary critics and the doctors means that this 'essential tension' is a structural element of the theory of psychoanalysis itself and cannot be wished away in the interests of simplicity; it also, I think, explains his appeal to both the parties mentioned above. This then is an important element in most forms of theory building as the historian of science, Thomas Kuhn, has demonstrated in his work.

III. Freud And The Philosophers

Freud however seems to have been ambivalent about philosophy even while there were philosophical impulses at play in his work. While it is common for philosophers to read and do critiques of Freud, he himself felt that what differentiated psychoanalysis from the philosophy of his era was the fact that it had a formal theory of the unconscious to explain the functioning of the mind, and a theory of the symptom to make sense of the libidinal turbulence that the neurotic subject was prone to suffer from, and for which he sought relief on the analytic couch. So while Freud had considerable exposure to philosophy as a theorist, it is difficult to generalize his responses to philosophy as such since there are a number of important strands in philosophy – some of which are obviously of great use to psychoanalysis and some of which are not. In addition to clinical work, most Freudians are preoccupied with relating the Freudian doctrine to a whole range of areas in medicine, humanities, and the social sciences. There is however an important difference between histories written by those who are psychoanalysts, and those who are not, since the former are already invested in and professionally committed to the clinical aspects of psychoanalysis; and are therefore not trying to find fault with or merely tinkering with the conceptual structure of psychoanalysis. This account of the discovery of psychoanalysis is by somebody who actually practices psychoanalysis and feels that this 'essential tension' in Freud's conceptual structure provides us with an important clue to make sense of what he was up to as both a theorist and as a practitioner of psychoanalysis. What Schimmel wants the reader to do in the course of reading his book is to 'rediscover' psychoanalysis by working-through Freud's operative fantasy of not only putting together a new form of thinking, but in also finding a useful place for it in the world. This project in the history of psychoanalysis will not only give readers a sense of 'rediscovering' psychoanalysis, but also 'defamiliarize' Freud's conceptual structure; and, thereby, generate new insights that may not otherwise have been possible.

IV. Freudian Themes And Techniques

In addition to an introduction and a conclusion which explain Schimmel's rationale for attempting this project in the history of psychoanalysis, there are seven chapters in this book which discuss the following topics: Freud's own fantasies about psychoanalysis; his interest in hypnotism and a range of psychotherapeutic techniques that preceded the advent of 'free-association'; the differences between theories of the brain and theories of the mind and the articulation of these differences through the 'mind-brain' problem in the history of philosophy; the theory of the interpretation of dreams and an examination of the prototype of dream interpretation, which is known as the 'dream of Irma's injection'; and, finally, Freudian meta-psychology with specific reference to the problems of transience, mourning, melancholia, the definition of the cure, and the end, if any, of a personal analysis. Schimmel also includes poems by W.H. Auden and Michael Harlow to help readers appreciate not only the extent of Freud's impact outside the clinic, but to also identify the literary, cultural, and scientific paths through which his thoughts percolated into the cultural unconscious. Schimmel is anxious to emphasize that Freud did not arrive at the methodology of free-association at once when he was starting out as a clinician, but that he tried out a number of traditional techniques like hypnotism, making suggestions to the patient to get well, and the cathartic method to abreact the repressed affects that the patient was suffering from. While the method of free-association continues to be the dominant form of psychotherapy across all schools of psychoanalysis, most popular representations of psychoanalysis in the media actually depict the Freudians as clinicians who still use the earlier techniques. It is therefore worth spelling out, as Schimmel does, the differences between all these techniques and ask whether it is still possible to use the earlier techniques if and when required or whether the older techniques have been superseded once and for all. The differences between these techniques also matter because they make some fundamental assumptions about the structure of the unconscious, and on the role played by signifiers, speech, affects, and language in structuring the Freudian clinic. The role of the history of psychoanalysis is to make these assumptions explicit and relate them formally

to the conceptual structure of psychoanalysis so that analysts have a better idea of what they are really up to in a clinical situation.

V. Formations Of The Unconscious

The 'mind-brain problem', for instance, is of interest to Schimmel in this book because philosophers working on theories of mind and psychoanalysts working on theories of the subject must relate and explain the differences between thoughts in the mind and the underlying neuroanatomical and/or neurochemistry of the brain that makes these thoughts possible. While all this may seem to be an esoteric theoretical undertaking, it has very important implications on what analysts mean by attaining a cure at the end of the analysis. Is there, for instance, a neuroanatomical or neurochemical representation of a 'normal' mind that is free or cured of a neurosis through psychoanalytic interventions? Or, do definitions of the neuroses and the 'cure' in the clinical sense a matter of socio-cultural conventions that have nothing at all to do with neuroanatomical or neurochemical representations of brain states? The mind-brain problem also has implications for those working in the tradition of rationalist philosophers like René Descartes and Gottfried Leibniz because it is important for both analysts and psychoanalytic theorists to understand whether theories of mind-body dualism or mind-brain parallelism are more relevant in the context of their meta-psychological assumptions about the existence of an unconscious, and explain why there is so much resistance to the very idea of the unconscious. The resistance to the idea of unconscious mental processes is expressed not so much as a rejection of the idea of the unconscious itself, but more subtly as resistance to the interpretation of dreams. Most scientific readers still find it incredible that psychoanalysts should bother to interpret dreams, or even attempt to derive a meta-psychology that can account for the 'formations of the unconscious' (which include condensation, displacement, secondary representation (the so-called dream-work), jokes, and parapraxes). Schimmel also considers the meta-psychological significance of Freud's 'self-analysis' (since Freud was never in analysis himself with another analyst like most trainee analysts), and the extent to which Freud's own dreams in his dream book can be considered as a form of self-analysis or even an autobiography since Freud felt that he had revealed a lot more than he intended to, or realized, at the time of writing about the formations of the dream-work.

VI. Conclusion

The 'originary' status of Freud's self-analysis in the dream-work, his letters to colleagues, and in his attempt to formally analyze his daughter Anna Freud in a clinical setting are some of the most interesting problems in the history of Freudian psychoanalysis; Schimmel however does not make heavy weather of these problems in this book. Schimmel concludes the main section of the book with a discussion of meta-psychology. It may however have been worth his while to discuss in greater detail the relationship between the attempts at the project for a scientific psychology in the earlier part of Freud's career with the compulsive ruminations on the death instinct in Freudian meta-psychology. To what extent did Freud believe that he had completed the edifice of the theory of psychoanalysis in his lifetime? Were his forays in meta-psychology an attempt to sublimate his passion for a scientific psychology? Is the canon of Freudian meta-psychology still open? Or, to put it directly in the context of a Bloomian theory of belatedness: Is it too late for a contemporary foray in Freudian meta-psychology that would be comparable to those of Freud himself? The question of what sort of a historiography would be adequate to making sense of psychoanalysis in the years to come depends, I think, on the answer to this question. While I cannot pretend to answer the question, it is nonetheless the one that will haunt anybody who takes this book seriously. This lucid introduction to Freud's 'discovery' and the reader's 'rediscovery' of the Freudian doctrine should be of interest to both lay readers who are interested in the history of ideas and for those doing courses in the history of psychoanalysis, the history of philosophy, and in theories of subjectivity in academic departments of humanities and the social sciences for years to come.