

ADAPTATIONS: DISQUISITIONS ON PSYCHOANALYSIS, 1997–2006.

By Phillip Freeman. Boston, MA: Hans Sachs Library, 2007. 89 pp.

This slim book, taken from lectures given on commencement days at Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute over a 10-year period, pokes fun at the self-importance of analysts.

When I was working in Paris in the early 1970s, Peter Ustinov made a public appearance there to further the cause of his organization for “the Promotion of Humor in International Affairs.” This cause was difficult to promote because of rifts in the international community based on rivalries, narcissism, and, worst of all, what Thomas Carlyle referred to as “puffery and quackery,” that horrifying pair of human foibles, twin pillars of “Mighty Seriousness.”<sup>1</sup>

Freeman is striving in this book to promote humor in psychoanalytic affairs, a most worthy undertaking and one in which he has far too little company. Fortunately, the company he does have—the community at the

<sup>1</sup> See Wood, J. (1902). *Sartor Resartus, with an Introductory Essay on Thomas Carlyle*. London: J. M. Dent & Co., p. 31.

Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute—appreciates him. As Owen Renik observed in relation to this book, “Lucky Boston!”

The book teems with BPSI familiars. In the chapter on “Outreach,” Freeman writes:

So, I’m driving through Central Square with Diana Nugent and Gerry Adler to get the dirt for our [the institute’s] front yard because the facade of psychoanalysis poisoned the soil and nothing will grow there any more and Gerry is quoting Isaiah about foundations . . . . When the face of the institute, the face of psychoanalysis in Boston, was washed a few years back it created a precipitant that bled into the soil, a precipitant so toxic that nothing will grow in our garden again. [p. 15]

Freeman takes up subjects as diverse as Ed Shapiro’s enormous feet; those who suffer from the terror of intersubjectivity; Joan Wheelis’s graduation; Carol Gilligan’s theories regarding “mentation in a syncitium of adolescent girls” (p. 35); and the locus of the occult and the rise of neuroscientific mysticism.

A recurring theme that the book approaches in a variety of ways is the precarious state of our field. Having noted that, as of 1998, “the average age of the American Psychoanalytic Association membership has reached the eighth and final Eriksonian stage of life” (p. 23), Freeman continues with comments about his research on the behavior of psychoanalysts in water, in which

. . . initial observations led us to describe a circular formation of analysts—arms linked, heads to the center, legs thrashing outward like sailors in shark-infested waters or like the agitated petals of a flower. It was a model that emphasized separation and vulnerability to a hostile surround. [p. 45]

Addressing BPSI’s American Psychoanalytic Association site visit, Freeman remarks that candidates noted that the report of the site visitors failed to “address an important problem facing the institute: that psychoanalysis is about to disappear” (p. 73). Then, in a finale meant to be reassuring (“it is time for resilience, it is time to be adaptive, there are reasons to be optimistic about being at sea,” pp. 86-87), Freeman shifts into full crowing mode:

It is time to keep our heads, but there are reasons to be optimistic about the alternative. On September 10, 1945, Lloyd and Clara Olsen used an ax to slaughter their 5-½-month-old Wyandotte rooster, soon to be known as Miracle Mike. After losing his head, Mike continued to stand, strut, balance on the highest perches as if nothing had happened. [p. 86]

The metaphor of Miracle Mike hits all too close to home. Our profession is all about crowing, getting ahead, occupying the highest perches, and the flapping of wings by those who cannot fly. It is far too little about human limitations and the need for mutual support, kindness, and the need to respect our patients; recognizing how precarious is our position as analysts in a world of behaviorists, materialists, and managed care; how difficult are the circumstances of candidates in training and how uncertain their future; how ineffective we are in defining and defending our values as psychoanalysts; and how arduous is the practice of our profession.

In such a context, this book is a breath of fresh air that allows us to keep our sense of humor as we confront the problems challenging psychoanalysis today.

**BENJAMIN KILBORNE (WEST STOCKBRIDGE, MA)**