

## **Le Livre Noir de la Psychanalyse. The Black Book of Psychoanalysis: To Live, Think and Feel Better Without Freud**

Catharine Meyer, Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, Jean Cottraux, Didier Pleux & Jacques Van Rillaer (Ed). Paris, France: Les Arènes. (<http://www.arenas.fr>). 2005. 830 pp., €29.80

**Introduction: context and purpose** This is a book published in France in 2005 (which is, with Argentina, the most Freudian country, according to the authors; over 70% of therapists are psychoanalytically oriented). The debate arose out of political circumstances; in February 2005, the Health Minister reversed a decision to publish a report by INSERM (a government funded medical research body) on the evaluation of the different therapies; this document had been unfavorable to psychoanalysis. It was already on the French Health ministry web site. The book regroups 40 authors from 10 different countries, most of whom had written strong negative opinions about Freud; the four main editor/authors are: a historian philosopher, an academic psychiatrist, a clinical psychologist and a “unconverted” psychoanalyst. There are chapters by the founding authors of “new” psychotherapies: Aaron T. Beck and Albert Ellis. The objective of the book is to question the validity of psychoanalysis and introduce readers to “new” ways of treating mental disorders.

It is a huge book, 831 pages, so no review can do it justice. I will describe its main parts, sections and chapters. Then I will give a more detailed “flavor” of some of the chapters with citations. Finally I will attempt an overall evaluation.

The book is divided into five parts, themselves divided into sections and chapters:

### **Part 1- The Hidden Face of Freudian History:**

Myths and legends, False Cures, Fabrication of Psychoanalytic data, the Ethics of psychoanalysis.

### **Part 2-Why was Psychoanalysis such a success:**

The Conquest of the World,

The power of seduction of psychoanalysis, The French exception.

### **Part 3- The impasses of psychoanalysis:**

Does it have a scientific value, Is it a psychotherapy, Is it a tool for self knowledge, the clairvoyants, the defense mechanisms of psychoanalysis

### **Part 4- The Victims of Psychoanalysis:**

Historical victims, parents and children, the first ones, The drama of autism, The wounded, An Example: drug addiction

### **Part 5- There is a life after Freud:**

The Revolution of neurosciences, Medications, Today’s psychotherapies

In **myths and legends**, Borch-Jacobsen reveals that Anna O. treated by Breuer, did not in fact recover mental health after her treatment with him but had to be hospitalized before becoming a successful women’s advocate. Esterson then reviews Freud’s **theory of seduction** and its eventual reversal. The question is even asked whether Freud was a liar; did he report, as one patient stated, “pure fantasies” as events, did he “embellish” outcomes? The “Wolf man”, Pankajeff, had two periods of analysis but was always beset by ruminations, obsessions and depressive episodes at age 60. P. Mahony, himself an analyst, has underlined how Freud manipulated chronology in his case histories to better fit his theory. Several chapters mention that Horace Frink, an American psychiatrist who was treated by Freud, was “encouraged” to divorce his wife (lest “he become homosexual”), and marry one of his own patients. Frink

eventually suffered from bipolar disorder, attempted on his life; his career in ruins, his new wife divorced him.

Shorter, a historian, then begins the second section by describing **the rise and fall of analysis**. He proposes that a “talking cure” and a psychological basis to mental illness were so innovative that they proved to be dominant concepts until the late 60’s in American psychiatry. Analysis began its decline with the arrival of psychopharmacology, and a diagnostic system based on data (DSM III), not theory. Shamdasani however thinks that psychoanalysis represents a closed system, with didactic analysis as a condition of entry, institutes that discourage new ideas, staying apart from academia, and the special attention paid to sexual development insured its success. Cottraux writes a fascinating chapter on the mutual influence of psychoanalysis on cinema ( Mankiewicz, Hitchcock, Di Palma) art (Dali), literature ( Breton), which increased its attraction to the public. Freud enchanted with interpretation of dreams, slips of the tongue- lapsus linguae- and an interpretation of every day life. Although the idea of an unconscious had been proposed before, Leibniz, Schopenhauer in philosophy, Janet in psychiatry, a cure through “deep” exploration of the mind became a seductive idea. Several authors then review the proposed sexual interpretation, the universal Oedipal complex and its variations espoused by dissidents, Jung, Adler and others.

There is a then a long section on **why psychoanalysis became popular** belatedly but so completely in France and the episode of the removed list of empirically validated therapies from the Health ministry website is explained politically.

The third section questions the very **validity of the techniques of analysis** themselves: “free” association, suggestion, interpretations, and constructions. The critiques are particularly harsh when Freud’s concept of femininity is reviewed, with penis envy as a central construct. Freud’s adherence to his own precepts of neutrality is also questioned. The authors even quote patients of Freud who had decoded his throat clearing, vocal sounds, finger tapping as “conditioning”; they had understood his interest in sexuality and gave him what he wanted.

Several chapters reproach Freud and disciples (Bettelheim, Dolto, Fromm-Reichman...) for conveying guilt and responsibility on the mother for a child’s disorder( schizophrenia, autism...) a result of his concepts that modern neuroscience refutes.

The fourth section focuses on patient reports on **the wounded by analysis**. Fonbonne recounts her own analysis which lasted 7 years before she “revolted”. Her analyst, upon her questions about Cognitive therapy, had answered that these CBT therapists were all charlatans! Another, a bipolar, established her diagnosis after several years and improved after she was put on medication. A sister testifies about her sibling’s schizophrenia and her family’s guilt induced by questions about parenting. Deglon demonstrates how psychoanalysis virtually blocked the development of effective treatments for substance abuse.

I shall be briefer reporting the fifth section, **There is a life after Freud** because this is known territory for modern therapists. It’s three chapters review progress in neuroscience, pharmacotherapy and “today’s psychotherapies”. The interpretation of dreams is challenged by neurophysiology; neuro-imagery contributes to better understanding of mental disorders etc. The veritable taboo against medication is explored, the unnecessary suffering decried.

Finally the last section looks at modern psychotherapies with chapters by Ellis, Beck recounting the development of CBT, RET. But also prominent are the pioneers of behaviour therapies, the couple therapies, interpersonal therapy indeed sex therapy without psychoanalysis. Cottraux concludes with a new scientific look at the concept of unconscious for precursors and contemporaries of Freud, in neuroscience, and in schemas in cognitive therapy.

As I previously stated this is a huge, comprehensive effort at exposing some of the egregious mistakes of psychoanalysis. Because it is multi-authored there are redundancies, for example several authors recount early exaggeration of outcomes by Freud, the debunking of the seduction theory, the pseudo-scientific non evidence-based theorization. It is not easy reading (even for a French speaker) because of the sheer size of the endeavour , its, at times, virulent attacks, and to some degree, the focus on early Freudian thought that he himself eventually corrected. It does accomplish its purpose to question the validity of psychoanalysis and proposes, although not extensively, new approaches to the treatment of mental disorders and their historical development. It is an eye-opening debate even for experienced therapists and hopefully, will result in prudence before categorically accepting proposed new theories and even recent published data as “truth, scientific fact”.

The format is clear, the structure and layout helpful; it makes easier the section by section perusal as well as reading of the different chapters.

Gilbert Pinard Ph.D.  
*Department of Psychiatry*  
*McGill University*  
*Canada*

All translations are the reviewer's