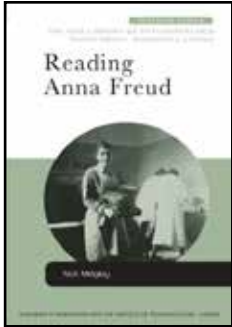




BOOK REVIEWS

Reading Anna Freud

Nick Midgley. Routledge, New York, NY, 2013. 236 pages. \$49.95 (US), softcover.



“Identification with the aggressor represents on the one hand a preliminary phase of superego development, and on the other an intermediate stage in the development of paranoia. It represents the former in the mechanism of identification and the latter in that of projection. At the same time identification and projection are normal activities of the ego and their results vary according to the material upon which they are employed” (Anna Freud, *The Ego and Mechanisms of Defense*).

The above is a quote from the chapter *Identification With the Aggressor* imbedded neatly in Anna Freud’s famous monograph reflecting her status as daughter of famous father, the author of *Ego and Id*, a central treatise on the structural theory of the mind. The excerpt further reflects that she does not travel in the shadow of her “Papa” but claims her own right to innovation and creativity.

This book, the title of which is reminiscent of *Reading Freud* by J-M Quinodoz, is not for those who work with child patients from a solely biological bias. It will be appreciated by therapists who will recall the work of Anna Freud as educator, psychoanalyst, child and adult therapist and champion of war torn families at the time of the Second World War. It will be appreciated by those of us who continue to do play therapy with children and psychotherapy with adolescents. As well, it is a superb document of the life and work of Anna Freud punctuated by frequent references to the biography by Elizabeth Young-Bruehl (*Anna Freud, A Biography*, 2008), and colours in personal relationships and academic references with her writings. Author Nick Midgley is well suited to his task on account of his training and his position as Program Director at the Anna Freud Centre, devoted to the memory, history, labour and thinking of Anna Freud.

The maturation of Anna Freud as educator and champion of the child in need when WW II struck Vienna and London inspired her career as the founder of nursery schools for lost infants and children. Beginning with the Matchbox Centre in Vienna for holocaust surviving children and continuing with the Hampstead center for motherless children in London, she inspired her communities to rise to their obligations. But her philanthropic actions were also based in her classrooms, where she learned and taught about the objectless child and wrote on psychoanalytic theories of child development driven by these experiences.

Anna Freud was continually concerned with normal psychological growth and development. As well as her seminal work on psychological defenses alluded to earlier, she taught and wrote on the concept of developmental lines in childhood often referred to in the child psychiatry literature. She wrote not only on the need to control bladder and bowel, but as well on the need of the child for self care, instinctual gratification and the postponement of gratification.

Reading this book, one is inspired by the theoretical underpinnings of child development gleaned from her war work in the nurseries in the 1930’s and 40’s. One is amazed time after time at her tireless devotion to children and families whose lives were disrupted by bombings and destruction but as well how she coped with all of this despite her sole experience being as school teacher. The book documents well that she owed thanks to her collaboration and friendship with colleagues such as Dorothy Burlingham and Lou Andreas Salome, to say nothing of her father.

It is unfortunate that the author steps gingerly around the infamous controversy with Melanie Klein at the British Psychoanalytic Society where Anna Freud stood her ground on the subject of the timing of transference and the Oedipus complex in youngsters, and especially the role of parents who were not to be forgotten in the child’s therapy. Her persistent position was that psychoanalysis not be trammelled or abused by wayward clinical approaches.

This book is well worth reading on the life, times and work of Anna Freud, who modestly and quietly influenced many who apply psychoanalytic principles to play therapy with young children, psychodynamic psychotherapy with adolescents and a concern for the best interests of the child.

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