

have been construed in religious terms. As Janet Sayers notes, spreading her net rather more broadly than psychoanalysis itself, “like religion, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy seek to animate or reanimate the psyche or soul of their recipients through the medium of the psychoanalyst’s or psychotherapist’s oneness with her or his patients. This entails the oneness that lies at the heart of mystical and religious experience, and also at the heart of falling in love, making love, and being in love.” Or, at least, that is one way of looking at it.

Sayers tracks a number of strands in a rather zig-zag run through a set of writers and psychotherapists who have some kind of relationship (sometimes rather tenuous) with psychoanalysis and who show some hint of religious feeling in their work. She notes early on that there is some evidence that religious belief is good for mental health, but this is not a theme that is much developed in the book, although some of her protagonists seem to hold the same view. She draws parallels between the religious sense of oneness with God and the way in which love of another person can inspire one, showing rather convincingly that creative work is often governed by a very specific love relationship — and also that these relationships (as in the case of Jung and Sabina Spielrein) can be opportunistic and abusive, and not particularly creative at all.

In some well-known cases rehearsed in this book, especially those of Winnicott and Bion, the evidence here is both compelling and moving. Sayers also introduces an idea that the movement from more individualistic to more relational concerns in psychoanalysis is linked with an awareness of the importance of a relationship with otherness over and above that of union — an issue informing many current debates and intellectual pursuits, for example in relation to Lévinas’s writings (which one might argue are rather more profound than some of those included in this book).

All this is handled in an accessible but flat, descriptive prose, which in many places restricts itself to summarizing the writings of the various authors Sayers selects as worthy of interest, loosely linking them with some thin biographical material to show how the more private

“love stories” are connected with the work. The result is that the reader is taken on an idiosyncratic journey through one twentieth century theme — the struggle with and for faith — in an unusual context with an unexpected cast (Simone Weil and Marion Milner are not often thought of together), showing some intriguing links and contrasts, but without much evocation of the remarkable imaginative reach of some of the writing, or of the depth of the personalities involved.

There is another problematic issue here, unusual for someone of Sayers’s political sophistication. Religion is evoked almost entirely as an experience rather than as a set of practices and beliefs, with their own specific history and social context. It is as if there is a mystical stance towards the world — a religious impulse — upon which psychoanalysis and psychotherapy can feed, and which is utilized in the construction of psychotherapeutic systems as well as manifested in personal love relations. What this does, however, is to collapse some highly significant and specific differences and to treat certain kinds of feelings and responses as if they are products of a shared human history.

Thus, the specifically Jewish origins of the psychoanalytic movement are mentioned in the context of Freud’s life, but their specific effects — not least in the disaster with the antisemitic, Christian/pagan Jung — are not explored at all. Yet, psychoanalysis is much more akin to a procedure of Talmudic exegesis than it is of mystical “oneness with the patient”, at least in its Freudian form. Parenthetically, the non-Jewish analyst Lacan, not included in this selection, had much to say about “Jewish” and “Christian” psychoanalysis, as well as about love and its impossibility.

The lack of specificity in cultural and religious context haunts Sayers’s writing throughout this book, reducing Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity to one impulse, itself somehow called “love”, leaving one at times moved by individual lives, but puzzled: what exactly is the relationship between “psyche” and “soul”, and in what terms, through what system, can these improbable concepts or experiences be understood? ■

Stephen Frosh<sup>2</sup>

## Divine therapy: love, mysticism and psychoanalysis

by Janet Sayers

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 2003

ISBN 0 19 850981 2, PB. Price: £24.95

The relationships between psychoanalysis, religion, mysticism and love have been debated throughout the history of the psychoanalytic movement. Sometimes this has been in relation to characteristics of the movement itself, for example its priestly hierarchy, untestable core beliefs, and attitude that only those who have been transformed (that is, converted by participation in its own rituals) can understand its truths. In other places, it is the ideas of psychoanalysis that have been taken up in religious or mystical terms: its first propagandists in England, for example, were members of the Society for Psychical Research; Freud was forced by the ministrations of some of his friends to engage head-on with (and against) religious experiences and doctrines in some of his writings; the Jungians and post-Jungians have indulged spectacularly in spiritualist imaginings; and, along the way, some profound theological work in Judaism and Christianity has drawn on psychoanalytic insights. Sometimes, it is the *practices* of psychoanalysis that

<sup>2</sup> Professor of Psychology, School of Psychology, Birkbeck College, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HX, England (email: s.frosh@bbk.ac.uk).