

the shoddy grammar, any environmental activist, let alone English-speaking reader, will find this book frustrating.

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MARIANO BEN PLOTKIN: *Freud in the Pampas. The Emergence and Development of a Psychoanalytic Culture in Argentina*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

This study stands in opposition to some of the generally accepted views of the history of this discipline, including those seeking to pinpoint the “real” current in psychoanalysis. By contrast, Mariano Ben Plotkin adopts a “historical approach” that focuses on the many ways in which different cultures affected the reception of psychoanalysis in Argentina. Accordingly, the author rejects a reconstruction of the past that assumes that psychoanalysis was necessarily meant to become the culturally influential phenomenon that we can observe nowadays. Although Plotkin shares this anti-teleological view with Hugo Vezzetti, he provides a different interpretation. Whereas Vezzetti thinks psychoanalysis developed without a system and that the different areas where it grew were compartmentalized, Plotkin contends that

Only a multidimensional approach that integrates into the narrative the complex conditions that facilitated the phenomenon can explain why and how a psychoanalytic culture emerged (p. 8, italics in the original).

The book’s narrative integrates issues such as the way in which local transformations in class structure and gender relationships affected psychoanalysis, the influences played by changes in politics and the state since the emergence of the discipline in Argentina, the development of a mass culture after the fall of Perón, and the radicalization of politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Through micro- and macro-analysis, the author traces the road followed by psychoanalysis towards its establishment as a professional discipline in the context of a polarized society in the 1930s and 1940s.

In his study, Plotkin constructs a chronology that is not strictly defined, but adapts to the flexibility of the process he is dealing with. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, psychoanalysis was a foreign medical theory known only to physicians who learned about it mostly from French sources. In the late 1920s, it became a part of the therapeutic arsenal and its popularization began. Literary reviews such as *Nosotros* and *Sur* introduced psychoanalytic topics, as did the more popular newspaper *Jornada*. During the 1930s and 1940s,

psychoanalysis became an autonomous field of specialization and played an important role in Argentine's urban culture. In 1942, the Argentine Psychoanalytic Association was founded by a group of analysts that were mainly locally trained; this explains why the discipline "was not seen as 'exotic or Jewish'" (p. 49), as was the case in the US, where its influence owed much to Jewish-German exiles. Under Peronism, psychoanalysis developed as one of the many forms of cultural resistance against Catholic nationalism. The discipline was taught at the Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores, an alternative, unofficial university that was recognized by the anti-Peronist middle class precisely because, like the APA, it was not a public institution regulated by the State.

Although in 1954 the minister of public health limited the practice of any form of psychotherapy to medical doctors, many psychoanalysts without the required degree continued to practice psychotherapy. In the 1960s, psychoanalysis became a successful liberal profession that played an important role in Argentine middle-class culture.

In the beginning, when the APA monopolized psychoanalysis (with the exception of some isolated practitioners outside the institution), the official approach adopted was that of Melanie Klein. Plotkin argues that beyond some personal connections that influenced this choice, the current was adopted because "Klein puts special emphasis on technique, creating a rigid but workable analytic setting" (p. 67).

In the 1960s, various tendencies began to emerge that challenged the APA monopoly. Group Therapy allowed psychoanalysis to be applied in work-related and other contexts, and to expand beyond the middle class. Through Group Therapy, the working class had access to psychoanalysis, since it was cheaper and available in public hospitals and other institutions. The growth of psychoanalysis in conjunction with state intervention was related to a concept of "mental health" imported from post-World War II USA and Britain.

Also during this period, psychoanalysis entered literature, popular sociological essays, and political journals. It became part of the atmosphere of open experimentation, and consequently some psychoanalysts began to use LSD as a professional tool.

Plotkin is of the opinion that in spite of the diversity inherent to the many theoretical approaches that sprang up in the 1960s, Argentine psychoanalysis opted for a traditional approach regarding family structure and the role of women in society. In his view, this is paradoxical, because the middle class and the media, as in the case of *Primera Plana*, considered psychoanalysis to be a modern tool for dealing with the neurosis provoked by modernity itself. In Plotkin's study, tradition tends to impose oppressive perspectives on gender, whereas

modernity represents the way to freedom. After Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, adopting this "repressive hypothesis" without explaining why it remains relevant implies a denial of one of the principal debates in the field. In Plotkin's book, this absence coincides with the lack of an analysis of sexual culture, a crucial dimension in the case of a discipline like psychoanalysis. The "historical approach" that is announced at the beginning of the book is forfeited the moment that the study obviates the history of sexuality when purportedly dealing with the discourse of sexuality. Because of this absence, the author focuses on an external history of the discipline and only analyzes some traces of the content of psychoanalytic discourse.

Although Plotkin describes some aspects of the theoretical perspectives of Marie Langer, Arnaldo Raskovsky, Enrique Pichon Rivière and Eva Giberti, he focuses on the role of women and never deals with the way in which they considered sexuality. The discourse that these theoreticians developed about the divisions between "normal" and "abnormal" sexuality is never explained. Although psychoanalysis has been obsessively interested in the division between homosexuality and heterosexuality, Plotkin does not even mention these words.

The author denies the role of sexuality, but allots crucial importance to gender. The latter is considered fundamental for explaining the conflict between the mostly female psychologists that graduated from the Universidad de Buenos Aires since the early 1960s and the almost exclusively male psychoanalysts from the APA. Although psychologists were trained in psychoanalysis, they were not legally allowed to practice it and medical doctors from the APA used this legislation to exclude them. This provoked a conflict that ended only in 1985, when psychologists were legally allowed to have equal status.

Plotkin also examines how the last dictatorship attacked leftist psychoanalysts but did not attempt to eliminate psychoanalysis in itself. Moreover, he explores how the authoritarian discourse that propounded the need to strengthen the family as the nuclear basis of Western society was sometimes rooted in a conservative interpretation of psychoanalysis.

Finally, the question that remains is: what is the future of psychoanalysis if the middle class, that was the key to understanding its expansion as a consumer product, is in the process of disappearing?

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