BOOK REVIEWS

Tony Manocchio and William Petitt *FAMILIES UNDER STRESS, A Psychological Interpretation* £4.95

What do publishers' editors *do?* I thought that for one thing they helped writers who can't express themselves very well to present their materials intelligibly and thus more convincingly. By the end of the introduction to this book (pp. 1-8) the reader's confidence in the authors' ability to tackle their chosen subject has been severely shaken. Let me give an example:

> *Conjoint family therapy as a mode of treatment is very young. It first emerged in the mid-1950's in America, particularly in California. It has had no time to develop traditions. This also means that there is comparatively little research done, and although the research which has been done is more than competent one cannot say at this point that there is any definite evidence to suggest that a breakdown in communication* causes *mental illness; however, what can be stated is that disturbed behaviour is always accompanied by destructive and confusing patterns of communication. This lack of certainty is not due to lack of investigation. Scientific research takes time; and since the mid-1950's an enormous amount of work has been done, as Peter Sedgwick so accurately describes (1972):*
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> > *The pathology of family communication has become one of the great research enterprises of American Science. Hundreds of families have trooped into the laboratories . . .*

Well has there been any research relevant to the authors' work or hasn't there? Since their stated purpose is to 'examine patterns of communication in both disturbed and healthy families in an attempt to shed some light onto the problems which most families share, no matter what their form' (the form of the problems? or the form of the family?), the early blows struck by the authors at the possibility of good communication between themselves and their readers is a matter of even more immediate concern that that of breakdown in family communication. And since the 'disturbed and healthy families' are families in plays - i.e., works of conscious literary art - the irony is the more melancholy: is the authors' understanding of the uses of language going to prove adequate to the examination of the language of imaginative literature?

As a matter of fact the book is not as disappointing as at first it seems it is going to be. The theoretical model of how a healthy family works recommends itself to both common sense and experience (as long as one doesn't think about its practical applications and their implications, of which more later): for everyone in a family to be able to develop his own potential, feelings must be expressed openly in the certainty that other family members will accept and tolerate even extremes of emotion; there is no secret hoarding-up of jealousy, fear, anger, hatred. The family not

only permits but encourages individual differences; thus supported, each individual will find his own identity and grow towards independence and self-responsibility.

This model is that worked out by Mrs. Virginia Satir, we are told in the introduction, so it seemed odd to me that she was hardly mentioned again; my *description* of her model is gleaned not from the introduction but from the first chapter of the book, where it is used to explain what a healthy family is like - that of the Winslows in Rattigan's play. The *label* given to her model is all that we get in the introduction to the book as a whole: 'conjoint family therapy (or communication theory) as developed by Mrs. Virginia Satir' (p.7) Does that mean that other people have other synonyms for the same thing, or that *her* thing is called communication theory, or what? I thought communication theory had something to do with computers. Or was it structural linguistics? Or information retrieval systems? Oh well . . . I hope this paragraph gives some sense of the lack of organisation and clear-cut definition the book communicates, and the confusing way in which it is always getting ahead of itself - I have mentioned Rattigan's play, but you don't even know yet, do you, that *plays* are the pegs upon which the authors base their discussion of family therapy?

So first (and now, seriously, folks . . .) a description of the authors' methods and intentions: they have analyzed (their word) several well-known plays (*The Winslow Boy,* Synge's *Riders to the Sea, Hamlet,* O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night,* Miller's *Death of a Salesman,* Albee's *A Delicate Balance)* which they see as illustrating certain elements of 'family theory:' overt and covert communication, the double bind, the myth of the perfect family, scapegoating, family secrets, the model child, decision-making, crisis, closed and open families, death in the family, *et al.*

Their hope, I take it, is that art will illuminate life; I hope so, too; indeed, I think it does. But quite *how* a work of art relates to life is not really understood by the authors. Invented families in realistic drama are often very like real families, it is true; but people in a family are just that, whilst the members of a family in a play are characters in a play as well, and their relationships and actions are part of a whole network of structural relations in the play which add up, if we have the time and skill to watch and read it carefully, to the play's human meaning.

It is because this book is apparently seen by both publishers and authors as making a contribution to literary criticism as well as to family theory that it is necessary to point out that it does not. The authors are not trying to understand each play in its own terms, as a student of literature would (the action gets much less attention than the dialogue, for instance); they often use the plays as quarries from which they get the materials to demonstrate theoretical models of 'good' and 'bad' family communication.

And I don't think such quarrying is unjustifiable. After all, in their work it must be impossible to find unselfconscious, so to speak, examples of any of the disturbances they attempt to treat. Families in therapy necessarily know there's something wrong somewhere, else they would not come to Pettit and Manocchio. Not only that, the therapeutic situation further distorts the 'real' situation (at home) in that the therapist

is present.

We look to literature, not to psychology or psychiatry, for our deepest insights into human life; the novel is perhaps the richest and most rewarding extension of our personal experience, but its narrative methods, of whatever sort, prevent therapists from using novels as the authors wish to use the plays: in drama, all we have to go on is what people do and say, as in life. I cannot refrain from one more *caveat* here (please excuse me, I'm an outsider, I 'teach' literature): what people do and say in a play is shaped into a particular closed structure of inter-relations having, strictly speaking, no past, and certainly no future; yet the whole is *more* than the sum of the parts, and it is understanding the whole which can sometimes lead us to a searing or healing understanding of human life.

So what have Manocchio and Pettit accomplished? More with some plays than with others - the *Hamlet* chapter, e.g., is preposterous and contradictory, the O'Neill extremely good. This is no doubt because *Long Day's Journey into Night* is closer than any of the others to being a study of family life: there are no other characters and those characters are wholly concerned with their relationships with one another. As a means of pointing out to the general reader what the symptoms of disturbance can be in a family, how all the members of the family contribute to the misery which may seem at first to be the fault of one member (the mother's drug addiction), this play is extremely appropriate and is well-handled by the authors.

Faced with Hamlet, the authors have sensibly recognized that something more than ordinary common sense plus a hypothesis is needed to approach this Elizabethan tragedy: they have taken advice. The advisers, however, have provided them with bibliographical and philological information which has been included to no purpose (another example of the need for an editor), and neglected, it would seem, to emphasize that for the authors' purposes the most significant literary fact about Hamlet is that it belongs to a *genre* known as the revenge tragedy, which had certain requirements of content in the light of which the form of this particular example of revenge tragedy must be seen.

Although the attempt to present Hamlet's behaviour according to family theory as a reading of the play is unsuccessful, the quarrying asides yield some nice nuggets. Ophelia and Polonius, for instance, act out the double-bind situation: Polonius absolutely forbids his daughter to have anything to do with Hamlet, but then rigs up a scene in which she is told to speak with Hamlet of his love for her, while her father and the King and Queen spy on them. No wonder the poor girl goes mad, as the authors say. Polonius's manipulation of Ophelia has not gone unnoticed by literary critics, it is only just to add, but that doesn't vitiate the point - particularly since literary criticism is addressed to a different audience than that for books of fringe therapies.

The Death of a Salesman is a play which lends itself very well to the authors' method - indeed it positively cries out for such an approach - and yields ore with a high percentage of gold: work, family expectations of children, secrets in the family,

fantasy. What I find a bit unsatisfactory, here, however, is something that dogged me throughout the reading of this book: the play itself seems somehow *diminished* by the approach. It's as if the plays are being looked at with one eye closed: without stereoscopic vision all the depth of focus is lost. This depends partly on how deep the play is, of course: Miller's play is much more accessible to superficial analysis than is Albee's *A Delicate Balance, or Hamlet.*

Both tantalising and irritating is the authors' free-association approach to the comparison of the situations in the plays to the situations in actual therapy, a field in which they are obviously much better qualified than in that of literary analysis, and which yet gets little space. From time to time something in a play reminds them of something they've either experienced or read about in family therapy, and invariably these glimpses raise more questions than they answer. In the chapter on *Death of a Salesman* we get this in the introduction to the section on 'Expectations:'

> *For example, in working with this type of family [low expectations of child, communicated by a series of confused messages] a number of years ago, one of the authors had the following experience.*
>
> > *The family included a mother and father and young boy of sixteen. The boy had been referred to us by Court Order for stealing cars and running away from school. The programme was a residential one and the families met once-weekly with the boys. During one of the sessions, the question of schooling was discussed. The boy had been asked how he felt about attending school and he replied 'so-so.' In asking his mother how she let her son know that school was important, she said 'Oh, I tell him every day it's very important.' I pursued the question a little further and asked about the interaction at home when the boy came home from school. The boy replied at some point that he would come home from school, drop his books off in the dining room, ask for some food and tell his mother that he would be going out to play, that he would do his home-work later. The mother would then accept this response and say something to the effect that 'Well, your Uncle Harry didn't go to school, and it didn't seem to have done him any harm. In fact he seems to be quite successful today (Uncle Harry was an automobile salesman.) Given this message, and the fact that the Uncle was a significant person for the young boy, it is no wonder that the boy received confused communication from his mother concerning the value of school. p.140*

Were there just those once-weekly sessions? What happened during the rest of the week? Who asked the boy's mother how she let her son know school was important? Grammatically, she asks it, but no doubt the authors mean the therapist. (Editors know all about grammar and syntax, too . . .) Do all the family members look to the therapist for a lead, or is he able to avoid this? Does he want to avoid it? How did the after-school pattern come to light? Do the families ever meet the therapist without their sons? Do the 'maladjusted' boys work and play together? A glimpse into how an

imaginary initial family therapy session with the Loman family might work is given later in this chapter, but what I want to know is what the authors *do* with real-life families, a practical description of their own clinical methods with case studies. After all, the jacket promises that the 'book will be of value to all those interested in the *uses* of family therapy' (my italics).

But these are only some of the questions the book raises, and it brings to mind many others which this and other books by fringe therapists raise. Those I've read (only three, for example, of the eight suggested for further reading) have in common not only poor performance in the learnable art of communicating through expository prose - a flaw one never hears about in Self and Society, perhaps because it is itself not a prime example of how to communicate successfully; at least, I hope that's the reason, rather that that its readers and writers *have never noticed.* They have in common a number of other faults and omissions which can only have the effect of putting off just those the so-called 'growth movement' wants and needs to reach. I see these as falling into two groups; first, the ordinary man-in-the-street whose life is driving him mad but whose lack of time and type of education make it difficult for him to discriminate therapy A from therapy B because whenever he comes across one of the books, they seem to be talking to some sort of self-selected in-group, which has already made all the discriminations and can't be bothered to explain them to yearning out-group people. This is by far the most important group.

But there's another group, a highly educated, articulate, and discriminating group who find much academic psychology and sociology empty of usable content (the quantification of the obvious, it's usually called), and the presentation of its findings laughable for the painfully self-justifying verbosity and pompous approach which is apparently thought to indicate that psychology and sociology are sciences. This group would I think be very sympathetic to much that goes on in the growth movement, if only they didn't have to work through acres of earnest proselytizing muddle; cheering for the home team; and essentially private self-congratulation on how much therapy A or B has done for the writer. The proselytizing is not objectionable, the muddle is - the failure to distinguish, to define, to think whether or not one is saying what one means and whether it's worth saying.

Everyone who is interested in what people are like, how they think and feel and act, must be prepared for muddle, of course, so inconsistent are we all and so unique is each one of us. But that does not justify the apparent lack of any properly thought-out theoretical framework which might encompass most, if not all, of the manifestations of the growth movement; indeed, it makes it the more necessary for people who are wondering, How do I fit in? What even *is* it that I'd like to get into? What would help me most?

One doesn't get from the book under review, for instance, any clear idea of the structure and range of application of Mrs. Satir's 'communication theory.' (Nor do the authors show any sign of awareness that their calling it 'conjoint family therapy.' *equates* the two. But a theory and a therapy are quite different, surely?) I can't help thinking that the Tyrones are well past being *assisted* by family therapy, useful though

they are for illustrating some of the things that can go wrong in families. And of '*A Delicate Balance* the authors say:

> *The Albee family is not that unusual. This is the kind of family we often see in treatment. We have seen how all the roles complement each other within a dynamic if unstable family. It should also be clear that a change in any one role will inevitably lead to changes in all the others. It is a question of who will make the first move. Change is thus a risk. Because the consequences are not completely predictable. [Editors know about punctuation, too]. If for a moment we try to imagine Agnes, what would happen if she changed in such a way that she insisted on reversing her role and became the decision-maker. The first thing she would do is place strong limits on Claire's drinking or get rid of her completely. Either way would probably lead to a complete rejection unless Claire made some pretty big changes. Agnes would demand clear response from Tobias, he would no longer be allowed to vacillate and opt out of conflicts. There would be no more comforting for Julia, she would have to act her age, and behave like a 36-year-old woman. p.195*

What do the authors envisage as a sufficient cause of change in Agnes? She must be pushing 60 and so must Tobias. How will Claire manage to make 'pretty big changes?' How is a 36-year-old woman escaping to her parents from her fourth unsuccessful marriage going to learn to 'act her age?' Is all this to be brought about by conjoint family therapy? It's *too late.*

Nuclear families seem to me to experience their greatest strains when the children are toddlers and during their first years at school. Can you put a family of mother, father, and children aged say 3, 5, and 8 into conjoint family therapy? Clearly not: the children will be totally unable to cope with it. Lots of 'secrets' have simply got to be kept from children. My guess is that conjoint family therapy works best with parents in *early* middle-age and teen-aged children. Even at those ages, I'd have thought a very disturbed family could be given only a limited amount of help. Can you get it on the NHS, by the way? No small matter for most families.

So what's the answer? Look around the growth movement and take your pick. If you know how to think and can understand what you read (both overt and covert messages . . .), you're all right - except that you'll probably throw it out as a lot of vague, woolly-minded, self-regarding rubbish, badly written by unsophisticated enthusiasts for they know not quite what. And I think - at least I hope - that would be a pity. If you don't know how to distinguish the clear from the unclear, the definite from the indefinite, the fact from the value - well, you're at the mercy of whichever growth group grabs you first, I suppose.

It's ironic I think that the movement's umbrella should shelter group-therapy techniques as disparate as working with a family and joining a group of strangers for from 10 to 72 hours at a go. This is the era, however, of team-teaching, committee decisions, communes, and participatory democracy: this is the era of the *the group.* Why? Is there a book on general group theory anyone can recommend to me? That must I suppose be the starting point.

Merivan Coles

Nicholas Saunders, *Self Exploration,*
published by Nicholas Saunders - 85p.

The sub-heading is 'A Guide to Groups Involved' and here most of the Growth Centres are recorded. However the bulk of the book seems to be concerned with mystical and oriental activities and it includes advice on witchcraft, a short guide to the Tarot cards and how to throw the I Ching. At one time I had been looking for a druid and I was somewhat reassured to find that Nicholas Saunders seems to have found the same one that I was recommended to.

He is on somewhat shakier ground in his potted description of alternative therapies, but then who wouldn't be? For example, I find myself disagreeing rather strongly with his description of the Alexander technique as being 'based on theories similar to Reich'. Alexander was completely uninterested in psychology or the *reasons* why bodies were being misused. He was concerned only with the immediate practical business of learning how to use the body in the right way.

Under Yoga, there is no mention at all of the Iyengar trained teachers, at least six of whom have regular classes in the London area.

Where the book is very valuable is in the innumerable references to and descriptions of the different esoteric religions and disciplines. Anyone looking for Subud, Kundalini Yoga or at least four different kinds of Buddhism would find Self Exploration a valuable *vade mecum.*

Vivian Milroy

Kurt W. Back, *Beyond Words: the Story of Sensitivity Training and the Encounter Movement,* (Pelican)

'The Story of Sensitivity Training and the Encounter Movement', as revealed in 'Beyond Words', bears as much resemblance to reality as a collector's case of dead, pinioned butterflies bears to the flitting of live butterflies among the meadows and flowers; the action has been stopped for purposes of identification, the foreground has been hacked from its functional context, and is therefore bereft of meaning. Fortunately, in reality, the encounter, or growth movement is a living, thriving, colourful expression of inner needs, strengths and concerns, and is not susceptible to destruction by this collector's well-meaning net.

The book does not do what it purports to do, which is to give an impartial history and assessment of the encounter movement. Instead, it offers a biased and often confused and contradictory description, full of inaccuracies. Typical of this confused thinking, for example is the following account of a weekend encounter group in which there is

'a strong expression of emotion caused by a really deep intensive experience which does not last, but whose memory gives the impression that something very important happened.'

As far as I'm concerned, this statement is meaningless; either the experience is a deep and intensive one, or it is not. The annoying thing about this book is its patchiness; perfectly valid and helpful observations are sandwiched in between unacceptable and insidious generalizations: he describes the leaders as 'sometimes little more trained than having had one experience in group sessions.' This can only be a blatant and unsupported allegation. Then he adds, more soberly.

'The whole sensitivity training movement is in a difficult dilemma regarding this problem. Most people in it have some good idea of what are at least the extremes of adequate and inadequate training,'

and goes on to discuss the problem of responsibility and training somewhat more constructively. But there are so many implied negatives in his seemingly innocuous statements that he is able to turn a constructive statement into an ambiguous one at will. Back's piecemeal approach is demonstrated by frequent contradictions: on page 112 he talks about Schutz's theory of interpersonal relationships which is about the individual's striving for inclusion, affection and dominance:

'The physical acting out and working out of these drives presumably break the mold in which the person is captured — and make him creative and free to act with other people.'

This is a fair and accurate description of the benefits of acting out, and working through, in a controlled situation - yet on page 183 he tells us:

'The mythology that anything non-verbal is true and only non-verbal effort can really get to the heart of the matter, is shown very strongly in these educational groups. People really believe that the physical contact and acting out of these somewhat general and complicated social relationships help both in understanding and in dealing with them.'

He seems to me to be strongly implying - 'gullible fools - of course it's not so at all!'

Such contradictions abound, but are usually cloaked in an insinuating language which is hard to confront. He says that the encounter movement is science based - but then denies it any scientific credibility. He says it has no influence outside itself - but then admits its effects may be extending into the culture. He does not deal with the positive values of a movement which aims at restoring individual and creative values amid the alienating effects of a bureaucratically and technologically organized society.

Finally the last chapter is more succinct and accurate than much of the rest of the book. His analysis of encounter as a movement which 'expresses the view of the affluent society, especially the affluent middle class within it' and 'which needs no materialistic help from society but feels only the frustrations that come from it' has the ring of truth. He is right to point out that 'there is a tragedy within man which arises from the fact that at some point social needs and human needs are contradictory. The good of the individual and the group cannot always be identical and one of them has to give.' This is one of the few places where a little of Back's own humanness shines through.

I would recommend anyone new to encounter to read this book with caution; it grossly misrepresents the spirit of the movement - and if spirit is a metaphysical word, then I choose metaphysics rather than this hash of innaccuracies and hearsay, masquerading as hard social science.

Hilary Sinclair

John McDavid & Herbert Harari, *Psychology and Social Behaviour,* Harper & Row, 417 pages, £3.30.

'Man is a curious animal' are the opening words of the book. With that thought in both its meanings I fully agree. In one sense this book is concerned with man's need to understand himself and his world. In another sense it is an account of his curious ways. Some of the research results on conformity and obedience to authority are so horrible that the dangers need shouting out.

It is a fascinating book explaining the viewpoint and work of social psychologists. It is frankly scientific in orientation but there is an open acceptance of the limitations and contradictions in such an approach. The book has five sections and covers everything from origins to methods. It travels from individual perception and behaviour through inter personal, group and mass behaviour.

The book is amply provided with highlights of specific research results and each chapter is summarised. The book has two indexes, author and subject. The latter being rather weak. Anyone interested in this viewpoint will find the book absorbing reading and as a source of reference it is full of interesting research to back up arguments.

The writers of the book are faceless. Apart from the names of their American universities nothing is revealed. In a book like this I find that unforgivable. One presumes they have good jobs and incomes, plus security. Due to the dangers of conformity which they illustrate they should set an example and speak out. It is understandable that they do not bite the hand that feeds them but they might stamp a few toes.

Under the section on psychological theory they write 'As the humanistic point of view matures into articulated theory it is likely that its contribution to social psychology

will increase further.' It might be paraphrased as follows. As social psychologists mature the humanistic view of the gap between articulated theory and behaviour will be better understood. Nonetheless from an integrative viewpoint it illustrates a weakness in our theory. I wonder? The theories of love and joy are old. Humanistic psychology helps the experience.

Mark Matthews
