



# BOOK REVIEWS

BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGY AND PSYCHOTHERAPY: A POETICS OF EXPERIENCE by Miller Mair. Routledge, 1988. 292pp. Price £9.95

Miller is one of the founders of the Psychology and Psychotherapy Association, a group which included Don Bannister, Fay Fransella, Bob Hobson and others. He has been interested in where psychology is going and what it is doing, and has published articles on this down the years, particularly in the personal construct tradition. Now here he tries to put it together and see where he has got to with it all.

It is a personal book, full of uncertainties and gropings, and containing diary entries and jottings from previous years. It expresses on the one hand dissatisfaction with the clinical psychology in which he is immersed (he works at the Crichton Royal Hospital in Dumfries) and on the other hand his interest in what he calls a conversational model of psychology and psychotherapy.

There is a very interesting case vignette here, where he shows that his own practice as a therapist is very humanistic, using imagery and the idea of subpersonalities in a very free way. He says:

One of the most striking things about people (for me) is that they/we **speak with many voices**, many selves. We are not units, single, coherent, all of a piece . . . One of the most clarifying experiences for a person can be when they are able to undertake some means of access to the many different parts they play, the community of selves that they jostlingly live through. To begin to be able to discriminate, sense, see, touch and minutely describe many of the different selves whose voices speak under their common name, can be especially liberating.

This is the one arm of what he is talking about, the psychotherapy arm. But there is the other arm, too, the psychology arm. He wants a psychology which is more about questions than about instant answers and numbers and findings and conclusions. He says:

By creating a psychology of answering we confirm and continue this conservative policy. By turning towards the possibility of many worlds in the making, we need to undertake a psychology of questioning which seeks radical alternatives, a questioning of roots.

This conversational psychology would, he goes on to say, be a resolutely human psychology, firmly about people and their relationships and not about other, more distracting matters which are more easily reduced to numbers and quantities. This book does have some drawbacks. It is slow and gives the impression of a man who takes an age to come to a conclusion about anything. It is sometimes like watching someone walking through mud, in great danger of losing their boots altogether. Does it really need to be that slow, one wonders?

The second drawback is the autism of the book - the way in which the author ignores others who have walked this way before. Other authors are autistic in this way, mainly referring to their own work rather than making connections with others. John Heron is one. Jacob Moreno another; but these tend to be more speedy than Miller. There is a contradiction between Miller's expressed desire to have a conversational psychology and the absence of dialogue in the book itself. The key moment in the book, the moment when Miller discovers his own direction and purpose, is a solitary moment in a library. Talking to oneself doesn't count as a conversation, in my book.

The third drawback is the lack of structure. It is divided into three parts, but there is no structure in any of the three parts that is discernible to me, and the three parts are not very different, even though the middle one is written in short lines instead of long ones. This lack of structure is very characteristic of the whole style of writing.

At the heart of the book is a concern about words and how words are used. In a conversational model this might be expected. But sometimes I felt that there was too much about words, almost with a psychoanalytic insistence that what cannot be put into words does not exist. Yet in his own practice Miller uses imagery and active methods which are not just about words. The subtitle of this book expresses the tension here: a poetics is a piece of literary criticism, at one remove from literature itself. And just as literary criticism can sometimes concentrate too much on the words, and not enough on what is behind the words, so sometimes this piece of writing concentrates too much, for me, on words as such.

If you can not worry too much about these drawbacks, this is a very challenging book, going to the very roots of psychology and psychotherapy and having a lot to say about some very fundamental matters. It can be stimulating and worthwhile for those who can persevere with it.

**John Rowan**

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Reach tall and far!  
Stay close, touch and feel!  
Aim high and deep!  
See your place in the sweep of time!

It is a calling and a passion  
It is a matter of ultimate concern.

Be wary and willing  
Be cynical and yet simple  
Try to speak always to the heart of the matter.  
Reach beyond the conventions of politeness and superficial pretence  
Do not live in the lap of protectionism and petty professionalism.  
Do not live mainly for immediate gain and self-flattery

We are baffled creatures in time and know little of ourselves or our neighbours.

We are on a journey and have a long way to go.

**Miller Mair**

30.9.85

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**in the centre**

. . . Love is neither a fine feeling nor a kindness shown to others  
In its heart it is the searing of truth - it burns  
like a laser beam - with terrible power into and  
through the very hardest material thing -

Love is power - love is frightening power -  
Love is in the terrible explosions of space and  
the devastating explosions of volcanoes  
Love is the gentlest, most slender rose -  
is lightning and instant death -  
Love burns and hurts and scalds and consumes  
and tortures and destroys -  
Love is no mild mannered plaything - love is power

Love neither quavers nor fails - though we  
often fail  
Love is not qualified or contained  
Love is power in all its forms and the endless  
movement of time

Love does not demand as a demanding person  
but love demands  
Love demands in the very nature of things - love  
demands all - everything - love is  
ultimate and complete - love consumes

Love suffers - love is pain - pain is love turned  
inside out - stretched across the barrel of time  
Love is not a pretty sight - love is  
beauty and the intensity of simple honour  
Love is all there is - love is power  
Love is ultimate demand - dare we even  
enter the portals of love - we scarcely  
yet know what it is to love -  
Love gives everything there is - love is power

Love is no easy option - love demands of you  
all you are -  
Love is no cottage with roses round the door -  
Love is pain - love is the ultimate giving -  
the receiving of ultimate giving -

And for us love sustains - and fear of love  
dominates our lives - fear of the power  
of others creates terror and torture -

We cannot yet love more than a little and  
we avoid love assiduously.

**Miller Mair**

27.3.78

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BEHAVIOUR THERAPY AND RELIGION edited by William R Miller and  
John E Martin. Sage publications Inc. California 1988. pp 186. pb  
£12.95: hb £29.95

Nine authors have contributed to this book. They are described as being  
currently involved in teaching psychology or psychiatry, except for  
Baugh who is a clinical psychologist. All appear to be highly qualified  
(seven PhD's) and are active church members.

The editors emphasise in the first chapter that to discuss integrating  
behavioural and spiritual approaches to change will be controversial as,  
traditionally, each approach has rejected the other. However, both  
approaches have benefited many people by expanding their lives,  
although by vastly different methods. An attempt to integrate the two  
seems, to me, to be a natural and desirable move forward.

In the opening chapter, 'Toward Integration' Miller and Martin note that 'The affirmation of spiritual behaviour (at least) as a legitimate form of human expression and experience would enable us to train behavioural scientists more as whole people. And also - and this may be more relevant in the US where, apparently, 90% of clients believe in God - 'Cognitive-behavioural interventions may have greater impact when they incorporate the client's own belief and imagery systems' -which is a sound premise.

However I was less convinced by Allen E Bergin's assertion in the chapter on Spiritual Perspectives that 'Obedience to moral law is in principle no different from obedience to physical laws.' Physical laws such as, for example, gravity or the different properties of liquids and solids are enduring, fixed and testable; but moral laws are the creation of human minds and are therefore arguable. For example, is it immoral for a mother to steal if her child is hungry and she has no money? To be fair to Bergin, he does then quote some value judgements which were endorsed 100% in a survey (e.g. 'it is mentally healthy to assume responsibility for one's actions') and others on which respondents were divided (eg 'it is mentally healthy to have a preference for a heterosexual sex relationship') to which only 57% agreed.

In the following chapter, on 'Including Clients' Spiritual Perspectives' Miller states unequivocally that 'Although religious beliefs themselves may not be subject to scientific verification, their psychological manifestation and applications in treatment are empirically testable.' I am not an adherent of behaviourism. I question this statement, if only because belief itself is not a constant ; on one day a person's faith in God may be strong and sure, and the next day a tragedy occurs and the same person is filled with doubts about God's existence and/or beneficence.

Perhaps it is this inconstancy of faith in God (this book is written from a Christian perspective) that makes this subject inherently difficult to write about in a 'scientific' way. Each contributor writes, necessarily, from their own particular point of view; and while it is fascinating and encouraging to see this area tackled by professional behavioural psychologists, I see it as a hesitant beginning with inevitable subjective bias and inconsistency which will, I guess, convince few religiously uncommitted behavioural psychologists.

Nonetheless, a couple of the chapters are excellent, notably the one on 'Spiritual Health' by Martin and Charles R Carlson (apart from lengthy sentences - one was 73 words long.) They discuss the effects on health of stress and spirituality and prayer with especial reference to coronary-prone behaviour patterns by types who feel they must rigidly control events, compared to the opposite end of a continuum of behaviour from persons who allow events to take their own course - guided by God.

I found that the best chapter 'The Relationship Between a Personal Theology and Chronic Pain' was by Ellie T Sturgis. She describes Buber's 'I-Thou' relationship as the goal of healing and gives an account of a case study in which reaching out to other people, despite his disability, and expressing his anger to God, allowed the patient to live his own life instead of feeling controlled by his pain.

Then follows a good chapter by James R Baugh, 'Coping with Powerlessness' and the paradox by which, in relinquishing control, we gain a different kind of strength.

Stanton L Jones wrote an interminable 30 pages - 'A Religious Critique of Behaviour Therapy' which I found heavy going and fairly abstruse. I was also put off Jones by his references to Calvin and his unexpected observation that 'Compared to analytic, Rogerian and Family systems approaches, which seem to have a low view of the person's capacity for meaningful change apart from expert intervention, behavioural approaches have a high view of the person's capacity for change through 'self-control' and related processes. He seems to misunderstand the fundamental aims of respectively, behavioural and Rogerian therapy - the former aims to alter symptoms while the latter works for lasting change at a deep personal level. Jones does not comment on the quality of change brought about by different approaches.

E Mansell Pattison concludes the book with 'A Cosmological Analysis'. This includes a table which shows the percentages of professional anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists et al who are personally religious but with no information as to how he obtained these figures. Pattison does happily make a distinction between religion and spirituality and concludes by saying that 'It is only in a transcendent spirituality that affirms the salvation of the human spirit by that which is beyond and apart from us (shall we dare name it God?) that the fragmented human is offered the salvation of our being.' Despite this distinction, and its title, this book embodies a narrow view of spirituality: that of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. So while I think that the general aim of its authors is worthwhile and optimistic, I should prefer it to embrace a far wider vision of spirituality, in which persons of every faith may feel included. Moreover for an academic book, surprisingly and disappointingly, it lacks an index.

**Jane Carlisle**

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