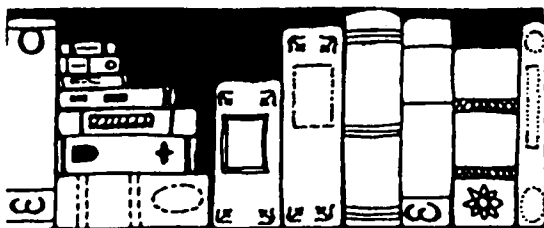


## BOOK REVIEWS



### **The Absent Mother, Edited by Alix Pirani. Mandala, 1991, £7.99**

There are several reasons why you might pick up this book: you read Alix Pirani's *Absent Father* but this is very unlike this book. This collection of different authors' accounts of their search for the absent mother was for me quite a difficult book to make contact with because of its scholarly style. A glossary would have helped me to re-search it.

As a budding feminist theologian it will help you to understand how patriarchy has disguised and dismissed the Goddess and women with Her. So start near the end of the book with Gloria Orenstein's chapter 'Gender Politics and the Soul'; she writes lucidly of a non-dogmatic spirituality.

Asphodel Long's historical perspective of 'The Goddess in Judaism' gains in meaning on the second reading ... 'all biblical texts are androcentric ... written, edited and expounded by men' and 'the female divine and human so put down, degraded, patronised and derided, obscured and reviled that only now women are beginning to be able to attempt to redress the balance' and 'as we do we open up a new perspective in history' (herstory?). The Goddess is 'immanent and part of Nature and the world ... We are women who have undergone defeat ... also defeated are men who have paraded and gloried in their 'godliness' to bring the world to the brink of extinction'.

Jenny Goodman considers what to call the Divine; she suggests we continue to use God, despite its long-embedded resonance of male power, after all 'the female half is not missing from God' but 'from our picture of God' and so use with it the pronoun She and begin to redress the balance.

If you have an interest in discovering more about the Goddess and integrating Her dark and light aspects, read Roger Horrocks' interesting contribution about Mary and the Black Virgin. His conclusion that one of the great problems in Christianity is its inability to accept the necessary dark side of life, and of the religious wars, persecutions, acts of genocide ... precisely because it clung too fiercely to 'the good' explains one of patriarchal religion's most troubling aspects.

Finally, you might read Ruth Barnett's very clear exposition of the role of Gods, Goddesses and religion as symbolic possessions standing in for an external protective power (or transitional object\*) as the human race develops from child to teenager. I liked this idea and talked enthusiastically about it but then found myself feeling rather alone in the world. So I reread Alix Pirani's 'Creations of the Goddess' and found three of the pre-Christian Goddesses: Lilith, dark Goddess of radical change and revolution, 'who patriarchy has turned into the queen of demons ... In reclaiming her we women throw off and pour away for ever the poison about ourselves - our so-called inferiority, our evil inner selves, our guilt'; Shekinar, Goddess of transition, continuous creation and evolution, and Hochmah, 'principle of integrative intelligence which balances positive and negative, stabilises, brings the past to rest in the present'. Now I feel in good company.

Guildford

Jill Anderson

\*D.W. Winnicott, 'A special toy can stand in for Mum' in *Playing and Reality* Penguin, 1971.

### **The Interpreted World - An Introduction to Phenomenological Psychology, Ernesto Spinelli. Sage, 1989, £7.99.**

You would think that a discipline claiming such luminaries as R.D. Laing, Harold Garfinkel, Soren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre and Irving Yalom would be full of challenge, excitement and inspiration. But what we have here is quite a pedestrian book, not badly written, quite clear and jargon-free, leading to a disappointment.

I remember having much the same response when the Duquesne Studies started to come out in the 1970s. The phenomenologists had been having a field-day criticising everyone else in the field of social science, and pointing out all of their unexamined assumptions, very successfully and interestingly, and now here they were doing their own original work. And it was thin, inconclusive stuff. The best bit in the current book seemed to me the discussion of perception, where Spinelli has a lot of fun with the famous optical illusion, showing that there is a third way of looking at it. Again this demonstrates the favourite phenomenological point - that we don't realise how much we are taking for granted. It is when Spinelli tries to spell out the positive ideas of the phenomenologists that he founders. The discussion of the self is so vague that we come out at the end not knowing what he really thinks. In one chapter the author tries to compare and contrast the phenomenological approach with Humanistic Psychology, but makes the elementary mistake of treating Est as a part of Humanistic Psychology.

One of the key things the phenomenologist asks us to do is to bracket our assumptions: that is, to switch them off and perceive things afresh. This is an essential move. But then the author draws a parallel between free association and bracketing. We know how difficult free association is, so that may tell us how difficult the task of bracketing can be.

Because the author is so nice and reasonable, we get none of the cut and thrust which made the original attack on social science so stimulating. This makes the book dull and hard to read; it took me several months to get through it.

London, E17

John Rowan

**Journey to Brotherhood: Awakening, Healing and Connecting Men's Hearts, Frank Cardelle. Gardner Press, New York, 1990, \$15.95.**

This is an important book written by a psychotherapist who travels a great deal and runs workshops for men in Eastern Europe and South America, though he lives in Canada. It offers a real vision of a new way forward for men.

One is a little put off at the beginning by all the talk about war between the USA and the Soviet Union, as if Gorbachev had never happened, but this is explained by the fact that the book was originally written in 1985, and took until 1990 to get published. The whole study of men's consciousness was desperately unfashionable in publishing until Robert Bly came along, and now the position has changed a great deal.

The book outlines the present position, how men are conditioned all through their childhood to be tough and independent. He gives many concrete examples of what he is talking about, and gives a theoretical rationale taken from a wide range of sources, from Laing to Perls, from Berne to Jung, from Janov to Fromm.

I don't know why he changes the name of the Count of Monte Christo from Edmond Dantes to Edmund Dante, consistently throughout quite a long discussion.

After giving his analysis of how men are right now, he goes on to discuss the question of how men could be in the future, and gives some hints on how to achieve this. He speaks of the revolutionary man who is being born today: this man knows how to take care of his health and well-being; how to stay in touch with his feelings; how to stay in touch with his body; how to tap into spirituality and creativity; how to keep a sense of proportion and humour; all these things require a different kind of courage. They are explained with a wealth of personal examples which are sometimes very moving.

There is a whole section on men and friendship which is worth reading - why men find it so difficult to have anything like a real friendship with another man. He tells us that it is very important to look at this, and gives us some hints on how to do it. Again this is very concrete, and he gives us some extended examples of male friendships which have worked. He relates it too, to problems around the father. A discussion of racism also comes in at this point.

There is a workshop section, giving ideas for exercises to use with men and full details about how and when to use them.

He also mentions Robert Bly, and goes along with the basic idea that it is not enough for men to learn how to be open and sensitive - there is a masculine wildness which is not to be lost.

"The word that fits, which reflects my own style of relating, is "vitality". I see vitality as the source of energy that flows through all living things. It stems from the deep stream within that often overflows with joy, excitement and a zest for life. It is a passion for existence, kinship and being grateful for life. Most of all, it is a feeling of deep respect and love for the self and for others, the environment and all kingdoms of creatures." (p.232)

This is well said.

Cardelle is a little kinder to the idea of androgyny than I would be myself, though he does say that in his view androgyny is not the ultimate goal.

He finishes up by discussing the implications of all this for society at large, and makes the point that men and women have to be allies if anything is really going to change. A woman friend of his contributes her own comments at this point. All in all, this is a worthwhile book which I think should be read by any man who is at all interested in how real change can come about.

London E17

John Rowan

**Astrological Voids, Janis Huntley. Element Books.**

This is a technical book, mainly for the use of professional astrologers, or at least people with some idea of how to set up a birth chart. A valuable book in that it covers a subject which, until now, has been pretty much untouched.

The author, obviously very experienced in chart reading, has done a great deal of research and analysis on the subject of voids.

Voids are the empty areas of the chart, and up till now have usually been considered unimportant. I say up till now because, as the author states, "much information concerning a subject's basic characteristics, attitudes and inherent needs in life, as well as karmic obligations, could be gleaned from such study."

The book is well written, being clear and comprehensive. The only point that bothers me is that, considering that there are various systems of house division, I would think it difficult to stick by any fast rules related to house analysis. Not all astrologers use the same system of house division, so this particular part of the analysis will vary from astrologer to astrologer.

Later on in the book the author goes on to describe other lacks within the chart, unaspected planets, element lacks, etc.

I must say that I was surprised by the author's analysis of an unaspected sun. I had been led to believe that this placement indicated that the subject had difficulty expressing the energy of the sun, which would therefore be unintegrated, but the author states the contrary - "the energy of an unaspected sun, however,

is brilliant and dazzling." She goes on to give examples of famous people with this position in their chart.

A highly informative book that serves as a guide and a stimulus for the practising astrologer in the difficult task of chart interpretation.

Majorca

Peri Rowan

**John Rowan adds:** *The reason I think this is so interesting is because once again it reminds us that what is not there can be just as important and significant as what is there. I was once helping a client to work with a dream about a Methodist church, and at some point or other in the dream virtually every aspect of the church was mentioned. But I suddenly realised that the absence of the minister was highly significant and carried much of the meaning of the dream. Another time I was helping a client work on a drawing of their family, and I realised that the father was missing. Again it turned out that this was the most telling thing about the drawing. So it seems that what is missing can be very charged with meaning in psychotherapy. It is interesting to know that the same thing can be true in astrology, particularly in the more sophisticated forms of astrology which come so close to psychology, as Jung pointed out.*

**The Way Men Think, Liam Hudson and Bernardine Jacot. Yale University Press, 1991. £16.95**

Liam Hudson has worked as an academic for more than a quarter of a century and has held posts as a professor in several universities and at the Tavistock Institute. His starting point is not that of a therapist - how to help people change themselves and develop their potential. He writes about how we explain and understand human behaviour which is never far away when we think about the assumptions made in therapy.

The authors are against the sterility of confining psychology, as academics tend to, to either experimental psychology or to psychoanalytic interpretation. They are committed to drawing on experience especially as it is represented in biography and artistic expression (that brings them nearer to Humanistic Psychology) as well as using the ideas of orthodox academic psychology. They do this well. I found the accounts of the typical and maddening personality quirks of scientists, for example, sensitively observed.

The main argument of the book stands Freud on his head. Freud argued that women are diminished, wounded or incomplete men because they lack external genitalia. Hudson and his partner argue that central to maleness are the ways that boys deal with the problem of breaking away from mothers to find a different, male identity, whereas girls break away to continue a unique but still female identity.

The process of rejecting womanliness creates a wound in men which leads to power trips, misogyny, repression of the personal and intimate parts of our nature and emphasises intellectualising and warfare.

Karen Horney, Bruno Bettelheim and others have written on these themes but *The Way Men Think* is further reaching and of course more up to date than earlier authors. It has a sound contemporary flavour to it. One of the best parts of the book looks at the way in which men, and not women, depersonalise sexual activity, turn it into a commodity and pervert it. It is one of the most readable parts of a very readable and thought provoking book.

London SW11  
David Jones

**The Enneagram, Helen Palmer, HarperCollins, 1991**

Helen Palmer's book on the Enneagram eloquently describes the nine personality types and explains that the purpose of understanding your type is "to learn to set it aside in order to get on with the real work of embodying higher consciousness. A small-minded approach to typing reduces the value and purpose of a system that suggests that type is merely a stepping-stone to higher human abilities ..." Thus by self-observation, one can make the distinction between what Gurdjieff describes as false personality and true self. Each type has a chief feature which is a neurotic habit developed in childhood as a way of protecting your true self, and you learn and grow by observing and working with this.

Helen Palmer names the nine types each with its own chief feature and typical defence mechanism. The Perfectionist, The Giver, The Performer, The Tragic Romantic, The Observer, The Devil's Advocate, The Epicure, The Boss, The Mediator.

This book gives a thorough description of each personality type. Helen Palmer says that the best way to learn about the types is "... by seeing and hearing groups of people of the same type speak about their lives ...", as each type has a "unique feel, a distinguished quality, a presence ..." which fills the room.

This book captures the essence of each of these presences with exquisite clarity.

Woodford  
Sandie Ritter

**Racism in Children's Lives, A Study of Mainly White Primary Schools, Barry and Richard Hatcher. Routledge 1991, £35,-Hbk, £9.99 Pbk.**

This study of children shows that negative stereotypes of black people are worse in schools with few blacks and suggests some useful action by staff.

London SW11  
David Jones