

## **From the Review Editor's Desk**

The books seem to arrive thick and fast; my book shelves have run out of space, and I have been forced to create a quasi-alphabetical system of vertically aligned books under the very couch on which my clients sit. I suppose I hope, that the wisdom of these books will be, through osmosis, absorbed through this couch and into whomever might be sitting there at a given time.

However, I'm sure that osmosis doesn't work this way, and I'm also aware that even my own uncritical consumption of these books wouldn't do the trick either. We must add the missing ingredients of internal dialogue, debate, experience, and some wisdom of our own and our colleagues in order to sift through these collections of concepts and ideas. I suppose my part of the job in this is to mediate the effort and knowledge that lies under my couch, and send it off into the world just for this sort of consumption and fermentation. The great question is, however, which of these myriads of tomes go out to review, and which remain to collect dust?

This difficult conundrum should be informed by the title and ethos of our very journal – a wide remit, it would seem. The logical solution, then, is to rely on our readership to dictate what they'd like to review and see reviewed. Fortunately for me, there is a lot of interested and expert readers out there who are happy to make some of these decisions for me. In order to facilitate this, a list of the current (relevant) books underneath my couch are now available on the ahpb website. Have a look yourself on [www.ahpb.org.uk](http://www.ahpb.org.uk) and let me know if you'd like to review one of them. Also tell me if there's a book you'd like to see reviewed that's not there, and I'll do my utmost to procure it.

In this edition we have three reviews; one on an explicitly psychotherapeutic theme, and a double review on a philosophical novel. This odd juxtaposition of texts seems to invite an unexpected resonance from the reviewers. Despite the great difference in the content of the books being reviewed, the uncomfortable dialectic of dominant norms versus more global, developmental, or multi-faceted perspectives emerge.

Alvin Marcetti's review of *Psychological Therapies for Older People* challenges the dominant paradigm of the medical model and it's blinkered evidence-based treatment of older people. He questions the dependence on cognitive and interpersonal theory at the expense of the more humanistic varieties which may be better utilised by practitioners working with such a client group.

In counterweight to the explicitly therapeutic, we also have a double-review of Ken Wilber's first foray into the world of fiction with his newest book *Boomeritis*. Wilber takes on the challenge of holding post-modernism and its fraternal twin, narcissism, up to scrutiny. Both reviewers, Nick Duffell and Pall Einarsson expressed doubts about the narrative structure (intentionally badly written in a discursive poke at post-modern style) while commending Wilber on his continued developments in the world of integral theory.

It seems that one of the central flaws of the post-modern condition, as Wilber points out, is that anything goes in our multi-subjective free-for-all. How does one navigate through such a world of ideas? It is through a critical capacity that our reviewers approach their books; and from this same capacity again that we engage with their reviews. The final decision, however, will always be yours. Happy reading to you all.

*Aaron Balick*

# Boomeritis – A Novel That Will Set You Free

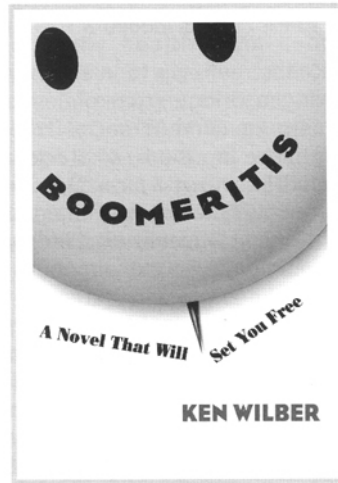
Ken Wilber

Shambhala 2002, \$24.99 (HB)

## review one

'The medium *is* the message', was one of the philosophic battle cries of the Sixties. In this extra-ordinary 'novel' Ken Wilber takes up it up again, employing a new form to re-present his familiar trademark: intense meditations on the evolution of consciousness. This is both good and bad news. The good news is the theoretical component. His story is set in a sparse unity of time, a week-long seminar at an American university. By means of a team of lecturers the author gives himself plenty of opportunity to repeat and drum ideas into the reader. And the ideas really are worth it - more below. The bad news is that the characters are wooden, the action non-existent, and there is no suspense. Many readers will not make it two thirds of the way through the 456-page hardback, where Wilber lets us into the joke. The joke is that the book was *meant* to be as bad as it reads! It is pretending to be the ultimate post-modern novel written by a 23 year-old Ken Wilber.

OK, what a relief, it's meant to be a joke! But we wouldn't normally read Wilber for his sense of humour. There are some pretty odd bits in it, though. Young Ken is a lad obsessed with sex, drugs and house music - as well as computers and 'Bots' - beings of artificial intelligence, who he thinks



may out-evolve humans. In frequent interruptions to the 'plot', he and his girlfriend Chloe (a most unlikely character, as are all the females in the book) endlessly *boink*, accompanied by wild music, Ken's ever expanding fantasies, and a chandelier. Yes, readers, **BOINKING**, and chandeliers. I had to e-mail an American friend to check whether there was such a word. He had never heard it, so I assume it's another Wilber joke. Finally, our hero manages to boink himself into absorption with the Absolute. It makes for an ending, but I kept thinking, "Wilber, please stick to what you know."

I adore novels with theory; to me they are the ultimate form. What a shame *Boomeritis* doesn't aspire to the quality of Pirsig's *Lila* or Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* or Melville's *Moby Dick*, the mother of all such books. Nevertheless, I could hardly put it down in my anticipation for the book itself to transform. It does not; it continues, as Wilber would say, to *translate*. What happened to me,

though, was that the theory got duly impressed on my mind and rang all kinds of bells; it was indeed a liberation.

What Ken is really up to in *Boomeritis* is making a bridge from philosophic mysticism to current social reality. Through the medium of Beck and Cowan's *Theory of Spiral Dynamics* - a very plausible schema that ranks levels of consciousness and lifestyles (called Memes) - he explains how the revolution began in the Sixties by the Baby-Boomers (born 1940 - 60) has paved the way for an evolutionary leap in the transformation of consciousness, but not yet made it. This is deadly serious, he tells us, because having not yet made the step to the next level (the integral world-centric consciousness of Yellow Meme) we have become stuck in an approach (the individualistic liberal Green Meme) which has become self-referring and self-serving. We are now our own worst enemies. Particularly relevant today, the theory demonstrates precisely why the real divisions between people are not national/religious (Red/Blue Meme) nor ideological (Orange), but are based on conflicts between operating levels of consciousness.

Next, there follows a complete and credible intellectual dismantling of social-constructionism. Interestingly, Wilber arrives at some similar conclusions to those of British philosopher, John Gray, in his latest book, *Straw Dogs*, even if they are coming from entirely different starting points. This is that Post-Modernism, though a vital part of the evolutionary journey, is now stuck in addiction to pluralism, slavery to political-correctness, and has become wholly narcissistic. It impedes original thought and further evolution, and conceals, in fact, within its hatred of boundaries, a hostility to freedom.

This is challenging stuff.

If you are not aware of the extent to which the post-modern theory-mongers have taken over academia (and much of the counselling world) - particularly in the US - you may not find these arguments as releasing as I did. But Wilber does not stop here. While 'Boomerism' may be responsible for this state of affairs, it is the next generations that are truly suffering. Here Wilber is utterly enlightening when he explains how the children of the Boomers, so-called 'X' and 'Y' generations, have become gripped in either materialism or depression or both. And he offers a message of hope for the future - through them. This is why he has to appear in the book as a young man.

Currently, my 26-year-old son is a student at a famous college of art. Recently, I asked him what his course was about; he was unable to explain it to me, but he did say it was noticeable that students could get away with producing just about anything they wanted, regardless of technical merit. So I went to the university web-site and downloaded an essay dedicated to exploring 'discourses' of the topic. In 17 pages of the most mind-numbing jargon, which would have embarrassed even Derrida, the authors and course tutors couldn't explain it either.

It would be funny if weren't tragic. So I propose a plot. Instead of mounting a counter attack on these people, buy everyone you know who holds such views a copy of *Boomeritis*. They will have to suffer the form but will surely be enlightened by the content. *Boomeritis* could turn out to be a masterpiece.

*Nick Duffell*

# Boomeritis – A Novel That Will Set You Free

review two



Boomeritis was born from the death of a book that Wilber intended to write on the same subject matter, but chose to abandon because he felt that it was too negative. He then decided to fictionalise the subject matter in an effort to create a novel that covered the same material. And this is it; Wilber's first novel and an interesting one. Ken Wilber himself takes the role as the main character in the book, a young student that is studying artificial intelligence and, by chance, ends up at a lecture at the Integral Institute where post modernism is being discussed in its healthy and unhealthy forms. Our young protagonist is both intrigued and surprised to hear about post modernism described in its ugliest form of rampant subjectivity and narcissism: otherwise known as 'boomeritis'. Each of the many lectures at the integral institute have something interesting to say about boomers and how they have come to think of their ego is the alpha and omega. The lectures at the institute consistently challenge the post modern notion that there is no objective truth and that everything one perceives is merely a subjective interpretation of reality. The main theme of the book rests upon the different forms this narcissistic disease (boomeritis) takes: most notably in American society.

There are many people that get labelled as 'boomers' in this book and an interesting one is Alice Miller as demonstrated through her book *The Drama of the Gifted Child*. In this book Wilber argues that Miller's primary

argument is the now popular victimised whine, 'if only I hadn't been fucked up by my parents, I would be wonderfully healthy and content!' Though Miller's argument has many merits, taken to its extreme there is the distinct smell of boomeritis. The new age movement, as well, gets its share of attacks along with the victim culture where it seems that individuals hardly take responsibility for anything anymore. In America the motto, 'just sue them,' seems to represent how reticent the modern ego is to take responsibility for its own actions, or even survive a perceived attack on its narcissism.

Extreme feminism doesn't escape the hit-list, and neither does art nor science. Everything gets explored from a boomer's perspective. Wilber also critically explores to the male psyche in the way that he reviles his character's day-dreaming about the breasts of a beautiful girl that attends the lectures at the same time as he does (apparently they are big).

It took me a while to get into the novel despite my being familiar with Wilber's work and theory. This book is in many ways different from his others as it is interspersed with images of the character Ken having sex with his girlfriend, taking ecstasy, or pondering how or when robots could reach the same level of consciousness as people and whether or not they would go through the same developmental stages as people do (strange pondering indeed!). In some way I felt like I was on a roller coaster going through this book as Wilber explores the ins and outs of boomers in society; it also forced me to confront my own boomer-like attitudes.

So did the book set me free? Well it depends what he means by free. It surely made me think about my own narcissistic attitude and in some ways it gave me an insight into the narcissism in our society. In that sense it really did at least set me free from my ignorance.

I would have been curious to read the book that Ken started off writing about extreme post modernism. By turning this into a novel he is able to give it some lightness and humour; but at the same time I feel it loses a quality of seriousness that would be needed for academic scholars to take a hard look at Wilber's point of view. Wilber is obviously struggling with his need to reach the wider public while maintaining the academic thrust of his work.

Wilber is one of the biggest voices of the Integral approach in the world today and has had a big impact on integrating philosophy, spirituality, psychology and social theory into one cohesive developmental framework. He is not someone to miss if you are interested in a fully integral perspective of modern life. This book might not be his best but I still wouldn't hesitate to recommend it. It can serve as a good antidote to our narcissism that is so well hidden in our daily life and often gets away with running the show.

*Pallie Einarsson*

## Psychological Therapies with Older People

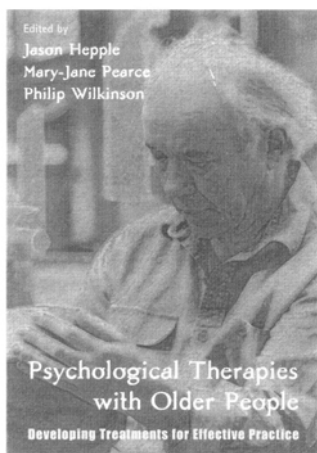
Edited by J

ason Hepple, Jane Pearce, & Philip Wilkinson

**Brunner-Routledge, 2002, 190pp, £16.99**

This well-meaning and well-written overview of a selection of contemporary psychological therapies used with older people has received good reviews in the professional press. It delivers exactly what it promises in a cohesive and organised manner, but presents a skewed view of therapeutic possibilities when working with older people. Most glaringly, it omits any mention of humanistic or transpersonal approaches, which are of interest to readers of this journal.

This book is a collection of chapters written by psychiatrists and psychologists whose experience is primarily within the NHS. In an interesting forward Mike Hobbs



attacks the previous view held by healthcare professionals that older people do not have the mental flexibility to benefit from psychotherapy. He notes that this

attitude is changing and that Freud's view that therapy was not suitable for people over 50 years of age is rapidly becoming outdated. In the initial chapter, Laura Sutton highlights the tensions between current and past views of therapy for the elderly emphasising that it is important to look beyond therapy that only focuses on telling the story of the past. What follows are four chapters, each one dealing with a psychological therapy: psychodynamic, cognitive behaviour, systemic, interpersonal, and cognitive analytic. Each is explained with good case material and theoretical models often expanded with diagrams. The authors conclude the book with a summary and overview that is both positive and challenging.

Perhaps the two most important elements of this book are the commitment to using appropriate therapies with older people and its very useful description of such therapies. The areas in which the contributors work, mainly the NHS, have been dominated for years with the negative Freudian attitude toward therapy for the elderly. The authors site research based on a survey of nearly one hundred psychotherapy departments which reports that psychotherapy for older people is often a scarce resource: 'The respondents drew attention to the lack of referrals of older people to psychotherapy services; the over-75 age group represented less than 1 per cent of referrals despite forming over 8 per cent of the population.' In their conclusion the authors suggest that cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and interpersonal therapy (IPT) are the most efficacious, particularly when working with depression.

However, in my opinion this book misses the mark. There is a great

void in the professional literature in this area, and while the authors attempt to redress the balance they do so from a limited perspective, that of illness and pathology. This perspective is both limited from a professional and personal point of view. Humanistic therapies would hold that not only can anyone benefit from therapy but that they can do so at any stage of their lives. In many ways the last third of life provides richer material for therapeutic work than at other stages. Any of the humanistic or integrative therapies would be useful, but the NHS is dominated by professionals with psychodynamic or behavioural orientations. The training therapy for psychiatrists is in fact cognitive behavioural therapy, and primary care providers, i.e. GP surgeries, only have funds for short term therapy that is symptom focused. Of the broadly humanistic therapies, it would seem that narrative therapy is a natural strategy for working with older people as is psychosynthesis or other transpersonal and existential therapies. I think of the excellent accounts in Yalom about his work with many clients over 50 who make significant emotional adjustments and growth as they approach seemingly intractable disease and life situations. Readers of this journal would do better to look to Yalom's *Love's Executioner* or *The Gift of Therapy*, James Hillman's *The Force of Character*, and Diana Whitmore's *Psychosynthesis Counselling in Action* for guidance.

*Alvin Marcetti*

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