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Foreword Review PSYCHOLOGY

Shrink: A Cultural History of Psychoanalysis in America

Lawrence R. Samuel
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There's enough history of psychoanalysis here for the layman to wrap his head around.

In *Shrink: A Cultural History of Psychoanalysis in America*, Lawrence R. Samuel successfully explores the role psychoanalysis has had on shaping the country's consciousness over time. Samuel delivers a powerful narrative of the discipline's ups and downs, packed with lively quotes, anecdotes, and fascinating historical tidbits—broad enough to be of interest to the general public, yet also sufficiently in-depth to appeal to those in the psychoanalytical professions.

In the early 1900s, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis first gained a foothold in American academia. Before long, cocktail parties were peppered with references to projection, transference, and birth order. At last, America's chattering classes could converse openly about the great unspoken—sex; the terminology of psychoanalysis placed the topic just far enough from the private sphere to remain titillating yet no longer too outrageous to acknowledge. The author conveys the naughtiness this added to otherwise staid drawing rooms and lecture halls, yet thorough discussion of its effect on sexual relationships themselves is lacking.

Samuel holds our attention as he takes us through the decades at a rapid clip—balancing events and trends with just the right amount of historical anecdote and contemporary reminiscence. The thirties and forties saw the field gaining steadily in respect, authority, and ubiquity. Its concepts pervaded movies, books, architecture, and even daily conversation. With the advent of World War II, the military started using psychoanalytic concepts to evaluate fitness for service. When armed conflict ended, psychoanalysis was widely used in the rehabilitation of battled-scarred veterans. The stage was set for the boom years of the fifties as the once-again affluent upper-middle class retreated to the privacy of the couch to resolve their inner conflicts. In the sixties, enthusiasm for the classic psychoanalytic cure faded as competition from faster, cheaper talk therapies and the rise of drug-based treatments shrank the demand for the classical shrink.

To this day, psychoanalysis has retained a following in the US and is currently experiencing a revival and re-evaluation. Moreover, its legacy extensively permeates the many other "talking cures" that have evolved to date. Samuel is admirably broad in his scope but could have delved a little deeper into the success of Eastern mysticism in influencing American psychoanalysis. He captures the many stages in this history with accuracy while always remaining accessibly readable. He consistently engages and prods us to consider the future. How will the field evolve? Will it continue to be relevant? "Mmm, interesting questions. However, I'm afraid we're out of time for today. Let's discuss those issues in a future session."

SEAMUS MULLARKEY (Summer 2013)

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