

Critical Appreciation of Wollheim, R., and Kermode, F. (editor). (1971) *Freud*

Richard Wollheim author of 'Freud' was one of the most distinguished and productive philosophers of his generation. He made a significant contribution to the post war flourishing of British philosophy and as his career continued his work grew steadily more individual, rich and expressive (The Times 2003). For Wollheim psychoanalysis was crucial to his personal outlook and played a fundamental role in defining his outlook on art. This was reflected in his standing as an honorary member of the San Francisco Psychoanalytical Institute and honorary affiliate of the British Psychoanalytical Society. In addition to this in 1991 Wollheim was awarded for his distinguished services to psychoanalysis by the International Society for Psychoanalysis. It is these personal and political affiliations which shaped the highly uncritical nature of the text.

'Freud' published in 1971 was written during an era when psychoanalysis became an influential method for understanding modern literature and culture. Psychoanalytical theory had been particularly effective in the area of literary and film criticism, its reading techniques widely disseminated, even when they were not always labelled psychoanalytic. Richard Wollheim points out that psychologist Sigmund Freud's writings on art usually focussed on the psychology of critics, rather than on analyses of particular paintings or stories (Thurschwell 2000). However, Wollheim adopting an uncritical stance failed to acknowledge the strong reactions psychoanalysis had provoked particularly within the feminist movement during the nineteen seventies. The criticism aimed essentially towards Freud's analytic practice and his theories of sexuality.

Wollheim states in the outset that the text will take the form of an exposition rather than an interpretation or evaluation of Freud's work. It does seem plausible to suggest that the text in fact can be described as a biography (Wollheim 1971) as it provides a detailed version of the 'life of a mind at work, and the story of a long and intricate process of discovery' (Wollheim 1971). It is at this point Wollheim sets himself two aims in the writing of the study. Firstly, to bring out what Freud actually said and secondly, to show the relevance of the chronological order in which he said it (Wollheim 1971). From these two aims it is possible to infer that Wollheim is attempting to inform and address an academic audience. This text would prove useful to academics largely in the field of psychology due to Wollheim's thorough account of Freud's work and findings. However, it may have implications for a variety of other fields including anthropology, semiotics and artistic creativity.

Wollheim successfully and systematically maps the work of Freud providing a chapter-by-chapter account of Freud's most influential and crucial theories. The first chapter entitled 'The First Phase' explores the beginnings of Freud's theories and it is here that the reader can see the surfacing of the ideas of defence mechanisms, the unconscious and infantile sexuality. Each of the chapters, are dedicated chronologically to a specific theory. For example 'the theory of mind' in chapter two, 'dreams, errors, symptoms and jokes' in chapter three and 'the unconscious and the ego' in chapter six. The penultimate chapter, 'the last phase' includes Freud's last theories, 'the pleasure principle', 'the ego and the id' and 'inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety.'

Within the opening paragraphs Wollheim it seems intentionally distinguishes his text from others with the statement that 'little trace can be found of Freud's own complex

thought.’ This appears to be a founded assertion as literature such as, ‘Sigmund Freud- an Outline of Psychoanalysis’ (Ragg-Kirby and Bowie 2003) although translating Freud’s ‘New Introductory Lectures’ there is a failure to include any discussion or reference to Freud’s reflections of his own work through the means Wollheim employs. This is particularly visible when other literature on Freud, discuss infantile sexuality. Authors often give the sense that Freud’s name was indissolubly linked with infants and sexuality. However, Wollheim directly challenges this writing ‘we can see the lengths to which Freud was prepared to go in accounting for the facts of mental disorder as he saw them without compromising the innocence of childhood’ (Wollheim 1971). This can be further warranted through Thurschwell’s text which claims that such assumptions are mistaken ones because ‘memory, like sex, is also a straightforward concern of Freud’s; psychoanalysis calls on the individuals to recall the childhood events and fantasies that shaped their personalities’ (2003).

Throughout the text there is continual evidence which illustrates the argument that it is written with Wollheim’s political interests always uppermost in his thought. For example, Wollheim writes ‘contrary to certain popular conceptions Freud had never believed that the whole of the man’s instinctual endowment was sexual.’ The succinct fashion in which this is written allows for no ambiguity and almost attempts to close any further discussion on the issue. Wollheim defends Freud’s work in a number of other ways. He ensures that any objections that may be raised against Freud are also incorporated into the text followed by an explanation using Freud’s own words or providing the reader with evidence which counteracts their argument. This is clearly demonstrated in the chapter ‘dreams, errors and symptoms’ where Wollheim addresses objections which may occur with respect to Freud’s extended view of the symptom. Wollheim uses Freud’s own work to explain his ‘three lines of defence.’ It

is clear the Wollheim does not want himself, to criticise Freud yet wants to provide an analysis of Freud's work so he brings in criticism and concerns from the standpoint of possible critiques of Freud. This successfully integrated technique prevents Wollheim's work from being merely descriptive.

As the exposition progresses particular weight is given to theory rather than encompassing a balance between, theory, methods and data. It is possible to explain this in terms of the nature of the text i.e. it is an explanation of Freud's work and how it developed. This theory is however, supported by the findings of Freud's research. Yet, in drawing upon this evidence Wollheim fails to bring to the reader's attention that Freud's choice of research participants was limited. Freud chose his participants from middle class, Viennese women who had been diagnosed as neurotic and he tended to generalise his findings to be applicable to the general population. Furthermore, his sole use of case studies does not allow for generalisation to be made. They only provide a deep insight into the person under study. However, as with much of the literature 'Freud' is shaped and interpreted in a way which reflects Wollheim's political affiliations. Thus, to pinpoint limitations in Freud's work would have proved highly unfavourable amongst his peers with the societies which he held great prestige and would possibly jeopardise his standing within them.

With respect to Wollheim's research methods he incorporates the use of primary sources of research in order to provide a reliable representation of Freud's work. Wollheim obtained letters which Freud had written to those with whom he was professionally involved. For example, a letter dated 1897 to Wilhelm Fliess, his friend and mentor he announced 'his disbelief in the seduction theory' and further wrote 'it was a moment of great triumph than of defeat' (Wollheim 1971). The letters here,

served as a type of written evidence which came into existence in advance of the research being carried out. Furthermore, they included all the factors that Freud believed to be relevant to his subject at the time (Stacey 1969). Consequently, they proved to be particularly valuable to Wollheim at the exploratory stage of research and it also allowed Wollheim to use Freud's own words to bring discussion and criticism to the text. This research method successfully meets with Wollheim's aim to provide a comprehensive account of Freud's work and what he said himself rather than producing a text that comprises of his own interpretation and evaluation.

Nevertheless, there are drawbacks when using such data. Firstly, it may be difficult if not impossible to prove their authenticity especially so if Wollheim had called for the letters and publicly paid for them. Secondly, Freud's letters were chiefly written to those who were influential in this thinking and understanding such as, Wollheim and Charcot a French physician who prompted his initial interest in hysteria. So, it is arguable that there may have been some distortion in order to impress the intended reader.

As so much literature was already in existence at the time 'Freud' was written it was difficult for Wollheim to bring any new knowledge or findings to the field with respect to Freud's theory. Nonetheless, from reading various writings on Freud both theory based (Ragg-Kirby and Bowie 2003) and critically based (Grunbaum 1984) it appears that Wollheim is one of few if any that adopts the use of Freud's letters to support an argument or to further develop an understanding of Freud's theory.

Therefore, it is arguable that Wollheim does in this way bring new knowledge to light. Wollheim's reluctance to incorporate his own critique of Freud through the use of letters allows the reader to view Freud's work from a neutral perspective and to read perhaps with the absence of misconceptions and pre-conceived ideas of the author.

Wollheim brings his text to a close by recognising the influence that contributed to Freud's ideas as being manifold. His theories were meant to explain all human psychology but he formulated them in response to the historical times in which he lived. For example, issues with 'social origins or the beginnings of a particular social or cultural phenomenon' exerted a strong hold over him (Wollheim 1971). These included 'origins of morality, or religion, of social institutions in general and of political authority in particular (Wollheim 1971). Wollheim explains how Freud saw religion as a resemblance to neurotic illness and paradoxically keeps people healthy by making them subscribe to a group neurosis. Thurschwell (2003) supporting this description writes 'many of Freud's beliefs about society and religion show the ways in which mass delusions such as religion replace individual delusions in civilised societies. This perhaps has implications for the concept of religion in sociological thinking because parallels with the Marxist perspective on religion can be identified. Whereby, religion is viewed as being a form of self-delusion that obscures reality and offers temporary comfort from oppression within capitalism. Furthermore, traditional religious thought was simply a distortion of real class relations dividing people (Lawson, Jones and Moore 2000). However, regardless of these similarities it has been argued that the psychoanalytic approach has had limited influence and few find it to be a central concern (Dicens 1999).

In conclusion, it is undeniable that Wollheim has produced a text which provides a valuable contribution to the existing knowledge surrounding Sigmund Freud. Its content would prove useful and applicable to the sociological, anthropological and biological fields as well as the discipline of psychology. The far reaching influence among academic fields enables the book to obtain the status of being a key text.

Wollheim, although personally and professionally influenced by the psychoanalytic

perspective produces an analytic text through the intelligent and thoughtful writing style. However, when critically yet, constructively scrutinizing a text it is necessary to keep in mind that one book regardless of how useful can not provide a wholly neutral account. So, as with other literature Wollheim's text will invoke criticism and counter arguments which need to be sought after in order to gain a more balanced view. It can be said that indicative of a successful text is whereby, the author fulfils their objective. In this instance Wollheim, has satisfied the aim set out in the preface. The text does indeed follow a chronological order and the inclusion of primary sources of research allowed Wollheim to accomplish the aim to write 'what Freud said.