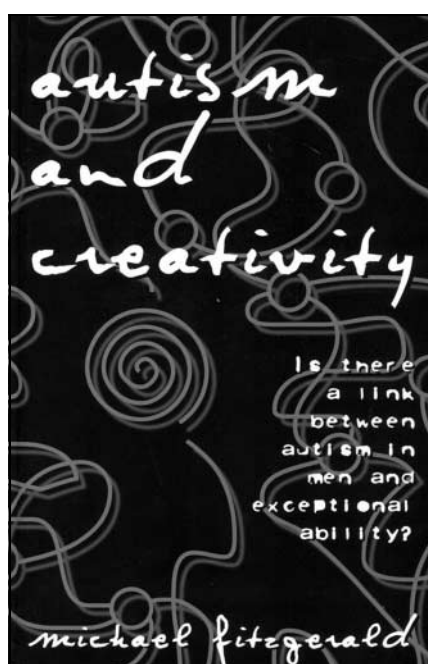


Book reviews

EDITED BY SIDNEY CROWN, FEMI OYEBODE and ROSALIND RAMSAY

Autism and Creativity: Is There a Link between Autism in Men and Exceptional Ability?

By Michael Fitzgerald. London: Taylor & Francis. 2003. 294 pp. £29.99 (hb). ISBN 1 583 91213 4



In this book pathologising creativity and genius, tidbits from the lives of Ludwig Wittgenstein, William Butler Yeats, Lewis Carroll and others are proffered as ‘proof’ of Fitzgerald’s conclusion that high-functioning autism and Asperger’s syndrome are more common than we think and critical to genius and creativity. The problem with this is that Fitzgerald writes as if he were their psychiatrist. He isn’t. Nor is he really their biographer. The ‘facts’ he uses to support his case have been cobbled together from secondary sources, by his own admission, ‘using biographies that have received favourable reviews in professional journals and recognised publications such as the *Times Literary Supplement*’.

Fitzgerald finds what he’s looking for, trawling life stories for nuggets to fit his

theory: Hitler’s autistic psychopathy, Wittgenstein’s autistic superego, Yeats’s classic ‘Asperger pose’ and ‘autistic aggression’. One might be forgiven for thinking that this sort of fudged pseudoscience comes with the genre. But retrospective psychobiography can be done without succumbing to this book’s shortcomings. Kay Redfield Jamison’s brilliant and captivating book *Touched with Fire* examines the relationship between bipolar disorder and creativity by presenting extracts of psychohistory as recorded by writers and artists themselves and consulting widely with colleagues working in the humanities (Jamison, 1991).

Fitzgerald’s conclusion is touted on the back cover as ‘spirited and controversial’. I think it’s shaky. Statements that he makes, such as ‘another important point emerging from this book is that the autistic spectrum is very wide and this book widens it still further’, seem as absurd as arbitrarily altering the definition of fever to fit a hypothesis that there is a link between pyrexia and genius.

Jamison, K. R. (1991) *Touched with Fire: Manic–Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament*. New York: Free Press.

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Psychotherapy for Borderline Personality Disorder, Mentalization-based Treatment

By Anthony Bateman and Peter Fonagy. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2004. 406 pp. £29.95 (pb). ISBN 0 19 8527667

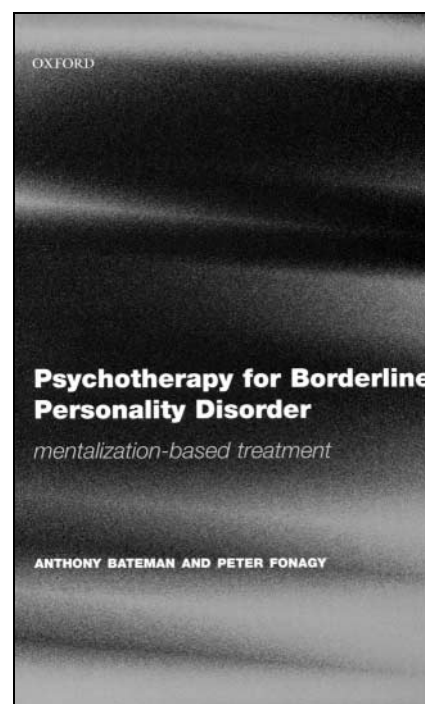
While reading this book I also read reviews of *Gielgud’s Letters* (Mangan, 2004) and a biography of Michael Redgrave (Strachan, 2004). These gave accounts of the lives of these two actors that left little out from a diagnosis of borderline personality

disorder. Narcissism, impulsivity, self-destructive behaviour, identity defusion; if they had turned up for an out-patient assessment, there would have been little difficulty in ascribing an Axis II diagnosis. Most psychiatrists are left uneasy about pathologising personality, as it would appear that the only difference between ‘them’ and ‘us’ is chance, circumstance or maybe the talent to get away with it.

On the other hand, psychiatry without a theory of personality development and how it can go wrong not only becomes an arid and dehumanising symptom checklist, but also has little to offer the many individuals who seek help for their chaotic lives and unhappy relationships with others.

Bateman and Fonagy have previously published the outcome of a randomised control trial of a day-hospital treatment for borderline personality disorder. This psychodynamically based treatment was shown to be highly effective on a number of measures to reduce morbidity. In the past psychodynamic treatment has lacked evidence of efficacy and its theory has not generally been backed by developmental studies. In addition the practice of psychodynamic therapy has been so unsystematic as to leave the majority of mental health workers totally bewildered about how therapy is conducted.

This current book addresses both these issues. The theoretical first half considers the evidence around the authors’ central



concept of mentalisation. This is a complex construct bringing together many elements of how the mind develops and culminating in an individual's ability to manage their feelings and relationships by constructing a coherent understanding of how beliefs and desires arise in themselves and others. The therapy is a means of enhancing this ability and the second half of the book is a manualisation of the psychodynamic day-hospital treatment approach. This is structured and systematic, and incorporates a technique that is both complex and flexible in relation to the individual. As the authors point out many of the elements of their therapy can be used by therapists other than those with a psychodynamic orientation. However perhaps most importantly of all it is jargon-free and approaches patients in a spirit where any breakdown in communication could as easily be by 'us' as by 'them'.

Mangan, R. (ed.) (2004) *Gielgud's Letters: John Gielgud in His Own Words*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

Strachan, A. (2004) *Secret Dreams: A Biography of Michael Redgrave*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

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Early Intervention for Trauma and Traumatic Loss

Edited by Brett T. Litz. New York: Guilford Press. 2004. 338 pp. £30.50 (hb). ISBN 1 57230 953 9

It used to be said that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was a normal reaction to an abnormally traumatic situation, and that anyone was susceptible to its development. In fact, the vast majority of people exposed to natural or man-made trauma do not develop PTSD, and factors such as individual vulnerability, peri-traumatic influences and social support play a critical role in defining risk. However, for those who develop significant psychological distress, when should appropriate intervention take place? In the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami in South-East Asia, the role of early psychological intervention for survivors has again come into sharp focus. News reports reassure viewers and listeners that counsellors are on hand to help relieve stress and prevent the development of more

chronic psychological syndromes. These interventions continue unabated despite research showing that techniques such as psychological debriefing have limited, if any, benefit and may actually increase the risk of developing stress reactions in the future.

So, is there any role for early intervention in relieving distress and preventing future morbidity? Hot on the heels of a similar book with a more European perspective (Omer & Schnyder, 2003), this text, covering early-intervention initiatives across the lifespan and in various clinical settings, provides an authoritative summary of existing knowledge, as well as offering evidence-based recommendations and directions for future research.

It is divided into three sections. Part I focuses on the psychological impact of trauma and traumatic loss, centring on acute stress disorder, PTSD and traumatic bereavement, emphasising the importance of risk and resilience in promoting recovery in a selected at-risk population. Part II, the core of the book, highlights the importance of secondary prevention using evidence-based practice that is tailored to the population and context. Although 'psychological first aid' is appropriate following trauma, it should not be seen as a therapeutic or preventative intervention. The criticisms of secondary prevention strategies such as critical incident stress debriefing are clearly elucidated in the book and

balanced with a summary of cognitive-based models of proven efficacy in early intervention. This is the section of the book that I enjoyed the most and is likely to be the most useful to clinicians. Part III covers experience gained in special populations, including the response to the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington in September 2001 and the challenge of developing effective early-intervention strategies in the US military, where the use of psychological debriefing is deeply ingrained.

Despite some repetition between chapters, this is a useful book, which goes some way towards rehabilitating the whole concept of early intervention and secondary prevention in trauma work. There is increasing evidence that such strategies work, but they must be selective and focused, appropriately timed and promote natural resources and personal resilience.

Omer, R. & Schnyder, U. (eds) (2003) *Reconstructing Early Intervention after Trauma. Innovations in the Care of Survivors*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Practical Psychiatric Epidemiology

Edited by Martin Prince, Robert Stewart, Tamsin Ford & Matthew Hotopf. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2003. 414 pp. £35 (pb). ISBN 0 19 851551 0

Enter the world of *Practical Psychiatric Epidemiology*. The book opens with a quotation, probably seldom surpassed in a discipline rarely afforded great literary expression, that epidemiology '... is like a cocktail blended from equal parts of science, art, and craft, laced with liberal applications of intellectual rigour and scepticism'. From this opening, one is confident of an enjoyable, critical introduction to the 'young' discipline of psychiatric epidemiology.

This text is primarily intended for students of epidemiology with an interest in psychiatry. Epidemiological concepts and techniques are introduced and discussed with exceptional clarity, and there is good application to psychiatric research throughout. Each well-referenced chapter

