

Herman Westerink. *A Dark Trace: Sigmund Freud on the Sense of Guilt*. Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2009. Authorized translation from the Dutch language edition published by Uitgeverij Boom, Amsterdam (The Netherlands), 2005. 319 pp. \$60.00 (cloth). ISBN 978-90-5867-754-9

This book offers yet another account of the chronological development of Freud's thought, differing from other such studies in the attention it devotes to his evolving conceptualization of the sense of guilt. At the conclusion of his text the author writes: "... despite the centrality of the sense of guilt in Freud's thought and, in the debates of his followers, despite the importance of these discussions for current debates between psychoanalytic schools, and despite the fact that the sense of guilt is the central issue in Freud's studies on culture and religion, studies on Freud's thought on the issue are rare. My reconstruction of Freud's theories on the sense of guilt fills that lacuna" (p. 302).

Although the book does not claim to do more than trace "a dark trace" in Freud's work, it nevertheless seems odd in 2010 to read a contemporary publication that might well have been written in the 1940s. The book does go slightly beyond Freud's own work on the sense of guilt, addressing in the penultimate chapter the controversies stimulated by Melanie Klein, Karen Horney and others surrounding the pre-oedipal phase, the role of the mother and the psychology of women and the implications of their contributions for Freud's theory of guilt. But over five decades have passed since these controversies took place and many important contributions to this subject, such as Eli Sagan's (1988) *Freud, Women, and Morality: The Psychology of Good and Evil*, are entirely neglected here. True, the author claims only to address Sigmund Freud on the sense of guilt, but there is much more to psychoanalysis than Sigmund Freud and the topic is very worth a far more comprehensive and up-to-date treatment—and a more critical one at that.

Westerink is University Assistant in the Department of Practical Theology and Psychology of Religion, Protestant Theological Faculty, Vienna. He approaches his subject as a scholar outside the psychoanalytic profession, a position that can have both its strengths and weaknesses. While he addresses some early debates among analysts, up to about 1940, with respect to Freud's "Dora" case volumes have been written both by analysts and by academics (e.g., Bernheimer & Kahane, 1990), knowledge of which might have saved the author some embarrassment. He describes Freud's "Dora" case study as "a vivid

portrait of a complicated, passionate relationship in a decent, bourgeois environment.” “Decent” is about the last word one would want to use to describe Dora’s family environment in which her father is attempting to bribe the husband of the woman with whom he is having an adulterous affair by offering him his daughter, an attempted “swap” with which Freud implicitly colludes considering her objections to the arrangement symptoms of hysterical sexual inhibition.

It is not clear whether the many textual problems that plague this text are the fault of the translators, the proofreaders, or the author. We have double negatives: “Yet refinement did not mean that the passions were not feeble” (p. 6). We learn “she was send to Freud” (p. 12, note 56). A patient is described as evidencing “an excessive demand for love which, to begin with, her family was satisfied” (p. 17). But there are more serious problems. According to Westerink, “The biggest problem with the seduction theory is unpleasure” (p. 30). No. The biggest problem with the theory that hysteria is caused by sexual abuse is that it is incorrect. As Freud came to understand, not all hysterics have been abused, and not all those who have been abused become hysteric. In several places the author describes Freud’s giving up his “neurotica” (the seduction theory) as “abandoning his belief in neurotics” (p. 37). Again, he writes “In September 1897 Freud gave up his belief in neurotics” (p. 46). One hopes such errors are the translator’s, for if they are Westerink’s his text loses all credibility.

On the matter of the “sense of guilt” which is the “dark trace” that this book seeks to elucidate, Westerink briefly addresses but fails to sufficiently clarify the important conceptual distinction between the *sense* of guilt and guilt itself. Freud himself is always inclined to suspect that it would be naïve to dismiss a patient’s self-reproaches as entirely irrational for, in his experience, they are often justified by “crimes” other than those to which he pleads guilty while being innocent. Writing of Freud’s case of the Rat Man, Westerink points out that Freud treated self-reproach and the sense of guilt as synonyms (p. 79). A more critical study might have queried this equation, as more recent psychoanalytic writers have begun to do (Carveth 2006).

REFERENCES

Bernheimer, C. & C. Kahane (1990). *In Dora's Case: Freud-Hysteria-Feminism*. Second Ed. New York: Columbia University Press.

Carveth, D. (2006). Self-punishment as guilt evasion: theoretical issues." *Canadian Journal of Psychoanalysis/Revue Canadienne de Psychanalyse* 14, 2 (Fall 2006): 172-96.

Sagan, E. (1988). *Freud, Women, and Morality: The Psychology of Good and Evil*. New York: Basic Books.

Reviewed by DONALD CARVETH, Professor of Sociology and Social & Political Thought, York University, Toronto ON Canada.