
Book Review

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Anne Ancelin Schützenberger. (1998). *The Ancestor Syndrome: Transgenerational psychotherapy and the hidden links in the family tree*. London: Routledge.

Anne Schützenberger is Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Nice, France, co-founder of the International Association of Group Psychotherapy, and is internationally renowned as a trainer in group psychotherapy and psychodrama. In *The ancestor syndrome*, she has brought together an invaluable legacy: stories of past generations gathered during 40 years of clinical experience in psychoanalysis and psychodrama. In this book Professor Schützenberger weaves together histories of Freud, Moreno, Jung, Rogers and many others, acknowledging an inspiring professional lineage. She links the psychological developments of the century to psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, anthropology, family therapy and history. Special tribute is made to the founder of psychodrama and sociometry, Dr J L. Moreno. Of Moreno she says “he transmitted to me and allowed me to develop the creative imagination, the sense of the encounter, the desire to meet the other and the stubbornness to help those who are suffering”.

In her work Professor Schützenberger extends the notion of genogram to the ‘genosociogram’ which she defines as “an annotated representation of the family tree”, and describes how detailing the quality of relationships and family traits and events assist therapy. She emphasises the ‘uncanny’ elements in history taking and quotes Freud as saying “the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of the old and long familiar”.

The author regards extensive knowledge of family history as assisting in unravelling psychosis in schizophrenic patients. She describes the development of strategic systems therapy, structural family therapy and analytical family therapy with reference to many researchers in family therapy.

Exploring “invisible loyalties” in family systems, Professor Schützenberger refers particularly to the work of the Hungarian psychoanalyst Boszormenyi-Nagy whose focus on relational bonds reconstructs past family ethics and values. She constantly returns to Morenian notions such as the “social atom”,

which she describes as “a womb from which an individual builds his or her identity”. The original social atom is the family.

With historical references to Napoleon, Schützenberger unearths ideas of “transitional terror” and “the trauma of the wind of the cannonball”. She discusses how past traumatic events become transgenerational experiences for those who were close to death and war. She explores transgenerational debts and merits handed down through the generations of families. She writes about “gifts with teeth”, obligatory family traits and our common need to receive something with the proviso that we can pay back later.

In the section of the book in which she attempts to make links with somatic manifestations of the mind we would benefit from some clarification of her thinking. Another criticism might be that the author attempts too much linking with other theorists, yet after a while the reader takes the point that the history of psychology is extremely complex.

Cultural stories, myths and historical truth are woven into an insightful and painful picture of a European past. Professor Schützenberger’s references to fourteenth century Kosovo shed new light on the experience of war in 1999. We are encouraged to consider J. Hilgard’s “anniversary syndrome”, and to recall connections between historical periods and events when working with trauma victims, refugees and the transient.

While Professor Schützenberger restates the importance of intrapsychic dynamics she also encourages us to take into account interpersonal loyalties between family and other group members. In detailed genosociograms, patterns of behaviour are recorded that will assist therapy when mapped out carefully.

This work refers to many analytic researchers and includes very interesting case material. References are made to phantoms and ghosts who speak through the generations. With reference to classical one-to-one therapy Professor Schützenberger makes clear her view that not all people are able to make symbolic representations of their past and that some may benefit from a different therapeutic approach such as psychodrama or group analytic psychotherapy.

Anne Schützenberger generously details her method of building a genosociogram with significant clinical examples and guides us in practical applications. Her transgenerational approach to psychotherapy reflects her wide capacity as psychoanalyst, psychodramatist and holder of knowledge.

This book is a tribute to the memories and value of our creative forebears in the evolving fields of psychology. The linking of many important theorists follows the theme of valuing history and its development. These links offer clarity and weight to practical techniques of history taking and assisting those who are suffering.