

Claude Steiner, emotional activist. The life and work of Claude Michel Steiner

Routledge, 2020. 284 pp. ISBN 9780367188818

Knowing the work of Claude Steiner, Keith Tudor and some of the other contributors, I anticipated an interesting read. I expected a relevant, stimulating, scholarly book. I found all that and more. What I had not anticipated was a fine work of art—a symphony of instruments and voices beautifully orchestrated and conducted by Tudor. Each voice has its place and is clearly heard. As befits a man who became a legend in his lifetime, Steiner takes centre stage and the others come in carrying their own themes and melodies. Chords and discords are carefully handled and brought together in a work that reminded me of the African tradition of praise songs for leaders or honoured elders; a praise song to Claude Steiner, to transactional analysis and to the art of healing. Of course, like all really good historic praise songs that cover a long life, it touches on the defeats as well as the victories, the depths as well as the pinnacles, which makes it both richer and more real.

Like Tudor, and Steiner before him, I was drawn to transactional analysis by what Tudor describes as its 'original radicalism', and by the radical psychiatry movement of which Steiner was a primary exponent. However, I admit to a bias against Steiner as a person. I served with him on the International Transactional Analysis Association Board of Trustees and all that he admits about himself and his power plays in the organisation were true. Thus, I was ready to be wary of anything that fell short of 'radical truth' or went against Hogie Wycroft's dictum of 'no secrets, no lies and no Rescues'. I am pleased to say that this book provided fresh insights into the limitations of the radical psychiatry movement and Steiner's more endearing and enduring qualities.

The structure of the book is ambitious and it is a testament to Tudor's skill as a writer and an editor that even the introduction, where he lays out his editorial plan, provides riveting reading. Steiner's autobiographical writings are interspersed between the chapters from the various contributors and introduce each of the carefully chosen themes: Scripts, Strokes, Radical Psychiatry, Power, Emotional Literacy and Love. The first five are areas of transactional analysis (and wider) psychotherapy theory and practice in which Steiner was a major creator and contributor; and the last one, being in my view, the driving force beneath all his life's work—his longing to give and receive love, both personally and to humankind.

Beginning with scripts, William Cornell provides a scholarly critique of Steiner's theory, continuing a debate they had while Steiner was still alive, while acknowledging that the concept of 'alienation is as relevant today as it was half a century ago'. Next, Deepak Dhananjaya brings a welcome perspective, from a more traditional culture, writing about the impact of colonialism on Indian attitudes to sexuality. Equally important is his timely challenge to transactional analysis for underestimating the somatic aspect of stroking.

Becky Jenkins, Ellen Morrison, and Robert Schwebell offer excellent first-hand accounts of the vibrant early days of radical psychiatry and its many experiments, successful and not so successful. Gino Althöfer and V. Riesenfeld move the story along to encompass more recent and fascinating developments of radical therapy, about which I knew almost nothing. Together, Luigi (Gino) Althöfer and Keith Tudor present an important piece on

power and how often this subject is ignored or evaded in transactional analysis and psychotherapy generally. They are interested in a real understanding of the uses and abuses of power, as indeed Steiner was, but regret his move into a more personal and away from a political analysis of power. The personal is indeed political and the political has very personal impact.

Harmut Oberdick's section on emotional literacy (in terms of its German translation emotional competence) was one of the most fascinating and made me aware of how little the transactional analysis world has really paid attention to this as an aspect of practice. Finally, Karen Minikin offers a sensitive and empathic review of Steiner's evolution in his understanding of, and writings about, love. She describes a man coming to terms with his own mortality and looking beyond it to transcendence in some form. Yet, even then, he remained concerned about the wider human condition and how to transform the world. She writes about his interest in the new information age and quotes from *When a Man Loves a Woman*: 'Ever powerful in human affairs, love alone has not been equal to the redemptive task. Teamed with information, love, I believe, is still the answer'.

And that, it seems, was indeed his last word on life. Steiner died with dignity and according to his own timing and wishes.

Having begun with the idea of this book as a praise song, I realise now that it was in fact a love song. That was why it touched me so deeply. A song for and about Love... Steiner's search for it and the way in which that search fuelled his work. A love poem for the flawed, yet lovable and amazing man that Steiner was. A song not unlike the one composed for him by his grandson but with all the scholarly weight that makes this a very important book for students and practitioners alike.

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Diane Salters has been involved with transactional analysis since 1976. She is a certified psychotherapist, trainer, and supervisor in transactional analysis. She met Claude Steiner on many occasions, experienced his workshops and conference presentations, and served with him on the International Transactional Analysis Association's (ITAA) Board of Trustees in the 1990s. More recently she served as ITAA president for 4 years. She currently lives in Cape Town but her work online extends to many continents.