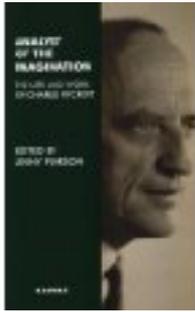


The Emancipation of Psychoanalysis from the Psychoanalysts”



The Analyst of the Imagination:

The Life and Work of Charles Rycroft

Edited by Jenny Pearson

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Who remembers the Penguin Edition of A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis? It was the first book of this renown independent psychoanalyst that I bought in Foyle’s because the title was irresistible to a 20-year old living 1972 in London. Rycroft, who lived from 1914 to 1998, is well served in this book with a lovely memoir from 14 friends and colleagues, nicely compiled by his second wife and widow, who is also a psychoanalytic psychotherapist.

“Charles,” she writes, “was an independent thinker and something of a loner in a professional world riven by factions and passionate allegiances.” While he was a consultant in psychotherapy at the Tavistock Clinic in 1956, he became R.D. Laing’s training analyst. Laing, who was a controversial practitioner and theoretician from 1960 onwards until the early 80’s, was one of the most articulate and creative voices of the counter-culture and radical psychiatry movement. I trained with Laing from the mid-1970’s onwards, thus I was eager to learn more about my “psychoanalytic grandfather” when I opened this well-written book. It was the first one to tell biographic stories and vignettes about Rycroft and we learn that he had a low boredom threshold and was capable of showing cold rage, as his children (who feature in this storytelling) testify. He wrote many a book and his favourite was *The Innocence of Dreams* (1979) through which he also wrote himself out of psychoanalysis.

Rycroft wanted open-minded psychotherapists whom he could encourage through his writings. This book tries to serve this tradition, so that we readers can find our own way through the deeply liberating experience of, and practice in, psychoanalytical psychotherapy. What was Rycroft’s aim in Psychotherapy? Anthony Storr quotes him in his memorial address as follows: “*The aim of psycho-analytic treatment is not primarily to make the unconscious conscious, nor to widen and strengthen the ego, but to re-establish the connexion between dissociated psychic functions, so that the patient ceases to feel that there is an inherent antagonism between his imaginative and adaptive capacities.*” (p.15)

As a medical doctor and a psychotherapist, Rycroft believed in the possibility of amelioration of suffering at both personal and social levels. He always supported the authentic

choice seen in the context of one's past. Further notions like 'freedom', 'agency', 'action language' and 'reflective self', were very important in his writings. He believed that once we are able to be clear about our inner frame of reference, through the psychoanalytic process, we can live from the core of the 'true self'. In an essay on the development of Rycroft's thought, we meet other original thinkers of the time, like Fairbairn, Milner, Payne, and Winnicott. It was refreshing to read that he did not need to create or claim a theory of his own, as the theorists with whom he lingered were Winnicott and Fairbairn, with more than enough theories of their own.

Besides his own busy private practice and training activities, he engaged himself as the librarian of the Institute of Psychoanalysis, served on the Editorial Board of the International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, and finally became Scientific Secretary. For many years he was the best known psychoanalyst in Britain through his numerous newspaper articles. He often asked what is valuable in healing, and aimed to answer this within the bounds of his own "liminality" since psychoanalysis is not a science, but an art, always in dialogue with its culture.

Many writers attest to Rycroft's gifted intuitive sense of the healing grace with his patients. Yet he could also be mischievous, rebellious, deeply serious, and generally aware of his blind spots, which often lead to a sabotage of his own creative self. He knew he could become an international force in psychoanalysis, yet he did not rise to the occasion. Harold Bourne, an old friend of his, shows why in his thrilling chapter on 'The Innocence of Charles Rycroft'. In his view, he was a profoundly subversive person with a masquerade of innocence. Bourne ends his chapter with the concluding words: "*The grand mission that inspired Charles was to de-doctrinism and de-dogmatise psychoanalysis, to cure it of ideology, and to make it English, empirical, commonsensical, and innocent – a far from innocent enterprise.*"

Rycroft gets the last word, for he hopes that we psychotherapists never forget in our practice, that our clients, our patients, are embodied minds and that the symptoms and problems for which they consult us are "...*reflections, derivatives, and manifestations of the great human problems implicit in whatever stage of the life cycle they are in.*"(p.247) This is some of the mystery of psychoanalytic imagination.

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