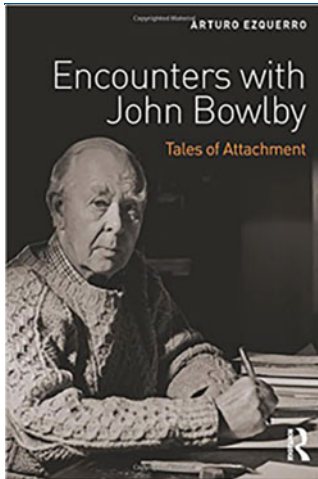


Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge and Femi Oyeboade



Encounters with John Bowlby: Tales of Attachment

By Arturo Ezquerro.
Routledge 2016.
£28.79 (pb). 266 pp.
ISBN 978 1138667648

'Unhappy the age that has need of heroes', says Brecht's democracy-deprived Galileo. But no pioneers: no progress. John Bowlby (JB), Ezquerro's conquistador, mentor, and supervisor is the inspiration for this delightful book, part eulogy, part exposition of attachment theory, part account of the travails of a NHS Child and Adolescent psychiatrist and group analyst.

Bowlby's hero was Darwin. Like its evolutionary parent, attachment theory was a long time in gestation. Bowlby rejected the prevailing orthodoxies: asocial neuropsychiatry, Skinnerian behaviourism, and the psychoanalytic Vatican. Drawing on his scientific and socialist-leaning approach, he painstakingly worked towards a new paradigm – attachment theory as an evidence-based, psychological theory of human relatedness.

Ezquerro engagingly intertwines his own translocation from rural Spanish childhood to Tavistock trainee, with JB's existential and intellectual journey to attachment via upper middle class London, Klein-dominated psychoanalysis, War Office Selection Boards, the new science of ethology, and enduring friendships with Harry Harlow, Robert Hinde and Mary Ainsworth.

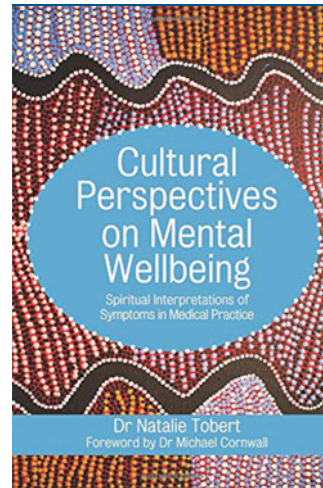
This is not the first biography of Bowlby, but, as supervisee and family friend, Ezquerro adds a personal slant that brings JB's brilliance and the historical context of the London psychotherapy scene vividly to life. There is new historical scholarship too: Blatz (1940) as the founder of 'security theory' was unfamiliar to me. Ezquerro describes in some detail how Bowlby wowed the star-studded WHO study *Psychobiology of the Child* group, which included alongside JB, Huxley, Erikson, Piaget, Mead, Lorenz and Bertalanffy – a unique interdisciplinary forum, a still much-needed model for psychodynamic cross-fertilisation.

In the later chapters Ezquerro moves on from his exposition of Bowlby's contribution, to his own experiences of group analysis, personal therapy, adolescent in-patient psychiatry, and working with sexual survivors, including those abused by therapists. The cast-list includes Peter Bruggen, Anton Obholzer and Sebastian Kraemer as supplementary Tavistock heroes.

Psychiatry needs to remember and celebrate its pioneers and role-models, of whom Bowlby is an outstanding example. The current neo-liberal health agenda has created a culture of short-termism, history-ablation, and decimation of group therapies and in-patient care. Ezquerro's habanera, with its emphasis on the need for secure therapeutic relationships, continuity, and mourning of loss, is a warm, humane, and strongly recommended antidote.

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doi: 10.1192/bjp.2017.37



Cultural Perspectives on Mental Wellbeing: Spiritual Interpretations of Symptoms in Medical Practice

By Natalie Tobert.
London & Philadelphia.
Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 2017.
£19.99 (pb). 264 pp.
ISBN 9781785920844

Hosting a 'Spirituality and Psychiatry' special interest group (SIG) with 3000 plus members, the Royal College of Psychiatrists is well-placed to support the basic theme of this book: that society is close to: 'A major shift in how health and mental health are understood and treated'. The new vision involves: 'Embracing a holistic, open ended, even mystery-filled vision of humankind'. Described here is a challenging but valuable evolution of ideas, not exactly abandoning, but developing an added dimension to the prevailing reductionist, disease-based paradigm.

Natalie Tobert, a medical anthropologist, writes clearly and persuasively about previous major revisions of attitude, towards unmarried mothers or consenting homosexuals, for example. Her research has been deliberately wide-ranging, concerning human experience of life through health, to death 'and beyond'. Using a spiritual perspective, she nevertheless avoids any particular religious or academic viewpoint. Her aim is, 'to acknowledge the dilemma of different frameworks of knowledge', and especially to reconcile perspective differences between healthcare workers and patients ... (in part) 'because coherence of understanding between practitioner and client tends to improve healing'.

In 17 neat chapters, each helpfully introduced and then summarised for clarity, the author tackles pertinent subjects including 'cultural beliefs about health and illness', 'beliefs about conception and human identity', 'women's bodies and human behaviour', 'cultural knowledge on death and dying' (also survival after death), then five chapters on 'anomalous experiences', among them 'religious and spiritual experiences', 'near-death experiences', and 'spiritual awakening'. The final chapters in turn cover, 'Why address cultural understandings and academic fixity?', 'Acknowledging dissonance as a way forward', and 'Towards positive change'.

This is a worthwhile book, making an ideal companion to two RCPsych Press publications edited by Chris Cook and colleagues: *Spirituality and Psychiatry* and *Spirituality and Narrative in Psychiatric Practice*. Members of the Spirituality and Psychiatry SIG will certainly find it rewarding. Others might find it surprisingly beneficial, both accessible and enlightening, too.

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doi: 10.1192/bjp.2017.36