

DAVID E. SCHARFF

EPILOGUE:

FREUD IN OUR TIME



**The Psychoanalytic Century**

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e-Book 2015 International Psychotherapy Institute

from *The Psychoanalytic Century* David E. Scharff M.D.

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# Epilogue: Freud in Our Time

**David E. Scharff**

Like most psychoanalysts, I believe Freud is one of the true and abiding geniuses of the modern era, but I also believe we should not accept Freud's work uncritically. He insisted that he had invented a science. Witnessing its evolution over this century, we can no longer say whether our field is more science than craft, more art or philosophy.

A core of Freud's invention has remained. We can still recognize our origins in Freud's clinical examinations, but the theoretical underpinning of our field and the emphasis with which we work has evolved significantly. For many analysts, practice is now so different from that of their teachers and their own analysts that they may wonder if they still work in the same field. In this regard, I think of the incredible silence that characterized the work of many analysts in Britain and America in mid-century, and that seemed to be as different from Freud's own practice as the current emphasis on the analyst's countertransference and co-construction of the analytic experience is both from Freud and from the next generations of analysts.

Notwithstanding his blind spots, Freud is among that small group of wide-ranging geniuses of Western culture to whom we return to study,

reinterpret, and to acknowledge the way in which they forever altered our thinking—Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Christ, and—skipping a few centuries—Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Shakespeare, Galileo, Newton, Mozart, Jefferson, Goethe. In the twentieth century, Freud and Einstein stand out as such intellectual figures; along with James Joyce and Picasso, they are inventors of new orders—not only of a single invention that changed history or culture—but life-long contributors to the way we view the world and the way we think. They have changed who we are!

The ideas that Freud brought to us, like those of Plato and Aristotle, are first principles, likely to be with Western culture for the duration. But as with Plato, Aristotle, and Shakespeare, each age must continually re-examine Freud and psychoanalysis. In addition, since psychoanalysis aims to be a science of the mind, we must expect the evolution characteristic of all science: Yesterday's principles form the foundation on which tomorrow's ideas stand. Few ideas survive unchanged. Some will be refuted by new understanding. All need to be subjected to rigorous examination and modification as we add to our store of knowledge and technique. As Ernst Falzeder demonstrated in his paper, such reexamination is, and always has been, subject to the politics and intellectual agendas of those who claim Freud for their own—or whose agenda is to discredit him.

Not long after Freud's death, W. H. Auden wrote of him:

For one who lived among enemies so long;

If often he was wrong and at times absurd,

To us he is no more a person

Now but a whole climate of opinion.

(Collected Poetry, p. 166)

Throughout this volume, we have been examining Freud's enduring vision of humanity by celebrating, studying, dissecting, and strengthening it. Flawed, sometimes marked by good ideas given exaggerated importance, wrong in places that have hurt, as in his psychology of women, Freud's work emerges as monumental: a climate of opinion, a body of probing, beautifully written thought that is an enduring source of understanding of the human condition.