

THE SHADOW OF THE OBJECT

Psychoanalysis of the
Unthought Known

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Basing his view on the object relations theories of the "British School" of psychoanalysis, Christopher Bollas examines the human subject's memories of its earliest experiences (during infancy and childhood) of the object, whether it be mother, father, or self. He explains in well-written and non-technical language how the object can affect the child, or "cast in shadow," without the child being able to process this relation through mental representations of language.

The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known Details

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Bethany says

I will write a more coherent review later, but this is a powerful, modest book that provides a wealth of insight into the methods and principles of object-relations psychoanalysis. It would be of interest to anyone in this kind of psychoanalysis and could interest even those who have never been in therapy. It does have its dry moments, but this is one of those rare, very dense and jargon-intensive books that is worth the effort required to read.

Danica says

This started out dense and assumed a knowledge of analytic theory that far outspans my limited understanding of some of Bollas's reference points. However, I forged through because of his distinct voice, and his devotion to following the idea of psychoanalysis to the furthest point, with equal parts exploratory rigor and deep compassion. The gravitational point around which chapters of varied topics hinge is the unthought known -- an essence which is the environment or mood in which each person situates themselves, identifies themselves by in some instances, creates for the other, and in Bollas's opinion is created by very early (sometimes infant) childhood experiences. I am someone who is three years into being an analysand, and I still struggle at times with the idea that the psychoanalytic project is all some sort of complicated quackery if not an egotistical indulgence, but books like this remind me analysis has promise for unresolved personality structures of all kinds, sick or healthy, and reading about types of analysis (because this book really was written more for clinicians than laypersons) reminds me of how varied but universal the human experience is. P.S. I love Christopher Bollas's VOICE. His vernacular is sometimes hilarious. I will be reading more of him.

Carol says

Fascinating thus far. Appreciate his examples from literature e.g. 'Moby Dick' and 'The Wind in the Willows'.

Maddy says

This is a wonderful account of lost objects and unknown thought within psychoanalysis. Bollas text covers a lot of ground - from the foundations of these objects, to its manifestations (most notably the part on normative illness which, as he notes, could make a wonderful science fiction text) and how it in turn is reflected back upon the analyst. Psychoanalysis is a fascinating discourse, albeit an immensely problematic one, and since I've always approached it from a philosophical angle (much to Freud's chagrin) this book helped to give be a bigger picture (though the bigger the picture gets in psychoanalysis it always goes back to the beginning).

Judy says

Fabulous discussion of object relations. The concept of the "unthought known" is worth the entire book. Chapter 6, "Moods and the Conservative Process" was especially good.

Stuart says

I found this book absolutely beautiful. It's complicated, especially I found in the chapter on countertransference, but it's extremely clear, and extremely humane and poetic. It's lovely, one of the best books I've read, I think.

Jamey says

Check out his essay "The Normotic," about people who have an obsessive need to be normal, and who "seem genuinely naive when asked about their inner lives..."
