

TALES FROM THE UNCONSCIOUS by Christopher Gibson

Reviewed by Maurice Whelan

In the preface the author explains how and why he came to write this book. Reflecting on his own introduction to psychoanalytic ideas he realised he had erred on the side approaching understanding as a cerebral process rather than a heartfelt one. He conceived a plan to establish a more balanced educational experience. When he became involved in teaching, he decided to present psychoanalytic ideas and concepts in a different way. He would use stories. And the stories he used he wrote himself. To use Gibson's own words from the preface: 'These stories were originally intended to be used (and indeed were used) in seminars with people in related professions, students, and anyone interested in psychoanalytic ideas. I wanted to find a way to introduce a topic in a lively manner that would capture the audience's interest. People from various walks of life are curious about psychoanalytic ideas, and there are many texts on the subject. Some people have a lot of experience of psychoanalysis; others have only a passing knowledge of Freud and his colleagues. As a teacher I wondered how to present relevant material...I thought about the engagement we have with stories on television, in the theatre and cinema, in books and magazines. We can learn something from these creations when we link a story with other aspects of our lives.'

Through the telling of and listening to stories, we open a portal into the so-called fictional world. If we spend a decent amount of time moving around that world, we come to understand that often there is not a great distance between the imagined and the real.

The stories he writes are between three and twelve pages. Each is followed by a short postscript which contains comments of the ideas within the story. There are suggestions for further reading. Some of the stories are similar to what you would read in a book of short stories; others read more like fairy-tales. What also is obvious is a sense of enjoyment in writing his stories, illustrating that lightness of touch is more effective than heavy handedness. Gibson has come up with a good idea and he has given considerable thought to the art and craft of teaching and I applaud him for it.

But he has set himself a very high bar. Short story writing is a long established and highly esteemed genre. The Irish writer, John McGahern a master of the art donated all his papers to the University of Galway. The manuscript material on a single story, called *Bank Holiday* (one of the many he wrote) was found to contain 34 drafts. In this 380-page book, Gibson offers about sixty stories. That is a huge number.

The book presents the reader with another, related challenge. To engage with fiction, we need to approach it in a particular frame of mind. Gibson knows this and encourages the reader to do so. But when each story is followed by explanatory hypotheses and theories and a list of further reading is suggested, how do we move on to the next story in a receptive state of mind?

All this is said to assist the reader because being aware of the challenges and complexities, gives more options as to how we read the book and how are use it in teaching. In a teaching situation, reading group or seminar for example, the readers of a single story could stimulate the remembering of other stories by other writers which the members had read and this could enrich and enlarge exploration of the subject matter in hand.

The book will be of interest to those with little of no knowledge of psychoanalysis. It is also a valuable text for those involved in teaching psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy. It is an unusual and interesting book that deserves its place beside all the other texts that are introductions to psychoanalysis. I commend Christopher Gibson for his courage in writing it and IPBooks for publishing it.