

***Freud in the Antipodes: A Cultural History of Psychoanalysis in Australia.***  
By Joy Damousi. South Wales: UNSW Press, 2005. Pp.x + 374.

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Joy Damousi, a historian currently lecturing at the University of Melbourne, has shown a vested interest in psychoanalysis since her third and fourth books, *The Labour of Loss: Mourning Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia* and *Living With the Aftermath: Trauma, Nostalgia and Grief in Post-War Australia*. This inclination for Freudianism was spelled out in the subsequent book she co-edited with Australian historian Robert Reynolds *History on the Couch: Essays in History and Psychoanalysis*. In 2005 she brought her ongoing project to fruition by publishing *Freud in the Antipodes: A Cultural History of Psychoanalysis in Australia*, which had mixed reviews in Australia.

Currently working on a psychoanalytic book project, I had high expectations for this cultural history, hoping to find out why psychoanalysis has never really kicked off in Australia, however much interest was expressed initially. If bold readers dare to plod through Ernest Jones's stilted but thorough account of Freud's existence initially published in 1953, they will be rewarded with a passing mention of the situation in Australia following the launch of the Psychoanalytical Movement at the 1909 Salzburg Congress and its subsequent worldwide expansion. I have taken the liberty to quote the whole excerpt which Joy Damousi has chosen to encapsulate in a short sentence. ("The first reference to Freud in Australia is made in Ernest Jones' biography of Freud" (Damousi, 27)).

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Things also were stirring as far off as Australia. In 1909 Freud reported having received a letter from Sydney telling him there was a little group eagerly studying his works. A Dr. Donald Fraser had established a little group and had lectured many times before the various societies on psychoanalysis. Before acquiring a medical qualification in 1909 he had been a Minister of the Presbyterian Church, but had had to resign his position on account of his “Freudian views” – the first instance, but far from being the last, of this kind of victimization. The spark died out, as mine in Canada was to, shortly afterward. Two years later, however, Dr. Andrew Davidson, the Secretary of the Section of Psychological Medicine and Neurology, invited Freud, Jung, and Havelock Ellis to read papers before the Australasian Medical Congress in 1911. They all sent papers which were read there (Jones, 278).

With historical hindsight, one might feel these were the heydays of psychoanalysis in the Antipodes. *Freud in the Antipodes* somewhat confirms this intuition with Damousi’s giveaway: “There were no such trips to, nor fanfare in Australia. Throughout the twentieth century Freud would be received with an ambivalent response in the Antipodes” (27). Interestingly, Christopher Koch’s vision of Australia as a world of “shadows” – of consumable products which are but the reification of a cultural ideal to which Australians were not given first-hand access and which they might someday discover – is backed up with Joy Damousi’s study. In this volume, psychoanalysis is essentially assessed in the light of Britain’s own cultural history to such an extent that John Springthorpe is surreptitiously presented as Freud’s Antipodean counterpart (11). “Shadows”, which represent a substitute for British civilisation exported in the form of cultural commodities, are also epitomized in this volume by numerous references to British publications like Joseph Schwartz’s *Cassandra’s Daughters: A History of Psychoanalysis*, Rosalind Minsky’s (ed.) *Psychoanalysis and Gender* and Adam Phillips’

oft-cited works, for instance. Was Joy Damousi given the choice? Hobson's, perhaps – given the paucity of Australia-based publications on psychoanalysis.

Lacanian studies being more popular than Freudian theories in the Antipodes, it comes as no surprise that the first major book-length study on the influence of psychoanalysis in Australia was Jennifer Rutherford's *The Gauche Intruder: Freud, Lacan and the White Australian Fantasy*. An earlier book, *Freud 2000*, aimed at re-assessing the relevance of Freud's theories in contemporary society was published overseas. This collection of international contributions edited by Melbourne-based scholar Anthony Elliott was instrumental in determining how Freud's system of thoughts impacted on the humanities and social sciences worldwide. However, Joy Damousi – out of ambivalence perhaps – has not acknowledged these two references, nor most original works by Freud, Lacan, Klein, and the like. As much as readers will appreciate *Freud in the Antipodes* for popularising Freudian views, they may wish to seek further information from reading Sigmund Freud's or Jacques Marie Lacan's prolific output.

As I suspected Damousi's study would cover the arts – and we have remarkable pages on Freud's impact on Australian painting as reflected in the works by James Gleeson, Joy Hester, or Albert Tucker – I had also expected to read about Xavier Pons's monograph on Henry Lawson entitled *Out of Eden* (which launched in the 1980s the pathography trend in Australia that eventually fizzled out) or about David Tacey's *Patrick White: Fiction and the Unconscious*, the other landmark psychobiographical study in Australian fiction. But literature was left out of the picture. *Freud in the Antipodes* may therefore be envisioned as a form of teasing for readers to look forward to perusing its forthcoming companion volume, should there be any.

While reading *Freud in the Antipodes*, not only was I under the impression that Damousi's initial project began as a world history of Freudianism in the twentieth century, but I was also left in want of more specific details on its impact Down Under. Say, why would psychoanalysis

fare better in Europe than in Australia? Admittedly, it sounds logical that a Eurocentric theory should receive publishing support in Europe; but would readers not half-expect to find their fair share of psychoanalytically-informed books in Australia, a country long perceived as an offshoot of Europe? Why is it that each time a local or overseas scholar decides to produce a psychoanalytically-informed monograph on Australian writers, these critical works, at best, deserve a passing mention, or, at worst, rank first on an implicit blacklist? It is precisely to redress this imbalance that I have chosen to dwell at length on and engage so strongly with *Freud in the Antipodes*.

In his book review of *Double-Wolf*, David Tacey, a Jungian critic, has analysed how Australia fits in this “long and established tradition of Freud-knocking and psychoanalysis-bashing” (Tacey, 11):

Firstly, Australian consciousness is suspicious of theory per se. Our own Australian pragmatism, backed by British positivism and rationalism, makes us culturally unappreciative of any kind of theory, whether Freudian or otherwise. Secondly because relatively few Australians actually read Freud we are all susceptible to crude summaries and vulgar simplifications of Freudian theory. [...] In “rejecting” Freud, many people are merely rejecting popular clichés and prejudices which have arisen from gossip and misinformation over several decades. (Tacey, 12)

Michael Dudley’s argument runs along the same lines: “Australian distrust of psychiatry may be linked with our frontier culture, and our cultural myths about self-sufficiency and masculine prowess, our suspicion of intellectualism and ‘things mental’, and our aversion to authority and ‘tall poppies’” (Dudley, 85). Damousi’s claim at the outset of her book complements these voiced opinions: “Australia is often constructed as a land of pleasure and opportunity: symbolised by the ‘beach’ – synonymous with unreflective hedonism – and populated by Australian males who value independence and individualism,

negate emotion and self-expression and have no care other than for immediate, material concerns” (2).

Joy Damousi’s massive study, which I found being tantalizing food for thought, has certainly whetted my appetite. Yet, I have also felt that there was something missing, like delineating a major distinction between psychology, psychoanalysis, psychotherapy and psychiatry. Damousi’s assimilation of different trends typifies the strange twist psychoanalysis has taken in Australia. Too often readers are given the feeling that all terms are synonymous, the author switching with ease from one concept to the next. *The Macquarie Dictionary* defines psychology as “the science of mind, or of mental states and processes; the science of human nature”; psychiatry as “the practice or the science of treating mental diseases”; psychoanalysis as “a systematic structure of theories concerning the relation of conscious and unconscious psychological processes”; and psychotherapy as “the science or art curing psychological abnormalities and disorders by psychological techniques”. A confirmation of this will to federate conflicting ideologies is given in the last pages of *Freud in the Antipodes* when Damousi reveals:

In more recent years, there have been efforts to draw together analysts as well as psychotherapists and counsellors into a unified body around common interests and concerns. PACFA – the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia – was established to ‘provide an umbrella group for the whole counselling and psychotherapy profession’ in order to break down some of the tensions and differences between the various groups. (328)

Having second thoughts about this review, I believe after all that Damousi’s achievement has matched her intent: throughout her account, she has proved – more often than once – that Freudianism has had little impact in Australia, leaving people confused about definitions and being relegated to a simmering offshoot of bubbling activities which were taking place at the core of European cities. In the Antipodes, Freudian theories were only of concern to a

cluster of aficionados based in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide. Like the Melbourne Institute of Psychoanalysis, psychoanalysis was confined to the happy few. Like the Melbourne Institute of Psychoanalysis, to poach Douglas Kirsner's words, it was "very much a closed shop with solid protective walls that effectively insulated its members from the outside world" (312). Fortunately, Joy Damousi and UNSW Press have contributed to pulling down these ramparts to popularise psychoanalysis to students, scholars and the general reader in Australia. Unfortunately, typos – which UNSW Press could have weeded out with a more careful proofreading of the manuscript – mar the text and Karl Abraham's name (to which an s is attached, 320 & 369). Beyond these mere quibbles, I wish to pay tribute to Damousi's book for going down in history. In her own words, "this is the first time a cultural history of psychoanalysis in Australia has been written in its own right" (2). The fact itself should be a source of inspiration for more books on the subject matter.

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