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Review Mullahy, P., Oedipus—Myth and Complex

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This is a commendably ambitious project, an attempt to satisfy a crying need. Its subtitle does more justice to the content which is much richer than the title leads one to expect. Here are structural outlines of the main theories of Freud (and of some of his students), of Adler, Jung, Rank, Horney, Fromm and Stack Sullivan. They are discussed with no more than proper emphasis on the Oedipus. The inclusion in the volume of Sophocles' Oedipus Trilogy (Oedipus Rex, Antigone, and Oedipus at Colonus) adds an impressive note of solemnity to the scientific exploration of one of mankind's basic problems.

The book is simply organized. The genius of Freud is given its due not only quantitatively—more than one third of the book is devoted to him—but also qualitatively, inasmuch as the historical development of his work from primary concepts to late additions and modifications, including those of some of his followers, has been included. One may be inclined to object—particularly in the chapter on symbolism—that the choice of both problems and authors appears rather arbitrary; yet one cannot but admire the skilful condensation of the whole.

Possibly because of this very conciseness, the book makes for singularly frustrating and at times exasperating reading. The author's obvious striving for total and almost inhuman detachment and objectivity is frequently baffling, an effect intensified by his peculiar use of quotations alternating with careless vernacular which at places convey the impression—perhaps without any justification—that he is reporting with tongue in cheek. It is positively a relief to come across his outspokenly negative evaluation of Rank's ideas and to get a whiff of warm air, as it were, in the last part, entitled A Brief Criticism and Appreciation, in which he indicates his convictions. Freud's Collected Papers are quoted by volume and page numbers, but without the titles of the papers. Since the four volumes are a more or less random collection, the omission constitutes a serious handicap. Apart from such blemishes, the book may serve as a work of reference for those interested in psychoanalysis, psychiatry, and in the social sciences.