

plained. One of the high points of Australian psychiatry, the discovery of Lithium in the treatment of Bipolar disease, is nicely dealt with.

This book would be of great use to historians of medicine, practitioners of psychiatry or psychology, social workers and the general public. I agree with the review of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 'A splendid book ... engaging and exceedingly well written, it both presents and compellingly documents a revision of history.' I recommend this book on a very important subject in modern medicine as very good value.

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Dear Dr. Menninger: Women's Voices from the Thirties. Edited by Howard J. Falconer and Virginia D. Pruitt. University of Missouri Press 1997. Pp. xi + 258. \$45.00 paper.

Dear Dr. Menninger is a collection of letters from American psychoanalyst Dr Karl Menninger. Menninger wrote a column in the *Ladies' Home Journal* on 'Mental Hygiene in the Home' for eighteen months from October 1930. He offered advice, not only to those whose letters he quoted in print, but also to readers who wrote to him with their problems. Nearly 2,000 of these letters and Menninger's replies survive, while an unknown number have been destroyed. Of the surviving letters, eighty-odd queries and replies are reproduced in their entirety in thirteen thematic chapters in this volume. The themes selected by the authors range from problems with mood and personality, through sexual problems, to relationships with husbands — philandering, abusive and disappointing — and with parents, children, in-laws and others.

Dear Dr. Menninger gives clear voice to the women's stories it selects; Menninger himself congratulated one woman on her 'flowing, vivid, readable style' (p. 24). The writers often set out detailed histories of their problems. For example, one woman who wrote to ask for some 'straight from the shoulder advice' about why her husband humiliated her repeatedly in public, began by describing herself:

I am thirty-nine years old, have been married nineteen years, have two splendid girls in high school and two boys in their graves. I have undoubtedly lost whatever attractiveness I ever had, but I am in no way dirty or repulsive ... I am an easygoing, comfortable sort of person. My worst enemy couldn't say I was a nagger. I have a good education and have held several responsible positions both before and after marriage (p. 131).

And while the writers emphasise their emotional lives, the material world of the Depression era is never far away: 'after all these years the serpent has entered our Eden ... Since the boom broke here our Real Estate investments disappeared and taxes ate up the others — due to three bank failures we are poorer than we were fifteen years ago' (p. 22).

Menninger's answers — which range from deep compassion to sharp criticism — provide an insight into the way in which one early analyst approached his work. While Menninger was always interested in understanding the psychological basis of behaviour, he did not exclude other social strategies for dealing with deviant behaviour. Advising one woman to seek legal advice about separation from a tyrannical husband, Menninger observed 'there are certainly many psychiatric cases whose behaviour is such that society has to protect itself against them.' (Menninger was horrified that this woman had decided *not* to leave her husband after reading his book, *The Human Mind*.) Nor was Menninger a passive or non-directive analyst, telling one woman: 'I think you are dead wrong. I think you have the wrong attitude toward your husband entirely ... I think there is still time to change, but get busy' (pp. 136-7).

One disappointing aspect of this book is that the editors were not a little more adventurous in their introduction. While it is certainly true that the letters give insight into 'the way the women saw themselves, formulated their problems, conceived the world' (p. 12), the editors do little more than observe that none of the writers fret 'for example, about "low self-esteem", "co-dependency" or "recovered memories".' (p. 3). Many of these women use the language of psychoanalysis to describe their problems — complaining of 'neuroses' or 'inferiority complexes' — and some discussion of the ways in which they *did* formulate their problems would have been welcome.

A little more detail in the introduction describing the whole collection of letters would also have been welcome. I would like to have known what parts of the United States the letters came from, what

proportion dealt with marital and other problems, in how many did Menninger suggest psychoanalysis and whether there were any letters written by men, as some internal evidence suggests (pp. 24, 136-7). Menninger occasionally asked correspondents to write back, to let him know how helpful his suggestions had been. I would like to have known how many of those invited to write back actually did so (see pp. 211-17 for an example) and, like Menninger, how useful they had found his advice to be.

These are minor criticisms, and the letters published here suggest a number of possibilities for further research. If it is true, as Nikolas Rose asserts, that we all carry around 'a veritable case conference of experts' in our heads, 'coaxing us to relate to ourselves as lay psychotherapists', it is documents such as these which will provide evidence for the origins of this aspect of the self.¹ Another possibility — if a similar set of letters exists elsewhere in the world — is a comparative study of the way in which personal problems are posed in different cultures. Such a study might also show that American exceptionalism in this area is overstated. For example, even though psychology developed relatively late in Australia, Dr A.H. Martin was running a 'worry clinic' at the Australian Institute of Industrial Psychology in the mid-1930s. Martin was an enthusiast for the value of psychology, and answered all manner of questions put to him by the Press, although he did not write an advice column, as far as I am aware. In later years Mary Smith in Adelaide and (much later) Ted Campbell in Melbourne both contributed newspaper columns giving psychological advice. The letters in *Dear Dr. Menninger* show how revealing the letters of anxious advice seekers can be.

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1. Nikolas Rose, 'Power and Subjectivity: Critical History and Psychology,' in Carl F. Graumann & Kenneth Gergen (eds), *Historical Dimensions of Psychological Discourse*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 122.