

Book Reviews

Putnam Camp: Sigmund Freud, James Jackson Putnam, and the Purpose of American Psychology

by **George Prochnik**

Other Press, New York, 2006; 471 pp; \$29.95

George Prochnik, the son of a Viennese Jew and the great-grandson of James Jackson Putnam, has written a fascinating account of the relationship between his great-grandfather, a Boston Brahmin neurologist, and Sigmund Freud, the Viennese Jewish neurologist who founded psychoanalysis. Putnam's association with Freud began during Freud's trip to the United States to deliver a series of lectures on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the founding of Clark University in Worcester, Mass.

Though Putnam had been interested in Freud's work for several years and had read most of Freud's published papers at the time of their first encounter, he had misgivings about Freud's psychoanalysis as a method of treatment. Prochnik writes: "He felt that analysis took too much time and demanded too thorough and degrading a generation of patients' histories to constitute any sort of redemption of psychotherapy". Prochnik continues, "Elements of the treatment could be useful, but nothing truly seized the higher Bostonians' imagination".

However, in Worcester, when Putnam heard Freud's lectures, he found them riveting. Putnam was so affected by his encounter with Freud that he invited Freud, Jung and Ferenczi to spend a weekend with him at his family compound in the Adirondacks (near Keene, NY) just so that he would be able to spend more time with Freud. Much has been written about Freud's visit to the Adirondacks, his encounter there with nature, his search for a porcupine (he found a dead one), and his game of tether ball with Francis, Putnam's 12 year-old child.

The comings and goings of the foursome are described in some detail in the first two chapters of the book, *The Utter Wilderness* and *To Find One's Porcupine*, after which the book leaves the Putnam camp and turns to Putnam's development as a psychoanalyst, his interest in transcendental philosophy and spirituality; Freud's interest in religion and the occult; and the interaction of Freud and Putnam until Putnam's death in 1919. Along the way we watch them as they appear on various psychoanalytic and historical stages, the Weimar and Nuremberg Congresses, and the periods before, during and after World War I. We look in on Freud in Vienna, in Rome, on vacation. We learn about the relationships between Putnam and his wife Marian and his children, especially his daughter Molly (Prochnik's great-aunt), and the similarities between the relationship between Putnam and Molly and Freud and Anna, as well as the similarities in Molly's and Anna's professional careers. We also learn a lot about Freud's interaction with his followers

and his defectors, including Ferenczi and Jung, the other two visitors to the Putnam camp.

The subtitle of Prochnik's book is *The Purpose of American Psychology*, and the history of both American psychology and the American philosophy of Transcendentalism and the St. Louis Hegelian movement are considered in some depth. The ideas of the latter were influenced by Susan Blow, Putnam's former patient and spiritual and philosophical advisor and confidante, who is the third major figure of Prochnik's book. The strength of Prochnik's account comes from first-hand sources: the published Freud/Putnam correspondence edited by Nathan Hale; the other published Freud correspondences; the Putnam archives in Boston; the Blow archives in St. Louis, and a treasure trove of Putnam family letters which had been stashed away in the childhood house in which he grew up and which his mother revealed to him while he was working on this book.

Prochnik's account of the founding of the American Psychoanalytic Association in Baltimore in May 1911 does omit an important piece of history. In May 1910 the American Psychopathological Association, with Putnam as its president, was founded in Boston as an off-shoot of the American Neurological Association. Jones had decided "the time was not yet right for a purely psychoanalytic society" to be founded in America. The following year Freud offered Putnam the "burdensome" presidency of the new American Psychoanalytic Association (APsaA). Freud did say that he chose Putnam because he understood that all great intellectual movements start in Boston, but Prochnik does not refer to Freud's interest in having a gentile at the head of the organization.

By the early 1920s, after Putnam's death, Putnam's society was again the American Psychopathological Association, a shadow psychoanalytic organization. And it was, of course, Brill's New York Psychoanalytic Society, along with the psychoanalytic societies of Boston, Chicago and Baltimore/Washington, which combined to form the new APsaA in 1932, which continues as today's APsaA.

Prochnik describes Putnam's trip to the September 1911 Weimar Congress in considerable detail. Putnam and his family boarded a boat for Glasgow on June 23, 1911. From Scotland they went to Paris and then on to Switzerland where Freud analyzed Putnam for about six hours, "a duration that was acceptable for the brief, intense, analysis of the era".

Putnam's Weimar address was met with great anticipation and applause by the European psychoanalysts in attendance but "frozen silence" and "stirring of restlessness" after it concluded. What went wrong? The paper, later published as *A Plea for the Study of Philosophic Methods in Preparation for Psychoanalytic Work*, was Putnam's attempt to marry psychoanalysis with the philosophical school of St Louis Hegelianism. Putnam's plea was for optimism, sublimation, and spirituality, which is just not where Freud and his central European colleagues placed their emphasis. Putnam told his audience: "Not only do people have to be analyzed in their bodies and minds, they have to be psychoanalyzed body, mind, and soul – which is to say, as creatures coextensive with the cosmos". Pfister, the Protestant theologian, was the most sympathetic member of Putnam's audience. Jones took him to task for making too much of Hegel; Freud, more bluntly, told Jones: "Putnam's philosophy is like a decorative centerpiece, everyone admires it but no one touches it".

The cool reception of the Weimar Congress to Putnam's lecture (given in German) did not dampen Putnam's enthusiasm for psychoanalysis nor sour his relationship with Freud. Freud needed Putnam, the native-born gentile, to carry the torch for psychoanalysis in the United States, a role which apparently Freud did not feel the emigrant Brill could fulfill. However, Putnam's role in psychoanalysis and his increasing public presence as its spokesperson in Boston negatively impacted on his private practice, much to the dismay of his wife. It is not clear, according to Prochnik, to what extent Putnam was aware that things had not gone well in Weimar for him. He did question whether all the work he put into the lecture was worth it, given the fact that his audience and Freud "had no head for philosophy", but he did write to Marian that he read a lot of books and learned a great deal of German on the way. After the Weimar Congress Freud was caught up in his effort to deal with the defectors, Jung and Adler, but still had time to consult with Putnam by letter about Putnam's ongoing self-analysis. They communicated about Putnam's dreams and childhood fantasies. In these exchanges Freud shared his generosity and empathic understanding with his epistolary analysand, which helped Putnam overcome the mortification which his 'self-analysis' brought on, particularly in regard to his incestuous wishes and fantasies.

But Freud and Putnam had more difficulty in bridging the divide between them regarding philosophy and religion, particularly when Freud began to address the latter subject in *Totem and Taboo*, *The Future of an Illusion*, and *Michelangelo's Moses*. Putnam, more than Freud, was aware of the potential negative impact on patients of the character flaws of the analyst, including the personal flaws of Freud himself, which are documented by Prochnik in several places in the book. Prochnik writes: "He wrote Jung was a prudish 'nuisance', Gross was a 'complete nut' and a 'parasite'. Freud kicked out a Dutch female patient because she had grown unbearable to him. Brill certainly had his 'resistances'. Jones's marriage was 'utter nonsense'. Adler's behavior was 'simply puerile'. Stekel was a 'strange sum of chaos'".

Putnam also became aware of Jung's serious personal failings in connection to a patient he sent to Jung for treatment, Fanny Bowstich Katz. He had, perhaps, sent her to Jung because Jung's response to his Weimar paper made him feel that Jung was closer to him than Freud in the "spiritual philosophical debate". The treatment turned out to be disastrous. Putnam watched as Jung "began degrading Fanny in ever more humiliating ways", which she dealt with by conversion to Jung's mystical symbolic universe. Putnam was clear that analysts needed their own analysts or self-analysis, a view shared by Jung. Jones's solution was to create the ring-bearers who invested Freud with infallible authority. Freud would become their training analyst and help them "purge personal reactions away so far as can be done".

Putnam of course never benefited nor suffered from formal analytic training. Perhaps he was the better for it. A paper based on his own self-analysis, *Remarks on a Case with Griselda Phantasies*, is one that Prochnik considers Putnam's most successful description of an analysis. Central to the case was the patient's (Putnam's) incestuous desires toward his daughter Molly. Freud, Jones and Ferenczi after reading the paper used the 'JJP complex' as code for incestuous desire.

The next part of the book covers the World War I years, 1914–1918, with Freud and Putnam on opposite sides of the Atlantic and the War. It is well known that Freud's initial nationalistic enthusiasm for the German and Austro-Hungarian side quickly subsided and turned into despair. It would appear that the carnage of World War I was a challenge to Putnam's optimism and a confirmation of Freud's pessimism. Putnam's philosophical mentor and confidante, Susan Blow, was particularly devastated by the accounts of the death and destruction, and some felt it contributed to her death in 1918. During this time Freud was writing his metapsychology paper *Twelve Essays*, only five of which survived, and Putnam was writing his own book *Human Motives*. *Human Motives* did not set the psychological world in the United States on fire but the book "succeeded in accomplishing what Putnam had tried so long and failed to do: he engaged Freud's imagination on the questions nearest to his heart". Moreover Putnam's book drew from Freud "a rare sustained meditation on the deeper ethical motivations informing his own character". Freud wrote: "If knowledge of the human soul is still so incomplete that my poor talents could succeed in making such important discoveries it seems likely that it is too early to decide for or against hypotheses such as ours". Prochnik points out that Putnam got as much as he could have hoped for. "Freud's acknowledgment of the possibility that there might be truth in his metaphysics, not an orthodox embrace of them".

But we do have ample evidence that Freud was interested in the metaphysical and the occult. He wrote at one point that if he hadn't become a psychoanalyst he would have wanted to study paranormal psychology. There is an account in the book of Freud's participation in a séance in his home, his obsession with numerology, and his questioning whether a dream he had about his son Martin's death coincided with when Martin was wounded at the front.

Finally, there is the subtext to Prochnik's book which is not adequately explored by the author: to what extent is concern with spirituality missing from psychoanalysis and the psychoanalytically inspired psychotherapies in the United States and the rest of the world? And does, in fact, the future of psychological interventions belong to the philosopher practitioners – the ministers and the feel-good self-help industry? But I think exploring these matters would take another book, which perhaps George Prochnik will write next. For me this book was a page-turner, but whether it will be for those who do not have the same interest in Freud as I do, I cannot say.

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Protecting the Self: Defense Mechanisms in Action

by **Phebe Cramer**
Guilford Press, New York, 2006; 384 pp; \$45

Protecting the Self: Defense Mechanisms in Action summarizes a lifetime of research on defense mechanisms. This book will be one in a series of conceptual milestones