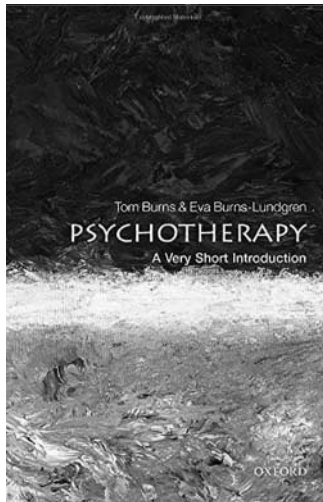


Book review

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode
and Rosalind Ramsay



**Psychotherapy:
A Very Short Introduction**

Tom Burns & Eva Burns-Lundgren.
Oxford University Press, 2015.
£7.99 (pb), 152 pp.
ISBN 9780199689361

I like the 'Very Short Introduction' series. Their back catalogue is a feast for the curious, including, at random, *The Silk Road*, *Knowledge* and *Sport*. Written for the general reader, their aim is to provide a terse yet illuminating way into the topic in question.

In my view, Burns & Burns-Lundgren have met this brief with *Psychotherapy*. Despite its brevity, they achieve depth, for example in their thoughtful definition of psychotherapy: 'The skilful and deliberate use of a specialized relationship to gain self-understanding

and relief from troubling symptoms', or in their depiction of the contemporary therapist stance in psychoanalytic work as being 'relatively reserved' as opposed to 'blank' – surely helpful advice for beginning therapists. The chapters also convey breadth, starting with the historical background to psychotherapy, navigating through the various individual, group and family therapies, and ending with some reflections about the future of psychotherapy and its role in non-Western cultures.

This book widened my knowledge about therapy approaches that are not in the mainstream National Health Service, such as existential therapies. In characteristic straightforward style, the authors explain that existential therapies 'aim to liberate us from what they see as a futile search for meaning'. For the experienced clinician who always wanted to know about transactional analysis or the 'American existentialist-humanistic approach' (but felt too experienced to ask), this is a book that will tell you what you need to know.

I imagine that some cognitive-behavioural therapists will feel the authors at times do not quite capture the tone of CBT. For example, they assert that CBT focuses 'on current thoughts and actions more than on feelings and personal history' and that it is more about 'control and mastery than in-depth understanding'. CBT therapists might well qualify these views by saying that it depends on the duration and scope of the work, and that a good formulation would intrinsically involve feelings and personal history.

This book is an incisive tour through ways of understanding ourselves and how we become troubled. This is interesting in its own right, but would also be helpful for patients and their psychiatrists wanting to consider whether therapy might be for them and, if so, then what approach suits them best.

Adam Polnay Specialty Registrar in Psychotherapy, Psychotherapy Department, Royal Edinburgh Hospital, Edinburgh EH10 5HF, UK. Email: adam.polnay@nhs.net

doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.115.169466