

THE DIFFUSION OF PSYCHOANALYSIS IN ARGENTINA

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- LA ENTRADA DEL PSICOANALISIS EN LA ARGENTINA: OBSTACULOS Y PERSPECTIVAS.* By Germán Leopoldo García. (Buenos Aires: Altazor y Catálogos, 1978. Pp. 292.)
- FREUD EN BUENOS AIRES, 1910–1939.* Edited and with a preliminary study by Hugo Vezzetti. Second edition, expanded. (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1996. Pp. 262.)
- AVENTURAS DE FREUD EN EL PAIS DE LOS ARGENTINOS: DE JOSE INGENIEROS A ENRIQUE PICHON RIVIERE.* By Hugo Vezzetti. (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1996. Pp. 293.)
- CUENTAME TU VIDA: UNA BIOGRAFIA COLECTIVA DEL PSICOANALISIS EN LA ARGENTINA.* By Jorge Balán. (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1991. Pp. 271.)

During the last thirty years, Argentina has become an international center of consumption of psychoanalysis, although not necessarily one of theoretical production. Today Argentina boasts the second-largest community of practitioners in the world affiliated with the International Psychoanalytic Association and one of the largest Lacanian communities.¹ More intriguing is the fact that in many major Argentine cities, particularly Buenos Aires, psychoanalytic terms and language have permeated almost all levels of public discourse. Given the everyday use of psychoanalytically inspired neologisms and the explicit references to psychoanalysis made by politicians and even generals, psychoanalysis has become a *weltanschauung*, despite Sigmund Freud's concerns.² Ironically, this deep penetration of psychoanalysis in Argentine culture may explain why the unprecedented diffusion of psychoanalysis was not perceived as prob-

1. It is impossible to determine the actual number of practicing psychoanalysts of Lacanian orientation in Argentina. In addition to the "official" Escuela de Orientación Lacaniana, created in 1992 and affiliated with the Paris-based Champ Freudienne, myriad smaller groups are operating.

2. See, for instance, General Martín Balza's speech of 25 April 1995 apologizing for the role played by the army in the "dirty war." General Balza spoke of "the collective unconscious" and referred to the need to "work through mourning."

lematic until recently. Only in the last few years have scholars outside the psychoanalytic institutions shown a growing interest in thinking and writing about the reception and evolution of psychoanalysis in Argentina as a historical subject deserving consideration.³ The four books under review here exemplify the emergence of this new area of interest.

U.S. scholar Thomas Glick has distinguished two kinds of histories of psychoanalysis: one that is internal, compiled from within the psychoanalytic establishment, and an external kind usually written by scholars not associated with psychoanalytic institutions.⁴ Internal histories have a long tradition starting with Freud's own work, *On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement*, and continuing with Ernest Jones's classic *Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*.⁵ Two problems are usually associated with this kind of historiography. First, it accepts as unproblematic a model of analysis that privileges the struggles of a solitary hero (or a few heroes) against the predictable resistance of society to psychoanalysis. In this sense, the approach departs from an unchallenged assumption that gives it a strong a priori component: that the introduction of psychoanalysis results from the struggles of solitary heroes who work in a kind of cultural vacuum. Thus the reception of psychoanalysis is reduced by this perspective to the work of "the pioneers." The task assigned to the historian is merely to find corroboration for this assumption (but never to question it).

The second problem is that internal historiography defines the moment of introduction of psychoanalysis as the moment in which it becomes institutionalized through creation of an official psychoanalytic association. In this view, "official psychoanalysis" is a synonym for "real psychoanalysis." In the best of cases, any evidence of reception of psychoanalysis before its institutionalization is considered as preparation for the emergence of a psychoanalytic institution. In the worst case, such evidence is simply ignored. What internal histories of psychoanalysis recount in general is the story of groups of pioneers (those heroic founders of a

3. In addition to the books reviewed here, see also Silvia Inés Fendrik, *Desventuras del psicoanálisis: Donald Winnicott, Arminda Aberastury, Telma Reca* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1993); Mariano Plotkin, "Freud, Politics, and the Porteños: The Reception of Psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires, 1910–1943," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 77, no. 1 (Feb. 1997):45–74; and Plotkin, "Freud en la Universidad de Buenos Aires: La primera etapa hasta la creación de la carrera de psicología," *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe* 7, no. 1 (Jan.–July 1996):23–40 (published in Tel Aviv). Recently, Emilio Rodríguez, a prestigious Argentine psychoanalyst residing in Brazil, published the first major biography of Freud written by a Latin American. See Rodríguez, *Sigmund Freud: El siglo del psicoanálisis*, 2 vols. (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1996).

4. Thomas Glick, "The Reception of Psychoanalysis in France: Lacan and Company," *Intellectual History Newsletter* 13 (1991):63–67.

5. Sigmund Freud, *On The History of the Psychoanalytic Movement*, vol. 14 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited by James Strachey (London: Hogart, 1981), first published in 1953; and Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, 3 vols. (New York: Basic Books, 1953).

psychoanalytic institution who fought against the inevitable resistance) who were preceded by “precursors.” The worthiness of the precursors (when they are mentioned at all) is appreciated only to the extent that they paved the way for the pioneers. This kind of history in hindsight has been the model of the first histories of psychoanalysis written by members of the Asociación Psicoanalítica Argentina (APA), the Argentine branch of the International Psychoanalytic Association created in 1942.⁶

Another point of view is provided by Germán García’s *La entrada del psicoanálisis en la Argentina*.⁷ Although published some years ago, this work offers a pathbreaking discussion of the reception of psychoanalysis in Argentina before the APA. García has been a prominent member of the Lacanian establishment in Buenos Aires since the creation of the Lacanian-oriented Escuela Freudiana de Buenos Aires in 1974.⁸ His account can be read as a reaction to previous works written by APA members, to which he refers in two ways. First, it demonstrates explicitly that psychoanalytic discourse, or rather a discourse on the unconscious, did not start with creation of the APA. This is the most valuable part of the book. Psychoanalytic discourse had a long tradition in Argentina, which García traces back to the nineteenth century. In this regard, García’s book breaks new ground. Second, in defining his Lacanian approach to psychoanalysis in opposition to the APA, García asserts that the creation of the APA was not the crucial landmark in the reception of psychoanalysis in Argentina but a distortion in the development of “real psychoanalysis” (by which he means Lacanian psychoanalysis) in Argentina.⁹ For García, psychoanalysis as practiced by the APA is the opposite of what the discipline should be. *La entrada* is a downright combative book written by one who defends a certain theoretical (and political) current of psychoanalytic thought against the other.

6. Arminda Aberastury, Marcelo Aberastury, and Fidias Cesio, *Historia, enseñanza y ejercicio legal del psicoanálisis* (Buenos Aires: Omega, 1967); Jorge Mom, Gilda Foks, and Juan Carlos Suárez, *Asociación Psicoanalítica Argentina, 1942–1982* (Buenos Aires: APA, 1982); and Asociación Psicoanalítica Argentina, *Asociación Psicoanalítica Argentina, 1942–1992*, coordinated by Raquel Rascovsky de Salvarezza (Buenos Aires: APA, 1993).

7. A shorter version of this book was published under the title *Oscar Masotta y el psicoanálisis castellano* (Buenos Aires: Puntosur, 1980).

8. By *Lacanian*, I refer to those who follow the psychoanalytic doctrines of Jacques Lacan, who broke with the International Psychoanalytic Association in the 1950s.

9. There are important theoretical differences between traditional and Lacanian psychoanalysis, although Lacan always claimed that what he was doing was “going back to Freud.” The main reason for Lacan’s expulsion from the IPA in the 1950s was his insistence on using short sessions as opposed to the traditional fifty-minute time frame demanded by the IPA. For a thorough discussion of Lacan’s theories, see Sherry Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics: Jacques Lacan and Freud’s French Revolution*, 2d ed. (London: Free Association Books, 1992); and Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co.: A History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925–1985* (London: Free Association Books, 1990).

Yet *La entrada* belongs to the internal kind of historiography because for García, “real psychoanalysis” also started with the creation of an institution, in this case the Lacanian-oriented Escuela Freudiana de Buenos Aires. García deserves credit for being the first to discuss the pre-APA developments of psychoanalysis in Argentina, although readability suffers at times from his heavy use of Lacanian jargon. For García, all the early approaches to psychoanalysis that he discusses are nothing but “false starts” because real psychoanalysis started in Argentina only with the creation of a Lacanian-oriented institution. Thus in the end, García commits the same sin that he claims he wanted to correct. His book boils down to a catalogue of individuals who discussed psychoanalysis and related topics, and their discussion is valued directly in relation to their knowledge and appreciation of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Equally important is how much they departed from the model established by the International Psychoanalytic Association, the declared enemy of all Lacanian psychoanalysts. Accordingly, Emilio Pizarro Crespo, a psychiatrist who cited Lacan for the first time in Argentina in the 1930s is deemed closer to real psychoanalysis than Angel Garma, founding member and the first president of the APA. “El retorno de lo reprimido” (the title of García’s final chapter) resulted from the diffusion of Lacanian theory by Oscar Masotta, an Argentine intellectual credited with introducing it in the Spanish language. “Real psychoanalysis” was finally imported when Masotta created the Escuela Freudiana de Buenos Aires in 1974, following the model of Lacan’s own Ecole Freudienne de Paris.

An internal perspective on the history of psychoanalysis emphasizing the role of institutions is avoided by Hugo Vezzetti in *Freud en Buenos Aires*, which focuses on the reception of psychoanalysis before it was institutionalized. Although a psychologist by training, Vezzetti is an independent scholar who remains outside any psychoanalytic establishment.¹⁰ His book presents a carefully edited selection of documents on the reception of psychoanalysis in Argentina between 1910 and 1939, prefaced by Vezzetti’s long insightful introductory essay. The documents included in the collection range from what was probably the first reference to psychoanalysis in an Argentine scientific conference (in Germán Greve’s 1910 presentation of “Psicología y psicoterapia de ciertos estados angustiosos”) to Freud’s obituaries published in various Argentine cultural journals and newspapers.¹¹ The collection includes several valuable pieces arguing pro and con psychoanalysis written by intellectuals, doctors, and

10. Other books written by Vezzetti on related topics are *La locura en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Folios, 1983), and *El nacimiento de la psicología en la Argentina*, edited and with a preliminary study by Vezzetti (Buenos Aires: Puntosur, 1988).

11. Greve’s paper was cited by García. It was also mentioned by Freud in *On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement* as proof of the expansion of psychoanalysis in the Spanish-speaking world.

writers over nearly three decades. The change in this second edition (the first was published by Puntosur in 1989) is the inclusion of a new document in the anthology: right-wing priest Leonardo Castellani's obituary of Freud published in *La Nación*. The introduction was left largely unchanged except for the addition of a short discussion on a negative remark about psychoanalysis made by philosopher Alejandro Korn in an article published in the literary journal *Nosotros* in 1927.

Vezzetti's "Estudio preliminar" goes beyond mere contextualization of sources to detail the reception of psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires prior to Freud's death. The essay shows how, at the beginning of the period under consideration, psychoanalysis was incorporated into and read through the filter of preexisting psychiatric theories, most notoriously the theory of degeneracy. Vezzetti aptly discusses the process of gradual reception of psychoanalysis in medical and cultural circles. He asserts that although psychoanalysis was still viewed with suspicion in the 1910s and 1920s by Argentine psychiatrists, by the 1930s it had found a place in Argentine culture. By this time, psychoanalysis was widely discussed not only as a medical theory but also as a system of thought with wide cultural implications. *Freud en Buenos Aires* is a valuable source. But the "Estudio preliminar" exhibits some of the problems inherent in the internal model of history of the discipline. Vezzetti draws a clear distinction between those like Enrique Mouchet (a psychiatrist who taught psychology at the Universidad de Buenos Aires), who showed much acceptance of psychoanalysis, versus those like Aníbal Ponce (a left-wing intellectual and psychologist), who rejected it. Vezzetti's sympathies are obvious. He suggests that negative or incorrect opinions on psychoanalysis served as barriers to its reception. On the contrary, discussion of a discipline, however inaccurate or negative, evidences a process of reception already in motion, in my view. Vezzetti stresses that both José Ingenieros and his disciple Aníbal Ponce dismissed psychoanalysis, but he fails to notice that the *Revista de Filosofía*, an influential cultural journal created by Ingenieros and subsequently directed by Ponce, published numerous articles for and against psychoanalysis beginning in the late 1910s. Similarly, as early as 1917, influential neurologist Christofredo Jakob devoted part of an article on problems in current psychiatry to reviewing and dismissing Freud's theories (it is not included in Vezzetti's collection). Clearly, psychoanalysis was already a topic of discussion.¹² Yet in Vezzetti's view, psychoanalysis had no impact on Argentine psychiatry and culture until the 1930s.

Vezzetti's latest book, *Aventuras de Freud en el país de los argentinos: De José Ingenieros a Enrique Pichon Rivière*, exhibits a clear distinction between his approach and the internal one. As Vezzetti points out, a differ-

12. Christofredo Jakob, "Problemas actuales de psiquiatría general y sus relaciones con las ciencias sociales y jurídicas," *Revista de Criminología, Psiquiatría y Medicina Legal* 4 (1917):7.

ence exists between the history of Freudianism and the history of psychoanalysis. The former deals with the reading and the diffusion of Freud's ideas in society, while the latter is a history of the institutionalization of the discipline. *Aventuras de Freud* focuses entirely on Freudianism, expanding on some of the topics Vezzetti dealt with in *Freud en Buenos Aires* and introducing many new ones. It is the best book written on the subject to date. The volume consists of a series of thoroughly researched essays on different aspects of reception of Freudian discourse. The first essay on José Ingenieros is a real gem. Ingenieros, a respected psychiatrist much influenced by positivism, had broad interests that included criminology and sociology. Throughout his large body of writings, he made a few references to psychoanalysis, most of them negative. Yet Vezzetti shows convincingly that Ingenieros's interest in hypnosis and psychotherapy opened up "spaces of reception" for psychoanalytic discourse and practice. For example, two prominent doctors who went on to practice psychoanalysis, Jorge Thénon and Celes Cárcamo (the latter a founding member of the APA), became interested in the discipline after reading Ingenieros's works on hypnosis.

Vezzetti's other essays address sexology, Freudianism and left-wing culture, poet Alberto Hidalgo, and Enrique Pichon Riviere. While interesting, they seem less thought provoking. Sometimes Vezzetti's digressive style makes it difficult to perceive the connections between his chosen topics and the reception of psychoanalysis, as in the lengthy literary essay on Alberto Hidalgo, an avant-garde Peruvian poet. Hidalgo wrote a collection of books on Freud under the pen name Dr. J. Gómez Nerea, which became very popular. Yet as Vezzetti recognizes, Hidalgo's literary career was unconnected to his work popularizing Freud's ideas (p. 189).

Aventuras de Freud is a sophisticated and well-researched book. Its most serious weakness, however, comes from the same source as its strength. Each chapter focuses on a specific area of reception of psychoanalysis, but Vezzetti establishes no connections among them. He believes that the reception of psychoanalysis took place through the constituting of various spaces that should be analyzed separately. In my view, a genuinely multilayered study of the reception of psychoanalysis in a country like Argentina, where a true psychoanalytic culture exists, must determine the connections between the different areas of receptions that constitute the "cultural tissue" that facilitated such a culture.

The last book under review differs greatly from the other three. Jorge Balán's *Cuéntame tu vida: Una biografía colectiva del psicoanálisis en la Argentina* covers the emergence and development of psychoanalysis as a liberal profession in Argentina. Accordingly, he concentrates on the evolution of the APA, although the book also contains insightful discussions of the earlier reception of psychoanalysis. Constructed as a collective biography of "the pioneers," the book ends by discussing the split in the

APA in 1976.¹³ Based largely on oral sources, *Cuéntame tu vida* provides a fresh, nonofficial version of the development of the official psychoanalytic institution. Particularly useful is Balán's account of the almost incestuous relationships among the early members of the small APA during its first decade of existence and the roles played by families and friends of the founders in the institution's growth. Less successful is his analysis of the APA's later evolution and the psychoanalytic boom of the 1960s. Balán fails to provide a convincing explanation of how and why the boom took place as it did, and his discussion of this topic is mostly descriptive. For instance, he describes how after the creation and expansion of the program in psychology at the Universidad de Buenos Aires in the late 1950s, the market for psychoanalysis expanded and helped diffuse the discipline. Yet the underlying question of why the program of psychology became so popular still begs for explanation. Other topics are treated with surprising superficiality, such as the introduction of Lacanian psychoanalysis, represented merely by a transcription of a single interview.

Overall, however, Balán's book makes a valuable contribution to one dimension of the history of psychoanalysis in Argentina. Regrettably, Balán chose to end his discussion as of 1976, leaving out the years of the last military dictatorship (1976–1983). *Cuéntame tu vida* discusses links between the APA and earlier governments, and thus it would have been intriguing to have an analysis of the not-so-clear relationship between the psychoanalytic institutions and the military regime.

The four works discussed here provide new approaches to a subject that scholars have only recently perceived as worthy of investigation. Each work makes a substantial contribution to understanding of the reception of psychoanalysis in Argentina. In focusing on its reception prior to its institutionalization, Vezzetti and to some extent García show clearly that official psychoanalysis was not introduced in a vacuum. By the time the APA was created, interest in psychoanalysis had long been expressed in medical and cultural circles. Balán, in contrast, focuses on aspects of the early history of the APA (internal conflicts and relationships between members) that are not included in the "official histories" and discusses the emergence of psychoanalysis as a profession.

These books have dismantled some of the myths surrounding the emergence and development of psychoanalysis. It is now time to address the most puzzling question: Why has psychoanalysis had such an enormous impact on Argentine culture? Only analysis that takes into account the connection between different levels of reception as well as the social and political evolution of the country during the last decades can answer this fascinating question.

13. In 1976 an APA split led to a new institution, the Asociación Psicoanalítica de Buenos Aires (APdeBA), affiliated with the new International Psychoanalytic Association.



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