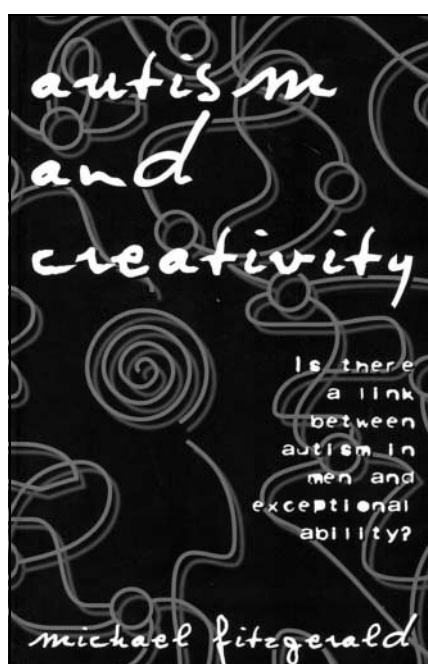


Book reviews

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Autism and Creativity: Is There a Link between Autism in Men and Exceptional Ability?

By Michael Fitzgerald. London: Taylor & Francis. 2003. 294 pp. £29.99 (hb). ISBN 1 583 91213 4



In this book pathologising creativity and genius, tidbits from the lives of Ludwig Wittgenstein, William Butler Yeats, Lewis Carroll and others are proffered as ‘proof’ of Fitzgerald’s conclusion that high-functioning autism and Asperger’s syndrome are more common than we think and critical to genius and creativity. The problem with this is that Fitzgerald writes as if he were their psychiatrist. He isn’t. Nor is he really their biographer. The ‘facts’ he uses to support his case have been cobbled together from secondary sources, by his own admission, ‘using biographies that have received favourable reviews in professional journals and recognised publications such as the *Times Literary Supplement*’.

Fitzgerald finds what he’s looking for, trawling life stories for nuggets to fit his

theory: Hitler’s autistic psychopathy, Wittgenstein’s autistic superego, Yeats’s classic ‘Asperger pose’ and ‘autistic aggression’. One might be forgiven for thinking that this sort of fudged pseudoscience comes with the genre. But retrospective psychobiography can be done without succumbing to this book’s shortcomings. Kay Redfield Jamison’s brilliant and captivating book *Touched with Fire* examines the relationship between bipolar disorder and creativity by presenting extracts of psychohistory as recorded by writers and artists themselves and consulting widely with colleagues working in the humanities (Jamison, 1991).

Fitzgerald’s conclusion is touted on the back cover as ‘spirited and controversial’. I think it’s shaky. Statements that he makes, such as ‘another important point emerging from this book is that the autistic spectrum is very wide and this book widens it still further’, seem as absurd as arbitrarily altering the definition of fever to fit a hypothesis that there is a link between pyrexia and genius.

Jamison, K. R. (1991) *Touched with Fire: Manic–Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament*. New York: Free Press.

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Psychotherapy for Borderline Personality Disorder, Mentalization-based Treatment

By Anthony Bateman and Peter Fonagy. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2004. 406 pp. £29.95 (pb). ISBN 0 19 8527667

While reading this book I also read reviews of *Gielgud’s Letters* (Mangan, 2004) and a biography of Michael Redgrave (Strachan, 2004). These gave accounts of the lives of these two actors that left little out from a diagnosis of borderline personality

disorder. Narcissism, impulsivity, self-destructive behaviour, identity defusion; if they had turned up for an out-patient assessment, there would have been little difficulty in ascribing an Axis II diagnosis. Most psychiatrists are left uneasy about pathologising personality, as it would appear that the only difference between ‘them’ and ‘us’ is chance, circumstance or maybe the talent to get away with it.

On the other hand, psychiatry without a theory of personality development and how it can go wrong not only becomes an arid and dehumanising symptom checklist, but also has little to offer the many individuals who seek help for their chaotic lives and unhappy relationships with others.

Bateman and Fonagy have previously published the outcome of a randomised control trial of a day-hospital treatment for borderline personality disorder. This psychodynamically based treatment was shown to be highly effective on a number of measures to reduce morbidity. In the past psychodynamic treatment has lacked evidence of efficacy and its theory has not generally been backed by developmental studies. In addition the practice of psychodynamic therapy has been so unsystematic as to leave the majority of mental health workers totally bewildered about how therapy is conducted.

This current book addresses both these issues. The theoretical first half considers the evidence around the authors’ central

