the ways that they shed light on the challenge of this profession, being open to the unknown, to what is unfamiliar. They carefully run through the ways that they attempt to engage ... whether that be in the consulting room, in the classroom or in the pages of the book.

This is not to say that I had no difficulty with this book. I did at first, in fact I found myself being strangely ambivalent to it. So much so that I put it down after a quick scan. The second time I picked it up I realised quite clearly what a little gem this book is. My initial mistake was to do with the mindset with which I approached the first reading. At the time of requesting and receiving the book I was slap bang in the middle of preparing for the new academic year and had gotten into a functional, unthinking place. In essence my relationship with the readings I was seeking was characterised by a sense of *'I-It'* (I know a book is a legitimate *'It'* but equally we all have our favourite texts that *'speak to us'*, ones we engage with in a fluid, responsive manner). At that time I wanted a chapter that would ***explain*** to trainees what they were getting into (hmmmm I hear the voices of HPC accreditation materials singing rather too loudly in my ears!!). I was looking for a chapter to refer trainees to that would explain the process and get them ready for the journey ahead. If you turn to this book in that functional manner, I suspect that you, like me, will find it sadly lacking. When I regained my senses, I realised that I have to thank the authors for rising above that limited, mechanical aim. While to have written the recipe book on training might have been lucrative (and would certainly have fitted with the current zeitgeist about consumers' rights to choose the 'right' brand), it would have made for a text without the soul, creativity and imagination that this book has in abundance. So for anyone ready to ponder the fascinating, scary yet wonderful process that teaching and learning psychotherapy is, you could do a lot worse than sitting down, putting your feet up and really engaging with MacCallum and Goldenberg.

Martin Milton

Remembering Our Childhood: How Memory Betrays Us

Karl Sabbagh, (2009) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Originally a student of experimental psychology at Cambridge, Sabbagh has pursued a career as a journalist, documentary television producer and writer. Here he explores what memory is and is not, what it is for and to what extent we can rely on it. He draws on interviews with several experimental psychologists, working in the field of memory, and on a review of literature and research findings. He goes on to argue against the safety of much recovered memory of childhood sexual abuse drawing on court cases in the US and UK where serious miscarriages of justice were subsequently found to have occurred.

I found the early chapters a fascinating and useful read. It turns out that all our memories are unreliable – not just mine! We all forget things that did happen, or remember things incorrectly (different time, place, people and so on) and we sometimes remember things that did not happen. The experimental evidence cited showing how we can remember things that did not happen at all or happened to someone else does give pause for thought – both personally and as a therapist.

For young children memory is principally a tool for learning and memories before the age of two are largely discarded in a haze of *'childhood amnesia'*. As we continue through life we notice and remember things that help us figure out how the world works so that we know what to expect and how to behave. Quoting one of his researchers he tells us *'the general function of memory is to predict and prepare for the future encounters, actions and experiences'* (p.39). i.e. it is not valuable in itself but as it enables a person to live adaptively.

Memory is also the means by which we create a sense of self. As we regale others with our stories we are saying *'I am the kind of person who does this sort of thing'* and these are added into our self-narrative. Memory is also used to construct a feeling of coherence about our lives - which of course belies reality since our lives are mostly not coherent and rational if viewed as a whole with nothing missing or added in. As Sabbagh says, when we tell our stories to others we cannot help but lie because we leave out things that don't fit and invent things that make them seem consistent. Then *'we remember our stories and begin to believe them'* (p.66).

False memories abound it seems, even with the best of intentions. Our earliest memories, it turns out, are particularly suspect. He cites experiments with results that seem perverse in that toddlers appear to have better memories than older children. The reason he suggests is because by the age of five we might actually remember some things that have happened to us whereas toddler memories are more likely to result from stories subsequently told to us which we have internalised and made our own.

Memory is not an infallible recording of events but a dynamic process. Trying to recall an experience requires an act of construction since there is no single place in the brain for particular memories. We make up history as we go along, reconstructing over time as new information comes in.

It is a shame that having carefully and credibly laid before us a great deal of interesting information and food for thought he then suddenly becomes a rabid anti-therapy campaigner when he turns his attention to recovered memory in his chapter headed 'crimes of therapy'. His arguments are no longer disinterested, balanced and carefully put forward. Instead he lumps all therapists into one group – except for CBT practitioners. The rest of us are all tarred with the same brush as 'recovered memory therapists' and we are pretty much beyond the pale in his view.

Having stated that anyone can set up business as a psychotherapist he goes on to say *'it is perhaps too much to expect people who might have no professional training to be able to assess critically psychological theories based on rigorous research'* (p.146).

As he warms to his own arguments he becomes ever more shrill. He abandons good practice and cites surveys without attribution wherein we are told *inter alia* that 25% of therapists with PhDs believe in repressed memories of child sexual abuse (we're left to assume much worse of the less academically qualified). Furthermore, one in four of us believe in past life regression using hypnosis. And we all have read The Courage to Heal and swallowed it whole and recommended our clients to do the same. Sabbagh says this book, which I have not read, claims all psychological illness is caused by child sexual abuse, memories of which have been repressed.

We all know there are serious cases of false recovered memories of child sexual abuse, made worse by ignorance about the reliability of memories, but this tirade against (nearly) all therapists is not the way to improve things. In any profession there are practitioners whose work is way below good practice.

Bravely and not unreasonably in my view, he says the unsayable – that maybe not all sexual behaviour between adult and child is harmful or experienced as traumatic. He isn't saying it is OK, rather that trauma is not inevitable and such events may be forgotten because they were not emotionally significant. He quotes from Clarissa Dickson Wright's biography where, when a case of child sexual abuse was discovered, Clarissa's mother did not make a fuss, quietly explained that some things were only for grown ups (p.54) and Clarissa experienced no trauma. I can tell a similar story from my own childhood. I had forgotten but not repressed something happened until my sister talked about the same thing happening to her. Having recalled it, I still had no wish to make a fuss as I had not been harmed. It just wasn't a big deal.

Sabbagh may be annoying but he is stimulating. For us as existential therapists he underlines the need to be ever more phenomenological and careful in our explorations with clients, and vigilant against the intrusion of our own beliefs where they may influence and encourage a client to *'remember'* something that did not happen, or to invent trauma that was not actually experienced as such. An appreciation of the malleability of memory and the importance of this knowledge in therapy have made reading this book worthwhile.

Reference

Bass. E and Davis L. (2002). *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*. London: Vermilion

Diana Pringle