

BOOK REVIEWS

In this issue we continue a venture which met with some critical success that we began in EA 18.2, that is to have more than one person review the same book. Irvin Yalom is a hugely influential writer in the modern Existential tradition and he is equally at ease writing in the academic style as he is as a novelist. The book we have reviewed by two different people is his latest book Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Dread of Death which as can be seen from the reviews is something of a hybrid. We hope that this reinforces the spirit of pluralism and debate that characterises the editorial policy of Existential Analysis.

Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Dread of Death

Irvin D. Yalom (2008) Piatkus £14.99

My first encounter with existential thought came through the existential-humanistic tradition of Rollo May and JFT Bugental, whose writings I devoured in the 'seventies. For the last quarter of a century the books of Irvin Yalom, whom I consider to be part of this tradition, have been my companions in my professional life as a clinical psychologist and psychotherapist.

When I did my first psychotherapeutic training in the early 'eighties, his book on group therapy was my guide to this subject. As soon as I got my hands on a copy of *Existential Therapy*, I devoured it in a few sessions, and the section of this book on my ultimate concern of death later became one of the sources of impetus for my own research into death awareness and personal change. In *Love's Executioner* I marvelled at Yalom's courage in writing about therapeutic relationships which had not been a great success and also at his skill in bringing these encounters to life. And *The Gift of Therapy* I value as a wise and generous offering to the next generation of therapists of his way of working and of the benefit of his therapeutic experience over several decades.

In the preface to his most recent work written in his mid-seventies, Yalom describes *Staring at the Sun* as '*a deeply personal book stemming from my personal confrontation with death... These pages contain what I have learnt about overcoming the terror of death.*' (p. ix)

Yalom writes always with great facility and immediacy and in this case, I experienced reading the first hundred pages or so as like eating a delectable dessert, which melts in the mouth and requires no chewing. Doubts began to rise in my mind: is this just a potboiler in which Yalom is recycling old material, specifically from the section on death in *Existential Psychotherapy* and the wisdom and advice already offered in *The Gift of*