angst and in other "negative" concepts such as inauthenticity, falling prey, and fleeing – is much too pessimistic. Freud's own apparent pessimism is likewise problematic for Carel – what is needed is an approach to death that avoids such a pessimism but which does not simply cover over what is important in death: transience, loss, and finitude. As Carel writes:

…it is not only through anxiety that one encounters death, but that opposite experiences of beauty and love are inherently transient and therefore confront us with finitude. Everything beautiful and cherished contains the kernel of its destruction in its transience. We therefore have an ambivalent attitude towards these experiences and objects. This ambivalence links love and hate, beauty and transience, life and death, a link that stands at the basis of the unified view. (P. 187).

The unified view of death as constructive of life emerges, Carel argues, from the meeting of the two "humanist" disciplines of philosophy and psychoanalysis. In this light, the book is in part an effort to bring philosophy back to its Socratic and therapeutic roots. As such, it belongs to the same tradition as does Jonathan Lear's work, to name but one other proponent of the Socratic view and its connection to Freud.

The book is well-written: its sentences are crisp, clear, and concise for a book that deals with an extremely dense subject matter. Freud and Heidegger are not natural bed-fellows, however, and in this work we see several cleavages which are knowledgeably traversed by Carel but which expose the radically different aims of each author. Ultimately, this dooms the book's overall project to failure, as it becomes clear quite early in the exposition of the project that doing justice to either one of these authors does a great disservice to the other. If we decide to avoid those exegetical difficulties, instead focusing on Carel's own aims, then we find ourselves with too little substance to make a comprehensive and informed assessment of its merits. It's not to be recommended as an introduction to either author, but as an exemplar of what happens when one tries to marry two incongruous systems of thought it is an instructive exercise in futility and thus has the capacity to teach us something about both Freud and Heidegger in spite of the aforementioned flaws.

Fabio Escobar

Dreaming Arrival

John Welch. (2008). Shearsman Books. £11.95.

In *Dreaming Arrival* John Welch reflects on (his) life, his experience of psychotherapy and the process of writing. Welch's text offers many interesting insights, observations and reflections on the experience of one man's being in his world. It is a fascinating and absorbing read for many reasons and in many ways. However, there are three features of the book,

in particular, which stood out for me and which I would like to explore further in this review. These include the way in which Welch's style of writing mirrors the therapeutic process, the phenomenological quality of the account, and finally his reflections on the double-edged nature of writing.

Although Welch reflects on his experience of psychoanalytic psychotherapy, his account does not present a narrative which traces his distress to its root cause and documents the process of recovery through psychotherapy. It is not a psychoanalytic detective story with a beginning, a middle and an end. Instead, the book is written in a way that reflects the open-ended, meditative, sometimes circular, meandering, tentative yet intense quality of the therapeutic experience. The reader is witnessing a process of visiting and re-visiting memories within different contexts and from different angles. Meanings emerge, evolve, and revolve around one another, and slowly and almost imperceptibly we get to know (something about) Welch and his life. Most of the time, I felt as though I was not really meant to be there, as though the book had not been written with a reader in mind. There is no attempt at providing explanations or justifications in order to win the reader's sympathy. Welch appears to be as honest with the reader as he is with himself. He also stays with what presents itself to him, focusing on the *'how'* rather than the *'why'*. It is an unusual book and reading it is an unusual experience.

Welch is extremely good at evoking settings; he brings to life his physical environment in such a way that we feel that we are literally *'with him'* as he walks the streets and parks of London, allowing his surroundings to set off trains of thought and associations which over the course of the book's 200-odd pages map out a territory which constitutes his life world. It is a phenomenological world made up of pavements, birds, sunlight and memories. Welch is also a poet and his ability to use words to evoke a sense of place, a mood, an ambience, allows him to circumvent conventional storytelling and to invite the reader into his experience in a way that is rare and that I experienced as both fascinating and somewhat unsettling as I did not always want to *'be there'*.

The process of writing – its meanings, functions, consequences- are a major theme throughout the book. Welch is reflecting on the ways in which writing (in his case, poetry) has structured his experience of being in the world from an early age. He acknowledges that writing this book has shaped his experience of psychotherapy (he was planning to write it and kept notes throughout the process) and, perhaps more significantly, that the book (the fact that he wrote it and the way it is written) expresses something fundamental about the way in which he experiences himself and his world- namely as an observer, conscious of himself watching but uncertain about where (if anywhere) he fits into the picture.

Welch's reflections on writing are fascinating. He moves beyond the widely acknowledged *'healing function'* of (autobiographical) writing (e.g. Philips et al., 1999; Hunt, 2000; Bolton et al., 2004) and confronts its *'darker'* side. Writing has variously been described *'as therapy, as healing, as salvation, as redemption, as mourning, as deferral, as reparation'* (Stacey, 1997: 241). Emphasis tends to be placed upon the beneficial functions of writing about traumatic experiences whereby a sense of control can be gained over such events by giving them meaning. Whilst Welch acknowledges and indeed celebrates the feelings of autonomy and freedom which writing can provide him with[1], he also observes its distancing function, the way in which writing as a project has lead him to position himself outside of events, even the events of his own life. He experiences a sense of not really being *'there'* throughout his life, and in this book he explores this feeling and its connection with writing. He comes to think of *'writing as the marking off of a 'secret' area'* which became *'a sort of solution'* to him when he started to write poetry in his mid-teens. He writes *'[T]otal outward compliance and inner freedom was the trick I tried, with silent ferocious determination, to pull off'* (p. 195). Welch explores the paradox of how trying to preserve a sense of self through writing (*' 'I' can only be propped up like this, a sort of membrane that needs all these words to strengthen it, or it will be taken over, like [the] ruins taken over by the grass'* p. 106) can result in a loss of presence, of being-there in the world (*'The breath that stirs inside the habit of language- it can end up being buried beneath the language'* p. 159). The very act of writing objectifies the experience and thus separates the author from its immediacy. Welch observes that his experience of psychotherapy reflects this and he writes with characteristic frankness, *'And the writing? It is still my calm fortress. Over the weekend I do my 'personal writing', communing with a sheet of paper. In front of this mirror I groom myself so*

[1] For example, he describes, "[W]aking early, watching the swifts sweeping across the sky, their flight punctuated by shrill screams, I experience that sense of complete autonomy. It resembles the absolute purity of bird flight crossing and recrossing the sky above the city. It's that hopefulness, the moment of it a sudden lifting like a bird lifting into the air, the words its wings. It's the thought that there is this-to-be-written, this is the hopeful part of me, the flight of it. There's the act of reaching out in an attempt to identify something that is so elusive, always liable to be moving away and just out of reach, the bird a living creature more 'other' than an animal is, the naming an attempt to be there where that creature is, eye and name resting on it for a moment before it darts away. So, first thing in the morning carrying this sense of self like something held in a cup, taking it over the floor patched with early morning sunlight and upstairs to my room, while the others are still sleeping" (p. 202).

that, by the time the session arrives on Monday afternoon, I am quite calm and ready' (p. 182). Writing seems to be both the solution and the problem. It is as if Welch is trying to (re)create himself every time he writes a poem.

He writes,

> *Do I believe that all the poems I write are one and the same poem? Something has to be given birth to, right there in the language. Starting from the inside I try to work outwards, like an embryo eating its way through the egg. Like a grub. I have to make and consume this word-food - making and consuming appear to be the same thing- and eat my way out. So I can stand on my branch, wave my wings about and move on until the next time*
>
> (p. 161).

Welch identifies a *'double movement'* in language whereby *'language sends us away from the world and in the same moment is calling us back'* (p. 197). There is an *'impossible promise'* in language in general, and in poetry in particular, which suggests that it can bridge the gap between self and world which it has created in the first place. Welch's therapist remains a constant but elusive presence throughout the book. We hear about the setting in which the therapy sessions took place and Welch's journey to and from the sessions feature repeatedly. Occasionally a citation of a brief comment or question offered by the therapist constitutes the point of departure for a reflective sequence. Welch continues to question his experience of psychotherapy and whilst some of his reflections evoke psychodynamic and Lacanian concepts, there is no sense in which Welch presents himself as a convert to any particular school of psychotherapy. Towards the end of the book, he indicates that for him the purpose of psychotherapy is to *'occupy his own past, but on different terms'*. He writes, *'It is as if the angle changes, the light on the landscape alters as it all swings round, and I see it 'in a new light'. I am not remembering anything I had forgotten. I am just here exactly where I have always been. It is simply that I start to tell myself a different story'* (p. 190).

References

Bolton, G., Howlett, S., Lago, C. and Wright, J.K (2004). *Writing Cures. An Introductory Handbook of Writing in Counselling and Therapy*. London: Routledge.

Hunt, C. (2000). *Therapeutic Dimensions of Autobiography in Creative Writing*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Philips, D., Penman, D. and Linnington, L. (1999). *Writing Well. Creative Writing and Mental Health*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Stacey, J. (1997). *Teratologies. A Cultural Study of Cancer*. London: Routledge.

Carla Willig

Invitation to Existential Psychology: A Psychology for the unique Human Being and its Applications in Therapy

Bo Jacobsen. (2007). John Wiley. £24.99

This book is an invitation to a field that needs development: existential psychology. This is its main virtue - inviting the reader to enter into an area fundamental to the application of theories and phenomenological and existential concepts, i.e., a field in which great questions of life are dealt with. The reader will ask: *'is that it?'* And then ask why such an invitation is so important. It is because the author deals with an aspect that requires increased in-depth development: the systematisation of an autonomous discipline – existential psychology. More than this though, the book stresses a number of fundamental aspects that have not been given due attention by the scientific community:

- There are three existential disciplines that inter-relate, philosophy, psychology and psychotherapy, but each one has its own field of application.
- Existential psychology provides the link between philosophy and psychotherapy, and thus avoids the usual gap between philosophy and psychotherapy.
- Existential psychology is a field of psychology that includes a set of concepts and theories on Man and the world that enables suitable scientific research to develop.
- Existential psychology provides the study of fundamental issues of life, maintaining a scientific rigour, but excluding the epistemological reductionism that sometimes prevails in empirical psychology.
- The phenomenological method is one of the more efficient instruments to help establishing scientific research of a human nature.

The book has a clear objective, it is *'an attempt at developing a firmer framework for the discipline of existential psychology'* (p.x) The three features that distinguish Existential Psychology from Humanistic Psychology, from Positive Psychology and from mainstream Psychology are as follows (p.21):

- *It focuses on essential life dilemmas and the big questions of life.*