



This Incredible Need to Believe

Julia Kristeva

Trans. Beverley Bie Brahic

Columbia University Press, 61 West 62 Street, New York, NY 10023, USA.
www.cup.columbia.edu. 2011. \$14.95.
 136 pp. PB. ISBN 9780231147859.

Daniel N Stern's (1934–2012) *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* (1985) is more relevant today since syllabi framers globally are pushing the study of Jacques Lacan (1901–81) and Julia Kristeva (b. 1945) in disciplines ranging from women's studies to religious studies. This is akin to the legitimisation of quack medical doctors, whose only source of medical information is the Internet. Lacan, one suspects, is a victim of his own bombast and thus finds many takers, because hardly anyone seems to understand his *Seminars* (1951–63).

The danger of doling out either Lacan or Kristeva's contentions about the human psyche to a non-clinical audience is to deprive both the non-clinical or non-practising reader and the clinically ill patient of medications and proper therapy. Just because Shoshana Felman (b. 1942) and Elizabeth Wright (See her *Speaking Desires can be Dangerous: The Poetics of the Unconscious* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999)) applied psychoanalytic techniques to literary texts, it does not mean that literature or art is the proper object of psychoanalytic studies. How is it possible for those without clinical training to vouch for or against psychoanalysis? It is within this simultaneously farcical and dangerous academic zeitgeist that Kristeva's book under review and her corpus need to be assessed. We need to stop teaching psychoanalytic techniques to those who might potentially fuel the anti-psychiatry movement through their ignorance and lack of clinical encounters. Or we have to first teach theorists the importance of heeding the latest guidelines of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* and also more importantly, teach them to heed the warnings of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention located in the US.

R D Laing (1927–89) and Lacan harmed mentally ill patients by denying them medication.

Knowing Lacan's *Meditations on Optics* (1954) will not help a child with autism-spectrum disorders. This reviewer once met a very intellectual sociologist, whose son is autistic, with ADHD, and due to her readings in psychoanalysis she thinks Ritalin, methylphenidate hydrochloride, cannot improve her son's quality of life! She lectures on the autistic, contiguous, position with no regard for brain anatomy. On questioning it was found that she does not know of Thomas H Ogden's (b. 1946) valuable insights regarding the autistic-contiguous position (1989), which builds on the works of earlier psychoanalysts who worked with and on children. Ogden is a trained medical doctor who specialised in psychiatry and would not hesitate to prescribe drugs for this sociologist's son.

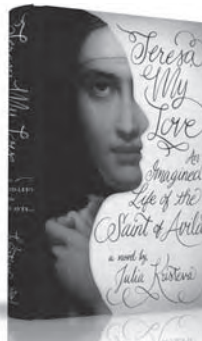
Kristeva shines only in two of her books: *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* and *Hatred and Forgiveness*. But for these two books, she too is relevant only so far as obscurity is the norm of being included in learned discussions and mindless essays, which has nearly finished the study, practise, and effectiveness of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is mistakenly thought of as anti-religious and solely concerned with the libidinal. This is because the global culture-brigade is not reading the likes of Robert Kennedy SJ aka Harada Roshi (b. 1933), or for that matter, the *Spiritual Exercises* (1522–4) of St Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556). Much earlier, in the East, Gautama, the Buddha (c. 500 BCE) taught the art of deep-listening or what we now term, psychoanalysis. The connection(s) between Buddhism, the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius of Loyola, and classical psychoanalysis have been already established and have been found to constitute one harmonious continuum of healing the psyche. Kristeva's own context as a white woman academic ensconced as the mater familias of contemporary psychoanalysis allows her the arrogance of neglecting the Eastern roots of Western psychoanalysis. When Kristeva nowhere mentions St Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*'s contribution to the analyst and analysand dyad, maybe it is unfair to expect her to acknowledge the contributions of Eastern spirituality and dharmic traditions' contribution to contemporary psychoanalysis. Kristeva, in short, effects white colonial hegemony on the discipline of psychoanalysis.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) never wrote: ‘I dream of helping ... mothers and those who assist them (gynecologists, obstetricians, midwives, psychologists, analysts) and to refine our knowledge of this passion, pregnant with madness and sublimity. Mothers today are in need of such a discourse’ (47). Kristeva being *narcissistic*, in the Freudian sense, *dreams* utopias in this book. Freud knew that medical science will make his theories redundant. Kristeva unlike Freud, having no medical training keeps penning her *phantasies*. Her failure to understand the heart of motherhood has forced her to write such meaningless essays on the Virgin Mother of God, Mary: *Stabat Mater* (1977). Kristeva has this to say of motherhood: ‘This sublimatory cycle [the mother-child dialectic] is not without sublimatory perversity’ (45). Donald Winnicott (1896–1971), Carl Rogers (1902–87), and later, Virginia Satir (1916–88) have more effective therapeutic solutions to issues of familial attachment than Kristeva has been able to formulate in her entire career. She just keeps reworking the unnecessarily libidinal aspects of Freud’s work.

The problem that faith poses, which Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) understood, eludes Kristeva. Thus she finds it ‘incredible’ that someone can be set aflame by the love of/for God. The vocation to enter into communion with God or Brahman is an anthropomorphic call, by *saguna* Brahman: Kristeva can never conceive of this call. How can she? She has never felt the passion which moved Swami Vivekananda to toil constantly for humanity or the inner urge which forced El Salvadorian Jesuits to become martyrs for the cause of justice fueled by *hesed*! In this book and elsewhere, Kristeva does not take into account *hesed*, *rahamim*, or *hēn*. She shows no understanding of God as *ginesthe oiktirmones* (Luke 6:36). Kristeva’s *poseur* as a humanist lies in her stress (21–3) in integration, in the guise of advocating multiculturalism, she advocates the erasure of individuality. Kristeva’s failure is in understanding the value of the inter-cultural. Cultures come into being not through the praxis of perfection of culture studies mediated by psychoanalysis, but through *hesed*. There is no *hesed* informing this book under review.

Kristeva provides clichéd insights about Marcel Proust (35) and Céline (38). The book under review proves that Kristeva is not *self-actualised*. She is still stuck within the *Tel Quel* group where she began her writing. Kristeva’s literary style is bad and to her, writing style matters. She is a failed novelist, who churns out bad novels and erudite essays which have little to do with reality. Kristeva and Sudhir Kakar (b. 1938) have jointly spoiled the reputation of both Freud and psychoanalysis. Kakar’s *Young Tagore: The Makings of a Genius* (2014) is an insult to both psychoanalytic studies and to Tagore himself. Only when we are rid of Lacan and books like the one under review, will we be able to offer proper treatment to those in need of medication and what classical psychoanalysis has to offer those traumatised. Father Harada Roshi and Daniel Stern need to be taught rather than Kristeva.

Subhashis Chattopadhyay



**Teresa, My Love:
An Imagined Life of
the Saint of Avila—A Novel**

Julia Kristeva

Trans. Lorna Scott Fox

Columbia University Press, 61 West
62 Street, New York, NY 10023, USA.
www.cup.columbia.edu. 2014. \$40.
648 pp. HB. ISBN 9780231149600.

St Teresa of Avila is one of the most studied and emulated Christian mystic. She is an extraordinary role model to be followed by a monastic religious, because she not only gives step-by-step instructions for the ‘interior’ life, but also guides life in a monastic community. She is one of the very few mystics who have recorded in detail their experiences. This record has helped and continues to help numerous mystical aspirants. However, this record has also had an effect that St Teresa could have hardly imagined: it has been made a subject of ‘psychoanalytic investigation’ and worse, turned into an ‘imagined life’ that masquerades as a ‘novel’.

The novel is not seen, because there is none. What Julia Kristeva presents in this book is an