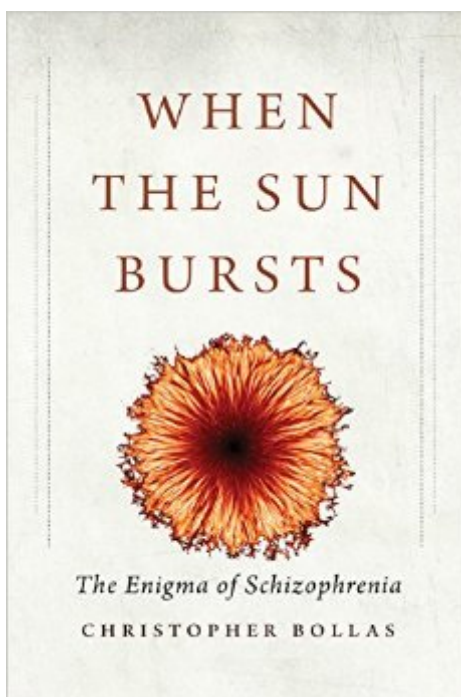


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When The Sun Bursts: The Enigma Of Schizophrenia



Synopsis

Many schizophrenics experience their condition as one of radical incarceration, mind-altering medications, isolation, and dehumanization. At a time when the treatment of choice is anti-psychotic medication, world-renowned psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas asserts that schizophrenics can be helped by much more humane treatments, and that they have a chance to survive and even reverse the process if they have someone to talk to them regularly and for a sustained period, soon after their first breakdown. In this sensitive and evocative narrative, he draws on his personal experiences working with schizophrenics since the 1960s. He offers his interpretation of how schizophrenia develops, typically in the teens, as an adaptation in the difficult transition to adulthood. With tenderness, Bollas depicts schizophrenia as an understandable way of responding to our precariousness in a highly unpredictable world. He celebrates the courage of the children he has worked with and reminds us that the wisdom inherent in human beings "to turn to conversation with others when in distress" is the fundamental foundation of any cure for human conflict.

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Customer Reviews

In this stunning new work Christopher Bollas has published a beautiful and welcome book on describing and treating psychosis ("the schizophrenias"). In its pages Bollas advocates for psychoanalytic treatment for these patients; he is not the first psychoanalyst to do so, but to my knowledge as both a clinician and the father of a deceased son with schizophrenia, it is the most lucid, by far the most useful, accessible, insightful and humane treatment of the subject. Dr. Bollas has spent a great deal of his working life treating psychotic people beginning as a part time counselor at treatment center for schizophrenic and autistic children at Berkeley. In this book he continues to demonstrate his love for treating this sector of humanity as it evolves through the various stages in his most interesting career. Bollas has described elsewhere that when an analyst meets a new patient he, of necessity, sets aside a search for an immediate premature knowledge of the patient. Rather he approaches the patient much like when a cultural anthropologist approaches a new people; that with a quiet observation and curiosity, he will learn much without interpreting on the quick. I think Bollas has done something similar in his study of the schizophrenic. He meets these patients before he is a trained clinician and seems to have a natural and uncanny ability to "get" them. It is fascinating to read how this ability is expanded through the mileposts of his career. Bollas, of course, is a stout advocate of the need in the treatment situation of the Freudian notion of unconconscious communication.

For more than three decades, Christopher Bollas has brought a singular voice to contemporary psychoanalytic thinking. In a voice consistently evocative and provocative, Bollas asks us again and again to reconsider how we think about our work, how we think about our thinking, and how we think about our patients. His most recent book, *When the Sun Bursts*, asks us yet again to think anew. One of the recurring themes in Bollas's work is to find and elaborate the communicative aspects of our patients' unconscious forms of organization, be it through free association, free talking, aspects of object usage, characterological modes of being, hysterical forms of presentation, or psychotic processes. Bollas demonstrates a willingness to enter as closely as possible the unique form and syntax of each patient's ways of being, so as to be shaped and informed by these ways of being. He does not back away from disturbance. This way of listening and working comes alive with full force in *When the Sun Bursts*. This book is in part of kind of memoir in which we witness Bollas's capacity to learn from his patients as to how to better engage with them within their psychic realities. There is a way in which I read this book as part of a trilogy, preceded by *The New Informants: The betrayal of confidentiality in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy* and *Catch*

Them Before They Fall: The psychoanalysis of breakdown. Each of these books is a challenge to our psychoanalytic and therapeutic communities, calling into question the ways in which we may acquiesce to professional, social, and economic pressures. Bollas demonstrates in each of these books a profound dedication to ensuring the privacy, dignity, and uniqueness of every psychoanalytic endeavor.

I picked up a copy of Christopher Bollas' "When the Sun Bursts: The Enigma of Schizophrenia" because it looked like a short, easy read about the disease that had stolen my ex-husband's life. What would it really have been like to see and hear and feel what he did during the progression of this most feared of mental illnesses? I was both shocked and heartened to learn from Bollas' thoughtful and humane narrative that the wrenching treatment of anti-psychotic drugs that P's family believed were his only option, the drugs that helped quiet the voices in his head while deadening his mind and emotions, were not, in fact, the only possible treatments for his illness. And while I wondered whether Bollas' intensive routine of psychoanalysis might have given P back to his family and loved ones, I also wondered to what extent the American health care system would have supported such a laborious treatment, five days a week of psychoanalysis, sometimes extending as long as five years before a particularly difficult patient was able to utter coherent words? And then I thought: what would five years have been, compared to the twenty or thirty more years of sane, reasoning life such a patient might experience? In some ways, Bollas' description of his treatments, including taking intensive histories of his patients, mirrors those of other humane medical practitioners such as Abraham Verghese and the late Oliver Sacks, simply listening to patients as people instead of cases. "Ordinarily I will simply ask the person to tell me what has happened in the days leading up to the moment when he changed," Bollas writes.

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