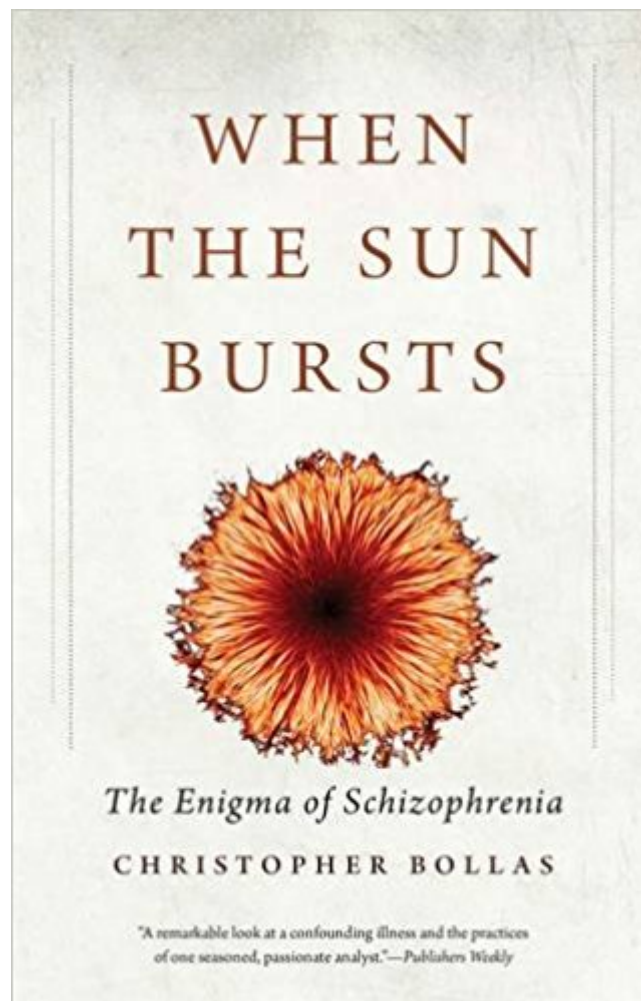


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When The Sun Bursts: The Enigma Of Schizophrenia



Synopsis

A leading psychoanalyst shares his experiences working with schizophrenic patients to show how effective talk therapy can be as a treatment. 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

"This book is a remarkable look at a confounding illness and the practices of one seasoned, passionate analyst." Publishers Weekly "The author's perspective embraces personal,

social, and political life on a vulnerable planet. His expertise extends to civilization generally, making an esoteric specialty relevant to human improvement in general. The book is suited for a general audience interested in psychology applied to the most challenging dilemmas." — •Library Journal, Starred Review

"A vastly informative, coherent, and valuable assessment; useful and accessible for both mental health professionals and laypeople." — •Kirkus Reviews

"In this book, Christopher Bollas expresses an uncanny ability to enter the world of another simultaneously almost unconsciously or automatically employing his intricate knowledge of theory and clinical experience to navigate the life of the schizophrenic." — •Carol Stratman, Michigan Psychological Association

"Christopher Bollas has written a beautiful, humane, and profoundly moving book. It tells us not just about the world of schizophrenia but also about what it is for all of us to be human, struggling not to be too frightened to live in a world of chance events. Its stories of the work of therapy illustrate the patient effort that is involved in respecting another person, and, indeed, offer a paradigm of love." — •Martha C. Nussbaum, The University of Chicago

"Imaginative, heartfelt and moving, this is a beautiful book. Bollas's compassion and respect for his patients is palpable on these pages. The result is a sense of shared humanity, understanding and even hope. There's misery in *When the Sun Bursts*, and yet you will come away feeling ignited and consoled." — •Stephen Grosz, author of *The Examined Life*

"If you want a book that will give you the living, vibrant, painful process of truly working with schizophrenia, then read this book. Christopher Bollas is famous in the world of psychoanalysis and beyond for the way he pushes us to the limits of possible thought. Here, in the most resonant, sensitive and even poetic writing — writing which teaches us anew what it really means to listen — Bollas makes a crucial clinical and political intervention into the increasingly vexed question of how to approach mental disturbance in our time." — •Jacqueline Rose, author of *Women in Dark Times*

"Christopher Bollas writes with dazzling insight into the embattled mental world of schizophrenia. A profound and moving meditation on the tribulations of human subjectivity." — •Barbara Taylor, author of *The Last Asylum: a Memoir of Madness in Our Times* (2014)

"In this absorbing, elegant, and uplifting new book, Christopher Bollas takes the reader on a personal odyssey through schizophrenia. In an era of biological reductionism, Bollas reminds us that no one we encounter in our work is completely out of reach by another human being. We all owe Bollas a debt of gratitude for keeping alive the flame with this extraordinary contribution." — •Glen O. Gabbard, Baylor College of Medicine

"In this sensitive and evocative narrative, psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas draws on his personal experiences of working with people with a diagnosis of schizophrenia to offer an interpretation of how it develops as an

understandable way of responding to our precariousness in a highly unpredictable world. — •Therapy Today (Therapy Today 2017-03-01)

Christopher Bollas is a psychoanalyst, practicing for over 40 years. He has published many books (nonfiction and fiction) including *The Shadow of the Object*, *Being a Character*, and most recently *China on the Mind*.

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 unconscious communication. He brings this communication to light as he gives many clinical examples of his work; one can see how he has FOUND the essence of being psychotic and in doing so has provided a gift by bringing us this knowledge. Bollas informs us that through the extensive overuse of psychotropic medications, the cultural and social whisking away of these people to radical incarceration in locked wards and ghettos of impoverishment, as well as the use of ill informed and watered down "supportive therapy", that this population has been portrayed as other than human, and, therefore, profoundly lost. Bollas has found these people and offers his portrayal of them. Along the way Bollas illustrates the seemingly un-understandable bizarre behaviors and verbalizations of schizophrenic patients that, when understood, have a brilliant logic... we see a world where disguised meaning becomes clear. We also learn how schizophrenia

develops in adolescence as a failed adaptation to adulthood as well as of the psychosexual development of the patient that he refers to as metasexuality. We also discover so importantly that, if a patient is fortunate enough to find herself very soon after her first break to be in a psychoanalytic talk therapy, that is possible for her to be CURED. To quote the author on this matter, "There is one thing at the beginning of schizophrenia- one crucial thing- that is vital if a person has a chance to survive and reverse the process. It is crucial there is someone for the person to talk to, perhaps several times a day times a day and possibly for weeks". Through fascinating and beautifully and humanely described clinical examples, this author shows us this way of work with both the newly diagnosed and those further along into the process of illness who can and do make tremendous progress in the "free talk" of psychoanalytic therapy. This book could not be more timely. As psychotherapy for those suffering ANY malady of mental illness is being marginalized, and yes, devastated by the underlying greed and dehumanizations of the pharmaceutical and insurance industries with their so called "evidence based" therapies, Bollas elucidates in clear and plain language what actual treatment can look like. In the mind of this reviewer this book is part of a continuing project the author has been working on throughout his luminous career. This project can be referred to as one to describe to ALL of us the nature of mental pain and how it can be addressed through the unconscious work between the patient and therapist. In light of this project this book is one to read by clinicians, patients, and family members as it offers all of us real and radical hope in treatment.

As he has done before, Christopher Bollas has elegantly taken up a major bugaboo of the current psychoanalytic (and wider psychological) scene: how to think about the treatment of schizophrenic people. Bollas's central idea in this fascinating, very personal, book, is that "talking soon after a psychotic breakdown can help reverse the schizophrenic process, because it implicitly restores the narrative hegemony of the I." That this is a controversial notion is in itself stunning. Of all people who would seem to desperately need empathic understanding, certainly it is schizophrenics who need it most and have the hardest time finding it. But in our universe of neurobiomedical approaches to everything---a pill and a neuronal connection or two for all problems---it is understandable, particularly given the emotional demands on those who would try to actually enter and comprehend the subjective world of those who seem so different from ourselves. Perhaps because we find it so hard to put ourselves in a position to experientially understand such patients, we would rather claim that there is nothing in the purely psychological realm to understand. And if that is the case, then the talking cure would be beside the

point. And if someone, as Bollas does, confronts us with the idea that we're missing the boat about this, we might become angry with him and excoriate him, as occurred in response to his New York Times essay describing his treatment of a schizophrenic woman. Of course, the debates about the treatment of all kinds of patients, not only psychotic ones, revolve around just this sort of point: are emotional and psychological problems to be understood as brain or more generally biological phenomena, as difficulties in making sense of one's experience of the self and the world, or both? Bollas makes a modest claim: he intends to tell us how he thinks about schizophrenic thinking and how to listen to and understand schizophrenic people. He is not intending to locate the ultimate causes of schizophrenia, and he is not intending to claim that all schizophrenic people can be successfully treated via psychotherapy. He is insisting that schizophrenic thinking can be comprehended, within a purely psychodynamic framework, as meaningful in a psychological context. Schizophrenics, Bollas believes, are engaged in radical forms of the externalization of intolerable psychic states. Further, for schizophrenic patients, being listened to, understood, and talked with about meanings, anxieties, and self protective measures, is extraordinarily helpful. In his customary elegant and moving manner, Bollas offers a description of how he understands the motives and dynamics inherent in the schizophrenic self. His writing seems to clarify what we feel we should have known, or somehow did know in a vague and unfocused way. He generously describes many clinical vignettes from his own work with children and adults in a variety of settings. In this book, as usual, Bollas is a man deeply worth listening to.

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