

*A Tribute to Dr. Joyce McDougall, who passed Away on August 24, 2011*

By Susan Kavalier-Adler, PhD, ABPP, D.Litt, NPsyA,

Founder and Executive Director of the Object Relations Institute for Psychotherapy and  
Psychoanalysis

Dr. Joyce McDougall was a major contributor to our field of psychoanalysis. A well-known, and largely celebrated, French psychoanalyst, Dr. McDougall, gave us the gift of a multitude of books and papers. I knew her as Joyce, since she became a regular presenter at the Object Relations Institute since we founded it in 1991. I felt privileged to be at many ORI conferences where Joyce presented, always with a graceful and related, and quite informative manner. Dr. Robert Weinstein, who helped me found ORI, played a major role in bringing Dr. Joyce McDougall to our conferences as a guest speaker. Upon her visits to us, Joyce shared her rich clinical examples, where she would relate the dialogue between herself and the patient. She brought home to us, first hand, the protosymbolic level of dissociated experience from the patient that the analyst feels. She brought home to us the primitive modes of symbolism within the concrete enactments of character-disordered patients, as well as the more psychologically mature symbolic communications in neurotic patients who are engaged in more classical analysis. She made clear that she understood the powerful messages of the major British object relations theorists, such as Melanie Klein and D. W. Winnicott, and was in tune with them in her belief that the mother–infant dyad was the bedrock of psychological experience and development. She noted JacquesLacan’s lack of understanding of this psychological axiom, now proven so repeatedly in infant research.

As Dr. McDougall, Joyce published her most famous books: *A Plea for a Measure of Abnormality*, *Dialogues with Sammy*, *Theatres of the Mind*, *Theatres of the Body*, and *The Many Faces of Eros*. Although Joyce had been schooled early on in London by Anna Freud, when she had to leave Anna Freud’s seminar to accompany her first husband to Paris, she also left behind a form of Freudian thinking that assumed a level of symbolic functioning and differentiated oedipal relations and conflicts that was lacking in all character-level disorders, i.e. in all those who suffered traumatic disruption in mother-child bonding before the separated, integrated, and individuated self was formed. Winnicott had spoken of the “false self” patient who was

disrupted by such early trauma, that which Margaret Mahler later referred to as “developmental arrest.” Joyce McDougall shared with us the clinical anguish of the psychoanalyst who deals with such patients with primal self-trauma by referring to Winnicott’s own words, “We must admit that it is always fatiguing to be a bad breast” (see Joyce McDougall’s *Donald Winnicott the man: reflections and recollections*). She agreed with Winnicott that, easy or not, being able to take the attacks from character-disordered patients (that were meant for the “bad breast” of the internal world) was a necessary anguish for the clinician that worked with such patients. In this sense, and in many others, Dr. Joyce McDougall was a true object relations theorist and clinician. But her most original contributions came in her books, such as in *Theatres of the Body*, where she offers graphic clinical example of how food can be used as primitive symbolic vehicle for the part-objects (breasts and penises) of internal-world-parents’ sexual and nurturing parts, and which patients cannot yet put into symbolic (“linguistic”) language. In her last book, *The Many Faces of Eros*, Dr. McDougall tackles difficult questions about gender identity and bisexuality within the unconscious world of fantasy that we call the “internal world.” As always, she does this in clear clinical terms, through her case process examples.

I was privileged to read Joyce’s books, and also privileged to receive several of them as gifts from her. She was a generous and gracious person in all regards. Also due to her generosity, I received forewords from her for two of my published books: *The Compulsion to Create: Women Writers and Their DemonLovers*, and *Mourning, Spirituality and Psychic Change: A New Object Relations View of Psychoanalysis*. Joyce also gave me a world-wide list of publishers, editors, and translators; because she believed I should have my books published in many different countries and languages. She also read one of my papers, on “The Supervisor as an Internal Object” to a large audience of psychoanalysts in Paris and gave me gracious feedback about the positive reception my paper received. In addition, I was able to present a case of my own to her at one of our ORI conferences, related to her interest in psychosomatic symptoms of unconscious psychological conflicts. When I reported that my patient’s uterine bleeding stopped after a psychotherapy session with me, following many years of analyst-patient bonding in treatment, and that allowed the patient to avoid a hysterectomy and to heal, - Joyce interpreted the bleeding as the 30-something year old patient just reaching her psychological readiness for her adolescent pubescence in the bleeding of the monthly menses. I found this feedback from Joyce to be quite insightful and enlightening.

I can remember Joyce McDougall in many ways. I still have two gold-framed Spanish artist's original prints in my office that were gifts from Joyce. She vacationed in Spain, where she had a villa, and she knew this visual artist who painted abstract prints with powerful psychological impacts. One of the two prints has a bull, in abstract form, coming just up under the breast of a bare, but abstract, part object, woman. The masculine and feminine interaction, or collision, depending on one's interpretation, is vividly painted in strong colorful strokes and forged into a printed form on the thick papered canvas.

Although we all feel the loss of the brilliant and dynamic Joyce McDougall, we are grateful for the rich and fecund legacy that dr. McDougall left for all practitioners of psychoanalysis when she ended her full life at the age of 92. We miss you, Joyce, and cherish the abundant intellectual and clinical gifts that you have offered to our ever-struggling to survive field of psychoanalysis!

