

Book Review
By Merle Molofsky,
of
OUR TIME IS UP
By Roberta Satow
International Psychoanalytic Books, 2024. 358 pages.

In writing her novel, *Our Time is Up*, Roberta Satow has created a fusion of fiction and memoir well worth reading. The title itself of course is a familiar phrase, practically a joke, a punch line, indicating that a psychoanalyst is informing an analysand that indeed it is time to end the current analytic session. Roberta Satow herself is an accomplished psychoanalyst, which means she herself was in a long-standing psychoanalysis with her psychoanalyst. At the end of the book, on the Acknowledgments page, she writes, “Most of all, I would not be the person I am without my analyst, the late Joan Klein”. The book indeed could be read as a tribute to Satow’s psychoanalyst, and the title could be understood as a sad sigh, that their time together indeed is irrevocably up.

The novel is divided into three sections, following a Prologue: Part I, MEETING JOAN (pp. 3-125); Part II, MEETING STEPHEN (pp. 129-280); Part III, ENDINGS (pp. 283-358). Each section is dated, and each chapter in each section is dated. MEETING JOAN begins January 26, 1967, and ends October 22, 1968, a seemingly short time, less than two years, and an intense, timeless time. The narrator, Rose (Satow, of course, who names herself Rose for the novel, and exists palpably as a memoirist whom we recognize as Roberta), begins with her anxiously anticipating her intake interview at Washington Square Consultation Center. Rose meets Joan Wiseman. (How wise Satow is to name the interviewing therapist Joan Wiseman, who represents Joan Klein by her first name, and psychoanalytic wisdom, Joan Klein’s psychoanalytic wisdom, by her last name.)

The novel is compelling and engaging. The narrative is daring, bold, courageous, and, necessarily, delightfully character-driven. Roberta Satow offers the reader the process of her personal journey of becoming a psychoanalyst. What does that process entail? Each psychoanalyst’s journey is unique, befitting the very nature of psychoanalysis, and yet each unique journey shares something in common with every other psychoanalytic journey – it is deeply personal. Thus, Satow’s novel/memoir

exploring her own journey must involve describing her own personal issues, her own psychoanalysis, her feelings about, and relationship with, her psychoanalyst, and, ultimately, while working with her supervisor, the process of conducting psychoanalysis with people referred to her while she was attending a psychoanalytic institute.

Those personal issues unfold as Satow describes analytic sessions.

As a fiction writer myself, I am fascinated with fiction writers' choices of names. Rose. Would a Rose by any other name smell as sweet? Is Rose afraid that she doesn't smell sweet, that she may be disgusting?

Rose says, "I want to see you three times a week" (p. 3). We learn Rose's presenting problem, framed in psychoanalytic jargon as she amiably shares the desperate situation that brings her to therapy: "My presenting problem... is that I'm the only college graduate who's still a virgin in the city of New York, or maybe the whole country" (p. 3).

An auspicious beginning! We know this will be quite a convoluted, necessary journey. Satow is a convincing writer. And she sure knows her material.

Her material. Professional ambition. Rose teaches, first in a Yeshiva, then at Brooklyn College. Meanwhile, her "other" material is loaded. Being Jewish. Transferential feelings! What will her immediately beloved, admirable Joan think of Rose? Sexual feelings, sexual desire. Shame. Shame regarding her bodily functions. Will this Rose smell like roses, or will she smell like piss or shit? "Asking to use her bathroom was embarrassing, as if urinating, or certainly defecating, would disgust her" (p. 75). She wants to hide a run in her stocking, and Joan offers an interpretation: "I think this is about masturbating, not the run in your stocking. Don't you?" (p. 78). Joan further addresses a fraught issue for Rose, saying, "I think you're afraid that nothing's wrong with you and both you and your mother are sexual women. But I wonder what it is about that that frightens you?" (p. 79). Along comes the inevitable: "Our time is up. We're going to have to stop for now" (p. 79).

The transference further heats up as Rose experiences competitive feelings involving the other analysands she sees coming and going in Joan's waiting room.

ENDINGS indeed is about all sorts of endings, some irrevocably final, including Satow's mother's dementia, where the mother she once knew is no longer present; and, ultimately, the illness and death of Joan.

To encounter the variety of endings, including such sad endings, the reader first gets to encounter a full and vibrant life, the emerging evolution of the becoming of memoirist Roberta Satow in all her complexity.

As someone deeply involved with the training Institute of NPAP, where I studied, graduated from, served on the Board, served on the faculty, served as dean of Training, I couldn't help but be fascinated as Satow describes her (Rose/Roberta's) experience at the Institute, enrolling at the end of June 1968. She describes a beginning pre-practicum course taught by someone who would become her supervisor, engaging in role-playing as candidates played analysands and analysts, learning through role-play something about what a first session as a therapist would encompass. Issues such as anxiety, boundaries, and silence were discussed.

Transference and competition emerges as a theme. Satow describes her concern that as she begins supervision with Anne Shapiro, loving her warmth and admiring her empathic stance, that Joan would feel jealous of the supervisory relationship (p. 117). And then, catastrophe looms. Satow describes the anger and resentment she felt at always having to initiate a session, that Joan waited for her to begin. Suddenly, Joan began a session. She told Satow that she would have to stop seeing her for a while, because she was diagnosed with breast cancer and would need an operation. Joan reassured Satow, but the feelings Satow felt were overwhelming, of course (p. 121). Part I: Meeting Joan, segues to Part II, Meeting Stephen.

Satow continues to miss Joan. She continues her involvement with classes at the Institute, and meets Stephen. They date, they are falling in love, and then he has to return to an aspect of his job in another city. "I cried for ten blocks until I reached my apartment, like a little girl whose parents had abandoned her. I had been so lonely without Joan and so filled up by Stephen. Now they were both gone" (p. 133).

As readers we stay close to Satow's intense and complex feelings, and the plot thickens! She begins her clinical work!

And, as we become involved with her involvement with her new status as a clinician working psychodynamically, the plot further thickens. Her mother falls ill with a stroke and is hospitalized. On August 1, 1970, Rose and Stephen get married. These beginnings are intertwined with endings. Rose visits desperately ill Joan every week. Sally, one of Rose's analysands leaves her therapy. And then, Rose is notified that Sally collapsed in the subway after leaving her last session, was rushed to the hospital, and died. Rose's mother dies. Joan dies. The last chapter, "Signs of Life", is two pages long. Four months after Joan dies, Rose is pregnant.

Beginnings and ending and beginnings and.... We are reading a novel, *Our Time is Up*, that is both fiction and a memoir. We are reading a book that is an ouroboros, a dragon swallowing its' own tail, and thereby hangs a tale....