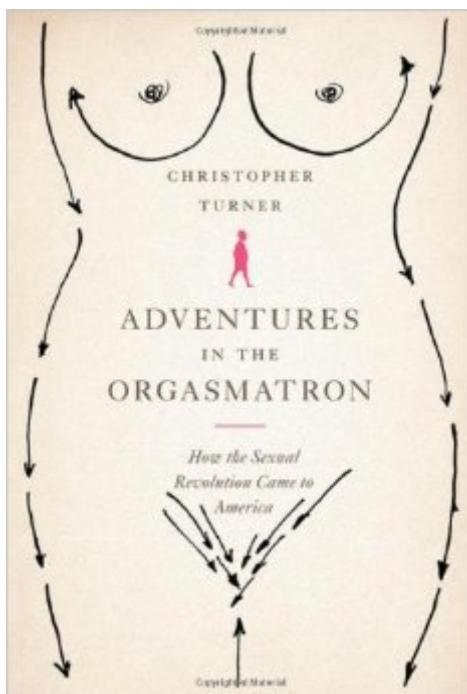


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Adventures In The Orgasmatron: How The Sexual Revolution Came To America



Synopsis

One of The Economist™s 2011 Books of the Year A Boston Globe Best Nonfiction Book of 2011 Well before the 1960s, a sexual revolution was under way in America, led by expatriated European thinkers who saw a vast country ripe for liberation. In Adventures in the Orgasmatron, Christopher Turner tells the revolution's story "an illuminating, thrilling, often bizarre story of sex and science, ecstasy and repression." Central to the narrative is the orgone box "a tall, slender construction of wood, metal, and steel wool. A person who sat in the box, it was thought, could elevate his or her œorgastic potential." The box was the invention of Wilhelm Reich, an outrider psychoanalyst who faced a federal ban on the orgone box, an FBI investigation, a fraught encounter with Einstein, and bouts of paranoia. In Turner's vivid account, Reich's efforts anticipated those of Alfred Kinsey, Herbert Marcuse, and other prominent thinkers "efforts that brought about a transformation of Western views of sexuality in ways even the thinkers themselves could not have imagined."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Turner's biog of Wilhelm Reich is an odd compendium of serious scholarship and sensationalism (the title, while droll, is completely off-message for the contents of his book, and the cover is frankly pornographic). I suspect the publisher had something to do with their choice; it's a sad symptom of our times, wherein a dedicated scientist like Reich could be ridiculed because of our own sexual uptight-ness. I met Reich when I was a child and wrote a novel about my experiences growing up

under his shadow, "The All Souls' Waiting Room." There is no easy, one-size-fits-all description of the man himself. I knew instantly, as a four year old, that he loved children. In spite of some ensuing traumas that I received at the hands of his analysts, I've never blamed Reich for what happened to me, hence the illuminating conflicts I've spent much of my life trying to resolve. (See "Children of the Future" for some insights into his child-rearing theories.) After years of research and reading everyone else's take on Reich -- including meeting Myron Sharaf, whose "Fury on Earth" is well-worth reading, and James DeMeo, who scrupulously continues Reich's scientific work (see "Heretic's Notebook") -- I had to come back to my own. To wit, I think Wilhelm Reich was a brilliant, tortured soul who was bigger than life and certainly bigger than the century he was born into; his mission to cure and heal was stupendous, world-changing -- and problematic, because it brought him up against the very forces that have been keeping humanity in the dark for millennia. It's only recently, I feel, that Reich's work may actually be given its due. Turner's book goes a long way to peeling back the layers of Reich's life.

First off, Wilhelm Reich is a personal hero of mine, and like many of my heroes, such as Hunter S. Thompson, Aleister Crowley, and George Carlin, he was also tragically flawed. I myself have suffered from mental illness and my tendency to become megalomaniacal, obsessive, and paranoid when I felt people were, in Karen Horney's words "moving against me" was all too real. I don't think Turner's book is an attack on Reich at all. I think it is an honest look at the man's genius AND his flaws. Is orgone real? Who knows? Was Reich somewhat mad? What member of the psychological professions isn't? I got a degree in psychology BECAUSE of my mental illness. He and Freud BOTH shared the same obsessive drive for fame and recognition. Personally, I wonder if Reich, in his later "orgone" years wasn't 'touched in the head.' Claiming that your cloud-buster scares off malevolent radiation-spreading UFOs and that the planes in the sky were sent to watch over your family are things Reich actually told people. The thing is, as a scientist, he may have been totally off, and it seems that he was driven to that because his true brilliance, as a socialist political thinker and psychoanalyst contributed to his rejection by members of both. I suppose he thought distancing himself from both was a way of "getting back" at both the communist party and the International Psychoanalytical community. The book rightly describes Anna Freud as one of the most grotesque and repugnant human beings who has ever walked the planet, and describes Freud as having become a traitor to his own ideals. Freud was just as much of a "my way or the highway" control freak as Reich, yet many of the reviews here seem to think Reich was some kind of saint Who Could Do No Wrong.

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