



Couch Fiction: A Graphic Tale of Psychotherapy

Philippa Perry , Junko Graat (Illustrator)

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Ever wanted an insight into counseling? Or wished you could be a 'fly-on-the-wall' in a psychotherapy session? *Couch Fiction* allows you to peep through the key-hole of the therapy room door and, more than that, read the minds of the protagonists...

Based on a case study of Pat (our sandal-wearing, cat-loving psychotherapist) and her new client, James (an ambitious barrister with a potentially harmful habit he can't stop), this graphic novel follows the anxieties, frustrations, mind-wanderings and break-throughs of each, through a year of therapy sessions together. Beautifully illustrated and accompanied by succinct and illuminating footnotes, this book offers a witty and thought-provoking exploration of the therapeutic journey, considering a range of skills, insights and techniques along the way.

Couch Fiction: A Graphic Tale of Psychotherapy Details

Date : Published June 15th 2010 by Palgrave Macmillan (first published 2010)

ISBN : 9780230252035

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Format : Paperback 151 pages

Genre : Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, Psychology, Comics, Fiction

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From Reader Review Couch Fiction: A Graphic Tale of Psychotherapy for online ebook

Erin Britton says

Written by Philippa Perry and illustrated by Junko Graat, *Couch Fiction* is an innovative new graphic novel that aims to give readers an insight into psychotherapy by offering both the therapist's and the client's prospective of the therapy process. Although none of the characters in *Couch Fiction* actually exist, in a note to the reader at the beginning of the book Philippa Perry comments that she has taken content from real people's actual dreams for use in the story and that the relationship between the therapist and the client is typical of psychotherapy case studies. Effectively, Perry guarantees that although *Couch Fiction* is indeed a work of fiction, it is also an accurate and informative illustration of the psychotherapy process. In order to fulfil such promises, Perry departs from the traditional approach to graphic novels with *Couch Fiction* in that she includes under the illustrated panels fairly detailed notes that discuss the ramifications of, and motivations behind, psychotherapy.

Setting out to provide readers with an accurate insight into counselling is an audacious undertaking which could be tricky to achieve. With *Couch Fiction* Perry gives a fly-on-the-wall perspective of therapy sessions so that readers can "peep through the key-hole of the therapy room door and, more than that, read the minds of the protagonists." The case study that Perry presents is that of Pat, a sandal-wearing, cat-loving psychotherapist, and her new client James, a kleptomaniac barrister. James's compulsion to steal could well cost him his career if it is discovered and so he has come to Pat in the hopes of a cure for his behaviour. At the beginning of his sessions with Pat, James's behaviour puzzles even himself. He has plenty of money and access to lots of nice things so why does he jeopardize his livelihood and his respectability by pilfering small items from trusting shopkeepers? Being a bit of a pompous ass, James is in denial about his problems and, while apparently seeking help, treats Pat rather contemptuously. However, as they keep talking, a level of trust is built up between Pat and James so that he is able to divulge some things from his past that his therapist believes may have a bearing on his present.

Couch Fiction is a very interesting, indeed educational, book that has enough humour and pathos to make it entertaining too. Perry is a very experienced therapist herself (although apparently she has never has a client suffering from kleptomania) and so she is able to give a detailed and seemingly accurate insight into therapy sessions and the inner workings of a therapist's mind. She must have observed a good deal of clients over the course of her career so far and so it is no surprise that the characterization of James rings true too. Watching the relationship between Pat and James develop over the course of a year as they begin to build trust, form an understanding of one another, and eventually begin to successfully tackle James's problems is actually quite compelling. There is just enough technical information and detail to make the story believable but not so many concepts and issues that they become a chore to read though.

Couch Fiction is presented in black and white with wonderful illustrations by Junko Graat that help to lead the reader through James's therapeutic journey. While the notes that Perry has included at the bottom of most pages are interesting, stopping to read them can disrupt the flow of the story. It might be worth reading straight through the pure graphic novel of *Couch Fiction* first to absorb the details of Pat and James's story and then giving it a second reading where you pause to digest the additional notes.

Couch Fiction is one of the most unusual graphic novels that I had read recently and it is also one of the best. I would recommend it highly to people who enjoy the realism of Harvey Pekar and Daniel Clowes as well as to those who have limited experience of graphic novels but who wish to learn more about the practical

experience of psychotherapy.

Wilde Sky says

This book provides an illustrated guide to psychotherapy sessions.

The beginning was a bit lame but it became more interesting as it progressed, but I'm not sure how much I learnt (if anything).

Not really sure who this book is aimed at – more likely to be clients rather than analysts.

Kritika Narula says

Diving into the book, I knew it isn't going to be a conventional story- and I was right. It is more of a resource than a tale- it gives interesting insights into the unsaid elements of a therapy session. As someone who goes for therapy, I found these deeply relatable at times, and I imagine that anyone who wants a raw, real picture of the sessions, and an understanding of what all goes through the mind of both the participants, would pick this up and find it useful.

I often found myself pausing and making a special note of some terminologies and concepts, and that to me is the hallmark of a good book.

Maybe I would've expected it to be more inclusive of the kinds of questions raised during therapy, but the limitation was imposed by the anecdote, which is understandable, but makes it fall short on certain accounts. Overall, I really liked the tangent on therapy that the book presents.

Gemma says

Such a smart way to introduce people to how psychotherapy works. Funny, smart, insightful.

Rick says

Who would think that a graphic novel (read here comic book) about psychotherapy would be a good idea?

Well...um...me, actually. Since it combines two of my interests (psychology and comics), I thought, "what the heck?" and took the plunge. Plus, it was recommended by one of my colleagues.

The novel focuses on the psychoanalysis of James Clarkson Smith and shows his progress from scared new client to healthy individual, with all of the ups and downs of therapy interposed. Dr. Patricia Phillips practices psychoanalytic psychotherapy (think Freud here, guys), but is not a perfect therapist. She actually seems to be a real therapist, moving too fast at times and taking some things too personally at times. Just like the rest of us. So, the process of therapy is presented accurately. And, while I do not agree with some of the techniques--I lean more toward cognitive behavioral therapy than psychoanalysis--I cannot fault the process.

This is a good book for anyone who wants to understand the process of therapy. Dr. Perry (she is a therapist herself) includes author's notes on almost every page that explain the importance of the scene depicted on the page. And even though the comic is drawn only in black and white, the art is well done and keeps the reader's attention.

All-in-all, if you were ever interested in a look behind the curtain of psychotherapy, this is the book for you.

KL Baudelaire says

I enjoyed this book - as a practising counsellor, much of both the theory and the process felt familiar; the therapist is written such that she makes human errors, and seeks to correct them (when she notices them!). I assume that the author's source material for the client's inner voice comes partly from her own experience of counselling; it's unusual to see both parties' thoughts given in an account like this, as the focus is usually on the role held by the author.

The client's journey felt very real, while also (necessarily!) happening quickly.

I'd recommend this book to those interested in counselling, or thinking of having counselling (while offering the provisos that a) no two counselling experiences will be the same, and b) quite a few different ideas relating to counselling technique and theory are touched on well but briefly - it's likely to spark the desire to read further). It might also be useful for therapists in training, and was certainly interesting to this counsellor.

Paul Bryant says

Psychotherapy gives me the creeps. But – wait a moment – why did I say CREEPS? Was it because I was going to write that it gives me the WILLIES but I didn't want to write the word WILLY because I don't want to draw attention to my WILLY which as you see I have now done? How rancidly ironic. I see I have subverted myself – again.

You can't win with psychotherapists. But wait – who said there was anything to "win"? is that how I look at life? As an eternal struggle of winning and losing?

Aaargh.

I prefer Motown to psychotherapy. On balance I think when all is said and done Motown has saved more lives and given meaning to more people than psychotherapy. I don't have the figures right now, but if you check into it, I think you'll find I'm right about that. It's on the internet somewhere.

This is a graphic novella about one particular psychotherapy experience from the point of view of both parties. This rich English barrister is a secret kleptomaniac (nothing serious, just a little light shoplifting). It turns out that.. er.. it was because he wasn't telling people what he was feeling. As soon as he did so, and it took him a year, his Spanish girlfriend married him and he never stole anything again. The End.

Sound like a pile of poo to you? Or is that another wretched reference to my private parts?

There are so many problems I have with psychotherapy but like religion it's because I never "got" it. I've never experienced it, only been around people who have. I've seen how it can become a destructive habit in

itself. But if, as Freud said, it can turn hysterical misery into ordinary unhappiness, as he thought was its *raison d'être*, then fair dinkum. And I suppose, grudgingly, I have to acknowledge that when the princess could not get a wink of sleep on her fifteen mattresses because of the pea hidden under the first mattress, it was real discomfort she was feeling.

This little book does give some insight into the therapeutic thing but if it's free and candid expression of feelings which is going to make me feel better about my life, then I'd like to say that I wanted to pour a bucket of icy water over the irritating upper class client and hide the therapist's glasses.

Greta says

Couch Fiction is Philippa Perry's creative attempt to show, via the medium of the graphic novel, what the practice of therapy is really about, and that success in therapy depends on the quality of the relationship between the client and the therapist. She wrote this book because she wanted to describe what life can be like as a therapist and as a client.

The author presents a fictional case study of Pat, a messy, middle-aged female psychotherapist and James, a seemingly successful, smug, thirtysomething barrister who, when he was only a kid, developed kleptomania. The illustrated story follows their psychotherapeutic relationship and the breakthroughs of each through a year of therapy sessions together.

With most of the pictures, illustrated by an unknown artist Junko Graat, there are footnotes that provide more theoretical reflections, and explain the importance of a scene.

There are for instance footnotes about 'projection, transference and countertransference', 'bracketing', 'attachment theory', 'projective identification', 'intersubjectivity theory', 'dissociative personality disorder',

I really looked forward to reading this, and it was an interesting read, but I thought it was shoddy. The story seemed too simplistic and wasn't really engaging, probably partly due to the many footnotes; the illustrations were rather poor and unattractive ; the font for the footnotes was so small they were almost unreadable ; the explanations in the footnotes were mostly too short to really offer an understanding, unless you already are familiar with these often complex theoretical ideas.

In short, a great concept that was poorly executed, according to this reader.

However, I can imagine that for therapy students, such a book could be a great introduction to the process of psychotherapy, and spark off interesting debates.

And it's certainly worth a try if you have an interest for psychotherapy.

Elodie says

erm this was okay but I was expecting better, the client and counsellor scenario and the counsellors ideas felt abit to simplistic in the message that "we talk and thus everything falls into place with a happily ever after and we never again have that same problem" it doesnt so much acknowledge the fluency of the change and the chance that the presenting issues may come back and there is not always a permanent cure but rather a continous battle where we may have off days. Having said that I did like that Philippa acknowledges that the

counsellor could make mistakes and correct herself so that counsellors are not perfect but that its important to be real and genuine.

Louise says

Rather interesting - good for anyone with an interest, shallow or deep in psychotherapy.

Stewart Tame says

This is worth reading for the curiosity value alone. This comic follows a therapist/client relationship from the first visit to the final session. Every session is not presented in detail, but the intent is to demystify the process of analysis by showing it from start to finish. There are somewhat extensive footnotes for almost every page that point out nuances that may otherwise be missed. One has the choice of reading the story, and then going back for the footnotes, or reading page-footnotes-page-footnotes straight through. I took the latter approach, which may have hurt my initial enjoyment as I found the story difficult to get into at first. As comics go, it's pretty basic stuff, though someone--either the artist or the writer--seems to have a compulsion to put a title on the spine of every book in the therapist's office. Most people would have been content to just have them be background. If you have any interest in psychotherapy, casual or otherwise, this book is worth checking out. Whether it's more interesting for its content, or simply by the fact of its existence, I'll leave up to you, dear reader ...

Kimberment says

As a psych student I found it quite interesting as there are not many options out there for seeing what sessions are like aside from wildly exaggerated Hollywood renditions or thrillers. I really liked that there was a critique of the therapist in the notes too - found that quite helpful. Though I'm generally not drawn towards psychoanalysis it was good to see her take a range of approaches and to see that she doesn't always get it right (she is after all human) and how it shows how those mistakes are able to be corrected etc.

Wes Hazard says

If you start this book you'll finish it quickly because once you're granted fly-on-the-wall access to an uber-realistic psychotherapy session it's not something you tend to walk away from in a hurry. I was engaged, entertained and left feeling like I learned a thing or two, Couch Fiction was well worth the read.

A graphic novel that explores the months-long encounter between London psychotherapist Pat and her client/patient/co-lead James, a successful barrister with an unhealthy compulsive addiction, Couch Fiction does a superb job of illustrating what exactly happens in a modern psychotherapy session.

A graphic novel is the perfect medium for this material. It does a great job illustrating how we often say one thing and mean another and it really allows readers to get inside the mind of not only the patient, but the therapist as well. The drawings and dialogue are enough on their own, but the whole project is really

enhanced by text footnotes/commentary at the bottom of most pages which gives lay readers some insight about what they're seeing from a clinical perspective.

Highly recommended.

Sam Quixote says

The book is a graphic depiction of a psychotherapy case of a man "James" who is a successful barrister who begins to steal for no reason. His kleptomania is explored by his therapist "Pat". Revelations occur and James is cured.

I read this thinking it would be an interesting comic and, as a comics fan of both popular and indie varieties, gave this a try. Unfortunately it's not very interesting or well drawn.

First off, the "characters" never seem real but just cyphers for the author to put into situations that can put forward psychotherapy instruction. James: "I am beginning to resonate with the idea that an unacknowledged feeling can rule me, whereas I can have more control over the ones I know about." (p.96). Sort of hypothetical scenarios for demonstrative purposes with mannequins.

Furthermore, these scenarios feature footnotes that explain what's going on in the cartoon section, sort of a running commentary throughout. Because of this the comic never takes off as a story and heightens the sense that it is an introductory-type pamphlet on psychotherapy to those interested in it.

The book is basically if Freud's "Dora" was illustrated this would be it, drawn by a less talented Posy Simmonds or Gabrielle Bell. Possibly good to those with a passing interest in psychotherapy, but not a great comic and not a great read.

Elyse says

Couch Fiction, 'a graphic tale of psychotherapy' was as entertaining as it was informative. Perry has put together an insightful snapshot into what it is like to be a therapist and also what it is like to be a patient. As a therapist I appreciated the explanatory texts underneath the graphics - despite it often being information I knew, the reminder and the explanations helped me identify fresh perspectives. Lines like "she is not a perfect therapist and there is not such thing" are helpful reminders. Seeing the nuances of therapy, the missed moments and the overzealous comments made me cringe and chuckle in equal merit. as did a later line: "The idea though is not to be perfect. The idea is to remain authentic while striving for the unknowable truth".
