The psychoanalytic situation has the power to change subjective awareness and one's experience of the world. And as our clients are changed, so too are we. There are complex dynamics within the dyad that fortify us, disassemble our preconceived notions, and enrich our understanding of ourselves and the other. It is possible to experience another type of transformation through encountering and absorbing the written word. In this way, I came away from Jeremy Safran’s new book, Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Therapies, somehow changed. I must admit that I approached the book with skepticism. Only at the tail end of my reading did I become aware of the fact that I had been reading with an unusually critical eye, continuously wondering what made Safran’s book unique and questioning the journey he was taking me on. Having read numerous books over the past year that present an overview of psychoanalytic or psychodynamic psychotherapy, perhaps I was tired or simply saturated with this type of writing. I found myself wondering, “What could this text offer that has not already been detailed in similar publications?” (Bateman & Holmes, 1995; Cabaniss, Cherry, Douglas, & Schwartz, 2011; Gabbard, 2010; McWilliams, 2004). However, in the end the answer is: quite a lot.

Safran’s book is rooted in two broader contexts. First, Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Therapies is part of a larger series of American Psychological Association books—with 24 titles planned—entitled the Theories of Psychotherapy Series. Each book is written by a leading proponent and practitioner of the respective theory, with the entire series geared toward a graduate-level audience. The books are also paired with DVDs that demonstrate the therapy process over the course of six sessions. Safran’s book can be coupled with the DVD Psychoanalytic Therapy Over Time (featuring Jeremy Safran himself), which was produced in 2008.

The second contextual framework is more substantive and is part of what makes Safran’s book a novel contribution to the psychoanalytic literature. Safran’s perspective is rooted in his own largely relational paradigm and his ecmenical approach to other theoretical perspectives, even those outside of psychoanalysis. More importantly, Safran is a social constructionist at heart. In the introduction to the text Safran offers a lengthy discussion of what he refers to as “subversive threads in psychoanalysis.” He offers the reader a tapestry rich in texture and nuance that draws together many disparate threads in order to create one of the most inclusive histories of psychoanalysis I have read to date. There are places where the contextualization of psychoanalysis feels labored, but necessary in order to thoroughly grasp Safran’s view of the psychoanalytic landscape. For example, there is a substantial discussion of critical theory and the Frankfurt School of social research in the introduction that lays the groundwork for Safran’s perspective on psychoanalysis. Although critical of ways in which psychoanalysis has privileged the few, Safran sees contemporary psychoanalytic theory as one that is politically progressive and deeply influenced by Marxist critiques of capitalism. His discussion, much later in the text, of working with diverse client populations returns to this theme of leveling the playing field across culture, class, and other forms of difference. This foundation is what makes Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Therapies truly distinct from other introductions to psychoanalytic theory and practice.

It was here, in the introduction to the text, that I encountered my own resistance. A small voice in my head kept asking, “Where are we going?” Safran affords the reader an entry into psychoanalysis that is novel and refreshing. There were places where I found myself disoriented as a result. However, much like the process of therapy, my resistance eventually yielded and gave way. I came away from the book with a new appreciation of the genesis of psychoanalytic thought and the many social, philosophical, and historical influences that have shaped the current milieu.

Safran does a masterful job summarizing disparate and complex schools of thought within psychoanalytic theory. He is catholic in his respect and appreciation for paradigms as varied as ego psychology, Lacanian theory, attachment theory, motivational systems, and his native relational school. Whereas many battles have been fought across these reified lines, Safran’s appreciation for the unique contributions of each is invigorating. Chapter 2 details the many theoretical developments across time and continents that have shaped today’s climate of pluralism and cross-pollination. The reader is given the opportunity to travel through basic Freudian tenets, the development of ego psychology in Britain and the United States, Kleinian and object relations theories, interpersonal analysis, Kohutian perspectives, relational theory, Latin American influences, and Lacanian theory. His writing on these very complex and nuanced perspectives, and the ways in which they have influenced one another, is refreshingly clear and straightforward. Even his discussion of Lacan is digestible, a rare feat matched only by the work of Bruce Fink (2011). The only perspectives that were notably absent were those of neuroscience and neuropsychoanalysis, which would be wonderful additions to what is already a pretty thorough history.

This chapter on history also introduces the reader to basic theoretical and practical matters of psychoanalytic therapy—namely, transference, countertransference, therapeutic alliance, and resistance. I was glad to see a more in-depth discussion of these foundational elements of psychoanalysis in the subsequent chapter on theory. The artificial divide between history and theory (chapters 2 and 3) is a bit of a conundrum for authors and readers alike. For example, the brief introduction to transference in chapter 2, “History,” left me wanting more. The concept was covered again and in more depth in chapter 3, “Theory,” but it felt a bit odd to have two separate discussions of the same concept. The chapter on theory concludes with a wonderfully precise description of attachment as a motivational system.

The longest chapter in the book is the fourth, and its focus is on the therapy process. Organized into two major sections—“Principles of Intervention” and “Change Mechanisms”—this chapter is packed to the gills. Safran’s appreciation for vastly different psychoanalytic theories and his own relational nod to intersubjectivity and a two-person psychology are on display here. In a section
on affect regulation, Safran writes, “There was thus a type of mutual evolving relation-
al dance taking place that allowed both me
and my clients…to change at the same time” 
(p.115). There were many places in this chapter
where I felt I was grasping long-under-
stood concepts in new and deeper ways. As
a teacher of psychodynamic psychotherapy, I
found myself placing Post-it notes throughout
this section to share with my students. Safran
writes about the impact of unconscious mo-
tives in this way: “We do things for reasons
that are opaque to us and are then surprised
and disappointed by the results. This contrib-
utes to a sense of being a victim rather than an
agent” (p.107). Something about this type of
parsimony, which can be found throughout
the book, added a new layer of clarity to a
long-studied topic.

It is impossible to teach the theory and
practice of psychotherapy without cogent
case examples. Often texts like these are
enhanced with a smattering of vignettes in-
tended to bring the material to life. Safran
offers many brief illustrations throughout,
especially in chapter 4, “The Therapy
Process,” and these are wonderful. But, giv-
en that the psychoanalytic therapy is a rich
and multilayered process that unfolds over
the course of time, it was the two lengthier
case studies that I found most informative.
The first case presented is that of a four-
year, three-day-a-week analysis of a young
Caucasian woman with a history of depres-
sion and substance abuse. The inclusion of
this case in a text on psychoanalytic ther-
apy will likely be satisfying for clinicians
working with time-limited treatment set-
tings (e.g., college counseling, managed
care) and for those who are familiar with or
eager to learn about brief relational ther-
apy (BRT; Safran, 2002), the core conflictual
relationship theme (CCRT; Book, 1997) in
brief psychodynamic psychotherapy, and
other short-term treatments. I did wonder
how the filming of these sessions might have
affected the process between client and therapist, but the case still pro-
vided valuable insights about how to work
through a therapeutic impasse. Safran’s
candor and self-disclosure about his coun-
tertransference reactions and thoughts
about the client between sessions were also
very gratifying. Both cases reflect Safran’s

client and therapist, as well as a thoughtful
discussion of dreams, early childhood ex-
pertences, and the client’s ongoing ambiva-
ence about treatment.

Perhaps the best parts of this particular
case are those that represent two sides of
the same truth—one part of being a therapist
is being comfortable in the “not knowing.”
There are aspects of the case that Safran
reports were never “fully explored” (p.123)
in their work together. I found myself nod-
ding in solidarity with this statement; there
are always threads that remain un pursued,
truths unre vealed, questions left unan-
swered in the work we do. This tolerance
for ambiguity and acceptance of things
that remain opaque is an essential trait of
therapists of all orientations. As Safran puts
it, “I believe that no story ever completely

unfolds in any treatment and that at any given
point in time a specific client and therapist are
able to reach the depth and accomplish what
they are both ready and able to accomplish at that
time” (p.134). On the other
side of this uncertainty,
Safran wraps up his case
with a follow-up from
the client years after the
termination of their work
together. These types of
epilogues are rare: how
many clients move on
from therapy never to be
heard from again? There is an argument for
knowing the effects of our work.

The second case detailed in this part
of the book is a six-session treat-
ment conducted for the purposes of the accompa-
nying APA training DVD, Psychoanalytic
Therapy Over Time, with Amanda, a young
African American woman with a history of depres-
sion and substance abuse. The inclusion of
this case in a text on psychoanalytic ther-
apy will likely be satisfying for clinicians
working with time-limited treatment set-
tings (e.g., college counseling, managed
care) and for those who are familiar with or
eager to learn about brief relational ther-
apy (BRT; Safran, 2002), the core conflictual
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tertransference reactions and thoughts
about the client between sessions were also
very gratifying. Both cases reflect Safran’s

relational stance and his rejection of the
myth of the isolated mind.

Finally, Safran concludes with a brief
chapter on empirical evaluation of psychoan-
alytic concepts and treatment and a dis-
cussion of future directions for the field. As
a psychodynamic researcher, I would have
preferred to have seen the evaluation research
woven into the rest of the text rather than left
for the end. This organization reminded me
courses where “multicultural issues” were
identified in a separate lecture as though they
were not part and parcel of all that had previ-
ously been discussed. Although Safran makes
a strong case for the importance of ongoing
psychodynamic psychotherapy research—
not surprising given that he is a leader in the
field—it would be stronger still if evidence and
future questions were provided throughout
the book. He concludes with more pointed
debate on the issues of class, culture, and
difference that are hallmarks of Safran’s work
and many of those from the relational school.
His inclusion of Altman’s (2000) self-disclos-
ing story of failed treatment with an African
American client was a wonderful example.

This is a gem of a book. Students of psychoanalytic psychotherapy and seasoned
practitioners alike will benefit from this mem-
ber of the Theories of Psychotherapy Series.
Safran’s writing is accessible and astute. He
takes the reader on a journey through his-
tory and social change that is unique in its
perspective and its appreciation for the many
who have built the foundations of our psy-
choanalytic thinking. Safran contextualizes
the countercultural forces that have shaped
today’s psychoanalytic community. He does
so with great care and equanimity. He is a tour
guide, taking the reader down broad, familiar
streets and also down narrow lanes that have
subtly shifted the landscape by subverting the
mainstream establishment. Psychoanalytic
Psychotherapy is an elegantly and
 lucidly written book that synthesizes an
credible amount of information. It is a superb
resource for academics, practitioners, and re-
searchers at all levels of training.

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