



Adventures in the Orgasmatron: How the Sexual Revolution Came to America

Christopher Turner

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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 “orgastic 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.

Adventures in the Orgasmatron: How the Sexual Revolution Came to America Details

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From Reader Review Adventures in the Orgasmatron: How the Sexual Revolution Came to America for online ebook

Eric Dietz says

Fascinating bio/history of onetime Freud heir-apparent/Jung colleague Dr. Wilhelm Reich, discoverer of Orgone energy, inventor of the Orgone Box; Philosopher of Sex and the Orgasm; friend of underground libertines, enemy of the State. An incredible- and incredibly strange- life.

P.S.- there is no such thing as Orgone energy. A brilliant con or the delusions of a schizophrenic? You decide.

6655321 says

This is, more or less, a history of Wilhelm Reich and sort of as a series of sidenotes about the sexual revolution as a historical event that has some sort of implicit argument and the thing is it is really interesting but the title is somewhat misleading?

Eddie says

Absolutely misnamed. The book was a biography of Wilhelm Reich and an interesting one, at that. The book goes into Reich's philosophy of sexual repression as being the cause of society's ills and individual happiness. It shows his membership in the Communist Party of Germany and his subsequent expulsion. He came to America and was already going off the rails. He spent the latter part of his life trying to protect the world from UFOs and aliens.

Steve says

Its a good read. Amazed a man like Reich with his mental demons had that much influence on the culture. Its packed with alot of tidbits about what was going on in the world.

Nuno Ribeiro says

This is a book with two distinct parts, simply called "Europe" and "America". And the the book is built that way, having Wilhelm Reich's biography as a reference. "Europe", the shorter first part provides a good background for the freudian circle, and interwar cultural atmosphere from which Reich emerged. And then we get the mature Reich, that drifts away from Freud, goes to America and becomes one of the most intriguing, controversial, influential and forgotten (thanks to this book, not for long) figures of the XX century.

Very well written, always captivating and relevant. Turner did a thorough research that included interviews with the living remaining reichians and former reichians. This is a fundamental work to help us understand how we got to what Zizek refers to: this culture that produces individuals that feel guilty if they are not enjoying themselves. The less sexy title could be, "How we got from orgasmic potency to mandatory enjoyment". (view spoiler)

Bob says

It's always fascinating to read about how crazy the founders of psychoanalysis were!

Williwaw says

This is quite a good book, but unfortunately, I have been unable to focus on it. (My lack of focus is partly the result being overwhelmed at and exhausted by a new job.)

"Adventures" is essentially a detailed account of Wilhelm Reich's life. Turner (the author) provides a lot of cultural and historical background to put Reich's life in the context of his times. Consequently, the book reads as much like a history book as it does like a biography. (In particular, I loved reading Turner's fascinating account of the devastating fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.)

Turner has interviewed some of Reich's friends and family, and he quotes extensively from these interviews. That gives the book a very personal touch.

Now the book is due back at my local library, so the odds are that I won't ever finish it. But for anyone interested in Reich's life, his influence on psychology, or his ideas, this is a great way to get the "big picture."

I have a sense that I'm losing this tome just when I was about to get into the most interesting material: namely, Reich's move to the U.S. and his controversial claims about his orgone box; his other weird inventions; and his persecution by the U.S. government and his eventual incarceration. All these topics are covered in the second half of the book. I have only made it about half way through.

I believe that Reich has had a powerful influence on the way we think today. In particular, his theory that the orgasm is essential to good mental health seems to have been adopted wholesale by our culture. His theory that children should be raised in complete freedom has, however, been rejected.

He was, and still is, a controversial figure. It seems that, even now, there are those who acclaim him as a genius, and those who deride him as a crazy man. There's probably some truth to both claims.

June says

I would like to point out that the British version of this book is titled "Adventures in the Orgasmatron: Wilhelm Reich and the Invention of Sex." This is a biography of Wilhelm Reich. I don't know where the American publishers got "How the Sexual Revolution Came to America," but it doesn't take a psychologist

to figure out that kicker will sell more copies. A great biography that covers Reich's life: Training with Freud:Sane; "discovering" Orgone orgasm energy that can cure cancer/Losing It; building "cloudbusters to shoot down spacemen/Insane.

Jean says

started off super slow but then picked up speed as soon as Reich started going off the rails (of course!). Interesting references to my other reading/research into motivators (Freud) and marketing (again Freud).

Jake says

Well, it isn't a true history about the sexual revolution and its journey from Europe to America. It's about the "Father of the Orgasm", Wilhelm Reich, and how he was the person that got the ball rolling on the sexual revolution in general, not just in America. It deals with a lot of principles and outdated techniques used to measure and treat sexual dysfunction and lack of sexual stimulation. I can't really say that I loved it; it's kind of a slow read. It is very interesting to see how this man's theories affected the cultural climate of American history, though.

Tony says

An absolutely wonderful book about a psychologist who became more and more leftfield (though he wasn't left wing) as time went on. Wilhelm Reich was disowned first by Freud, then other psychologists, then the scientific establishment. He died in prison in I think 1959. He wrote influential books such as Character Analysis, and The Cult of the Orgasm. Unfortunately he then started marketing his Orgone Accumulator machines, which had no scientific basis in fact -- none that could be measured. Unsurprisingly he fell foul of the FDA, was put on trial, and ended up in prison... The book organises a complex story into a very absorbing narrative. Wilhelm Reich had an impact on popular culture -- his story encompasses Freud and the development of psychology, the McCarthy era in the USA, aliens and UFOs, the development of the pill, and the sexual revolution of the 60s, and the debate between believers in repression (Freud) and sexual freedom (Reich). It's fascinating to see someone who analyses other people's neuroses himself tragically become a very wacky paranoid schizophrenic. Highly recommended. Some wonderful anecdotes -- one early Viennese female believer in sexual freedom had a dog named Climax....

Felix Hayman says

Firstly, let's get rid of the worst part of this book - the title. It must have been invented by someone at the publishers because it has little to do with the book's contents and will mislead many readers who want to read a dispassionate biography of Wilhelm Reich.

I think there are times in history when the right person is there to make things better and because of the misguided brain becomes the wrong person in history. Wilhelm Reich will always be remembered for his orgone theory or his rather paranoid fantasies of his later years instead of his groundbreaking work in the area of modern sexuality, for without him we may not have seen free clinics, sexual liberation and the rather

misguided Marcuse (joke). It is a sad indictment of the possession of his character

I started this book with a great deal of trepidation and some of my misgivings were confirmed in the first couple of chapters as the author jumped around a lot between the young and older Reich. However, once he gets into stride this is a fabulous biography of Reich, where the judgements come from his older colleagues and not the author, and demonstrates how out of touch they were with the social movements of the 1920's in Vienna and the rise of fascism in Germany.

Reich's personal gifts to the world have been mystified by the spirit of the 1960's and for many people they only see the orgasmatron as his only output. I hope, when you read this book, you may change your mind because Reich made the biggest mistake of all in a person's life and that was to believe in the logical outcomes of your theories in extremis. It is a lesson to us all.
