

BOOK REVIEWS

It is a truism that there is more than one way of looking at a subject and combining this with the idea that novels are legitimate publications for review we are trying as a special feature something rarely tried before and that is to have three different people review the same book. Not only that but the novel in question *Zone of the Interior* by Clancy Sigal has a chequered reputation and the status of being something a hybrid – a fictionalised account of a real event that happened some 40 or so years ago. What makes it even more interesting is that all three reviewers do not come to the job of reviewing the book without some personal knowledge and involvement with the subject. One often needs some distance from past events to be able to assess them accurately and the theme of the special feature of how we can understand the legacy and influence of RD Laing is continued in a re-assessment of the functioning and demise of the Paddington Day Hospital in London.

Zone of the Interior

Clancy Sigal. (2005). Pomona. 404 pp. £9.99.

(Originally published in 1976 by Thomas Y. Crowell Company in New York), 359 pp.

Zone of the Interior, first published in the US and Canada in 1976, is Clancy Sigal's fictionalised, but largely factual, account of his experiences of 'anti-psychiatry' between 1961-65 with R D Laing; the Philadelphia Association charity, the therapeutic community at Kingsley Hall in east London and David Cooper's National Health Service ward for young male mental patients called Villa 21 at Shenley Hospital, Hertfordshire.

This 'lost classic' and 'the book they dared not print', according to the publishers, has been largely ignored since it was published in the UK in 2005. According to Sigal's preface to the 2005 edition, *Zone of the Interior* had been suppressed in the UK in 1976 because of the publishers' fear of libel.

However, well before Kingsley Hall closed in 1970, Jeff Nuttall's *Bomb Culture* (1968) described with real names what was happening inside and outside Kingsley Hall from the time it opened in 1965. Also, in 1968, *Drop Out!* (with a cover by Alan Aldridge) by Robin Farquharson, a mental patient who had been a resident in Kingsley Hall, was published by Anthony Blond. Both Jeff Nuttall and Robin Farquharson are referred to by R D Laing in *Mad to be Normal*.

There is also of course the most famous of the Kingsley Hall residents, Mary Barnes, who co-wrote *Mary Barnes Two Accounts of a Journey*

Through Madness (1971) with Joseph Berke, which gives a very detailed account of life in Kingsley Hall through most of its five year period and which is recognisable from Sigal's book.

Other books published in the UK since Laing's death in 1989, including Adrian Laing's biography of his father (1994) and Laing's own words transcribed from interviews by Bob Mullan in *Mad to be Normal* (1995) confirm many of the events and facts described here by Sigal.

In the first edition of his father's biography, Adrian Laing quotes from *Zone of the Interior* which he calls 'hilarious' and describes the climax of the novel when Sidney Bell (Sigal) attempts to leave Meditation Manor (Kingsley Hall), is pursued to his flat by Dr Willie Last (Laing) and the 'Brothers' of Clare Council (the Philadelphia Association), is overpowered, forcibly injected and taken back to Meditation Manor, which he leaves for good a few days later. In a letter to Adrian Laing, Sigal said he believed without reservation that Ronnie and the others had '*tried to kill me and almost succeeded*'. In a new and '*fully updated*' edition of Adrian Laing's biography (2006) which also lists the number of books that have been published since the first edition, he says:

Clancy Sigal's riotous and provocative novel based on his bitter experience at the hands of the 'Brothers', resulting in Clancy's 'escape' from Kingsley Hall, as written up in Zone of the Interior, was published for the first time in the UK in 2005 by Pomona. The fact that my father resisted its initial publication provides a good enough reason to read Clancy's book.

Other than this comment, Adrian Laing has not reviewed or commented on the UK edition of the book.

So far, virtually no reviews have appeared in the UK, but when it was published in America and Canada (1976) *Zone of the Interior* was well received. John Leonard in the New York Times summed up Sigal's acute powers of observation as: '*... his ear is superb*', but also identified Sigal's ambivalence as, '*his sympathies are always promiscuous*'. Throughout the book, some of Sigal's most cutting observations are about himself for example he has Dr Willie Last making fun of him as a '*flyaway bird fuelled by curiosity and a mortal terror of commitment*'.

Because of the claim that this is a novel and the difficulty in identifying the characters, other than the most obvious portrayal of R D Laing - the book would benefit from a Who's Who, as well as notes on contemporary events to place the story in context, such as the Enoch Powell's '*Water Tower*' speech in 1961, calling for the closure of the large mental hospitals. A full list of the many books that have either quoted from or referred to *Zone of the Interior* since its publication in 1976 is also needed. In many cases however, this '*fiction*' has been used as a factual source.

We already have two other independent accounts of the failed conference in 1965 at Brazier's Park, Oxfordshire - Jeff Nuttall in *Bomb Culture* and Laing himself in *Mad to be Normal*. These mirror Sigal's account of the disastrous weekend at 'Armistice Hall' in Dorking, Surrey, with an ill-matched group of people that included 'American junkie novelist' Sy Appleby (Alex Trocchi) with Frisbie Blue (possibly Jeff Nuttall) and 'Last's father figure', Phineas Maud (Graham Howe).

This UK edition has only been altered by minor re-working of some of the text and a few changes such as likening a husky voiced female to Janis Joplin rather than Anita O'Day. The only additional information is in the UK Introduction, where Sigal confirms the names of (some of) the real people portrayed under pseudonyms. Mary Barnes (Anna Shepherd, a barrister, in the book.) is incorrectly described by Sigal as a 'bonkers mental nurse'. Mary Barnes was actually a qualified general nurse and nurse tutor.

The novel opens in Spring 1961. Sidney Bell (Clancy Sigal) a Chicago born writer, blacklisted in the McCarthy era, who has been living in the UK since the late 1950's is on the way to his first appointment with Dr Willie Last recommended to Sidney by his girlfriend Coral (Doris Lessing) and another writer, Fred Bradshaw (Alan Sillitoe). Last is Bell's 'umpteenth doctor' after having had treatment from a string of private therapists around London who had confirmed his 'worst fears about psychiatry'. He hated their 'smug superiority, the middle class philistinism behind a pose of scientific detachment'.

Dr Last is very different, 'more like a Bill Haley rocker than a stiff-necked doctor... he looked like the kid brother I always wanted but never had'. Sid also approves of his 'plain working class talk'. Three afternoons a week Sidney undergoes 'eggistainshul' therapy and soon he is also taking frequent LSD trips with Dr Willie Last on the 'final self-healing Great Voyage to... Schizophrenia.'

Zone of the Interior is as much about Sigal's own life and difficulties as it is a vivid account observation of what he encounters. It is the middle volume of two prequels and two sequels about Sigal's life and times. *The Secret Defector* (1992) details Sigal's life in London and his relationship with Doris Lessing before and after the period covered by *Zone of the Interior*.

Sidney feels ready to go back to America but is dissatisfied there and returns to London nine months later.

It is now 1963. He goes to see Last to resume his therapy but Last is preoccupied with plans to set up a community for doctors and schizophrenic patients 'in trouble' to get away from the 'mind butchery' of NHS treatment. Sidney is invited to join Clare Council (the Philadelphia Association) and be the seventh of a group of 'Brothers' - Richard 'Dr Dick' Drummond (David Cooper), Boris Petkin (Aaron Esterson), Alf Waddilove

(Sidney Briskin), Davina Mannix-Simpson (Joan Cunnold) and Major Anthony Straw (Raymond Wilkinson).

Dr Dick works in the NHS and has set up a radical treatment ward in Conolly House (Villa 21) of the King Edward VIII hospital (Shenley Hospital) for a group of young male mental patients. He allows Sidney to live among the patients on the ward. Sidney is planning to write about these experiences.

A large part of *Zone of the Interior* is taken up with a very detailed inside view of Conolly House, its patients and staff.

The accuracy of Sigal's descriptions of Conolly House is corroborated by Anthony Stadlen who worked with David Cooper as a Social Therapist in Villa 21 in the early 60's and who used the text during his Inner Circle Seminar on David Cooper in July 2006.

In the meantime, Clare Council continues to look for financial backing and search for a 'place' which is eventually found by Alf Waddilove, 'A huge decaying abandoned Congregational church' - Meditation Manor in Brixton (Kingsley Hall in Bow). Clare Council is registered as a charity and the run down Meditation Manor is leased to them at a peppercorn rent - as was Kingsley Hall to the Philadelphia Association. Sidney asks Alf how he had convinced the trustees to let Clare Council have the Manor. Alf replies: *'Dead easy. I promised we'd raise the tone of the place'*.

This too is very close to what actually happened. Jill Wallis' 1993 biography of peace ambassador, Muriel Lester, explains that by 1965, Kingsley Hall - where Gandhi had stayed in 1931 and which had been a thriving centre of local activity - was very run down and Muriel Lester, then an 80-year old in very poor health was convinced by 'Dr R D Laing of Wimpole Street' who had assured her that the Philadelphia Association wanted provision for mental patients of a '*spiritually tranquil social context*' and that the Association intended to '*maintain the normal activities of Kingsley Hall and if possible extend community work in the neighbourhood*'. There is also a detailed explanation from Adrian Laing in his biography. Anna Shepherd (Mary Barnes), an '*impeccably dressed lady barrister*' is the first person to move in and Marve Munshin (Joseph Berke) appears along with a number of other Americans '*recruited from Last's transatlantic lecture tours and stateside publicity about him*'. Again, Sigal's description of the residents and the milieu are recognisable from descriptions in other publications.

Once Meditation Manor is open - two thirds into the book - the story weaves back and forth. Jerry Jackson, a patient in Conolly House is involved in a disturbance on the ward and sent to another part of the hospital where he dies under suspicious circumstances. This, together with other problems, leads to the closure of Conolly House. Another person commits suicide, Lena is a young German woman Sidney met on a CND march who becomes a patient of Dr Last's by whom she feels rejected.

Sidney's mental and physical health deteriorates and he becomes completely disillusioned with Willie Last and Meditation Manor which reminds him of his days in Hollywood and the star system. He compares it unfavourably with Conolly House where nobody got special treatment. The story ends with Sidney staging a histrionic '*last supper*' and telling Last that he has been '*up a creek without a paddle*.' He then leaves and returns to his flat, but he has been followed by Willie Last, Boris Petkin, Marve Munshin, Bronwen Jones (Mary Garvey) and Major Tony Straw. He is overpowered by Munshin, Petkin and Major Straw, Last injects him twice and he is taken back to Meditation Manor.

Two days later, Sidney leaves Meditation Manor for good. This was, Sigal tells us in his Preface to the UK edition, in September 1965.

Kingsley Hall closed at the end of May 1970.

Zone of the Interior is unique in being not only a first hand account of the formation of the Philadelphia Association, the inner workings of David Cooper's Villa 21 and Kingsley Hall but also private psychotherapy and LSD sessions with R D Laing and the acrimonious relationships between Laing and others.

Shenley Hospital, along with many other large hospitals, is now closed, but Kingsley Hall was restored after laying empty for some years after the Philadelphia Association. Sir Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* film created interest in restoring the Hall to its original social use and it is now a venue for a variety of community activities. A blue plaque on the wall commemorates Gandhi's stay in Kingsley Hall for nearly three months in 1931 and is the office base for the Gandhi Foundation formed in 1983. The room that Gandhi stayed in is preserved as he used it and open to visitors. Kingsley Hall is now one of the buildings in the London Open House event in September each year, when guided tours of the building take place throughout the day.

Of the seven people who started the Philadelphia Association, only Sid Briskin, Alf Waddilove in the book, stayed the full course at the Hall and he probably did more than anyone to support Laing.

The Gandhi Foundation Annual Report 2006/07 records that last year

Sid Briskin visited Kingsley Hall, a compatriot of the psychiatrist R D Laing, and reminisced'. He presented the Gandhi Foundation with a brass candlestick and candle which was said to have been used by Gandhi when he stayed in 1931. It now resides in the Gandhi Cell.

Another person who had an inside view of the events of 1965-70 was Leon Redler, another of the American recruits. Last year, he wrote on the Kingsley Hall website:

I'm ready to speak about and discuss my involvement at Kingsley Hall (1965-70) and consider and respond to questions, including questions

about what was intended and what happened; why that was and remains important; and how it points to what still very much needs to be thought through and done.

The full text of what Leon Redler wrote can be found on the Kingsley Hall website.

Zone of the Interior is about events that have had a profound effect on the development of the treatment of the mentally ill.

Can we now hear from those, still with us, who were at the heart of those events?

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Rosemary Moore

Zone of the Interior

Clancy Sigal. (2005). Pomona. 404 pp. £9.99.

Zone of the Interior is a very funny, outrageous, biting, venomous and painful satire of the accomplishments and pretensions of 'anti-psychiatry' and 'anti-psychiatrists.' These include R. D. Laing (roughly denoted as Dr Willie Last), Aaron Esterson (Boris Petkin), David Cooper (Dick Drummond), Mary Barnes (Anna Shepherd), myself (Marvin Munshin), and others, as well as Shenley Hospital's Villa 21 (Con House) and Kingsley Hall (Meditation Manor). With an acute ear, keen eyes and sensitive nose, Clancy Segal interweaves fact and phantasy, as he tells the story of his attempts to seduce and be seduced by drugs and madness and revolution during the 'swinging 60's.'

One might say that this novel is a shriek, the fictional counterpart of Allen Ginsberg's poem, *Howl*. Both aim to depict reality, both from the micro reaches of the soul to the macro dimensions of medical and political processes. In doing so Segal deploys accurate depictions of Laing's ideas with fanciful accounts of their relationships. Often I wished he had simply have written a detailed chronicle of events. At other times I enjoyed his fictionalized accounts of LSD sessions and revolutionary intrigues. And I loved his dialogues with 'Dr Last,' while utilizing a barely readable Scottish brogue. The real Ronnie did have a marked Scottish accent, but rarely talked 'Scottish.'