

Who is it that can tell me who I am?

Jane Haynes (2009) London: Constable

This book is about Jane's meeting with and sustaining a relationship with a Jungian therapist over many years. It becomes a training therapy so is viewed from several angles as it progresses. It is also about her experience as a therapist.

The first few pages of chapter one, in my view, deserve long consideration. This book is about the therapeutic experience of a woman who is later to train as a therapist. Jane describes her first encounter with her therapist and I found myself making all sorts of assumptions from the information given – most of which turned out to be wrong. As I reflected on what had happened when I read these pages, I realized that I had assumed all kinds of things – an object lesson in not putting my stuff to one side and going with what was in front of me.

I was particularly hampered because of the mention of 'John Barnes' of blessed memory - the John Lewis store that used to be in Finchley Road in north London (now a branch of Waitrose). It brought up so many memories for me that I was completely involved with myself and had no thought for what I was reading. How often does that happen with clients? Maybe a lot more often than I would care to admit – you, too, perhaps? And Jane's story echoed strongly what had happened to me – so another layer of myself getting between what I was doing and what I thought I was doing (I thought I was reading a book).

Just how often do we think we are 'staying with the client' when, in fact, what is happening is that we are consumed by our own experience. We dive into this because a word or sentence spoken by the client leads us far away into memory. Then we 'come to' and start being with the client again.

There is something about this book (or about me reading this book) that brought this home to me very strongly. It pulled me up short and made me reflect on just what happens to me in the therapeutic space. I have not come across a book before which had such a profound affect on me in this respect.

The first half of Jane's book made me think of the old saw: experienced therapists who work in different models are more like each other than training therapists working in the same model. Jane (as she frequently mentions) is a Jungian analyst – I an existentialist. On page 70 she says: '*I think one of the great mistakes of human communication is the naïve assumption that it is easy to understand anyone, it is a huge undertaking and requires so much more than most of us are capable of*'. In this sentence alone, Jane seems to encompass what it might mean to be a therapist, no matter which model one works in. Jane is concerned with the

relational aspect of therapy and how hard it is to listen. Her observation that it may take a lifetime to accomplish chimes and echoes with me.

Jane raises the question of therapists not touching their clients and how the clients might desperately need that touch. It is a question that stays with me and I have no answer to it. It occurs to me that in these days of presumed litigation at every turn the healing effects of touch in the therapy room recede – and I, as I presume are many – are schooled into a non-touching relationship. I can acknowledge/see/understand these arguments and still I wonder.

I think Jane is very interesting in her views on the sexual in the therapeutic room. Maybe this is something that is not always addressed on a personal or therapeutic level and raised for me questions that continually need exploring and seem to have no concrete answer – thank goodness. Jane's insight into the need for and holding of therapeutic boundaries is well expressed. An example of this appears on page 44: *'Certainly that moment at the door was also the moment when I was most likely to abandon my reservations and say something spontaneous because I could escape before you had time to reply.'* If we do not hold these boundaries clients cannot experience their reaction to them and, I believe, trust and safety for the client is compromised. Again, Jane stimulated my reflective process.

It always delights me to discover that, however and whatever their training, other therapists are in the same 'don't know' place as me – as unsure, as unable to say 'this is it' – and Jane, I think, is counted amongst that number.

The second half of the book is taken up with case studies. I flipped through them but felt I didn't want to read them in any detail. The whole issue of case studies being open to be read by anyone makes me want to stick my fingers in my ears and sing loudly. Reflecting on conversations I had with Hans Cohn, I wonder if it is ever helpful to publish such studies. On page 130 Jane says *'... two strangers may undertake a creative journey together, whose goal is the coming together of a therapist and patient, at the heart of which there can sometimes exist an intimate relationship.'* This sentence may describe the book and its place within an existential tradition.

I do recommend this book. I think it throws light on the therapeutic process that is unique and illuminating and, as I say above, Jane is an open and perceptive writer who does not hesitate to address the therapeutic problems that assail us.

Nicola Slade