

For me, the attempt to avoid fragmentation and stay with the wholeness and totality of clients feels very important.

As philosopher David Abram argued in *The Spell of the Sensuous*:

Imagination is from the first an attribute of the senses themselves; it is not a separate mental faculty but is rather the way the senses have of throwing themselves beyond what is immediately given, in order to make tentative contact with the other side of things that we do not sense directly.

(1996: 44)

Similarly, in her review of the art exhibition *Private Lives Public Spaces*, writer Leslie Jamison writes as follows:

From before she was born, I'd wanted to give my daughter a sense of the world as infinite – difficult, perhaps, and painful, but never closed, never static, always more of it, always another swath of sky behind the clouds, a sudden vistas from the trail, the possibility of a love you couldn't see coming until it arrived.

(2020: 52-54)

To me, this speaks directly of the extensive space of existential therapy that Groth and DuBose open up for us.

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Fiction's Madness

Liam Clarke. 2009. Ross-on-Wye: PCCS Books.

This simply presented paperback is a volume of immense power, engaging empathically with the world of the Other via some of the greatest works of (mostly English) fiction. The book also includes discussions of Hesse's

Steppenwolf and Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. It contains a vast amount of vital psychiatric information that is thoroughly enjoyable, and rewarding to read and study. It could easily form the basis of a brilliant course that would invigorate clinicians into becoming artist-practitioners. Yet do not be complacent, this title requires a great deal of effort and persistence, as you wade through the urgent, crucial references, the cultural data and information. The text runs for 221 pages, and a very useful ten-page index guide. It contains thirteen chapters, a conclusion and ten discussion papers, an extensive and engaging body of content.

At the time of writing this book, Clarke was Reader in Mental Health at the University of Brighton, and for many years he has been involved in mental health care, mainly through writing and lecturing. He manages to deliver intelligent instruction for both the existential practitioner, as well as the survivor of psychiatric services and cerebral abuse. This powerful addition to the mental health field could perhaps clarify certain aspects beyond reasonable doubt. For this review, I will therefore focus my thought on the works that I believe most useful in everyday existential application, as the author deploys a sophisticated level of analysis which is complex and rigorous. Consequently, I will consider Clarke's discussions of *Regeneration*, *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *Asylum*, as well as alluding to stimulating observations from the work generally. My selection deals with insanity specifically that the psychoanalyst could encounter in their everyday situation.

I am heterosexual and yet I found the chapter about W.H.R. Rivers, Sassoon (or 'Sass' to his friends), the Great War and war poets very moving and a yardstick section for reflection. Barker's *Regeneration* covers the period July to November 1917 at Craiglockhart Hospital, a converted unit for the treatment of neurasthenia, also known as shell shock, and which we would define today as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Despite being decorated for heroism in the field, Siegfried Sassoon published a protest against World War I, in which he stated that the politicians and military of his own side were as responsible for the carnage as the enemy (1983: 173). This was read out in the House of Commons on 30 July 1917 and printed in *The Times* next day. For the existential practitioner, who clearly have to cut back on time, simply watching the film directed by Gillies MacKinnon for BBC Pictures will acquaint the analyst with the horrors of the trenches and the atrocious mental health of the soldiers.

*...But sudden evening muddles all the air,
There seems no time to want a drink of water,
Nurse looks so far away. And everywhere
Music and roses burst through crimson slaughter.*

Owen (2017: 34)

Sassoon and the others tread their way through a narrative dotted with social and political upheaval, a class-based psychiatry and homoeroticism. It has been said that the heuristic research process is an open-ended inquiry and active experience which could embellish on the dilemma of such insanity.

The researcher must be alert to signs or expressions of the phenomenon, willing to enter a moment of the experience timelessly and live in the moment fully.

Moustakas (1990: 44)

So, the psychoanalyst might be able to fashion some original poetry into existence with the tactical approach of heuristic inquiry as psychotherapy towards the traumatised.

The heuristic researcher is not only intimately and autobiographically related to the question but learns to love the question. It becomes a kind of song into which the researcher breaths life

(ibid: 43)

Throughout this text we are reminded of the class-based origins of psychotherapy and its utility to educated, affluent and self-inquisitive people. As the late Professor of Poetry at Oxford University and 'war poet' Robert Graves states:

Paradise can be visited by saints who wear out their body through prayer and fasting; by drowning people; by schizophrenes whose corporeal chemistry is not working as it should; or by takers of hallucinogenetic drugs.

(1967: 170)

When he 'officially' died in battle this poet visited such a 'paradise'.

The next chapter for our consideration is Gilman's *Yellow Wallpaper*, an intensely disturbing book which is not diminished by its brevity and takes the form of a diary which is kept secret from the narrator's husband. The message conveyed throughout the tome is that women in distress need male expertise to put them right. Women who question this merely confirm their unreasonableness, as well as their unreasoning nature. Gilman writes how for many years she suffered from a severe and continuous nervous breakdown but managed to step outside domesticity, personally and politically, so as to make herself heard in the wider world. She rebelled against the dominant feminine ideal in Victorian culture, which tended to present female characters as either pious angels or shameful objects of pity and scorn.

Clarke continues with the theme of strong, virile, red-blooded men by mentioning John Boorman's classic film *Deliverance* in which four weekend warriors are on the knife-edge of survival in the wilderness. Whilst exploring and travelling down the mystery-laden Georgia river, they encounter the local provincial, murderous, inbred hicks, who stalk, assault and violate them. Eventually they destroy these devils, but they have been tested in ways they did not expect.

It could be said that contemporary Laingian thought adds predictive weight and meaning to the context of female sexuality – and psychosiasas well as to the motives of therapeutic activity.

Finally, there is McGrath's *Asylum*. The author was born in 1950, the son of a medical superintendent of Broadmoor Hospital, a maximum-security psychiatric unit. So naturally he writes eloquently on the Victorian-built hospital setting in the late 1950s, about the rare matter of the sex life of a wild psychiatric patient, the cliched dangerous lunatic, by the name of Edgar Stark. This character has been institutionalised after he murdered his wife. Nevertheless, Stella Raphael, wife of the deputy superintendent risks everything to consummate and pursue a passionate love affair with Edgar in the midst of staff surveillance; suitably the advertising slogan for the film was 'passion knows no boundaries' (Clarke, 2009: 158). The affair escalates as obsession begins to threaten Stella's love, her sanity and her very life. Driven by longing and a need to punish the boredom of marriage, she soon becomes ashamed of all the years when the provision of domestic comfort for her husband and son had been her sole occupation. We may see Edgar as a lunatic but for Stella, who opted to be his willing lover, he is a poet, a sculptor of human and inhuman forms.

McGrath provides a useful antithesis to the 'burnt out', mundane, mute schizophrenic which is potentially of great use in the existential consulting room. The vigorous, virile madman is hardly ever spoken of. In fact, it seems the inter-psyche love life of such individuals is all too often snuffed out. Ehrenwald's articulate theories into mental processes of the insane are a source of delight, to both parapsychologists, and medics.

The ranks of paranoid schizophrenics to whom the possibility of action and interaction at a distance, of thought reading and thought transference seems to be a matter of everyday experience. The schizophrenic is committed to an essentially magic mode of existence...

(1960: 43)

Furthermore,

Plato distinguished divine madness from other types of insanity. Similar notions are still reflected in the writings of Aldous Huxley, Allan Watts, Timothy Leary, and John Lilly.

(1974: 159)

Hence, we decipher regarding Stark and Stella “that he has ‘read’ her accurately and calculated well her sexual response to him” (Clarke, 2009: 151).

Lastly, I think it relevant to refer to the subject of projective identification; we read that over-determinism is the error of ignoring that there may be various and different factors to account for a phenomenon. A favourite Persian verse from one of the fathers of Sufism encapsulates this rather well, nine hundred years before Klein:

*Our antagonist eyes us: sees – we’re all flawed!
Each defect he sees a hundredfold.
Yet! A mirror we are; any who gazes at us,
Any good he sees or bad, it’s his face – on us.*

Ordoubadian (2010: 73)

Ultimately, this work is methodically precise, containing review after review, to research and explore. It is truly extraordinary and quite astonishing how Clarke has evaluated a veritable range of culture. I recommend this book to existential colleagues, guiding the practitioner through the most celebrated works of largely English psychological fiction. You will find throughout these pages provocative insights into human distress and its consequences both past and present.

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