



Love, Madness and Transformation: Humanistic Stories

AHPb Annual Conference, London, Saturday 30 June 2018

Review by **Graham Mummery**

Poet and Psychotherapist

Love, madness and transformation. That is quite a trio, come to think about it. Yet when I arrived at the Resource for London all seemed calm in the conference room. There Richard House was setting up things at the front, and Dina Glouberman was preparing for her contribution to the day's proceedings.

I was aware that there was a possible shadow on the day. John Rowan's death a couple of weeks before is a big loss to both humanistic and transpersonal psychology. He has proper claim to be father of both in the UK. I say that having benefited from and loving both. Zohar, as Dina Glouberman prefers now to be called, has been one of my best teachers in life. I came to the previous conference in October last year, having just been accredited by the UKCP as a Humanistic Counsellor and Therapist, though my diploma is transpersonal. I don't feel any contradiction. In fact, I like it, not just because of the shared history and people, but also because I regard the two as being part of one family. John was also proof of that.

Later in the day we had an opportunity to make our own tributes to John and express any grief. I remember one person in the audience describing John as a thinker worthy of mention alongside the likes of Stanislav Grof and Ken Wilber. Amen to that. And of course, there was a lot about John the man. His love of poetry and life. His generosity of spirit. I shared my own memories of him on an Integral email group when he would thunder like Father Zeus his impatience when things were getting silly or out of order. I remember him doing that in the October 2017 conference, when he suggested there needed to be some participatory aspects. John was a force of life who will be missed, yet his presence remains.

The first talk of the day was from another force of life, Dina Glouberman, reading from and launching her new book *Into the Woods and Out Again* (2018) in her own inimitable style.

The book is a memoir that centres around her experience of a psychosis in the 1970s. It chronicles her experiences as a therapist and lecturer working towards a Ph.D. while training with R.D. Laing, and how she found that she needed admission into a psychiatric hospital. How the medical staff were not always helpful. There was no help from Laing and his colleagues, as might have been expected. It was the support of patients and friends that got her through, and Zohar now sees her psychosis as one of her most important teachers in life. A transformational experience, though as she admitted she didn't see it as that at the time.

This was a very human story. Yet in the centre of it I also perceived something else. At one point I remember Dina talking about when in the grips of the psychosis she felt caught somewhere between nothing and the need to create. Her life afterwards has been moving towards that, with the creation of Skyros and Imagework, which are also mentioned in the book. Something in this reminded me of something in Jung's *Red Book* (2009) which has a section written in gnostic mythic terms, talking about creation and nothing. It is where we find ourselves, in my view. There was plenty here also for those of us interested in archetypal approaches also. I urge everyone to read Dina's book. It is an inspiration as well as informative.

Dina is a hard act to follow. One of the things she had implied in her talks was how love can be what gets us all through difficulties. This was the theme picked up by Jill Hall in her talk on love. It was a clear-sighted presentation on love in its many facets. Love at all times of life and how humans all need this. This included a part we sometimes miss, namely self-love, which sometimes is misrepresented as narcissism. This was a preparation for Jay Ramsay's contribution.

As some will already know Jay is on a journey of his own with

cancer. Because of some recent treatment he was unable to be with us in the hall. We were therefore given a recent podcast filmed of him, which is available on Vimeo (see <https://vimeo.com/277625151>) under the title 'Grit and Pearl' [see also the text of Jay's talk in this newsletter – ed.]. The title, as Jay acknowledged, owes something to Ken Wilber (2001), though he did some poetic alchemy on it, alluding to how a pearl is made in an oyster from a small piece of grit. This was a sometimes harrowing, always moving account of things he is learning from his cancer about staying true to and finding his deepest self as a path to healing, often expressed through poems he has written. There were occasional flashes of humour also, for example one poem where he admonished himself 'don't be New Age'. At the end of this it was decided not to offer comments from the floor. Instead we observed a silence in which there was time to send love, healing, prayers. It was also a time of witnessing. I'm sure all of us wish Jay finds the healing he needs.

It was time for a break. Most stayed in the room to discuss what we had seen, or for further meeting. So many issues had been highlighted through the morning, much connected with what we had seen, including mental health treatment. There was also a brief introduction from someone from the union for psychotherapists (the PCU), aiming at picking up in areas where the likes of UKCP and BACP may not help therapists. Those bodies might be ones that prosecute. But there doesn't appear to be one that will help the therapist put their case at such a hearing. Having seen how sometimes on placements, student therapists can be taken advantage of, there would seem to be a need for this. Of course, therapists are in the business because they hope to help people through difficult feelings and times, but more needs to be done to protect them other than therapy and supervision.

Malcolm Stern's contribution was an account of the suicide of his daughter. A painful issue for anyone, and no less so if one is a therapist meant to be able to navigate a client through a bereavement. At the start he stated he didn't know whether he was going to break down as he described the process. A daughter he loved in the throes of a depression. This had put an emotional strain on him, perhaps made worse by the fact he is a therapist and facilitator. He honestly acknowledged the ambivalence in his feelings, veering between the love that was there and the barriers the depression in her created between them. There was also a very moving moment when someone in the audience felt stirred to express a grief in his own life. The two men hugged in front of the hall. We were all witnesses to this story that goes on.

With so many stories shared, it was now time to share some of our own. We broke up into small groups discussing what we learned and experienced today. Again, some human stories, and impressions were shared. This was itself of value. As a newcomer to AHPb, I have been struck by the friendliness and community spirit. Being ourselves is a part of what we need. We also need sympathetic community to manifest that self in the world. This was

happening now. But of course, there are difficulties there. A look at the media, be it online or the television, demonstrates that.

This point was raised when Serge Beddington-Behrens acted as facilitator for the closing. In the previous October 2017 conference, John Rowan had 'thundered' that we needed things that were participatory in the conference. These last events on the agenda were just that, though there was plenty that could be described as 'participatory' in the conversations on the floor when discussing what we had just seen.

The question was raised about how, in the 1970s, it had been easier to posit a positive future, with perhaps possibilities of a more enlightened, or awakened future. A positive view of human potential. Serge reminded us of Jung's (1967, p. 265, or CW 13, para 335) phrase that we don't become enlightened by 'imagining figures of light'. The Shadow also has to come up and be integrated, before we move on. In a sense this is what we were doing all day, listening to stories of human suffering. This at times was a reminder of all our pain. But the light was not excluded, either. Instead it was focused into the darkness, which as Jung has noted also contains what we need to take on board. Serge reminded us of that in his closing meditation, when he invited us to place in our hearts things for which we feel grateful.

From the day I take much with me. At AHPb I have seen and met the kind I want to walk with through my life's darkneses, which are of course also those of our society and of the world. The stories I heard on the day show how suffering can be transformed into alchemical gold. Some of us are still in the process of that transformation, but I believe we will find it. In the previous conference we pondered on the future of Humanistic Psychology. In this one we witnessed how the work continues, and I believe will continue. Love to us all.

Graham Mummery is a poet and UKCP-registered psychotherapist, who trained in Imagework with Dina Glouberman. His book of poems, *Meeting My Inners* (Pindrop Press) appeared in 2015. After an abortive career in banking, Graham completed a Diploma in Transpersonal Counselling at CCPE. He has written for *Integral Management Review* and divides his time between writing, his practice and his passion for the humanistic and transpersonal vision.

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