



Sympathy for the Devil

Douglas Mathers

*'... and if you meet me have some courtesy, have some sympathy and some taste,
Use all your well earned qualities, or I'll lay your soul to waste.'*
(The Rolling Stones, 'Sympathy for the Devil')

This piece is about admitting the shadow in the training of therapists. Why quote the Rolling Stones? Because discussing an archetype evokes the archetype, and discussing the shadow evokes the shadow. The way to admit the shadow is first to acknowledge it. The Rolling Stones, and this myth, come from my own shadow.

Around the time the song came out I recall sitting outside a tea stall in the Himalayas, watching two other kids climbing up, panting in the thin air. From California, on the road a long time. We shared myths of our journeys. One of the Californian boys had met a group of American tourists outside a BIG hotel, he was begging at the time. They asked why;

he said he'd no money, he was a traveller. 'Well,' said one of the Americans — imagine him with cameras, lots of cameras — 'I'm a-travelling too. I'm a-going round the world. I've been to *thirteen* places so far. How many places have you been?' We laughed for hours.

Admitting the shadow means a journey, not a place. A perennial problem in training therapists is that the skills of journeying are replaced by the smugness of finding a place. In psychosynthesis, therapists are called guides. An aspect of the shadow we find hard to admit is that as therapists, and trainers of therapists, we behave like the American tourist. Cameras. Lots of cameras. No vision.

By 'therapists' I mean counsellors,

Douglas Mathers is a Jungian analyst in private practice in South London and an associate member of the British Association of Psychotherapists. He trained with the Psychosynthesis and Education Trust and teaches on their graduate programme.

psychotherapists and analysts, but these thoughts might equally apply to multitudinous human behaviours now enhanced by the word 'therapy'. Sleep, sex, sea-bathing — you name it, someone somewhere has turned it into therapy. This debasing transformation is a collective, cultural aspect of shadow. Also known as kitsch. Kitsch therapy has not yet been accredited by the BAC, UKCP, CIA or whoever, but it's only a matter of time.

Real therapy is itself a shadow to society. It is seen as a place to put all the feelings we prefer not to admit. Therapists and therapy are wonderful sources for contemporary humour, yet we insist on treating training as serious, if not holy. Freud, the inventor of the slip (here I can't help seeing the Bernie Kliban cartoon of the bearded Freud in lingerie in front of a mirror) knew this and valued it. Yet disciples worship at his shrine in Maresfield Gardens. Jungians are worse. This year's International Conference in Zurich offers, as an extra, sightseeing to 'places of significance in Jung's life' — presumably bottles of lake water and mirrors etched with his face will also be on sale. And the T shirt.

Shadow is everything we would not be: for a doctor, the charlatan, like Dr. Knock in the famous play by Jules Romain, who explained his financial success thus: 'There are no healthy people, only sick people who don't yet know they are ill.' For the sportsman, the shadow is cheating. Perhaps, for the politician, it is honesty; for the military, intelligence. And for the therapist? Lack of sympathy for the devil within.

Shadow feelings emerge during conflicts at boundaries, whether these are

societal, familial, personal or intrapsychic. In most models of the psyche the important boundary is that between conscious and unconscious. The one is known, or potentially knowable; the other unknowable. To misquote Gertrude Stein, the unconscious is unconscious is unconscious. That is, it cannot be made conscious: can't be dragged kicking up a mountain, whether real or imaginary, can't be shoved on a chair and dialogued with, can't be interpreted away by reference to experiences at the breast, penis envy or oedipal triangles, can't be alchemically transformed or transcended. It just is. The shadow is an archetype — nearly all of it is unconscious. It, too, just is.

The conscious/unconscious boundary is maintained by the classic defences of the ego. We take care of our 'I-ness', protect it from being either overwhelmed or depleted, in three fundamental ways, by splitting, by projective identification and by denial. Aspects of the shadow. In other words, like all archetypes the shadow has a function: boundary maintenance. Which is why those who work in socially liminal areas, policemen, doctors, psychiatrists, social workers, therapists, receive strong shadow projections, are the subject of jokes, are prone to self-parody.

Archetypes are encoded in myths. Therapies are inextricably part of cultural mythology. Each form of therapy creates its own myths and culture, functioning (or not) like a family system relating (or not) to a wider society. Just as the family which is not functioning disintegrates and loses its social place, so too do therapy schools. The mechanisms of this breakdown are, famously with Freud and Jung, splitting, projective identification and denial. That's why the Institute of

Psychoanalysis has three arguing streams, why there are three Psychosynthetic and four Jungian schools in London . . . not to mention all the other schisms. Fundamentalism, making one's own experience into a place — whether religious, political or therapeutic — thrives on splits. There is a wonderful illustration of this in the Monty Python film 'Life of Brian', when the Popular Front for the Liberation of Judaea curses the splitters in the Judaeen People's Popular Liberation Front. Nothing to do with theoretical differences, everything to do with people wanting money and power. Not a good advert for the product, is it? Or is it . . . ?

The shadow of training organisation and trainees is constellated in mutual investments in the validity, scientific or otherwise, of the theories and methods espoused. There are eclectic, anarchic, scientific, artistic and even fundamentalist therapy schools: Popular Fronts for the Liberation of the Unconscious. The differences between creeds, whether humanistic or analytic, probably matter far less than the castrating effect that belief has on the abilities of trainers and trainees to be open to new insight, from wheresoever this comes.

Training can be de-skilling. It can damage trainers through their unconscious acceptance of parental projections, which allows them to amplify their own omnipotence fantasies and infantilise trainees . . . well, let's be truthful, any and every form of intrapsychic conflict can and probably will be found in relationships between trainers and trainees in any school at any particular time. If it hasn't yet happened in your own school, it probably will. As a Jungian, I see that as an inevitable consequence of therapy being a

human activity — we all need money and power, after all. My sadness about the therapeutic endeavour is that so often we forget this, and our need to love ourselves, never mind our customers.

In *Mourning and Melancholia* Freud said, 'The Shadow of the Object falls on the Ego.' Translated, 'object' means 'Not I, but other' (the accusative case) and 'ego' means 'my sense of me'; hence, 'The shadow of the other falls on my sense of me.' The usual case is that the shadow of parents, all that they are *not*, falls on the child. Many therapists and trainers of therapists have lived this experience. We could call it abuse, physical, emotional, spiritual. Whether it is genetic or environmental, deliberate or accidental is of no consequence for the child.

Freud pointed out the human capacity to repeat: the abused becomes the abuser. The child of the maladaptive family seeks a similar family. We go to what we know. And, if our own shadow is not admitted, we experience it as if it existed around us, using our own capacity to project, split and deny. Example: there is someone in our training group we just can't stand; there is a seminar leader with an arrogant, irritating know-all quality; there is too much to read, or not enough; the theories are too restrictive, or too vague . . . whatever it is, it's wrong — and it's *their* fault. Or: we can't stand ourselves, our therapy is going nowhere, we'll have spent all this time and money and have nothing worthwhile at the end of it — and it's *our* fault. We blame, we feel guilty, we may even become depressed or give up altogether. We become our shadow when we don't admit it exists. The need for sympathy is strong.

We all have a shadow, everything real

casts one. Ego is to shadow as light is to shade, as the actor in the spotlight is to the edge of the stage. If unaware of shadow, then one is unable to maintain ego boundary — psychotic, with no capacity for reality testing, no capacity for 'as if'; that is, no ability to form and use symbols, to make and amend myths, whether personal, social . . . or therapeutic.

In therapy trainings, Freud's statements equally apply. He had no therapy himself, nor did many of the pioneers; the books say they did, but a close look reveals that at best this was more like a few chats over a few months. Not ten years at three or more times a week, nor thirty holistic experiences of deeply meaningful personal growthfulness. No way. This parental shadow wraps psychotherapies like a shroud. This is partly why it has taken generations for knowledge and wisdom about what constitutes good practice to be built up.

There is a parallel in mountaineering (my reason for being in the Himalayas). Old mountaineers I met recalled the 'good old days', envying the better gear and opportunities of us youngsters. Envy forms a structural part of trainings. Analytic training therapists refight the feuds of their analytic parents — and, like real parents, envy the children for having better things than they had. This is equally true in humanistic therapies. Envy has such a marvellous, self-righteous, enemy-making, spoiling quality to it. It is, maybe, the essential shadow emotion. Think of the lyrics of the Stones' song. What is the Devil doing, if not enviously spoiling? . . . bringing about separateness, is what. Separateness is an essential part of individuation.

Object (Other) relations theory speaks about 'oneness, twoness and threeness', the basic patterns of relating to others. The dark side of oneness is stagnation (greed, attachment to place); twoness is envy; threeness, jealousy. However, these capacities to relate to others are also essential steps in the process of becoming human. Each describes a basic survival need, a move outward from the ego. With the shadow as boundary-marking archetype.

In ancient Greece boundaries were marked by phallic stones called herms, after Hermes, the trickster god of boundaries, conductor of souls to the land of the dead, messenger of the gods, the god of shepherds. Also the god of money and thieves. Also a magician, a magus. (There is a well-known hermetic myth involving shepherds and magi.) In those days it was possible to imagine a god both good and evil, neither good nor evil. Modern Western materialist society, the shadow of the Christian tradition from which it sprang, has to deal with the shadow of the Christian myth; that is, good and evil being split. Indian gods are both good and evil, creative and destructive. Lakshmi is Kali, Shiva is Vishnu. This split is not inevitably irreconcilable.

Jung said, 'Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in an individual's conscious life, the blacker it is. If an inferiority is conscious, then one has a chance to correct it; furthermore it is constantly in contact with other interests, so that it is continually subject to modifications.' The shadow is the archetype of the split between the dark side and the light side of the psyche. Contrary to the enlightened optimism (sickness) of western materialism and western Christian tradi-

tion, it can't be 'integrated', cannot be 'transformed'. Jung again: 'One does not achieve enlightenment by imagining beings of light, but by entering the darkness.'

Therapy training is therefore essentially a dark, alchemical, shadowy, trickstery, hermetic affair. That is, it involves shepherds and magi. The emotions contained inevitably constellate strong affects. Trainers and trainees become obsessive, possessive, struggle for autonomy, and can overwhelm each other's egos. Our experience of this occurs first in projection, or in projective identification, of strong, irrational positive or negative feelings onto the other, whether trainer or trainee.

Twenty years, much therapy and analysis later, my shadow and I went to enjoy the Glastonbury festival. Everywhere people, music, madness. Crowds. Noise. Except two places. One, on top of the hill, beside a new laid stone circle. Quiet. People journey through by ones and twos, maybe stay a while, chill out, then wander back to 'Babylon', the stalls and the sounds and the shows down below. This was the Sacred Space. The other, nearly deserted, I stumbled into by accident. Plywood pyramids, tarot cards, astrology, crystals, ley lines, ginseng, snake oil, colonics, rent-a-guru. Earnest evangelical souls. Yes! The Field of Healing.

I felt the spirit of my Californian friend, and his laughing face. These guys here, I

thought. They've been to thirteen Places — just like that American tourist. They've Arrived, in this weird field, on this weird planet — and stopped Journeying. As one traveller friend quipped, two sorts of people come to Glastonbury: those with something to buy, and those with something to sell.

Which may be all that need be said. Therapy training organisations sell things, trainees buy them. Perhaps we all ought to be out there with the folk in the Field of Healing. It's a 'free market', after all. And what is a market? A place where value is added to things. Value is worth; *wyrth* (Anglo-Saxon) means value. What is therapy? A place where value is added, by people, to each other. Sympathy for the devil begins by accepting the shadow's role in defending our egos, preventing them from becoming autistic bubbles, in questioning our values, and enabling us to maintain an ambivalent, healthy bridge between conscious and unconscious. A bridge for journeying over, not a place to stay.

The only way to break the shadow's compulsive hold is to be aware of its images, and of situations likely to constellate it. This is so simple, and so painful. It means admitting that therapy is 'when two sick people get together in a room, and both of them get helped'. Therapy is a Sacred Space activity, a Journey. It becomes its own shadow when it is reduced to a Field of Healing, when it becomes a Place.