

Self & SOCIETY letters

from Alix Pirani

I write to protest at the Obituary you published in the September issue of *Glyn Seaborn-Jones*. I found the exaggerated eulogy of him, and the seductive photograph, deeply offensive. A great deal of what he did was an affront to the values of humanistic psychology. I am one of those referred to by Guy Gladstone parenthetically, almost dismissively ... 'Some reading this will know all too well how these [intense negative transferences] were not always satisfactorily resolved.' That is an under-statement. Any account of Glyn Jones's career must emphasize the damage he wrought, some of it long-lasting, much of which went unrecorded. Indeed it was because of my experience of severe psychic abuse by him, and Anne Dickson's awareness of sexual abuse by many male therapists, that she and I joined together to initiate the founding of AHPP in 1980.

In the September 1993 issue of *Self & Society* which reported on the AHPP Conference '*The Use and Abuse of Power in Therapy*' there's a detailed, profoundly shocking account by Ruth Green (which she'd given at the conference) of her relationship with Glyn, though his name was not given. The conference itself was acutely challenging: many who'd abused that power were present, and many more significantly absent. Ruth and I were both 'apprentice therapists' with Glyn at the same time in the early '70s

(contemporary with Guy Gladstone). In that same issue is Chris Robertson's analysis of the abuse of power in Training Schemes. Glyn's 'training scheme' was exactly as described.

Ironic it is that the obituary has appeared in an issue devoted to politics -because when it was possible for me to reflect on my experience with him I recognised the fascism of the power he held over his groups. As their size increased and large gatherings of forty or more were held it became a well-nigh psychotic cult community. Loyalty was expected to his regime, and belief in his system, which was never scrutinised. Most participants were in individual therapy with him or his co-therapists. Boundaries were blurred and manipulated, protests interpreted out of court, attitudes to sex far from healthy, projection and scapegoating rife. It became ominously familiar to this Jewish socialist woman who'd somehow got caught into it perversely from her own cultural conditioning. As is politically typical, Glyn came from a lower middle-class family, and he chose two comfortably-off Jewish women to be his subordinated and often humiliated 'work-force'. We responded, probably, to the patriarchal 'chosen people' scenario.

Do I refrain from giving further vent now to my grievance? At the time there was cover-up, and the usual subtle male collusion to allow Glyn, and other male therapists, the right to fuck over

anyone they chose to. After reading his selfcongratulatory evasive articles in *Energy and Character*, in 1977 I offered David Boadella a detailed pseudonymous account of my experience, but he wouldn't publish it: Glyn had threatened to write an equally attacking critical comment about me, which I would have welcomed. But it was all too close to home for David. Yet he was himself at the time publishing his exposé of the appalling physical violence happening in Rajneesh groups in India, which led to his leaving the orange movement.

When I read now what I wrote, I can still hardly believe the heartless cold cruelty of the man who kicked me out brutally when I was so dependent on him emotionally and professionally, and used his wife to do that. It took many years for me to recover from and understand what had happened between us, how what began as a potentially creative connection had turned so sour and destructive. I was helped by other therapists, by the ordinary affection of family and friends, who knew nothing of the particular distress I was suffering, and my sanity was saved chiefly by the late Frank Lake, a psychiatrist whose Christian faith and disciplined loving commitment to healing were sniggered at by Glyn's atheism.

Glyn's line had been that I reminded him of his mother, and I had to work on that... He simply denied his counter-transference and his shadow and acted them out. He experimented dangerously with primal regression work, ignoring its potentially drastic effect on the transference. He worked without supervision. His 'therapy' consisted of co-counselling with his wife, who was twenty years younger

than him and knew nothing about psychology. He never showed genuine remorse, and had seemingly more respect for money than for persons. 'Supervision' time for his trainee apprentice co-therapists who were also in individual therapy with him consisted largely of counting the money taken and checking that he was getting his percentage. (cf. Ruth's account of this.)

I don't want to quibble with Guy about his representations of Glyn and I know little of what Glyn was doing in the past two decades. Of course I too have some good memories of him and what I learned from him; but it won't do to call him admiringly a 'maverick'. That is simply to buy into his own narcissistic view of himself. True mavericks have an important role in relation to the regulated establishment they dissent from. Glyn had no such relationship: he was alienated, and was in reality a tortured soul living in paranoid fear on the edge of an abyss, and his madness went unrecognised at the time by the idealistic untrained members of the growth movement. He shouldn't have been playing about with other people's lives; and those who went on supporting him in his grandiose delusions need to see how they prevented him from experiencing fully the horror of being utterly abandoned and betrayed, the existential 'nothing' of his poem. It's noteworthy how Guy misquotes TS Eliot. The words are 'Birth, and copulation, and death: That's all the facts when you come to brass tacks' and they come not from the Four Quartets but from 'Sweeney Agonistes', in the context of Sweeney's fear of death, of impotence, of loss of feeling and meaning: his fear of the demons pursuing him. This is the terror of the

schizoid abyss: it was Eliot's, and it was Glyn's. Eliot had the humility of the true artist: Glyn didn't. I got to know that terror also: he pushed me into the abyss and left me there.

After 25 years I can understand, and - perhaps - forgive. But not forget, nor cease to condemn: that would be to betray everything that humanistic psychology tries to stand for. As I write these words about forgiveness I hear them as having come so often from victims of abuse, rape, genocide, holocaust. Humanistic psychology developed in the '40s and '50s, very much from a determination that there would be no repetition of the evils of the war. But soon we were all into repetition compulsion... as are so many of its survivors worldwide. As is plain from all the other articles in the recent *Self & Society*, psychotherapy must see itself as inescapably political and answerable to some power beyond its confines - otherwise it may become a safe haven for those wishing to escape judgement of their actions. Indeed, when I saw the photograph of Glyn, taken at the time when he was casting his spell, I immediately wondered how torture victims feel when they are

shown attractive pictures of Pinochet to promote the cause of the 80-year old living in safe haven in our Home Counties.

The issue of Jewish-Christian relationship has become over the last two decades central to my spiritual struggles, private and public. Glyn had a role in that which we couldn't look at: at that time it was virtually taboo in British psychological circles, as in British life elsewhere. And for all that since 1995 so many skeletons have come out of the cupboard, and so many Jews out of hiding, I suspect it still is taboo (in all its meanings) and always will be.

And I imagine that my baring my wounds here will cause reactions of irritation and shame as well as sympathy. Perhaps we should describe our century as the Age of Shame: the horrifying culmination of the 2000 years of Christianity we're about to commemorate. Certainly there has been shameful betrayal of what Jesus was: a Jew with an inherited sense of spiritual and prophetic mission, and a passionate desire for love and peace.

Dear Alix

How about according the dead and grievors the respect of waiting before getting the knife out?

The psychic abuse you speak of happened twenty-five or thereabouts years ago. For the purposes of an obituary I stand by what you term my 'understatement' and repudiate both your haste and your catastrophising. If indeed Glyn's effect on you and others was so dire, how come you only now publicly reopen your fight with

such indecent urgency over the top of others' mourning? On the one hand you co-opt Ruth Green's courageous exposition of *her* relationship with Glyn, - 'Blurred Boundaries', while on the other hand you adduce an abusive male therapeutic conspiracy from David Boadella's refusal to publish your piece.

Yes, Glyn hurt you. Your response to my obituary is your belated redress.

However, he helped me. I wrote as my way to bear witness to that. I have to assert the obvious: clients have very different experiences of the same therapist (I never had any training agenda or contract with him). Glyn was the therapist I needed at that time, offering a working alliance that got me started. Like Ruth I sought further therapy and an analysis but not remedially. Therapists offer themselves to the people they come in contact with as figures to be used. When like you the client is left feeling used by the therapist, *ultimately* (twenty-five years later perhaps), that too is part of the use you made of them. Registration

doesn't create a new class or caste of therapist to whom *caveat emptor* won't apply. Indeed the political power over therapists you seem to advocate supports further transference abdications from person-to-person responsibility. To conclude, maybe you could be a bit more humanistic yourself and not kow tow to 'the transference' like the Bible as if there weren't more than one version of both. And thank you for honing up my rather vague knowledge of T.S.Eliot's work.

Regretfully
Guy Gladstone.

Dear Guy

I respect your feelings of allegiance to Glyn, but regret that they lead to your grossly misreading what I wrote and attacking me personally. I heard of his death from Ruth Green when it occurred and had no thought of saying anything, publicly or privately, about what seemed to me past history. It was when I read the obituary that I felt bound to comment, on my behalf, and that of others who've had no chance to voice their grievance. Far from 'co-opting' Ruth, I showed her the letter to ensure she was agreeable to its being published as it stands, which she

was. I'm not seeking to 'reopen a fight' nor to get belated redress. Why do you mention registration? You know nothing of my views on that. I am not needing to be 'more humanistic' thank you. If you read any of the books and articles I've published - e.g. the one in the same issue of *S&S* - you'll know that I don't kow-tow. Not to the transference. Not to the Bible. And not to lecturing by people who don't respect me enough not to insult my intelligence.

Alix.

Responses to these letters will be printed only if they refer to any general issues raised, rather than the individual people concerned.
Ed.