Book Reviews

Edited by **Manu Bazzano**, Book Reviews Editor

Teach Them Guitar

Clinical Psychology: A Critical Examination

By: Craig Newnes
PCCS Books, Ross-on-Wye, 2014, 252pp
ISBN-13: 978-1906254599
Reviewed by: Sami Timimi

This is an unusual book. Firstly, I can't recall coming across a book that provides a thorough-going critical look at the profession of clinical psychology as its sole target. I am used to reading books that critique the practice of psychiatry and the way mental health is conceptualized in general, many of these written by clinical psychologists. In such works it is common to find critiques of aspects of clinical psychology practice, particularly when that profession hangs on the coat tails of the more psychiatric profession by supporting and promoting practices such as diagnostic based working. In this book the critique is extended across the range of clinical psychology roles and tasks, including critiquing the ideas and methodology of those clinical psychologists who critique psychiatric practice.

Secondly, this book is unusual in its style, a style I haven't come across in other scholarly reviews. Newnes has a thread of self-awareness running through this book; aware that 'looking' scientific is part of the game that everyone who wants to be taken seriously in academic discourses plays. This 'scientism', he points out, has unwritten rules of engagement. For example, the liberal use of references is a must to support any argument. He plays with this idea, mischievously suggesting that

> any of the chapters in this volume might have been written arbitrarily using only research published by those with the letter D as their first initial.... The conclusions, already forgone, would only have needed the research gloss provided by supportive evidence to give the appearance of arising from that research. (p. 207)

One of the main premises of this book (though I suspect Newnes would rightly critique such a simplistic summary) is that clinical psychology as a profession is built more around guild interests than upon a solid foundational and scientific basis. Mental health remains shrouded in an uncertainty that is characterized by contested claims around what constitutes 'real' or 'true' knowledge. In such a context clinical psychology is understandably engaged in a competitive struggle with other professions in its attempt to carve out a defined role for its members. Whether clinical psychologists are supporting or critiquing established models for mental health care, the prism of self-interest cannot be avoided for those practising in societies that are driven by neo-liberal market-based philosophies.

The book itself is made up of eight chapters. The first outlines Newnes's conception of the 'nature' of clinical psychology, with the next five discussing the problems associated with various aspects of practice (theory and research, assessment, effectiveness and informed consent, therapy with children, and therapy with adults). Chapter 7 examines clinical psychology as a profession, and the last chapter looks at where the profession could go from its current position. There is also an introductory chapter that is titled 'a kind of biography'. This short chapter gives a flavour for Newnes' subsequent style and approach, where a dry wit – 'the only one [at the first job interview] to have said when asked, "What do you do with really troubled kids?", "try to teach them a bit of guitar"' [p. 2] – lurks behind a powerful intellect, able to see through the day-to-day honest attempts, by members of his profession, to help people. The backdrop to this ordinary picture of the honest practitioner plying their trade is a big-picture political dynamic that drives the professional body in a variety of directions.

Newnes provides some fascinating historical insights into the development of clinical psychology as a profession and some of the key debates that took place. For example,

he outlines in Chapter 1 how providing therapy was disputed as a valid activity for clinical psychologists, with psychometric assessment and experimental research being considered more important than therapeutic practices (that were largely psychoanalytic at the time) in the early post second world war years. However, clinical psychology eventually established itself as a profession offering a variety of approaches that provided an alternative to the physically invasive practices of psychiatrists. But Newnes cannot find anything particularly special about the knowledge base of clinical psychologists, quoting authors who have concluded that 'psychology has yet to establish a single fact about human behaviour' (p. 15) and, referring to why clients benefit from weekly therapy, 'to some critics this looked uncomfortably like magic' (ibid.).

Newnes then examines current practice, regularly referring to the gulf between the personal experiences of most psychologists and the personal experiences of deprivation, abuse and oppression that many of the more troubled clients have. If psychologists have no special 'knowledge' and little in the way of knowledge born out of experience, it is hard to understand how their claims for 'expertise' can be supported. Expertise in negotiating human social encounters (therapy) in this view comes out of politically successful strategies that enable a profession the power to make claims about possessing special and unique 'scientific' (as that is the currency for knowledge claims) insights, that allow it access to the money table.

Looking at where clinical psychology is now, Newnes laments the lack of engagement with some, in his view, easy targets such as campaigning against Electro-Convulsive Therapy (ECT). He notes the continued lack of diversity in the profession (since 2000 white applicants make up about 89–93 per cent, with 85 per cent being women), and muses over the production of position papers as an industry that produces large booklets of policy and guidelines that few members will ever know about, let alone read. He thus quotes Frank Zappa – 'These are pieces written by people who generally can't write for those who don't read' (p. 178).

Newnes is largely sympathetic to his profession and their practitioners but pulls no punches in his scrutiny of the frameworks for theory and practice used, and uncovers the largely hidden role that guild interests play in shaping the discourses of the profession. This should be a must read for all practising and training clinical psychologists, and a useful read for anyone involved in delivering mental health services. S

Evenly Suspended

After Mindfulness: New Perspectives on Psychology and Meditation

By: Manu Bazzano (Editor)
Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2014, 175pp
ISBN-13: 978-1-137039-6
Reviewed by: R.J. Chisholm

In 1979 Jon Kabat-Zinn, a clinical scientist and dedicated practitioner of Buddhist meditation, wanted to devise a programme of stress reduction that would rely heavily on the meditation technique of mindfulness to treat a wide variety of stress-related ailments. Although he was certain that mindfulness would alleviate the suffering that was commonly experienced in both physical and psychological maladies, Kabat-Zinn realized that presenting any sort of religious practice in a secular setting would be almost impossible. Fortunately, he received some useful advice that all the religious trappings of mindfulness could safely be dropped to focus solely on the technique itself. Kabat-Zinn eagerly took up this suggestion, and his secular mindfulness programme soon proved to be a remarkable success.

Now, 35 years later, secular mindfulness appears to have taken the world by storm as it has been adapted for all sorts of worldly endeavours far removed from Buddhism's religious context. A friend of mine, for example, a former Buddhist monk, was recently contracted to present mindfulness workshops for a leading UK bank. Even the US Marine Corps has taken up mindfulness in order to train its troops to deal better with the stress of combat. But the spread of mindfulness, based on its proven ability to reduce stress while apparently dispensing with any ethical or sapiential considerations, raises a serious question. Isn't there a danger of mindfulness being used mindlessly, without regard for the philosophical and ethical matters with which it had always been concerned? To address this question, one could do no better than to turn to this rich collection of thought-provoking essays.

The editor of *After Mindfulness: New Perspectives on Psychology and Meditation*, Manu Bazzano, an ordained Zen monk as well as a psychotherapist, has drawn

together an impressive group of therapists, mindfulness practitioners and Buddhist thinkers who each offer a unique perspective on what mindfulness is and how it should be practised. For someone unfamiliar with mindfulness, the collection should begin with the excellent lead essay by John Peacock, as it provides some useful historical and cultural background for the essays that follow. A Buddhist scholar and an Associate Director of the Oxford Mindfulness Centre, Peacock discusses how mindfulness (or *sati* in Pali, the language of the oldest Buddhist scriptural tradition) originated in the teachings of the Buddha, and how it has now been adapted for therapeutic purposes in clinical settings. But the collection is not restricted to essays with a therapeutic interest. Stephen Batchelor, author of *Buddhism without Beliefs*, argues that mindfulness can be separated from the superfluous dross of tradition to allow for a direct encounter with what he calls 'the everyday sublime'.

In a similar vein, in his essay Bazzano sees mindfulness as a form of deep awakening without any hope of metaphysical consolation or hint of other-worldliness. Indeed, both writers make robust arguments for a new approach to Buddhism that may appear defiantly post-modern and unapologetically Western to more traditional Asian Buddhist sensibilities. Even so, both Batchelor and Bazzano acknowledge the debt that their practices of mindfulness owe to the Pali Canon and Zen. It may well be that their different approaches herald a fresh development in Buddhist thought.

In a subtly argued essay, Jeff Harrison makes an insightful comparison between the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and mindfulness, which suggests that the divide between Eastern and Western sensibilities may not be so unbridgeable, after all.

Many readers may prefer to approach mindfulness from a more therapeutic angle, and there are several essays in this collection that should certainly satisfy that interest. Although it seems that CBT most easily assimilates mindfulness into its therapeutic approach, other therapies have also found that mindfulness has something useful to offer.

I was particularly intrigued by Monica Lanyado's essay on her use of mindfulness as a psychoanalyst. Freud famously called for analysts to employ 'evenly suspended attention' – which arguably can be likened to mindfulness – in the act of listening to patients. But Lanyado's use of mindfulness far exceeds Freud's prescription as a method of impartial listening, and exercises a much deeper influence in her self-understanding as a therapist. Indeed, I found myself wondering if her allegiance was more to Buddhism than to psychoanalysis. However, self-identifying Buddhist therapists such as Caroline Brazier and David Brazier worry in separate contributions about losing important features of Buddhist teaching in the interest of therapeutic utility. Meg Barker's essay on mindfulness for sex and relationship therapy certainly departs from traditional Buddhist teachings in its unabashed advocacy of sexual pleasure. But the fact that mindfulness can be used in treating such complaints as sexual dysfunction shows the extent to which it can be taken from its original context to find an altogether different purpose than as an approach to meditation for an essentially monastic practice.

If there is one omission in a collection that brings together such a wide diversity of views, it might be the absence of a staunch traditionalist interpretation such as a Theravada or a Tibetan monk would have provided. But talking about a Buddhist tradition as if it were monolithic is obviously nonsense, for there are a number of diverse Buddhist traditions which can be markedly different, especially in matters of practice. Moreover, much as I would have welcomed the opinions of such learned Buddhist monks as Thanissaro Bhikkhu and Matthieu Ricard, the high quality of its arguments assures that this volume will make an important contribution to the debate about mindfulness in the contemporary world.

That mindfulness is certain to influence therapy is undoubtedly central to the place it will find for itself and Bazzano has done much to further a deeper understanding of mindfulness for therapy, in part by refusing to allow it to languish in a psychotherapeutic ghetto or rest complacently in a cloister. But as an overview of these essays would suggest, mindfulness is likely to appear in a number of different guises to serve a variety of different purposes, not all of which will sit comfortably with any established Buddhist tradition. Though it remains unclear what mindfulness will become, some intriguing indications of its future can be found in this necessary and timely book.

Uncommon Ground

Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation

By: Richard Sennett
Penguin, London, 2012, 324 pp
ISBN-13: **978-0-141-02210-9**
Reviewed by: Manu Bazzano

Pluralism is a very good thing. What a pity, though, that it is such hard work, demanding of us the concrete practice of cooperation – something we are asked to do rather than endorse in high-minded pronouncements. Beside other catchphrases such as 'diversity' and 'dialogue', the ritual waving of the pluralist flag is obligatory in contemporary politics, even among representatives of privileged social groups who broadcast delicate sentiments amidst the chores of a life in a Chipping Norton mansion. Or among those who, rather less suavely, find the presence of migrants repulsive.

Pluralism is enthusiastically endorsed by wide sections of contemporary psychotherapy, though at closer scrutiny its promoters seem to be pointing at something else, namely eclecticism, drawn in turn from a nebulous notion of 'post-modernism'. In retrospect, it could well be that a notion of pluralism divorced from difficult cooperative engagement is not too dissimilar from bland eclecticism or from an arbitrarily and summarily adopted 'post-modernist' stance.

'Dialogue' is another case in point. What goes on under this tag is often purely and simply mutual endorsement, the confirmation and amplification of our own cherished opinions. Yet Mikhail Bakhtin, the first to coin the word 'dialogical', saw dialogue as a conversation which does not end in mutual agreement, nor finds a common ground. Could it be that what goes under the name of dialogue in our current psychotherapy milieu is not dialogue at all? Personal experiences seem to confirm this. Whenever, for example, I write critical articles on the work of a colleague, the response is almost invariably frosty. When inviting a reviewer to write a piece on a particular book on these pages, I hear the refrain, 'No thanks, I couldn't possibly write a critical or "negative" piece'. But is it really true that all one wants to hear from others is praise? Is not the time spent studying, reflecting and critiquing another point of view of any value? Are critical discussion and attention not in themselves marks of respect and consideration?

And yet notions of pluralism, dialogue and diversity have become universal. To those who naively forget that ideology is invariably at work each time a value is deemed universal, it may come as a shock to discover how the very opposite phenomenon, tribalism, is everywhere on the rise. In this formidable book, Richard Sennett gives the examples of The Netherlands, once upon a time an inclusive nation, but now a place where 'the mere mention of the word "Muslim" triggers a Wagnerian onslaught of complaints' (p. 3). The United States are also 'an intensely tribal society, people adverse to getting along with those who differ' (ibid.). In Europe we can't feel too smug either; it was only a few decades ago that tribalism, accompanied by the chirpy tunes of patriotic nationalism, produced horror and devastation. Genuine cooperation is hard, and it is not achieved by repressive unity or homologation, by lachrymose vows of empathic attunement, or manipulative incitements to a 'dialogue' designed to entice the interlocutor to the higher virtues of our position.

Aristotle was probably the first to be suspicious of repressive unity. A city dweller, he described the city as *synoikismos*, 'a coming together of people from diverse family tribes' – each dwelling having 'its own history, allegiances, property, family gods'. Tribalism for him meant thinking we know what others are like without knowing them: 'lacking direct experience of others, you fall back on fearful fantasies. Brought up to date, this is the idea of the stereotype'. (p. 4) Conversely, cooperation is 'an exchange in which the participants benefit from the encounter' (p. 5). In secular and sacred rituals, in formal and informal customs, one finds, Sennett writes, a coming to life of ethical principles. A healthy notion of cooperation *includes* competition – not the latter's shadow side, the legal robbery performed by bankers and the illegal theft perpetrated by gangsters. But this notion of cooperation, inspired by Bakhtin's dialogical philosophy, requires an ability to handle the natural contradictions and complications arising from impact with difference.

Unfortunately, we are less and less equipped to dealing with such difficulties. This is because modern society has produced, according to Sennett, a new character type, which he calls *the uncooperative self*,

> the sort of person bent on reducing the anxieties which differences can inspire, whether these be political, racial, religious, ethnic or erotic in character. The person's goal is to avoid arousal, to feel as little stimulated by deep difference as possible. (p. 8)

Narcissism, complacency, an obsession with self-improvement born out of puritanical shame and a titanic struggle against oneself: these are some of the traits of this new character type, augmented rather than healed, according to Sennett (who quotes approvingly from Lionel Trilling's seminal book *Sincerity and Authenticity*) by popular notions of 'authenticity' and 'self-actualization':

> Authenticity is not concerned with making oneself precise and clear; instead it is an inner search to find out what one 'really' feels, and contains a strong narcissistic trace. But this search is elusive; one never arrives at really knowing one's authentic feelings. Authenticity of the sort Trilling criticizes is perhaps best represented in the social sciences by the 'Maslow paradigm', named after the social psychologist Abraham Maslow, who devoted a lifetime to developing the idea of 'self-actualization'. Trilling's view was that, unhinged from other people, other voices, the search for authenticity becomes self-defeating. This was precisely Max Weber's view of the Protestant Ethic: it turns people inwards in an impossible quest. Other people have no place in the obsessional struggle to prove oneself: at most they count as instruments, as tools to be used. Cooperation with others will certainly not salve inner doubts. (p. 195)

For Sennett, cooperation is demanding and difficult; it is an attempt to connect with people who have different views and conflicting concerns – an endeavour that fully acknowledges the endemic inequality of everyday experience rather than indulging in phoney egalitarianism, woolly dialogue and bogus pluralism.

The book supplies ample historical examples of cooperation at work; some people and events shine like bright stars of courage and initiative. Based in Chicago, Saul Alinsky (1909-1972) was 'the most effective American community organizer of the last century', fighting for the rights of African-Americans in a climate of segregation, championing an informal method of social cohesion, getting people together who never talked to one another. His followers included Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, 'both of whom later strayed the master's path' (p. 50). Settlement houses and workshops present us with great examples of cooperation in action, the latter bringing forth the vision of the craftsman-citizen already endorsed by Confucius and Plato, who both believed that craftsmen made good citizens. Robert Owen in Scotland and in America; John Ruskin and William Morris in England – all can easily be seen as examples of 'self-conscious exercises in nostalgia for the pre-industrial era' (p 57). Yet some of these experiments did make a difference: B.T. Washington was an ex-slave who founded the Tuskegee Institute for ex-slaves, where they could learn horticulture, carpentry and metal working, and learned how to teach others in turn, all geared towards relearning cooperation in view of reintegration in society.

Interestingly, many of these pioneers saw the workshop as a more refined form of social organization, and considered the factory a step back in human civilization. The focus here is not only the ownership of the means of production, as advocated by Marx, but on asking the crucial question of 'how to behave sociably once you are in control' (p. 60). There is a crucial difference, Sennett argues, between political cooperation and the politics of cooperation. The first is 'a necessity in the game of power', as in the example of the present Lib-Con coalition government in the UK; the second deals with face-to-face relating, as the examples of settlement houses, workshops and community organizing espoused by Saul Alinsky show. The politics of cooperation entail informal contact, empathic attunement, learning how to navigate through difficulties and conflict, what the author calls 'the spectrum of exchange'.

There are, Sennett writes, five types of exchange: (1) altruistic; (2) win–win; (3) differentiating; (4) zero-sum; and (5) winner-takes-all. Acknowledging in passing 'the baleful influence of accountants felt everywhere in modern life' including behavioural psychology (pp. 72–3), Sennett concedes that as humans we are too complicated for our experience to be neatly translated within the language of losses and gains. Yet the spectrum of exchange is useful in mapping out the territory of encounter and cooperation.

The *altruistic* stance is one of self-sacrifice; corroborated by religion, it recently enjoyed a revival in psychotherapy with the attention some devoted to Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy of otherness. The *win–win* exchange is more openly reciprocal, but it is the *differential* exchange that is truly dialogical. Here, 'differences are exposed in the course of the talk; contact may stimulate self-understanding; something valuable will then have transpired through the exchange' (p. 79). In the *zero-sum* game, a remnant of reciprocity – of mutual acceptance of the rules – still persists, with one individual's gain becoming another's loss. In *winner-takes-all*, the defeated is utterly destroyed. This is the logic of genocide in war, of monopoly in business, a logic dominated by the elimination of all competitors. Interestingly, cooperation is absent in both the far ends of the spectrum, in altruism as in winner-takes-all.

This comprehensive guide to the rituals, pleasure and politics of cooperation is divided into three parts: Cooperation Shaped, Cooperation Weakened, and

Cooperation Strengthened. In spite of its thorough-going method of little concession to rose-tinted views, the book maintains a breezy, even musical tone, supported by the unshakable faith that cooperation positively enhances the quality of social life. 'Could community itself become a vocation?', Sennett asks (p. 273). Critically inspired by Hannah Arendt, Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, he imagines community as 'a process of coming into the world, a process in which people work out both the value of face-to-face relation and the limits of those relations' (ibid.).

The book ends with a coda on Montaigne's cat ('when I am playing with my cat, how do I know she is not playing with me?'). Musing on the mysterious life of others (we don't know what goes on in their minds, be they cats or humans), the final pages call for a social and political engagement from the ground up. Here the supreme value is empathy, and the greatest art conversation. These values and practices are not envisaged by the social and political order but happen at grass-roots level. There is great hope, Sennett implies: it lies in the fact that 'as social animals we are capable of cooperating more deeply than the existing social order envisions' (p. 280). S

Send Me Shivers

A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing: A Novel

By: Eimear McBride
Faber, London, 2014, 224pp
ISBN-13: 978-0-5713-17165
Reviewed by: Manu Bazzano

> Deprived of world, therefore, I fall in a faint.
>
> (Julia Kristeva)

What happens if a piece of writing does not stoop to the Book Club qualifications of biography, grand historical yarns, plush rehabs sagas and adultery tales in even plusher surroundings? What if it refuses to slog along linearly redemptive 'psychological portrayals' and 'nature descriptions' served in either journalistic, sub-Nabokovian or third-rate populist plodding prose justified by that staggeringly insolent conjecture called 'This Is What the Public Wants'? What if the writing itself summons us readers to crawl out of our absorption in managerially redemptive tales, and reminds us that the very fact that we have bought the book might hint at the fact that we are, at heart, adventurers of the spirit rather than consumers? What if the book presents us with a disquieting blend of illness, early death, sex, religion, rape, suicide, incest, the general fucked-upness of a society crushed under the yoke of a stultifying morality? What if all of the above is heart-breaking and tenderly suffused in elegiac, lyrical fraternal love and loss?

A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing has all of the above traits and more. And this is what happened to it: (a) it was thoroughly ignored for a decade, rejected by all of the publishers in the land; (b) it was taken on by the audacious Beggar Galley Press in Norwich; (c) it began to be reviewed positively by some reviewers, including Anne Enright, who first murmured the words 'genius' and 'old-fashioned'. Also around this time, the pathetically inept label 'stream of consciousness' began to stick, a term which in England is destined to any non-Dickensian or non-Orwellian novel that does not plead allegiance to either Saint Charles or Saint George and to any writer who dares to use (i.e. Virginia Woolf) free indirect speech; (d) it won one literary prize after another, and was praised for its imaginative and linguistic daring; (e) it got 'Fabered', i.e. crowned by one of the most prestigious publishers; (f) its novelty, as well as its intractability as a dangerous object, was 'understood' and canonized as an imaginative if hybrid offshoot of Joyce, Beckett and O'Brien.

If your reading diet consists almost exclusively of journalistic, hyper-conventional prose or, worse, of the staggeringly dreary clichés churned out in the majority of psychology and mental health 'literature', then this book will be a shock: in turn, the apparition of a numen or the sighting of a monster – or both. Once you decide to stay with its syncopated, truncated rhythm and with its pre-cognitive, pre-conscious idiom, the work shines through as a kind of short-hand naturalistic tale.

The language may be atypical, but the narrative is straightforward, depicting a young woman's relationship with a brother affected by a brain tumour. In the tradition of the naturalistic tale, it traces a downside trajectory towards annihilation, in this case via the route of *abjection*, i.e. 'the state of being cast off'. The term 'abjection' belongs to the European tradition, and was most notably articulated by Julia Kristeva. Yet as far as I can tell, only one reviewer, Kerryn Goldsworthy in the *Sydney Review of Books*, was alert to this association. I wonder why that is: could it be that there is more to Euro-scepticism than populists in tweed jacket, corduroys and brogues holding a pint of bitter? There seems to be a palpable terror to get one's insular 'cultural values' and literary taste soiled by perilous unorthodoxy. It's just about OK with the Irish, in spite of all their dangerous liaisons with thwarted

religiosity and perturbed sexuality. After all, it's been quite a while since Joyce and Beckett, canonized by academia, finished off by copious footnotes, and duly patronized by every scribbler in the land. But *abjection*? This is simply outside the cultural radar of the *bien pensant*. Like it or not, the literature of abjection comprises of the best of modern literature: Dostoevsky, Proust, Artaud, Céline, Kafka, all echoed in the novel (at least to this reader) alongside the 'Continental' (and equally Catholic) sensibilities of Bataille, Genet, Pasolini and the post-Sadean tradition. If this is too daunting, too 'foreign' a proposition, it may then be easier to head for the Yorkshire moors and the world of Emily Brontë. *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* is Brontëan in its unceremonious appeal to chaos, to a decentring of characters and a strong hold on *affect*. Reading it, I was reminded of Andrea Arnold's remarkable 2011 film rendition of *Wuthering Heights*.

McBride evokes an impersonal world of pain and exuberance – what lazy religious people call 'evil'. Here, all 'characters' eventually fall, whether seized by death or wheezing in the mesmeric syntax. The Girl's repeated attempts at baptism are the unholy enactment of everyone going down, isolated and alone, their descent punctuated by Hail Marys and Lord's Prayers. Early in the novel we find the first plunge in the lake, an anticipation of what is to come:

> I step there. Cool and cold and colder. Outside the leather. Coming in over my white socks. Feel it rising. Catch my ankles. Send me tremors. Send me shivers. I know what I'm doing. Mud suckering round my toes. If I stand. Still. The reeds glass bend a little. Shiver winter. There's a soft cold breeze. I search the quiet out for footsteps. For the armies. Coming. To slither under water here with me. Those spirits smell and see them I do in my sleep. In dreams of all the things that in my life will come to me. Take hold. I fear not. Hear not. See not. Feel the rap on my knuckles of the water going in. It soak my coat up. Up my leg up. Feel it there inside my thigh. So cold. So ice and glass and see though things and friendly hands. Between my secret tight shut legs the water. Lurking brownly seep inside me. Drag me down. I do not. I know not. I know not what I do. It is not that. It is not drowning I have come for. Not for death or any other violent thing that I could do to myself. I am here this hour for. Storage I think. Cleaning and cold storage. I will gust myself out between my legs. Whoever let the poison in. The dirt retreat. The thing I want I should not get. I'll put my head in for discreet baptise.

The above scene comes just before the Girl's first sexual encounter with her uncle: abuse, no doubt, but detailed along an intricate arc that does not allow for knee-jerk moral responses: the space of literature (and art), from which psychotherapy can learn in nuance and complexity.

In writing about Genet, Sartre listed abjection as one of the ways of experiencing the world, as legitimate, in his view, as the Stoics' refusal of the world, as Cartesian doubt and Husserlian *epoché*. He saw it as one methodical conversion lived in pain and pride which does not lead to the transcendental consciousness of Husserl, the abstract thinking of the Stoics or the *cogito* of Descartes, but to an individual existence lived at a high degree of tension and lucidity. His suggestion was scandalous at the time he wrote it. It is even more so now, in a psychological landscape arguably saturated by dreams of control, sanitization and a general pathologizing of ordinary humans by other humans in the 'caring professions'. Sartre's (as well as Kristeva's) articulation of abjection is crucial to therapists who aspire to work beyond the cosy domain of cognitive reprogramming and ersatz religion and are not shy to work within areas where the suspension of judgement and cultural prejudice are paramount.

The ending (I won't spoil it for the reader) got me thinking: easy denouement, baptism into infinity through muck and slime, towards a redemption of sorts? At any rate, it represents a sombre step away from the bigotry and pain and narrow-mindedness of an Irish upbringing. The other option? Getting the hell out, like Joyce did. Or Beckett, who petulantly said he preferred occupied Paris to narrow-minded Dublin. Like McBride herself, who went to live in Norwich. Yours truly knows what it's like, since he left bigoted Southern Italy first for the world, then for London town.

Erratum

From the last issue, Volume 41, No. 3, Manu Bazzano's paper, 'The poetry of the world', page 10, column 2, lines 34–5: where it says 'given the latter's sincere amazement...', it should have been '**the former**', i.e. referring to Montaigne rather than Descartes.