

Book Review

Into the Woods and Out Again: A Memoir of Love, Madness and Transformation

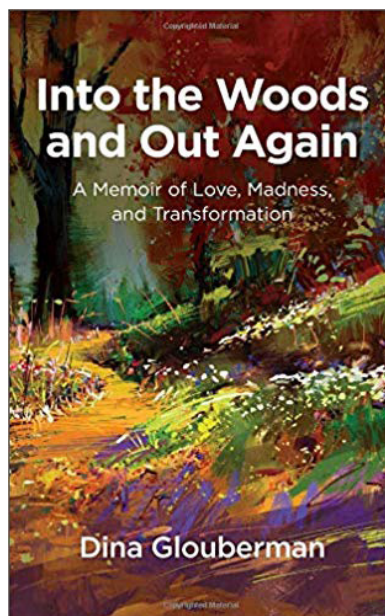
by Dina Glouberman, Sphinx/Aeon Books, London, 2018, 320pp, ISBN-10: 1912573067, price (paperback) £9.99.

Reviewed by **Graham Mummery**

Dina Glouberman has had a career that could rightly be described as remarkable, as psychotherapist, facilitator and co-founder of Skyros Holidays. She has also developed a therapeutic tool which accessed the creative imagination, which she calls Imagework. As she explains in her various books, she does not use the word 'visualization' because her images are intuited rather than visual. But she recognizes that other people's images often are visual, as indeed many of mine have been in workshops she has facilitated.

Her books on Imagework, *Life Choices*, *Life Changes* and *You Are What You Imagine*, provide models of how to do creative-imagination work. Drawing on lessons learned from Jungian Active Imagination and Gestalt as well as her own experience, they combine a mixture of well-grounded method with humour and wisdom sometimes expressed in an aphoristic manner. She once told me that the poet Hugo Williams suggested she write a book of aphorisms. Her other book, *The Joy of Burnout*, provides valuable insights into a problem of our age. I know people who attest that her workshops and books have changed their lives, as they have done for me. They are a foundation-stone for my own therapeutic practice.

The book under review here, *Into the Woods and Out Again: A Memoir of Love, Madness and Transformation*, is Glouberman's most personal book to date. It is a memoir rather than a manual, or, to use that much maligned term, 'self-help book'. The book briefly describes her training in America, going to a college where she encountered some of the pioneers of Humanistic



Psychology, including Abraham Maslow, Fritz Perls and Carl Rogers, before moving to Britain. It then moves quickly into her time in Britain from the 1970s. This was a turbulent time for her. She was working both as psychotherapist and lecturer working towards her Ph.D., and also studying with R.D. (Ronnie) Laing at the Philadelphia Association. She then had a psychotic breakdown.

It is at this point where the book really gets into its flow. She chronicles her experience, including her eventual hospitalization where she found it frightening at times, with the doctors and nurses being unable to provide her with much help. Indeed, at times they seemed to offer the opposite of help, being caught up in the conventions of the day and the limits imposed by the health service. Her therapist was away, and the therapy had even been in its ending phase. There was also little help from Laing and the Philadelphia Association, not least because she found it more caught up in internal matters rather than being a community. In the end, she found that the community of patients was often more helpful to her in recovering, with support from her then husband-to-be, Yanniss.

This is described in very human terms, rather than clinically. For example, whilst not afraid to use terms like 'psychosis', Glouberman finds it more helpful to get directly to her feelings, using words like 'madness'. As she puts it,

Why do I prefer to call it madness rather than by a

more psychiatrically acceptable label?

It is because this is the word that is most vivid to our psyche. We do not fear 'going psychotic' unless we've been around the block a few times in the world of mental illness. We fear going mad. And it is how I can best sum up the way I felt. (page 6)

This, I would add, is still a part of her approach in Imagework workshops where participants are encouraged to connect with the feeling directly, rather than the abstract term. As is hinted at in the subtitle of the book, Glouberman views the events she describes here in terms of a healing crisis, rather like those described in the shamanic literature. There are also echoes of Laing's dictum that there can be 'breakthrough as well as breakdown' (Laing, 1967, 110) in psychosis. She contrasts the differences between what she experienced here under the influence of her madness to other spiritual experiences, in which she was interested even then.

If this area is perhaps the most vivid part the book because of its immediacy, it connects directly with much of the rest of the book, which covers the founding and setting up of *Skyros Holidays* with Yannis. Much of this comes out of her experiences previously described. The idea was to create a healing community where people could have a retreat from life to explore what was going on for them.

She and her husband found a suitable place for this on the island of Skyros in the Aegean, which is much mentioned in Classical literature, including Homer's *Odyssey* (1991) and Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (2014). The community has had an impact on the island, but it remains to this day relatively unspoilt and off the usual tourist track. She mentions the initial difficulties, which sometimes included conflicts between running a business with creating a loving community as *Skyros* grew to the point of needing an organization. Yet people kept coming back, and it will celebrate its fortieth anniversary this year.

Of course, the story does not end there. In the book Glouberman records some of the difficulties that continued while this was going on. She also discusses the difficulties she later had with the problems of bringing up a family, working towards a Ph.D. and running *Skyros*. These led her to some of the events described in *The Joy of Burnout*, though extra personal details are provided here, including the death of her father. The book ends with her contemplating her life, her path of wisdom just after

an email from Yannis who was worried after reading the book manuscript. He is worried that she's not showing enough of the strong, vibrant qualities that he saw first-hand in their marriage.

I wouldn't claim to know her as well as Yannis must do. But I've known and worked with her now for nearly 15 years. This woman I know as both Dina, as she is known professionally, and Zohar, which is her birth name. The story we are given in *Into the Woods and Out Again* is one of transformation from the psyche into the world. Imagework and the *Skyros* community have come in part, the book suggests, from a realization from a psychological or spiritual crisis. The vulnerabilities have their place in the whole story. They are the base material we transform in the alchemical process that makes a phoenix fly.

This is a highly readable book that will fascinate her readers and people who have been to *Skyros*, and those of us who know this remarkable woman. It is in many ways a portrayal of her inner landscape, working in similar ways to, say, Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, or Jean Houston's *A Mythic Life*. She couldn't have better company here. What is of special interest here in Dina Glouberman's work is how she has translated, and continues to translate, those inner images into something of value in the material world. And, of course, she helps others, including me, to do that as well.

All told, this is an inspiring read.

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