

# Book Reviews

THE SOUL'S CODE: *In Search of Character and Calling*. James Hillman. Milsons Point, NSW, Random House Australia, 1996. ISBN: 0-09-183437-6. Paperback, 334 pages, \$19.95.

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Family therapy has somehow managed to ignore completely one of the most innovative minds currently at work on the planet. I would like to think this oversight is connected to our earlier distancing from psychoanalysis, which in turn had already distanced itself from Jungian analysis, rather than a sort of arrogant ghetto mentality. Regardless of the reasons, perhaps the spirit of pluralism and blurring of boundaries that postmodernism at its best can facilitate will enable an exploration into the somewhat foreign territory of contemporary Post-Jungian Archetypal thought. Paul Gibney has tentatively begun this process in recent workshops.

In 1992 Hillman, a renegade Jungian analyst in collaboration with the social critic Michael Ventura, published *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy—And the World's Getting Worse*. A decidedly bizarre work, it could be analogous to Roy and H.G getting very intellectual. One of the stated aims of this book was to clear the deck so that a new framework could emerge in which 'the consulting room is a cell in which revolution is prepared' (Hillman and Ventura, 1992: 38). This earlier volume serves as a context to Hillman's latest, most accessible work, which seems to be targeting the co-dependant Venus and Mars readership. Do not be put off—this work has more depth to it than a library full of Gray, Bradshaw and all their dysfunctional families.

It is hard to describe this book without lapsing into hyperbole; it is nothing short of brilliant. Accustomed to reading books and finding perhaps a smattering of new ideas, I was not prepared for a work wall to wall with insight.

The first chapter opens with: 'There is more in a human life than our theories of it allow. Sooner or later something seems to call us onto a particular path' (1). He says: 'this book is about calling, about fate, about character, about innate image' (6) and that much neglected idea 'beauty' (37). Like a heat seeking missile it takes aim at many of psychology's sacred cows and blows them out of the paddock, replacing them with something that is simultaneously profoundly new, and yet ancient. Two themes that were touched on by Hillman and Ventura and elaborated upon in *The Soul's Code*. Hillman almost brings the language of the street into the work. After a tirade about the 'deadness' of psychology, he announces:

evidence of this book's attempt to exit the mortuary is the absence from these pages of the contemporary language of psychology. Except where set apart in quotation marks to keep from contaminating a sentence with psychological

morbidities you will not find any of these infectious agents ... (37).

His language is beautifully alive, packed with poetic allusion that keeps you repeatedly returning to soak up the richness that permeates the text.

Hillman is interested in biography, and consequently the book is packed with biographical fragments. His thesis is that when we read the lives of the extraordinary backwards, we can discern something at work that our linear, forward thinking theory cannot currently give words to. Drawing from a Platonic myth, he calls this the 'acorn theory', 'which holds that each person bears a uniqueness that asks to be lived and that is already present before it can be lived' (6).

Hillman argues:

The concept of this individualised soul-image has a long, complicated history: its appearance in cultures is diverse and widespread and the names for it are legion. Only contemporary psychology and psychiatry omit it from their textbooks (10).

This calling that enters life with us is most clearly illustrated through the early years of exceptional children. The reader would have to be made of concrete not to be enchanted by the multiple examples of children who somehow show an intuitive knowing of their future life.

Constantly drawing from both myth and biography enables Hillman to reframe the dilemmas, downers, and darkness that contemporary culture and therapy habitually frame as problems; they become the twists and turns of the unique image in the soul struggling to emerge and engage with the world. Readers will find themselves constantly reflecting on their own childhood, envisioning accidents, mishaps and neglected parts afresh.

A chapter titled 'The Parental Fallacy' challenges a central tenet of family therapy—the influence of the family of origin. Despite having moved beyond the narrow psychoanalytic focus on the mother-child to the broader family and cultural context, our theory is still trapped by its own theoretical context. By stepping outside a hundred-year social science loop into ancient, mythical, and metaphoric thought, Hillman is freed to challenge radically the notion of the power and influence of parents.

Working through the parental fallacy is more like a religious conversion—out of our secularism, out of our personalism, out of our monotheism, developmentalism, and belief in causality. It requires a step backward into the old connection with invisibilities and a trusting step out and over the threshold into the rich profusion of influences afforded by the world (90).

Children are seen as having something that falls between nature and nurture. It is in the chapter on this third element, where perhaps the discussion becomes

slightly more technical, that the pace slackens ever so slightly.

One chapter highlights the need for a mentor to see intuitively and draw out the potential, the 'Acorn', hidden away behind a often unappealing persona. Another chapter on the 'Bad Seed' attempts to plumb the mysterious depths of the psychopath, with Hitler being a prime example. Hillman's brief allusive comments on prevention and ritual warrant further exploration, especially for those working with extremely violent men.

There will be many readers who will have enormous problems. Whilst it is grounded in profoundly 'feminine' values, Hillman states very early that gender is not on his agenda. Those who have been socialised into science's demands for empirical evidence will see much of this work as pure speculation. Pragmatic, fast-change addicts will be intensely frustrated at not finding ten easy steps. Those with a psychoanalytic edge will be disturbed by having foundational theories turned upside down. Some deconstructive postmodernists will also no doubt experience considerable cognitive dissonance.

Nowhere in this work will you find a new therapeutic technique. Reading it will force you to re-look at your current techniques, as well as your life history and the world around you. You won't agree with all that Hillman says, but you will be deeply rewarded by the act of listening.

Slouching towards Family Therapy Part 2 has brought a focus on literary, critical and post-modern Theory. I am convinced Hillman's emphasis on literature, biography, beauty and myth has far more to offer and provides a starting point with more heart and soul.

JEFF POWER  
Family Therapist  
Lifeline Gold Coast.

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TUNING INTO SCHIZOPHRENIA. Kylee Webb. Kew, Victoria, Draw Publications, 1995. Soft cover, 69 pages, \$15.00.

This is a brave book. It opens with the author describing the beliefs and voices that terrified her from adolescence onwards. Then her psychiatrist, mother, father, older brother and younger sister each tell their story.

What emerges is a tale of suffering, bewilderment, failure, self-blame, guilt and helplessness for the chief protagonist and her immediate and extended family. But it is also a tale of endurance, goodwill, support and fulfilled hope.

For the lay person, sufferer, relative or friend, there is a message of hope, showing that recovery and rehabilitation are possible. This outcome is shown to

depend on a readiness factor, both in the protagonist and in her social network. It enabled a mustering of social support, including that provided by a club for fellow sufferers, that pointed away from disabling symptoms and towards a useful present and a desirable future.

In a section called 'The Journey Back', an unnamed author or authors describe how viewing a video about schizophrenia led to a comment about 'the lack of real life experiences for the public and sufferers which could be accessed to maybe help families to understand the disease'. And 'Somehow the mention of writing a book about Kylee's schizophrenia arose and was discussed on and off in the ensuing months that followed the viewing of the video' (63).

The timing was right; Kylee began to write 'a few notes on scrap paper'. Gradually her family were drawn into the process of collaborating on the joint task. An unidentified member, perhaps Kylee's mother, says,

Writing about her schizophrenia has assisted Kylee's healing process. Family discussions around the table assisted and enriched each of us to understand each other's insights, experiences and pain as well. Therefore it may be a process which could work for another sufferer of this disease (68).

Kylee writes:

Most of this book has put my four and a half years' experience with schizophrenia into perspective for myself. I now have more self esteem and my standards and expectations of success are much more realistic. I welcome the opportunity to speak publicly about my personal experience of schizophrenia (24).

Kylee has come to hear her own voice and not the voices. Blatt (1995) provides a useful discussion on the destructiveness of perfection, whether self- or other-imposed. He argues that it disrupts 'the development of satisfying interpersonal relationships and a well-differentiated sense of self' (1013). He claims that 'Most forms of psychopathology can be defined as a distorted and exaggerated emphasis on one of these two developmental lines and the defensive avoidance of the other' (1013). Fortunately, Kylee did not have to resort to deception to outwit some 19th century asylum doctors who denied inmates the privilege of writing. From early in the 20th century, doctors were encouraging autobiographies as evidence of the success of modern treatments.

By creating a concrete task that requires the joint participation and collaboration of significant others, the author and contributors to the present book have provided a powerful therapeutic tool for case management and treatment. The process drew the family together around a joint task and heightened their perceived interdependence. It realigned system forces to reduce interpersonal conflicts and contradictory expectations (Sullivan, 1953; Laing, 1961; Clark, 1969; Haley, 1981; Parker, Fairley, Greenwood, Jurd and Silove, 1982; Falloon, Boyd and McGill, 1984). As Lindsay (1996:154)

suggested, 'It is perhaps the accepting and being accepted that is the treatment.'

Kylee and her family raise collective voices against what Szasz (1994) calls the cruel compassion of mental health treatment. But they may still be victims of the disease concept of schizophrenia and the definition they give that 'Schizophrenia is a group of illnesses, probably resulting from chemical imbalances, deficiencies or structural abnormalities that create a breakdown in the signalling system of the brain' (4). This concession to the medical model and its preferred aetiology and treatment may be misleading, given the present state of knowledge. A social or psychological model may have an equal claim, as may a vulnerability model or an interaction model of the biological, the psychological and the social (Wing, 1983; Wilson and Kneisl, 1988; Clements and Turpin, 1992).

The present book shows that a combination of medication and a mobilisation of social and psychological forces have improved Kylee's role-taking efficiency and psychological comfort.

At the very least this book shows that the voices of consumers of psychiatric care are being raised increasingly. We have gone a long way past Laing's experience (1985: 142) when he was asked, 'Dr. Laing, I am told that you allow your schizophrenic patients to talk to you.'

Or have we?

ALFRED CLARK  
Emeritus Professor  
Department of Sociology  
La Trobe University, Bundoora, Victoria

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LEARNING CONSULTATION: A SYSTEMIC FRAMEWORK. David Campbell. London, Karnac Books, 1995. Soft Cover, 176pp., 16.95. (Systemic Thinking and Practice Series, Ed. David Campbell and Ros Draper).

In recent years, writers in the field of so-called 'family therapy' have rightly been redescribing this therapeutic approach as 'systemic' therapy. These thinkers have expanded the notion of strictly 'family' therapy to the wider concept of how the 'space between' people, the web of relationships, the interconnectedness of individuals, is an arbiter of health and disease. While this 'space between' might embrace the traditional nuclear family, those in the therapy room are equally likely to include remote extended family members, non-family members, work colleagues, etc.

This shift in the configuration of what falls under the rubric of family therapy has meant that the practitioner has to make only a small shift from being a family therapist to being a systemic consultant or to working with organisations. *Learning Consultation: A Systemic Framework* by David Campbell is a very useful text for the family therapist who is expanding her/his repertoire by taking some beginning steps into organisational consultancy.

The book is the product of the 'Danish Seminars', three two-day workshops given by the author in Copenhagen over a ten month period. Part One gives a detailed account of the three seminars, the theoretical material and the experiential exercises, with the author's rationale for his methodology. Part Two consists of six articles written by seven of the participants, describing their attempts to put theory into practice in their own professional work. They share their successes and their failures.

The theoretical concepts covered throughout the text include: second-order cybernetics, the meaning of the problem, the management of change, feedback loops, the observer position, membership of different systems, the both/and position, hierarchy, communication, systemic interviewing, the reflecting team, gains and losses of change, working with dilemmas, change and stability.

One of the key ideas which stood out for me—and it applies equally well in therapy—is the necessity of clarifying what the 'client' wants of the consultant. I believe that clarification of the contract and staying with that step till it is clear, is often half the battle of therapy and consultation. Helm Stierlin says that five minutes of clarification is worth hours of therapy. The same applies in organisational consultancy, except more so. Who is the *real* client? What is the hidden agenda? Campbell strongly emphasises the importance of this initial clarification and the importance of a mutually satisfying and clear contract.

The family therapist reader will find other contemporary ideas being re-shaped for more strictly organisational work: how to balance appropriate expertise with not taking over, how to be a 'not-knower' in consultancy,

the notion of the 'problem-determined system' ... ideas from the Goolishian/Anderson team. The use of the reflecting team in organisational consultancy is a creative extension of the use of reflection.

*Learning Consultation: A Systemic Framework* is an addition to the 'Systemic Thinking and Practice Series' published by Karnac, and it maintains the high standard of that series. The author does not propose the book as a complete text on organisational consultancy, and it would need to be complemented by other reading on the theory and praxis (much of which is included in the recommended reading list for the seminars and the bibliography at the end of the book). The reader will take away from the text some very useful and concrete strategies that should—and shouldn't—be employed when working with organisations.

PETER CANTWELL  
Lecturer and private practitioner  
Kew, Victoria

SEARCHING FOR CHARMIAN. Suzanne Chick.

Sydney, Pan Macmillan, 1994. \$35.00. Hardcover, \$16.95 paperback.

A MOTHER'S DISGRACE. Robert Dessaix. Sydney, HarperCollins, 1994. \$16.95. paperback.

AN AUSTRALIAN SON. Greg Mathews. Melbourne, William Heinemann, 1996, \$16.95. paperback.

As a therapist and adoptee who has undertaken her own adoption reunion, I haven't always been fascinated to explore the meaning of other reunions for other adoptees. Somehow, it was as if it would dilute and corrupt the experience and blur my sense of entitlement to the powerful emotions that are synchronous with reconnection to a genetic heritage. (Indeed, *entitlement* is an issue for many clients, adoptees in particular!) However in Australia, since the 1930s over 300,000 babies were relinquished for adoption and one in six Indigenous Australians were removed from their families, adopted or placed in foster homes. In New South Wales alone, with the 1991 Adoption Information Act, almost 16,000 people have made applications for original or amended birth certificates in order to undertake a reunion. We are seeing more and more clients presenting with the complex issues that surround the adoption experience. They include adoptees who did not know that they were adopted until approached by their birthmother, adoptees facing vetoes, birthmothers and adoptees frightened by the intense need for physical closeness, birthmothers facing condemnation from their present partners or anger from their adult relinquished children, and adoptive parents or adoptees' partners, seeking to support their children or spouses in reunion, but confused and displaced by the intensity of the connection the adoptees may feel in the 'honeymoon' stage post reunion. Suzanne Chick, Robert Dessaix and Gordon Mathews are three such adult adoptees who undertook a search of their origins in order to find an identity they had been unable to complete.

Suzanne Chick in *Searching For Charmian* presents an intimate and unromantic view of adoption reconnection when she finds that her birthmother was the novelist Charmian Clift, who took her own life at the age of 48.

Chick seems to attempt to merge with her mother by absorbing herself in the written, pictorial and oral records of her mother's life. This exemplifies the obsession that so many adoptees and birthparents experience in the early stages of reunion. Chick struggles to 'reassemble' herself, and like her eldest daughter, Gina, begins to find a mirror for her difference, for her own reconstructing identity. The book is interwoven with Chick's own writing, and she pieces together her mother's narrative as much as she reauthors her own. Unable to connect in life, Chick tries to touch the spectre of the mother she will never know. She

crunched barefoot along the coarse gold-ochre sand of *her* [Clift's] beach, and sat, still talking, on the sharp eroded rocks, slippery with Neptune's necklace, while *her* sea, placid today, played lazily with our feet (Chick: 40).

Like many adoptees and birthmothers struggling with the shame, secrecy and unresolved mourning of the relinquishment, Chick feels what she imagines to be her mother's grief as well as her own and wonders whether she could have provided a lifeline to her mother or whether, like two of Clift's later children who were driven to suicide, she also would have been overwhelmed. Chick wants to tell Clift that she feels compassion, not anger, for her mother's decision; perhaps Chick's own life experiences give her more empathy for her birthmother's trauma. I wondered too, whether Chick's compassion for the pain of her birthmother's life, for her emotionally abusive marriage, her alcohol abuse and indeed, her eventual suicide, in a sense protect the daughter from anger she may have felt at Clift's decision to relinquish her. The book movingly documents the tragedy of one gifted woman's life as seen through the eyes of another gifted woman, whose grief at never physically knowing the mother who gave her birth deeply expresses the losses created by adoption.

Very different in style is broadcaster Robert Dessaix's compelling and honest *A Mother's Disgrace*. Like Chick, Dessaix was adopted during the 1940s, growing up in North Shore Sydney. As with Chick's work I was struck with the womb-like metaphors, with Dessaix's desire to merge and join, whether it was to do with his friendships with women, his relationships with men, or his journey to define his own identity. Just as the adoption experience challenges genetic continuity, so Dessaix questions the 'binary constructions which raise the stake in any power game', such as constructions of gender and the linear progression through middle class white Anglo-Celtic life stages. Dessaix comments on the difficulty of walking into his birthmother's home and seeing photos of her life which deny his existence. So many adoptees and birth parents carry the stigma of adoption and the desire, as Dessaix describes, to be part of their birth family's 'unashamed conversation'. He

sums up the veil of secrecy which stifles the expression of emotion and destroys intrapsychic and systemic well-being: "The remedy of disgrace in that family has been the suffocating blanket of silence" (Dessaix: 108).

Dessaix himself, from the time he meets his birthmother Yvonne, is forced to relinquish the belief that he is self made. How strong that construction had been, even as a child, is demonstrated by Dessaix's creation of an imaginary country of his own, complete with complex language, history and culture. As for other adoptees, Dessaix's rediscovery of the genealogical signposts that influence identity development challenge his overwhelming sense of the randomness of his life. At times, I found myself wanting Dessaix, who himself wished his birthmother would break through the seal of silence, to be less polite, less restrained in his interactions with her, but I found the poignancy in what was not said quite compelling. He *accommodates* his birthmother's position as best he can and illustrates the struggle which affects all three parties in the adoption triangle.

The most recent addition to reunion autobiography is Gordon Mathews' *An Australian Son*. Mathews was adopted at birth in the early 50s, taunted at school for his dark skin, and eventually embraced an Aboriginal heritage to find meaning and history for his colour, only to have that meaning disintegrate on reunion. The extent of Mathews' loss of racial identity is profound: 'Explaining to my parents that they had left me to grow up without my race, was a terrible thing to do' (154). Mathews is forced to "de-Aboriginalise" himself, and although on reunion he is made aware of his true origins, the discovery is shrouded by the loss. He finds his birthparents, but loses the sense of racial and cultural entitlement that an Aboriginal identity had given him, his place in the world.

In contrast to Dessaix, Mathews is overtly faced with his birthmother's grief over her relinquishment of him, but resists her need to share and release the pain she has carried for over thirty years. Mathews is aware of the deep reserve and resentment he feels in response

to his birthmother's desire to be understood, as much as he objectively acknowledges her disempowered and societally shamed position. A further anxiety is his desire to protect his mother, to reassure her that she is his 'real' mother. Many adoptees similarly describe the dilemma of conflicting loyalties to both adoptive and birth mothers, and a similar desire to reassure them of their place in their lives; many adoptees adjust their use of language and names, who is called 'Mum', who is called by her first name, in whose presence to walk the tightrope of belonging to two worlds simultaneously. Like Dessaix, Mathews faces the pain of denial again when his birthparents refuse to acknowledge his existence to Sydney relatives. Is it any surprise that continuation of the secret post reunion means that adoptees may have to consciously and repeatedly reaffirm their entitlement to exist? Mathews wonders whether the truth has been worth the pain.

All three books strikingly highlight the tasks of constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing the self and the discourses upon which we build life and meaning. For clients who are thinking of searching, all three books describe varying emotional issues that may be encountered in placing themselves in a new narrative. In writing these books, all the authors actively move themselves from positions of unconsciously perceiving themselves as undeserving and indebted, to positions of *legitimising* their feelings and needs: they expose the secret, they make a stand for their existence. Is this not the challenge of therapy for many of our clients? The books describe what it means to the authors to have an absence of generational sequence linking past, present and future; they present identity issues unique to adoption, and issues of attachment. For those clients who are reconstructing and reauthoring their identities post reunion, these books provide connection to others who still find the adoption reunion experience isolating, confusing and intense in its complexity.

LINDA MACKAY  
Relationships Australia NSW  
Lane Cove  
Sydney