

# *PsyPraxis* – the Changing Context

## Research Report 50 23 April 2010, Janet.Low@mac.com

Picking up the thread from PP49 – can literature defeat bureaucracy? – I’m sorry to report that there was a clear win for bureaucracy at last week’s International PEN meeting ‘Free the Word’ at London’s South Bank. Internationally celebrated writer Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo (a political refugee currently living in Spain, exiled from his home in Equatorial Guinea) was denied entry into the UK to take the stage on Saturday because the beleaguered bureaucrat got tangled up in the red tape of the new border control agencies (UKBA, formed in April 2008). Donato had applied to enter as a ‘business visitor’, but the poor fuddled civil servant got hopelessly lost in the labyrinth of rules and ended up quoting chapter and verse from the wrong page of the book. Donato was rejected without hope of appeal and so was prevented from entering good old bastion of liberty, free speaking Britain.

The Labour Party Manifesto links this agency with crime reduction policy in chapter 5 entitled *Crime and Immigration*. “Our borders are stronger than ever” it declares, though it may simply be a matter of piles and piles of red tape that make no sense and simply get in the way. Nevertheless, this “new Border Agency has police-level powers and thousand more immigration officers, 100 per cent of visas are now biometric, and new electronic border controls will be counting people in and out by the end of the year... Genuine refugees will continue to receive protection.” Or not.

In the absence of Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo’s bodily presence, someone read a passage from his book, *Shadows of your Black Memory* (Swan Isle Press, 2007), around about page 84. The voice of a boy describes watching with glee as his Uncle, the leader of the tribe, sparred and jibed with the visiting Catholic Priest whose mission was to impose his superior culture on these poor guys who were evidently stuck in the dark and dismal past. The Uncle’s work was to constantly subvert the Priest’s mission by reminding him to practice what he preached. But the Priest was deaf to his witty reminders and carried on obliviously. The justifications for the Priest’s unwelcome rescue package were uncannily familiar and reminded me, of all things, of the HPC. A man convinced he is right, and employed in a state backed institution excuses himself the effort to think and takes pleasure from telling the other how to live.

Which reminds me, I received a letter from Marc Seale today, replying to the letter I sent following Malcolm Cross’s hearing in which I asked a series of questions about the way the HPC conducts itself. Mr Seale quotes chapter and verse from his big book of rules to prove that I am wrong to raise these questions, and invites me in for re-educating.

Last night at the National Theatre, Alan Bennett’s play, *The Habit of Art*, (in which, by the way, Alex Jennings, who read the part of the CBT therapist in Josh Appignanesi’s play *Therapy!* plays the

actor playing Benjamin Britten in this play within a play) was filmed and broadcast live across the world to thousands and thousands of people. Fabulously rich, layered, funny, thought provoking, intelligent, and mysteriously moving this play sent me off to discover Auden on You Tube reading his poem In Memory of Freud in which so many lines are worth quoting but these especially:

If he succeeded, why, the Generalised Life  
Would become impossible, the monolith  
Of State be broken and prevented  
The co-operation of avengers.

Other lines also reminded me of Therapy! whose most moving scenes come in the analytic session when, between them, analyst and analysand managed to find the truth that Auden puts like this: “to be free is often to be lonely”. And,

But he would have us remember most of all  
To be enthusiastic over the night  
Not only for the sense of wonder  
It alone has to offer, but also  
Because it needs our love...

Literature alone doesn't solve it, of course. Bennett's play was very different from that of Mark Haddon currently playing at the Donmar – Polar Bears. This one tries hard to look directly at Bi-polar madness with the help of philosophy, post-mortem anatomy, and (perhaps) post-modern style. Although engaging in parts, its characters all missed the chance to ask themselves what the hell they thought they were doing. It gave a glimpse of the world in which Sigmund Freud's work was already long forgotten.

In Auden's poem, written in 1939, he could say of Freud

To us he is no more a person  
Now but a whole climate of opinion.

Climate Change, apparently, has already evaporated his wisdom.

At the Dulwich Village yoga class on Tuesday evening two women talked enthusiastically about what they'd learned on the Radio 4 programme “Between Ourselves” earlier that morning (9.am, 20<sup>th</sup> April) in a discussion between Oliver James and Laverne Antrobus. If a baby doesn't receive the right amount of love, they said, then the brain does not develop, and there's nothing more to be done. They went on to explain that this was the reason for Jamie Bulger's murder. Listening again (on iPlayer) Oliver James (who I learned is the son of two psychoanalysts) didn't *exactly* say this, but the general drift of his interventions are easily blown into difficult water in the current climate of opinion.

In a section of chapter 5 (Crime and Immigration) entitled Early Intervention and Preventing Crime, the Labour Party Manifesto boldly state: “We need to do more and act earlier to stop children going down the wrong path. So we will expand Family Nurse Partnerships to all vulnerable young mothers, reducing future crime and behavioural problems. For the 50,000 most dysfunctional families who cause misery to their neighbours, we will provide Family Intervention Projects – proven to tackle anti-social behaviour – a no-nonsense regime of one-to-one support with tough sanctions for non-compliance’. All three major Party Political Manifestos also contain a line about mental health. Labour promise to provide ‘access to psychological therapy for those who need it’. The Liberal Democrats say they will ‘improve access to counselling for people with mental health problems, by continuing to roll out cognitive and

behavioural therapies'. The Tories will 'increase access to effective 'talking' therapies.' The question remains in all cases, however, how these policies relate to the State. In particular, who defines mental illness, who defines the talking therapy, the behavioural adaptation, the cognitive modification, and how the practitioner who delivers this policy is going to be policed.

The Institute of Group Analysis, in the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of their newsletter Dialogue (March 2010) illustrates how the insipid creep of the modern British State infiltrates even (!) analysed minds. At their conference (Can Group Therapy Survive NICE: Examining the Evidence) Glenys Parry and Chris Blackmore presented their findings from what is known in these circles as 'a systematic review'. They were searching for 'evidence' of the 'effectiveness' of psychodynamic group therapy and group analysis, something they described as 'difficult' in the 'deluge of articles picked up by their search terms'. Nevertheless, they were able to conclude that there was, indeed, broad and consistent evidence for the aforesaid therapies, though 'insufficient to distinguish between the various group therapies, and, get this, 'insufficient randomised controlled trials'.

And thus they can conclude; this puts them 'in the position of not being able to make a case for inclusion in NICE guidelines apart from in a combined treatment for personality disorder.'

What do do? Chris Mace 'usefully' suggested that they do a Cost Benefit Analysis on their Group Analysis! Apparently the PowerPoint presentations can be accessed from the IGA website.

Perhaps you too have had experience of doing a systematic review. You will know that it is made possible by the powerful computerised search engines ploughing mindlessly through databases to pick up keywords across disparate fields. The quantity of papers that line up to be read is literally mind-blowing. Each paper, once a pearl of wisdom situated in an agonistic field, is plucked from its context and thrust into such a heap that difference, meaning and value are reduced, mashed and beaten to a pulp and any goodness is utterly destroyed.

Perhaps you too have had experience of learning a poem off by heart, or of learning a part in a play. You will know that it is only possible by constantly going over one text. Could there be two more different approaches?

Auden, again, on Freud:

He wasn't clever at all: he merely told  
The unhappy Present to recite the Past  
Like a poetry lesson till sooner  
Or later it faltered at the line where

Long ago the accusations had begun,  
And suddenly knew by whom it had been judged  
How rich life had been and how silly  
And was life-forgiven and more  
humble.

The whole poem is well worth a longer look - published by Faber and Faber in the collection *Another Time*.