

President's Report to AGM of College of Psychoanalysts – UK on 29 October 2016

In the last year the College has taken some significant steps forward in making ourselves known within the wider psychoanalytic community. Last year I noted the initiative to set up a 'union' for practitioners, an initiative which has now borne fruit in the formation of a Psychotherapy and Counselling Union which includes among its objectives to support practitioners who are struggling individually and collectively against managerial and medical agendas in mental health. This 'union' is small, but we need to keep note of what it is doing, and some members of the College will be working with it at different points. Members of the College, including Bruce Scott who is now stepping down from the Board, played an active role in the other initiative I flagged up last year, which was the first national conference, in Manchester, of the Free Psychotherapy Network. This unusual conference, for which nearly 200 people registered, included a wide range of practitioners who were re-activating an ethos of therapy which is not tied to commercial exchange, to the circulation of goods. The College was also a voice alongside many other professional and user organisations protesting against the government's attempt to turn psychotherapy into a tool for social control in some local offices of the Department for Work and Pensions.

It is important for us to be seen to be speaking alongside colleagues in other organisations, to be part of the political landscape of psychotherapy. However, we have also sought to speak in our own voice, actually multiple contradictory voices as psychoanalysts, and we have had some success with the film project the College helped fund the Freud Museum to make last year. We had a well-attended showing of the four films in Manchester attended by academics, students and school teachers, and had more positive feedback on the films. The translation project for the films is going slowly but is underway. One of the films has been nominated for the 2016 Gradiva awards of the US-based National Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis.

An ambitious research project has also been launched by the College which also keys into the contemporary political landscape of psychotherapy in the UK. This project includes an international conference in Manchester in June next year. The conference, which is called 'Islamic Psychoanalysis / Psychoanalytic Islam', involves a detailed reflexive examination of psychoanalytic theory and practice, and of commonplace assumptions about the nature of the culture in which psychoanalysis developed and which it often replicates unbeknownst or despite itself. There are deep questions here about the formal structure of psychoanalysis, the nature of transference and interpretation, including its commitment to certain presumptions about the role of interpretation and semiotics in its practice, and about the changing content of psychoanalytic theory, the ideas about speech and action that inform the work of each practitioner. The different traditions of psychoanalysis that we bring together in the College will have conflicting approaches to these questions, and some will, of course, argue that the form of our practice is a secular one that does not ally itself with any particular theological content.

That aside, or even precisely because that is a key tenet many of us hold about our work, the question of religious and cultural content and context has to be addressed as a question that has come to the fore in many recent discussions of therapy and attempts to make it more 'accessible'. Many psychoanalysts have attempted to step aside from these questions over the past century, but there has still been much fruitful debate about the role of Jewish culture in the formation of psychoanalysis as such and then of the role of Christian culture as the dominant ideological form to which psychoanalysis sometimes has adapted

itself. Islam poses these questions again, and we will be bringing together psychoanalytic theorists and practitioners from around the world who have written on these questions. We already have keynote speakers and submissions of papers for the conference from colleagues in Brazil, Egypt, Germany, India, Iran and Tunisia. Actually, we have also already succeeded in doing something in this international forum that we have been attempting to do here in the UK.

We aim to keep the College in existence as a point of reference for psychoanalysts who are not members of, or allied to the Institute of Psychoanalysis and the International Psychoanalytical Association. That is, we bring together psychoanalysts of different persuasions who defend the multiplicity and innovation of contemporary practice. But we also seek to maintain a dialogue with those organisations like the Institute, the IPA and its own registration organisation, the BPC. Our three keynote speakers at the conference are all from within the IPA tradition, willing to speak with us about these crucial questions of the interface between culture and practice.

There are clearly political-organisational issues we still need to grapple with. The threat of governmental regulation that spurred the formation of the College, and against which the College played such an important role, also included the threat that some organisations would compromise, give way in the hope that their own power would be maintained under the new regulative arrangements. Now that direct threat has receded, but only for the moment, and we need to be ready to defend our practice again in the future. Instead, the adaptive 'self-regulation' agreed by the main registration bodies poses different, perhaps more insidious threats. Instead of being told to abide by codes of practice, we are being invited to agree with an idea of what is good for us because, it is assumed, it is good for all. We are taking up those ethical questions, prompted by Anne Worthington who is now stepping down as Treasurer, and this should now also be central to the profile of the College.

There are some specific issues we discussed at the AGM last year that we have been slower to act on, and I mention them so they don't disappear into the minutes. There was some discussion about the website, and we have now, thanks to Simona Revelli, who is now stepping down from the Board, freshened up the website and taken on board the idea for an email forum which is now embedded in the website as a members' area for discussion. There was the suggestion last year that there could be a members newsletter and open Board meetings. We have not moved so fast on these suggestions as we might, and I hope that new members of the Board elected at this AGM and participation of members in the website forum will re-energise us to take those ideas forward. We have new members joining the College, but we also need to do more inside the psychoanalytic training organisations to encourage people to join us, and for those who are members, to pay their subscriptions. Many thanks to Bruce, Anne and Simona for their work for the College, we will miss you, and welcome to the new Board members we elect at this AGM. There is work for all of us to do, and some interesting initiatives that we can work with in the year ahead.

Ian Parker