

Cinderella goes to the Ball, or thoughts after the UKCP conference ‘About a Body’

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This article was published in the Newsletter of the Association for Chiron Psychotherapists (AChP) No. 28, 2004, p. 24.

Ever since I started training in body psychotherapy, I've had the understanding that body psychotherapists, including myself, are a sort of Cinderella of the psychotherapeutic world: despised, seen with disgust and disrespect, misunderstood, and having to scrape the barrel of feeling hard done by for a bit of self-respect. I've also had this fantasy that somewhere there is a joint project going on of working towards becoming respectable and accepted. This has meant trying on the glass slippers, in other words: engaging with the stock heckling question from more analytical psychotherapists: 'What about the transference?'. It also meant doing our homework, learning about the theories of the crème de la crème, and generally sorting out our theoretical underpinning to become a solid, watertight, acceptably phrased conceptual framework. As in the story of Cinderella, I imagined myself and others sitting in the dirty kitchen sorting out lentils for a long time until we'd be through with the impossible task. And then, and then: the ballgown would arrive, the coach and horses, Prince Charming...

So when I was asked to advise the organising committee for the UKCP professional conference this year, immediately all my old fantasies woke up again. The time had come, and moreover, I was to help get Cinderella to the ball (which I suppose makes me either a rat or a pumpkin), and be there to witness the magical transformation, the vindication of all the hard work, the acceptance by the powers that be. It was all very daunting and exciting.

I have to say that a lot of my own lentil-sorting happened in the preparation of the conference, and the 'pigeons' who helped me were the members of the conference committee. Their spaciousness and genuine openness and willingness to suspend judgement and freedom from crippling attachments has impressed me no end, and made it possible to put together a conference programme that offered a very broad and truly interesting palette of contributions, and for me to feel truly happy about this. I owe them a big debt for their teaching in tolerance and acceptance and forbearance of my own tendencies to get stuck in enfant terrible attitudes.

So now the magical three days are over. What has happened to Cinderella? Well, she had a wonderful time, and I reckon she was a success at the ball. She was big, and full of life, and radiating her good feelings about herself, and she enjoyed being with lots of people from her own tribe and lots more who were curious about what other therapists do. She even got a bit cheeky now and then ('So where are your glass slippers then, Lady Charming?'). And she felt at times very crestfallen. Because of course Prince Charming didn't turn up for the ball. Because the point is, there is no Prince Charming. Because the whole thing was a fantasy. Because there were no rules of acceptance, nobody who really wanted sorted lentils, no glass slippers fetishists.

If this had happened to me in a more personal context, I think I would have recognised the fairy tale a long time ago. I certainly wouldn't have fallen for the particular belief system in a client! So I am left with a little chuckle at myself. Any of you who share my feelings are invited to chuckle along. And I want to say that I am also left with a lot of relief and feeling pleased.

Because at the end of the day, sorting out all those lentils has been good for me, I've gained from it. Not to mention making the acquaintance of all the lovely pigeons. And I am proud to say that I didn't leave any glass slippers trailing about on any staircases (having learned some time ago that the only result I ever got from that sort of thing was to trip over them and hurt myself falling down the stairs). I kept my glass slippers firmly on my feet, because these are my glass slippers thank you very much!

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