

‘Walking Shadows. Archetype and Psyche in Crisis and Growth’

By Tim Read

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You are taken on a tour. Some of the terrain (as a psychiatrist) is familiar, but other parts seem strange, even bizarre. Yet the familiar is made engaging by your guide, who also reassures with his good sense when the landscape is unfamiliar. *Walking Shadows* takes us on a journey to help better understand intense and extreme mental states, through a bio-psycho-social-archetypal perspective. While the familiar bio-psycho-social is not eschewed, the addition of the archetypal gives another lens from which to understand psychosis and other extreme mental states. Tim Read approaches his subject in a wide-ranging manner, including quantum physics, Plato, Jung and the transmissive mind. He draws on a wealth of experience as a psychiatrist, group analyst, and explorer of the transpersonal, illustrating his material with lively stories and case histories.

The first section gives an overview of what is meant by archetypal and how this can manifest in intensely pleasurable or intensely painful mental states. Read uses the story of the cave from Plato as a metaphor for how we have a limited understanding of reality (enchained within the cave), but yet can encounter the numinous (through emerging into the sunlight outside the cave). He coins the term archetypal penetrance to indicate the degree to which the presence of the archetypal is felt. A state of high archetypal penetrance is characterised by intense meaning, which can be overwhelming – an archetypal crisis – such as delusional mood, or if it does not overwhelm, one that may be life enhancing. Low archetypal penetrance is associated

with lack of meaning. The notion of archetypal penetrance can bring an alternative perspective on diverse intense conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, brief psychotic episodes and serious self-harm, especially where this is unexpected given the history.

Encounter with the archetypal can lead to growth as well as problems. In section two the author considers how growth can occur and the difficulties that need to be navigated. He discusses well-known archetypes such as the shadow and the anima, as well as other perhaps less well-known ones such as Stanislav Grof's perinatal archetypes. Each stage of life presents particular developmental challenges that can be viewed from an archetypal perspective. The advantage of this view is that it can point to the power that can hold someone in a pattern of difficulties, as well as indicating a solution; a way out of the difficulties. For some people, intense archetypal experience can appear unexpectedly, seemingly without reason. Others actively pursue strong experience, such as through spiritual practices. Read points out how this can be helpful, but can also lead to problems where someone becomes addicted to the pursuit of intense archetypal experience.

The final section is devoted to ways of working with archetypes. Read considers mindfulness, the imagination, psychedelics and breathwork. Throughout the book he uses the threefold framework of mind-set, setting and integration to help understand archetypal experience and how to work with it. Successful encounters with the archetype requires a positive mind-set, where the individual wants to learn from the experience; a setting that is safe and supportive of growth, and where there is help to integrate the experience that occurred. The simple framework can help to indicate what needs to be in place, and why things can go wrong. For those of us working with people experiencing intense mental states the book offers some guidance on how we approach our patients, and the qualities of the places within which we treat people. I recommend *Walking Shadows* as a lucid and balanced account of the archetypal in psychiatric practice as well as in wider life experience.