

## **Book Review by Dr Claire Davis**

### **‘Walking Shadows: Archetype and Psyche in Crisis and Growth’ By Tim Read**

**Published by Muswell Hill Press 2014 (ISBN: 9781908995094)**

Tim Read is a psychiatrist with extensive experience in dealing with high intensity mental states. In this wide ranging and accessible book, he draws on his work as a psychiatrist with the Crisis Intervention Service and the Emergency Psychiatry Service at the Royal London Hospital, alongside his training in group analysis and later in transpersonal psychotherapy. The breadth of his frame of reference is evident in the richness of ideas and theories of personal and transpersonal growth that he offers.

The book focuses on the potential for human development through the experience of high intensity mental states. In the first part the author introduces us to the realm of archetypal experiences, described as intense meaning states with particular ‘flavours or tones’. He paints a vivid picture, through numerous engaging case studies and stories, of the range of qualities of archetypal material, and illustrates the concept of a spectrum from the ‘lighter intensifications’ found in the everyday experiences of life and, for example, in the arts, to the more intense and potentially overwhelming experience of ‘archetypal crisis’.

He draws on Plato’s concept of ‘underlying forms’ as a synonym for archetypes and uses the allegory of Plato’s cave to illustrate the relationship of our physical world (the dark world of the cave that is taken as consensus reality) to the non-physical realm of Plato’s ‘form of the good’ or ‘primary reality’ (the sunlight outside the cave). This parable frames the book’s focus on the journey of ‘ascent’ from the world of the cave towards the ‘primary reality’ through encounters with the shadowy world of the archetypes. Read then weaves the work of physicist, David Bohm into the picture which gives weight to the argument against an ‘outdated dualism’, articulating instead a relationship between meaning and matter as two aspects of an ‘all embracing and undivided reality’.

In the second part Read addresses how such archetypal forces affect us and there are engaging discussions both here and in the first part of the book around the themes of mental illness, archetypal experiences and the relationship between the two. The author guides us through case material and argues for the thoughtful and careful assessment which is characteristic of ‘good medicine’, alongside an openness to the usefulness of a Bio-Psycho-Social-Archetypal framework, one that eschews both medical and spiritual fundamentalism. We also find a discussion here of myths, fairy tales and of key archetypal themes such as the numinous feminine and the Shadow.

In the final section, we are guided through a selection of approaches to working with the numinous, including mindfulness and meditation, active imagination, shamanic journeying and holotropic breathwork. Throughout the book, Read returns to the importance of giving consideration to the mind set (the individual's orientation towards growth), the setting (safety and security) and the integration of intense, meaning filled mental states, in order that the experience can be harnessed for growth rather than leading to disintegration and distress.

This book encompasses a huge breadth of ideas that are dealt with sensitively, imaginatively and with humility. It is also an account of a personal journey of discovery and I would recommend Read to both medical and non-medical readers as a balanced and trustworthy guide to this sometimes misunderstood, unfamiliar and inspiring territory.

(Editor's note: this is the second review of *Walking Shadows: Archetype and Psyche in Crisis and Growth*. The first can be found in Newsletter 38)