

Graduation June 3, 2002

What an amazingly rich and diverse group of graduates we honour here this evening!

As I say your names—Robin, Coleen, Patricia, Janis, Penny, Jeri, Larry, Mung-Ling—I am aware that these personal names acknowledge in this room the presence of eight unique persons whose life journey to this point is of unwordable richness.

As their crowning task before graduation, each student is required to write two case reports, a longer one about a client they have seen for 100 hours and the other a shorter study of another client.

This year I have read almost all your case studies. I have been moved by the honesty and high caliber of your work. When writing about a client it is very easy to hit a wrong note, to adopt a knowing and professionally superior tone, to summarize their story, their troubles and their persons in an objective manner: the therapist's own self being humbly left out of the picture. Except that the whole thing is a therapist's confident and foreclosing assertion.

Now all the cases I read had none of this. There was a grace and a luminosity that came from a willingness to express the difficulty and sometimes pain of staying open to the other without foreclosure, without taking refuge in expert clarity or definition. There was no cover-up of the humbling experience of learning from mistakes: the too early intervention, the covert agenda for changing the client, the misinterpretation of silences, the inability to bear silence, the use of silence as power, overeagerness to help, taking offence at not being appreciated and so on. I'm not quoting here. I merely consulted my own practice for the kinds of mistakes some therapists make.

Above all, each client written about was treated as a unique person in the writing and, I think, a *fortiori* in the therapy itself.

I thought our kind of training was shining through. For each of you was invited into a process that was not just academic but you were asked to join with others in groups and do your own therapy with your colleagues. You understand that the path and the struggle is the same human path that everyone follows, that the journey is the same human journey for you and your client.

So we have increasingly been talking about therapy as a piece of life and conversation between two subjects. The client's whole world and your whole world are engaged and may be at stake. Your therapist work becomes an integral part of your own psychological journey and your own moral journey.

In contemporary psychotherapy, this democratic spirit as Adam Phillips calls it, makes possible a liveliness and zest for the work so that all the study and personal therapy have their fruit in a steady maturity and occasional brilliance. This is clear in your case reports. I note with pleasure a poetic touch in your writing, an appreciation of the luminous particulars, utterly missed by generalized diagnosis.

You will be going about your work in a culture that puts its reliance increasingly on chemical interventions. Consequently many who might be your clients, are ignorant of or discount that mode of human life enshrined in our profession whereby people can become agents of their own self-formation and self-understanding in relationship with a living, present other.

Many of the things you have done in your training you'll be doing all your life. May I end by recommending especially that you work hard to find a group of colleagues for mutual support and peer supervision? I think we need this like air and sunshine.

Congratulations and welcome to this work. May the Spirit of love and courage be with you on this amazing journey!

Philip McKenna June 2002