

## CTP Graduation 2015

I recently received my RP certificate online and this led me to imagine what it would be like for you if the CTP Diploma arrived in an email.

I'm sure it would be a significant moment for each of you to see your diploma at last—yet the moment would be essentially private.

So here we are at the annual Graduation. All the faculty here, your fellow graduates are here. Many graduates and fellow students known to you as well. Friends and family join you in this ritual and celebration. The difference is that with collective intention and energy, we have created a ritual. We have signified a special time and place to express together to each of you a collective salute and recognition of your success in the arduous work of preparing to be a psychotherapist.

This ritual concentration and weight of attention should help you ponder as a whole this extraordinary first part of your life as a therapist---to see it whole and honour all the hours of study, all the emotional strain and richness of your four years in the training psychotherapy group.

This ,of course, is not like a graduation from a University which marks the move from study to beginning your career. For you are already therapists in action. You know already how hard it is to stay open to the uniqueness of persons, the vast areas of indefinability in lives and therapy sessions. You know the anxiety about your own preparedness, the temptation to narcissistic domination of troubled people, the fear of being useless anyway... You have also experienced, I'm sure, the

peace and joy of doing your best, listening well, trusting your preparedness and the initiatives you take with great good will.

Letting yourselves be negated and emotionally slapped around by your clients without retaliation is a very hard part of the work. It's also fruitfully disconcerting for the client when their "best shot" is just "material" for the next session.

So the clients you saw last week you'll be seeing again this week or next. It's not then, that this night makes a huge change for you in your work. But apart from significant economic relief, it does mark a moment of summary and thankful reflection on the hard years of training and study.

You might think, from my description of therapy work above, that I favour emotional engagement over the use of intellect and reason.. Indeed I do see a divine hand in my departure from philosophy seminars to spend forty years talking to people about their feelings. And I've made the *History of Ideas* course a place to stir the creative imagination in the service of good therapy.

However when Dante visits the various floors of the other world you can see clearly in the poetry the light from his reading Thomas Aquinas' theology. Nor could I have borne the constant work with the unconscious without the lively attendance of an analytic intellect. One of CTP's founding faculty, Grant Goodbrand, once passionately remarked in a Therafields' marathon "The rational is deep".

So yes, we live and breathe the creative life of metaphor, yes we understand the deadliness of pretentious precision and certitude. We get that psychological concepts have fuzzy edges and contents that,

while marking some knowledge, reveal large areas of our ignorance. Yet reason and reasonableness, while keeping us cautious and humble, urge us on to use well the “good enough” language of ordinary life and the best collaborative theoretical work in our tradition. And in the end we sense the coming together of intellect, imagination, senses and heart in our one human life.

One last theme. We are at the University but not of it. Our school was created without capital by the private initiative of a small group of therapists. Our therapy based on listening to the subject in conversation, cannot easily fit into a medical model of health care. We have always thought of our sessions as a person’s privileged place apart from their daily social and relational engagements. An utterly confidential place, not open to their society.

Yet everything we’ve learned psychodynamically tells us of the critical importance for our clients’ well being of their initial and ongoing relationships and social conditions. So while the therapist at work is not and must not be a social activist or ideologically expressive, our Profession and specifically our **Profession in its modality**, must indeed be ready to speak out to the larger society to defend the dignity of each human person against social, political and economic oppression.

We have been brought willy-nilly into regulation as part of the health system. One consequence is clear. We can no longer live on the social margins. As a profession and as a modality we must be ready to speak truth to power. And the truth must come from our collegial conversations.

And now I turn again to you wonderful graduates of whom we are so proud. I’ve known some of you for many years and all of you intimately

in the *History of Ideas*. I read this year some of your case histories. I found myself thinking –Who could not love you and salute you for your honesty and endurance, your humility and generous spirit? *Noblesse oblige* --- I owe you a poem...

## **Therapy**

The words come fast.

We read the book,

we did our work,

we learned to name ourselves

delusional or paranoid,

split or wounded,

in Foundation times.

We hold our breath

and wait

until the spark of recognition

and communion comes,

reliance on the kindness of the eyes,

the spirit open to

the fullness of the other.

Who'll die first,  
have babies first,  
find true love first,  
and meaning for the Way?

Find God or  
something worthy of your all,  
something to die for,  
something to live  
a whole life for?  
A therapist's life.

So together climb the mountain,  
ford the river,  
master by surrender to the surf.

The strength in fragile form,  
chaos ever near,  
the glorious life  
of any therapist.

Philip McKenna May 29, 2015

