

## **Love is in the Earth:**

*Motley, the 'Mix' and Mediation in bridging cultures  
and dramatherapy practice.*

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## **Love is in the Earth:**

### ***Motley, the 'Mix' and Mediation in bridging cultures and dramatherapy practice.***

In this presentation, I am inviting us to view the Conference Theme of "Bridging Cultures" through the lens of mixed cultural/mixed heritage, which is my own identified position and one which I probably share with a number of other practitioners, clinicians and educators. I am not presenting a ground-breaking presentation or attempting to explore concepts that are new. In fact, I feel sure that you may be well aware of much of what I may cover this morning. I am simply taking this opportunity to visit these thoughts and invite you to visit or re-visit them with me. Neither am I presenting this paper in a scholastic or academic manner in order to seek to persuade but rather in the spirit of "questions", "points" and "signs" suggesting ways forward for us all, including myself.

Starting with questions about what we may or may not understand by the terms Culture and Bridging Culture and the light that may be thrown on the answers to those questions from a Mixed-cultural position, I hope to go on to point to some approaches which we may or may choose in the practice and research of dramatherapy. In the course of this journey I shall also be touching on how these questions may relate to notions of and the practical realities of Power or the lack thereof.

I have chosen to call this presentation *Love is in the Earth*, identifying Love as the desire to seek mutual nourishment by growing together, and I will be suggesting that it is a major integrating factor in bringing cultures together in grounded practice, which is symbolized by the Earth – the basic, primary, heritage of all peoples and cultures. As we go along I will stop to provide space/time for you to have your own personal individual reflections and for this purpose I have come with small objects, which, in keeping with the theme I am presenting are drawn from nature and the sea, paper and pastels etc. which you may use freely as you please.

## **Culture**

In approaching an understanding of Culture, I found a useful pointer given by Robert Hewison, the critic and cultural historian, in the introduction to his book *Culture and Consensus* (1997, where he suggests that

A society's culture – which is an active process, not an inert collection of objects – supplies the medium for the interaction between the real and the imaginary, the historical and the mythical, the achieved and the desired, that constitutes the daily management of the social consensus. Culture shapes the context in which other social practices such as economic activity, politics and litigation take place.

(Hewison, 1997, p xv)

So, then, the next point would be that the culture of any individual would in part stem from the culture of the society in which that individual experiences life and would not simply be an expression of personal or social identity, it

would *be* that identity. I say, in part, as our own personal sense of who we are is also a matter of internal as well as external experience. We may relate to ourselves and “know” ourselves through various filters and models – psychological, genetic, biological, spiritual, racial, political and so on. Which models are prioritized in which cultures have their own influences on who (or what) we perceive ourselves to be. To add to the mix, there are also various degrees of experiences – external and internal, material, emotional and spiritual – through which we experience ourselves as being who or what we are by and through which we relate to others.

If we follow this last point through we could begin to see every experience of life, every moment of our days and every position we hold as being part of a mediation process between ourselves as individual beings and this wonderful experience with we call Human Existence within the contexts of the culture/cultures in which we live daily, some of which we identify with as “ours” and others as “theirs”. Subsequently, then, we tend to find ourselves separated and divided. This, in turn, leads to a need for “us” to communicate with or relate to “them”. The tighter, more authoritarian and more highly institutionalized cultures that have a greater tendency towards Zero Tolerance of the Other, the separation and division, as we know, can reach proportions approaching what we may be tempted to call institutionalized paranoia. In the extreme examples of such societies we have witnessed throughout history grotesque examples of bigotry and genocide wherein the Earth no longer exists for all humans but only those most in line with the prioritized cultural characteristics

In those cultures which are not so tight and authoritarian there still exist stratification and categories of “Us” and “Them” which are reflected in various categorical statuses of economics, property ownership, education, - the rich/poor, the represented/the unrepresented, and to bring the binaries closer to our own working practice – clients/therapists, the well/the unwell; and underlying all these binaries lies that of the prioritized/the marginalized and the powerful/powerless. It may be an Utopian truism for me to suggest that the more multi-cultural the society may be the more acceptance and inclusiveness there is the more loving the society is capable of being – remembering that I am identifying Love as the desire for the mutual nourishment of ourselves and others together.

I wish to turn to Robert Hewison again and agree with him in a large part when he says that:

A plural society would be a better guarantee of collective liberties and a closer reflection of contemporary realities.....not a “welfare state” but a commonwealth in which individual and collective responsibility would seek to reconcile self-interest with public interest.....This can only be generated by genuine citizens – not subjects, clients or customers  
(Hewison, *ibid*)

## **Motley**

Perhaps it would be useful at this point to consider any precedents that we may find in literature, theatre or history that may embody challenges to and questioning of the status quo in established cultural forms. I suggest that we can find them in Jesters, Fools, and Clowns – the wearers of motley. I will be referring now to some material that I covered in my paper *Motley Crew* I delivered at the BADth Conference in 2006. I shall only be selecting some parts of that paper. Anyone wishing to look at it more closely can access it on my website ([www.brucehowardbayley.co.uk/dramatherapy](http://www.brucehowardbayley.co.uk/dramatherapy))

The actual motley garment made of a multicoloured fabric of mixed threads seems to have emerged in England in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century and became the recognizable costume of variegated colours – made up of partly-coloured patches or diamonds – worn by the professional Court Fool or Jester. Hence, the term “motley” comes to be used for the Jester or Fool as well as the clothing. It also comes to mean the making something more diverse and varied or discordantly composite. Rather than representing a state of fragmentation or chaos, as it has often been interpreted, I suggest, it represents a state of being which contains multiples within a whole. It also has a sense of marking the wearer as someone who is apart from everyone else, someone with a particular sort of function to fulfil.

One of the earliest stories of a “man in motley” is, of course, the Old Testament story of Joseph, whose father, Jacob, gives him alone out of all his sons a “coat of many colours” which set him apart from his brothers who are envious of him and attempt to kill him. That particular story has a happy ending. Joseph survives and goes to Egypt where his personal and special qualities bring him social and political advancement.

A many-coloured or motley coat is also worn by members of a Bengali religious sect in North West India, called the *Bauls*, who live outside social recognition and who are widely known for their peripatetic life-style and folk music called *Baul-gān* (Baul Songs). Bauls make a living out of performing street-songs and creative arts that were originally combined with the quest for inner knowledge. A famous Baul song runs:

My brother, O, my brother, I have become a mad-cap Baul.  
I do not obey any master or order.  
Man-made distinctions don't affect me.  
I dwell in the joy of love that springs forth from my being.  
Love knows no separation, but only the meeting of hearts forever.  
And so I find joy in singing and dancing with one and all.  
That is why, brother, I have become a mad-cap Baul.

The Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore in his collection of essays entitled *Creative Unity* (1922) said of the Baul that being a poet

he also knows that the objects of sense can reveal their spiritual meaning only when they are not seen through merely material eyes.

In *Motley Crew*, I focussed quite a lot on the relevance of the Motley Fool and the uses of the topsy-turvy characteristics of the Clown to the healing dynamics within therapy practice relating issues like splitting and sabotaging and the uses of humour within clinical practice. I here would like to touch briefly on the witness that the Motley Fool may give us in viewing Culture. The Theatre of the Absurd abounds with aspects of the Motley Fool. The work of Beckett, Ionesco and Apollinaire abound with themes of changeability, split identity, apparent irrationality, the flouting of all ordinary cultural conventions which are also present in the Symbol of the Motley Fool. The radicalness of the Theatre of the Absurd calls for a breaking up of the existing order so that we can then begin to rebuild and discover a new sense of reality and spirituality. Eugene Ionesco (1958) put this very clearly:

As our knowledge becomes increasingly divorced from real life, our culture no longer contains ourselves (or only contains insignificant parts of ourselves) and forms a social context in which we are not integrated... we shall have to kill the respect for that which is written..... it becomes necessary to break up our language so that it may become possible to put it together again and to re-establish contact with reality..

Contemplation of the Motley Fool may be invaluable to us in providing us with opportunities to reassess our perceptions of ourselves, others and the world around us. Motley reminds us that the world is not fixed and unchangeable. Motley symbolizes the breaking of rules in order to remind us that human beings made those rules and can turn them around; that culture is something that has been constructed, and can be re-created. We become so used to our images of ourselves that we think of all those character traits as the sum of our individual existence. The Fool holds before us our belief in the authority of horizontal time and of our belief in the possibility of “final solutions”, “sacred values”, prescriptive and predictive outcomes and mocks them, showing us the changeable, multiple possibilities within a cyclic viewing of Time in which what ascends must at some point descend – and that this is actually healthy.

Can the Motley or the Multi-coloured Coat, then, perhaps serve us as a metaphor for a *mixed-cultural* position that is perceived as residing outside specifically defined cultural structures and is often seen as a threat to less pluralistic cultures.

*(I now invite you to take 10 minutes to contemplate or reflect on the concept of “Motley” and what connections you may identify with “Motley” in your own personal lives and the implications that this may have or had in your clinical or other work practices. Please feel free to do this in whatever way you wish – paper, pens, crayons and small objects are available in the baskets for you to use in your exploration.)*

### **Multi-cultural/Mixed-Cultural/Mixed Heritage**

It may be useful at this point to distinguish between my usage and our understandings of the various terms - *multi-cultural*, *mixed-cultural* and *mixed heritage*.

I am using the term *multi-cultural* to describe positions, organizations or groups that include qualities, elements or people of various cultural backgrounds not all of whom may be considered or consider themselves to be “mixed” in themselves. An example of this might be, for instance, the description of Britain being a multi-cultural nation that includes people who belong to a diverse range of cultural communities some of which are in themselves identifiably different and exclusive of each other’s cultures but who are all British.

By the term *mixed-cultural* I am referring to people, organizations or groups that would have arisen out of a mixture of cultural factors that may, for instance, include mixed-race, mixed-religion or mixed-nationality/dual-nationality, bilingual cultures, etc.

Turning to the term *mixed heritage* – is it to be understood as being interchangeable with *mixed cultural*? Does it matter that we are clear about this level of definition? My own sense leads me to use the term *mixed heritage* to refer to those instances where the *mixed-cultural* aspects have a strong historical sense over time. Also, I suggest that within *mixed cultural* groups there may be *mixes* present that are not readily visible or identifiable and to assume that a person of a particular identifiable *cultural heritage* or *mixed heritage* is somehow representative of the *mix* in the identified group has not proved to be useful.

At this point, I feel it would be useful to spend a little time to tell you something about my personal mixed heritage position. Your own positions and experiences will be different and undoubtedly lead you to your own contemplations and reflections.

I was one of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, being born 2 days before Independence in Bombay, now called Mumbai, in the state of Maharashtra. I am an Anglo-Indian. To say that one is Anglo-Indian is somewhat different from saying that one is Eurasian though the life experiences can be largely similar. To say that one is Eurasian is usually to say that one is a child of parents of whom one is European and the other Asian. Sometimes, it can mean that one’s grandparents had made a mixed marriage. To say that one is Anglo-Indian, however, is to use a title over which there has some confusion.

The term Anglo-Indian has been used historically to refer to those British families who settled in India during the time of the Raj and who were more properly referred to as Domiciled Europeans. The Anglo-Indian community into which I was born, however, was the result of mixed marriages - some of which were generational and some of which were untraceable. In John Masters novel *Bhowani junction* that focuses on the fortunes of an Anglo-Indian railway family, the character Victoria Jones refers to her own community as “*chee-chees*” and “*blackie-whites*”.

29% of my DNA is South Indian – with 35% being North European, 34% South European and 2% Middle-Eastern. But this is genetics, merely. I am simply mentioning it to give you an idea of my personal position. Visibly, of course, I am White and, therefore, not usually perceived as being Indian at all. There have been occasions when my relationship to my aunt has caused surprise purely on the basis of the observer's response to the question of skin and eye colour and shape of nose, even though she was my father's natural sister. However, this is to look merely at those racial features.

My family lived for 5 generations in South India mainly in the State of Hyderabad, now Andhra Pradesh, which until Independence was the sole Islamic principality in South India under the nominal rule of the Nizam. My father spoke 3 Indian languages – Urdu, Tamil and Telugu – before he ever spoke English. I, myself, spoke words in Urdu, Marathi and Hindustani before I went to kindergarten where I first learnt English other than Anglo-Indian English, which utilizes a mix of English and Indian phrasings and may be considered to be a form of "pigeon". My ancestry contains within it several mixed marriages. I was never encouraged to think of myself as British and to this day I still identify as Anglo-Indian. While my school education was Christian my family upbringing was of mixed culture and the world in which I grew up was full of elements drawn from a multiplicity of cultures.

I have been merely using my own circumstance as an example of a mixed heritage position which can, perhaps, be considered as containing within it something of the nature of mediation in itself. It can be experienced by each person differently, perhaps as a relatively freeing enjoyment of different cultures coming together within a household or, contrarily, it can be experienced as the source of great pain – particularly when the mix is between cultural groups that have difficulties in tolerating non-conformity with or deviation from their established values – where the individuals "breaking the norm" or the "rule" can be subject to ostracization, marginalization and in some cases, may be denied any individual or social validity within their birth communities.

*(I now invite you all to spend a further 10 minutes by yourself or in pairs, perhaps, to consider where the "mix" might have featured in your life experiences or work practice. It may not have been as visible or dramatic as "race" or "colour" but may manifest as role-multiplicity as therapists or linguistically mixed heritages)*

To knit together this part of the paper, then, we may ask if the term *motley* may be usefully considered as a descriptor of the position of the individual of mixed heritage. Can it also, perhaps, inform us about the mediation of cultural differences by pointing to a collaborative way of being? Can it point something for us in terms of bridge building?

## **Bridging**

I now invite consideration of the other element in the Conference Theme – the image of Bridging. We can, perhaps, vision a bridge as being something that is quite delicate and fragile – simple, crossing a stream, maybe; or perhaps,

one that is an enormous feat of engineering, robust, enormous and structurally complex but beautiful – like the Golden Gate Bridge, maybe. We may vision the bridge as a passage-way, a means of facilitation whereby visitors may cross from one terrain to another; something that enjoins two territories but leaves each territory free to be itself; something that enables but is not itself an invasion of either territory. We may extend this idea of the bridge as a means of facilitation and access to the work we do in therapy – offering a path that the client may use to cross over into other terrains that they have previously not been able to do, or, indeed, a process for ourselves and our clients to explore together a terrain that lies between us.

However, we may also vision the bridge as a means by which invasion of one or other territory may be accomplished by the colonizing forces of a more dominant culture. My own Anglo-Indian cultural heritage has left me very sensitive to the Colonizing-Colonized binary and its ensuing consequences. We may consider the question of whose bridge it is that is being built and in whose interest the bridge building is being undertaken? We may also extend this idea of the bridge as a means of invasion to consider the working cultures in which we practice as dramatherapists; to consider the extent to which clients and patients may be subjected to models of treatment in which they are “facilitated” by being objectified by dominant work cultures in which we find ourselves practising and to consider in whose interest the work is being undertaken.

Drawing these strands together, then – the concepts of Culture, the Mixed-Cultural/Mixed Heritage positions, and the metaphors of Motley and Bridging – it might be well to remind ourselves, perhaps, that there are, indeed, varying practices within dramatherapy - what Don Feasey, a Manchester-based UKCP psychoanalytic therapist, once referred to as a multi-coloured quilt. We need only to consider the variety of models within dramatherapy training and practice – techniques, skills, ways of intervention and different approaches to the dramatherapy Healing Space.

### **The Healing Space**

My own development has led me to a search for a place where spirituality, psychology and politics may be brought together to develop clinical practice that is seen as working with people rather than working on people.

It is, perhaps, useful at this point to consider therapy as providing a healing space that can provide nourishment; a space in which clients feel that they can speak the unspeakable; a space in which that which separates is struggled with in a spirit of mutual nourishment – a collaborative working in which the client is not seen as an object to be worked on but as someone the therapist is working with.

Too often within the health professions, therapy comes to be regarded as something that the client “receives”, that the therapist is supposed to “do” something to the client to “fill in” something that might be missing. In this vision the client/patient, too often, is perceived to be someone that the therapist is working on. I find more and more that this seems to be a dilemma



for therapists when we find ourselves working in what seems to be a solution-based culture. It is as if the medical model of working with diagnoses and solution-based treatments often requires the therapist and client to know before-hand what needs to be fixed. Often it seems that the vision of nourishment is then perceived to be the fixing of the problem, working with what may be the symptom and the process becomes one of achieving the target which then seems, all too often, to be understood as being the removal of the symptom.

When we work within this cultural context we are faced with notions of Health that leave little room for exploration, for the client to discover themselves with a sense of their own integrity. Often in this context, the client's own spiritual dimensions and personal experience are subordinated to a programme prescribed for them as if to providing them with a tool-kit for what is seen as the successful achievement of a healthy state.

In my work with self-harming clients and clients who are struggling with addictive behaviours I find, too often, that the externally apparent alleviation of a client's behaviour is seen as the goal of the treatment. True, the cessation of the behaviour would indicate that the client may not be physically at risk (which is a vitally important development) but all too often it is no indication that the client has truly found the nourishment that makes him/her feel Whole. It may be said, and advisedly, that that is not the aim of the medical or rehabilitative treatment and as therapists we may agree with that position. But as creative therapists we can surely wonder whether this is the essence of nourishment. We may wish to consider whether as creative therapists we may find different bridges to build with our clients than the prescriptive treatment model may permit us. And what would be the integrating factors in building these bridges?

I referred earlier to my identification of Love as being a possible integrating factor – Love being for me the desire for mutual nourishment, the desire to work together for a psychological, spiritual and physical flourishing. This may not at first sight seem like much of a strategy but it requires a notion of Love that is neither romantic nor unrealistic and which sees the work that we do as being fuelled by Love, working through Love towards a mutual collaboration in the development of relationship in which bridges may be built which preserve the integrity of both territories – that of the therapist as well as that of the client. I am not pointing to this as a substitute for other kinds of treatment models but I am suggesting that we as creative therapists not lose sight of this when we are called to work in more prescriptive working cultures.

One area in which working through Love can be grounded in practice (which I have referred to as the "Earth" in the title) is in the context of research. Too often, evidence-based research consists of research on people, again, either as "case-studies" or as quantitative phenomena and, too often, it is found in the cause of promoting or confirming some theoretical body of knowledge or in the cause of economically attractive solution-based treatment. Here again the "subjects" of the research can be treated as not being subjects at all but as objects. One area of research which embodies the identification of Love

as being the desire for mutual nourishment is Action Research – collaborative research where enquiry is undertaken *with* people rather than *on* people. Co-operative or collaborative enquiry is a serious, robust process with action followed by reflection, periods of on-going mutual questioning checking for continuing validity, missing factors, what might have been overlooked, what might be being overstressed, the goal of which is accountability – collectively, co-operatively.

Co-operative or collaborative research or therapy practice would seem to offer a useful and sensitive bridge between practitioners and clients, researchers and the subjects engaged in the collaborative research – a culture of inclusiveness where mediation is not a matter of prescriptive treatment only but a mix based on the desire for mutual nourishment. It is, then, no longer a question of a dominant culture's values and objectives being prioritized and the spiritual nourishment of the client being subordinated or of the integrity of the client population who are the subjects being of the research being marginalized into objects being studied and de-humanized into statistical data. It has something in it of the nature of mixed cultures.

### **Questions of Power**

This leads me on to touch on how the practical realities of co-operative work involve the consideration of questions about Power – how is power held, how is it shared? Where does power reside in the clinical relationship, in the culture of the work place? As therapists are we seeking to “do” something to or for our clients? Are we encouraging our clients to take a passive role and expect therapy to be delivered to them like a package, thereby possibly retain for ourselves a position of covert power which we are not aware of? or are we holding a space in which we look for connection in order to see what unfolds and discover along with our clients their own moments of self-healing, transformation and nourishment or are we being limited by an agenda that concentrates on the achievement targets? How is power used or how is it abused? How is power accounted for?

These are political questions and to a large extent, the accountability of power in our clinical practice is found for us by the Standards of Proficiency laid down by our regulating body – the HPC. Here, already, it may be said, is a dominant culture within which we work, by whom we are regulated. Again, I am not presuming that you are not already aware of the workings of the HPC but as my exploration in this presentation has brought me to the HPC I feel I need to spend a short while saying something about that body drawn from my personal experience.

Some of you may know that I have worked as a Panel Partner for Arts Therapy (Drama) with the HPC covering 4 areas of the Council's work since its formation by an Act of Parliament in 2002 – which in itself may be seen as the act of a political authority. However, the HPC, it is a partnership of sorts. For all its apparent bureaucratic image of state authority it works in partnership with the Partners who are drawn from members of the lay public as well as from representatives of the various professions. The HPC cannot

carry out its functions without this partnership and without consultation from time to time with the professional bodies.

However, the HPC's mission is not the development of the practice of therapy. Neither are the processes of co-operative and collaborative therapy and research the domains of the HPC. They are still within the domain of the profession. The HPC's mission is the protection of the public against potential abuses of power as well as the safe-guarding of practitioners' standards. Here, however, while we can see a state regulator working collaboratively with the professions certain political questions may be raised as to the nature of the "fit" of the HPC to creative arts therapies. But a truly co-operative and collaborative culture can also be a critical one – in fact, I would even contend that it needs to be – and there may be some appropriate questions we can still ask. I have from time to time, been faced with these questions from some dramatherapists and it may be useful to share them with you here. I must confess that I don't actually have the answers. I am simply taking the opportunity to invite consideration of them.

Is it appropriate that the work of creative arts therapists, which is arguably related to the work of psychologists and psychotherapists, is seen as being measurable and monitor-able in the same way as health professionals who work in more tangible areas of physical health? Or are there sufficient differences in the nature and the concerns of the work that we do to warrant different methods of measurement and monitoring? This question is put to me more frequently now as we nearer the intended regulation of the psychologists and psychotherapists and the question has been aired fully in those arenas.

Is it appropriate that a state regulator approves the training and practice within dramatherapy if the mission is not the development of the culture within which dramatherapists work? I have considered this question as being the possible expression of understandable distrust that free-thinking practitioners may have of state interference and the, again, understandable resistance that may be felt in defence of creative integrity against perceived bureaucratic institutionalization. I grant that this may not be the case but that is how I accounted for it. You may well experience this differently.

You may take the position that we are regulated by the HPC, that it is the existing position in the Law, that some regulation is important and we need to work with that reality. It is a position that I very largely am in agreement with.

### **Concluding remarks**

A process where Love as a desire for mutual nourishment is grounded in the Earth of co-operative, Action Research and clinical practice with people rather than on people, a process that puts the integrity of the client and the search for a healing, bridging and sustaining place at the heart of a culture where both the therapist and client may explore together whatever may arise in the client's search for wholeness and in which the client is not regarded as an object for treatment or simply as a passive recipient of some prescriptive

solution-based strategy but as a connecting partner (along with the therapist) in search of his/her own moments of healing, transformation and self knowledge – such a process may lead to a place in which we may see the integration of spirituality, psychology and politics as in a coat of multi-coloured motley.

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