

Remembering Tony Ryle: Roots, reformative experiences and a relational tale

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Introduction:

I met Tony Ryle in 2009 when I was about to embark on a research project to develop an integrated model of cognitive analytic music therapy.

At that time I was managing the Music and Art Therapy department in a high secure hospital. As is so often the case in NHS services, I was under pressure to demonstrate an evidence base - without which the department was threatened with closure.

Tony invited me to his home to help me to think about the theoretical commonalities between Music Therapy and CAT, both of which have their own integrity. Yet to consider what works, how it works and then to develop a pragmatic research framework.

Tony met me at the station in Sussex and he shared his thoughts in a warm and personal way. Having reached his home and met Flora his wife, he suggested that we go for a walk. This was an unforgettable experience that changed my life. He was very patient, kind, challenging yet thoughtful. I suppose as one might expect the most exemplary model of learning from the more experienced other.

Tony passed away just two days before I sent my post-doctoral publication: 'The Clinician's guide to Forensic Music Therapy' to the publishers. I felt sad and unresolved that I had been unable to tell him that the journey that had begun with our meeting, had at last come to fruition.

This book is dedicated to him.

I decided therefore, that whilst the following is a personal story, to recount the following tale because it uses the reformulation techniques that we learn as CAT therapists and it contains some key CAT techniques through the use of the procedural sequence object relational model, (what I would call parallel process) as well as metaphor as a vehicle of change.

Naturally, since it is a personal story there is a level of self-healing in my grieving process for Tony by sharing it with you.

I have used my middle name to recount this tale.

Once upon a time a long time ago there was a little girl called Jeanie who, like many little girls, was crazy about horses. Her Dad would tell her wonderful stories about her brilliant and kind grandfather who sold a horse to the King.

Jeanie thought her dream had come true when she and her family went to live on a racehorse stud farm. This was way back in the day and her new home looked much like something out of the James Bond Movie 'Goldfinger' - (but without the baddies)

She and her little sister were given a donkey on which to learn to ride. The donkey was very old and not very well. He had a swollen tummy and was very stubborn. He would stand as still as a rock, refusing to move, other than in his own time if tempted by a bucket of food.

Jeanie learnt how to coax and cajole this metaphorical mountain into action.

With her little sister they would take it in turns to ride. Together the three of them would perambulate sedately across the fields. They would pass neatly harrowed pastures in which thoroughbred brood mares grazed.

Further on they reached an old stone railway bridge. The railway line and trains had long since gone but the old line still traversed the open fields. A strong post and rails fence separated the mares on one side of the track, from their foals on the other side, (since the latter had been weaned.)

These young colts were the elite offspring of Derby winners, now running as a separate herd like a gang of boisterous testosterone driven youths. They were the equine equivalent of budding athletes. Before them lay either a hopeful or a tragic life depending on how fast they could run and whether or not they could sustain without injuries. Their resilience and passion was what would give one of them the edge to become a winner.

Jeanie and her sister Annie surveyed the bridge and the colts. Then they saw on the bridge an ancient iron railway sign, which read 'not suitable for ponderous carriages'. This made them laugh because donkey seemed to meet this criterion. However with the lack of any real trains to board, they continued on their journey across the line to visit the naughty boy colts.

Later the family acquired a pony called 'Prospero'. His name was taken from the main character of Shakespeare's final Play 'The Tempest'. Prospero the Pony, like the donkey who had passed away by then, was old too. He needed

a good home as he had endured pain and trauma having been caught in wire and made to jump too high. This beloved and kind, but mentally damaged pet, would unpredictably set off at a racehorse pace in a terrifyingly unstoppable manner. Jeanie had to learnt about the extremes between being either stuck going nowhere (on the donkey) or feeling out of control and afraid on Prospero. At that time not understanding the connection that needs to be made in how horse and rider will reciprocate either in fear or courage.

After several falls (in which she always lost her spectacles and for several minutes could neither see nor breathe as the air was knocked out of her lungs,) Jeanie discovered how to hang on tenaciously and to regain control. She was determined not to give up learning, even though Prospero was far from being the ideal or perfect Pony.

This was to prove important in more ways than one. Her father taught her how to calm her damaged pony's mind.' use your voice, talk to him... ' Listen and feel his rhythm, he can tell if you are anxious, o you must tune in to feel if he is anxious'

(In therapeutic and developmental terms the reciprocity and gentleness of this process is known as emotional containment and entrainment.)

Jeanie was later to give up her aspirations to follow in the family footsteps because Dad said that being a musician had to be a better living than being a stable girl. Her decision greatly pleased her Dad, because he had seen so many sad and cruel things happen with animals. He gained great pleasure by listening to music on the 'record player' and Jeanie enhanced his pleasure when she discovered that she could make her own music.

Whilst this demanded at least as much

tenacity as it had to get the donkey to move -there were slightly fewer disappointments. Jeanie relished her new role in which she 'tried to please' her father as her musical skills developed. She could also retreat to her studies and in her music she expressed all the sadness, loss, trauma, joy and humour that seemed to have occurred in the history of her family – all without having to tell anyone with words.

All these significant experiences came back to this little girl much later in life when she had found her calling in discovering how certain ways of making music could have a positive impact in therapeutic treatment. The right sorts of music could change the responses and ways of thinking and behaving of mentally disordered offenders; men and women who had done very bad things and yet sought some form of redemption.

Jeanie subsequently went to a university where a King had once fought a duel. There she learnt more about mental health and psychological treatment and she met three amazing old wizards, all of whom inspired and influenced her:

Professor MacD demonstrated that for all the discoveries in the field of psychodynamics and the unconscious, within the researcher there is always an autobiographical component: for example Freud discovered the Oedipus complex having remembered and 'recognised' how erotic feelings had arisen within him at too early an early age when seeing his mother undress whilst the family were travelling on an overnight train. He then discovered in the case of the 'Ratman' the 'transference' in which he had become the symbolic father figure to this traumatised soldier.

Wizard number two was Dr John of the divining tree Birtchnell. He had spent his whole life turning into numbers and devising a way of measuring how

people relate to others. Based on Bowlby's attachment theories this now statistically valid and reliable measure quantifies eight qualitative domains of positive and negative relating in which closeness and distance, upperness and lowerness traits can be identified.

Then there was Tony Ryle whose pragmatic relational approach made total sense: and here we return to a stud farm.

Tony offered to help Jeanie to develop the evidence based for a CAT model of music therapy for use in forensic psychiatry. Jeanie had taken up a post in the NHS. This Institution was perceived generally as rather old fashioned in its institutionalised pace and therefore might be likened to the donkey in character. But also to the pony Prospero in the sudden and challenging demands that had to be met in order to avoid feelings of total annihilation.

Tony invited Jeanie to his home, which to Jeanie's surprise was right next door to a thoroughbred stud farm. He then suggested that they walk round the perimeter - during which he challenged her on her clinical thinking towards developing and implementing a research proposal which focused around the meaning of non-verbal communication in CAT and Music Therapy.

Jeanie was transported back in time. Together they passed a post and rails fence behind which were some mares. She took one look and said (rather too knowingly) 'those are brood mares'. Tony was mildly surprised - and asked 'how do you know that they are ' brood' mares?

Well ...as CAT Therapists we know that we learn ' from the more experienced other' and Jeanie's childhood had been surrounded by horse experts- namely her parents. So she explained briefly that brood mares (in foal) look

wholesome and are generally calm, and they must be kept separate from the older 'barren' mares.

Jeanie's real time project was also in its gestation period and would require at least as much tenacity as her childhood had taught her by which to ensure that she didn't fall off. She did get injured and yet was determined that this would not become a 'barren' land.

Together she and Tony continued their perambulation across a Heath, crossing a marsh via a little wooden bridge into new territory- all the time exploring theories of that are common to music therapy and to CAT.

From then on over several years Jeanie would occasionally email Tony to report on an update, pitfall or a hurdle overcome. Always he would respond like the positive encouraging father figure, who not that long before in Jeanie's real family life -she had lost.

She knew however not to forget the power of the Transference as a potentially healing experience when making links between the object relations of her childhood and the differences in the present time. Thus, thanks to Tony many patients are able to live a bit more happily ever afterwards with an additional intervention towards their recovery.

Postscript

After our walk we dined and drank lots of whisky.

That night I had a nightmare in which I was in charge of a pick truck- like an AA rescue vehicle (which I thought might represent my department.) In the

dream I was near my home driving up a narrow hill but two men in black were blocking my way.

In reality it transpired that there were many obstacles to overcome, (represented by the men in black) in completing the research project and it truly was a team effort in which relationship building was crucial.

So the dream highlighted the power of the unconscious upon, if we reflect, we may be prepared for what lies ahead.

A dedication with thanks to Tony Ryle and all the Patients who found repair and reconciliation in Cognitive Analytic Music Therapy

PROSPERO ACT 5 The TEMPEST
by William Shakespeare

*Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
And what strength I have's mine own,
Which is most faint. Now, 'tis true,
I must be here confined by you,
Or sent to Naples. Let me not,
Since I have my dukedom got
and pardoned the deceiver, dwell
In this bare island by your spell,*

*But release me from my bands
With the help of your good hands.*

*Gentle breath of yours my sails
must fill, or else my project fails,
Which was to please. Now I want
spirits to enforce, art to enchant,
and my ending is despair,
Unless I be relieved by prayer,
Which pierces so that it assaults
Mercy itself and frees all faults.*

*As you from crimes would pardoned be,
Let your indulgence set me free.*

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