

Miller Mair

14 May, 1937 – 9 June, 2011

Professor JMM Mair, known universally by his middle name Miller, was a pivotal figure in the development of psychotherapeutic theory and practice in British clinical psychology in the second half of the last century. He was still elaborating and deepening his and our understanding of the field when he died suddenly and unexpectedly on 9th June.

During the sixties and seventies the assault on rigid authority characteristic of the times took the form in clinical psychology of a reaction against the dominance of conventional psychiatry and a challenge to the dour hegemony of behaviourism in psychology generally. A particularly important strand of this movement was the liberating, humanizing and yet still scientifically viable influence of Personal Construct Psychology. PCP was introduced into British clinical psychology principally by Don Bannister, closely aided and abetted by Fay Fransella, Phillida Salmon, and Miller himself. Miller and Don collaborated closely and indeed became very close friends, co-authoring *The Evaluation of Personal Constructs* in 1968.

Clinical psychologists at that time were not trained in and indeed largely not expected to practise psychotherapy, and it was Miller's energy and initiative which, in order to address this lack, set up the Psychology and Psychotherapy Association in 1973. Now withered away, this organization was important to many of us in offering a framework in which to talk, think and write about theory, practice and training in psychotherapy. Its newsletter, *PPA Forum*, of which I was the first editor, gradually morphed into what is now the *Journal of Critical Psychology, Counselling and Psychotherapy*.

While respect for PCP and its creator George Kelly always lay at the heart of his approach, Miller was not restricted by their authority, not squeezed into a 'school', but embellished and elaborated the therapeutic possibilities he sensed within them. He loved and was fascinated by language and the avenues for therapeutic com-

munication it offered, and he used it himself to wonderful effect in his writing and the many talks he gave. His 1989 book *Between Psychology and Psychotherapy* was subtitled *a poetics of experience*, and this theme recurs throughout his extensive written and spoken work. He saw therapist and client as reaching towards understanding through conversation and metaphor, through engaging with the 'community of selves' of which they were personally constituted, and through striving to 'tell stories' that would illuminate the conditions of their lives (not convenient postmodernist 'narratives', but means of expression that grope, like poetry, toward revealing truths that can be reached in no other way). Anyone who heard Miller speak is unlikely to forget the quietly burning intensity of his delivery, the deep seriousness of his quest for a therapeutic psychology without dishonesty or professional self-aggrandisement.

Miller was unfailingly courteous and respectful to colleagues (however much he may sometimes have disagreed with their views) and he was part of a wide range of organizations within the field of therapeutic psychology. He was a regular contributor at conferences within the Personal Construct world – he organized the first International Symposium on Personal Construct ideas in London in 1968, and he delivered the keynote address and received a lifetime achievement award at the 14th biennial conference of the Constructivist Psychology Network as recently as July 2010. In between these times he travelled world-wide in response to invitations to speak and teach. He was Chair of the British Psychological Society's Psychotherapy Section 1988-9. After retiring from the NHS in 1997, where he had been Director of Psychological Services and Research in Dumfries and Galloway, he was for a further ten years Resident Fellow at the Kinharvie Institute at Glasgow. In 2001 he was appointed Honorary Visiting Professor of Psychology at City University, London.

Miller grew up and was educated in Aberdeenshire and studied psychology at Aberdeen University before moving to London to train as a clinical psychologist at the Maudsley. After qualifying in 1960 he went to the Middlesex Hospital Medical School, receiving his PhD from the University of London in 1964, and soon becoming Senior Lecturer. He moved to the Crichton Royal Hospital at Dumfries in the mid-seventies to take up the post he remained in until his retirement.

From 1971-2 Miller was awarded a Fellowship at the Netherlands Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences which gave him a much-appreciated opportunity to reflect upon and organize his ideas about the state of psychology and psychotherapy, an opportunity he worked hard to recreate in Dumfries and Galloway for young clinical psychologists who felt the need to break free from the confines of the orthodox, narrowly behavioural approach of the discipline. For a number of years (until 1994) the 'Crichton Course' provided a haven for recently qualified psychologists to develop their thinking and practice in a context that was both stimulating and challenging, aiming at their personal as well as their intellectual development. Now seeded all over Britain, they were for two years 'post-qualification Fellows', selected, and indeed self-selected, not for the award of any paper qualification, but for precisely the kind of opportunity that the programme afforded.

Beneath his quiet, almost restrained manner, Miller was a sociable, warmly good-humoured man whose friends are to be found all over the globe. He turned being a host as well as being a guest into a kind of gentle art-form whereby he really *took account* of whom he was with, of what were their concerns and their likes. Follow-

ing his retirement from full-time work and with the companionship of his wife Ingrid, he nurtured talents that he had not before had time to indulge: for example, painting and strikingly creative gardening were added to his life-long absorption in writing. But his was no slippers-and-pottering retirement. He was until the moment of his death deeply involved in the issues of therapeutic psychology that had concerned him throughout, still elaborating a 'way of knowing' in psychology other than the superficial and the pseudo-scientific, still in conversation with the many people he knew who were seriously concerned with what it is to be a person. All of them people who, like his family, will profoundly miss him.

Miller is survived by Ingrid, by his first wife Katharine, their children Andrew, Imogen and Frances, and five grandchildren. His elder brother Alistair also survives him.

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REFERENCE

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