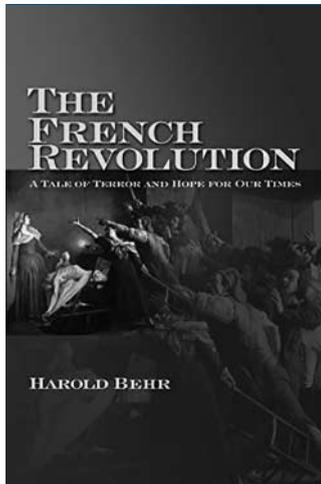


Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode
and Rosalind Ramsay



**The French Revolution:
A Tale of Terror and Hope
for Our Times**

By Harold Behr
Sussex Academic Press. 2015.
£19.95. pb. 180 pp.
ISBN 9781845197032

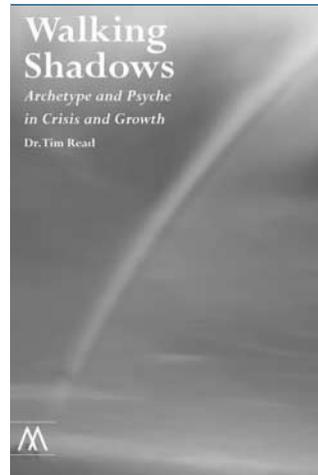
Victor Hugo meets Sigmund Freud (or, rather, S.H. Foulkes) in this engaging group analytic account of the French Revolution. Psychiatrist Harold Behr describes a lifelong interest in this period of history, beginning in his South African childhood and developed by devouring biographies of Maximilien Robespierre, 'the idealist turned monster'. He experienced a growing awareness of controversies and contradictions at the heart of the history and 'decided that the only way to unuddle myself was to pull a few clinical tricks out of the psychiatrist's bag and examine some of the dramatis personae of the Revolution as if they were patients. This would force me into empathic mode by investigating their backgrounds, rooting around in their childhoods and doing my level best to see the Revolution as they might have seen it' (pp. vii–viii).

The book introduces the major characters – Louis XVI, Robespierre and Georges Jacques Danton – and examines their personal history, motivations and role in the Revolution, devoting one chapter to each: 'The Scapegoat King', 'The Mind of the Fanatic' and 'The Passionate Opportunist'. The rest of the book is then organised thematically, covering groups, violence, leadership, paranoia and myth. This structure means that there is some repetition of historical events. However, despite this and the chronology provided at the start of the book, I found it rather difficult to keep the whole story of the revolution in mind. The episode which most sticks in my memory is the failed escape in 1791 by Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette and their family from house arrest in the Tuileries Palace in Paris. The king – who would be executed as a tyrant 18 months later – was so relaxed about his flight that he excitedly traced the route on his map and – in a rather touching, childlike manner – waved to 'his people' from the carriage.

Zhou Enlai's circumspection that it is 'too soon to say' what the significance of the French Revolution is has been widely quoted and Behr does not resist the opportunity to follow suit. This interesting book has stimulated me to think more about groups and leaders, which can only be a good thing – but who knows if we will ever fully understand the significance of the times in which we live?

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**Walking Shadows:
Archetype and Psyche
in Crisis and Growth**

By Tim Read
Muswell Hill Press. 2014.
£17.95. pb. 362 pp.
ISBN 9781908995094

Walking Shadows is an unusual book. Tim Read is a clinical psychiatrist who has had a psychoanalytical training and he has thought deeply about his own and his patients' lives. The subtitle made me suspect that I was in for something weird, but I was wrong. It is a fascinating journey into the irreducible mystery of human existence in which Read asks us to suspend our contemporary demands for empirical evidence and nurture a sense of openness to the mind's 'knowledge'. He takes the term archetype both from Plato and from Jung. Plato's archetypes were universal principles or essences, such as beauty, from which the world derives its visible form and meaning. In his parable of the cave, our world of sensation and experience is nothing more than a shadow reflected by the deeper reality of forms, ideals or archetypes. Having an archetypal experience means we walk up and out of Plato's cave into the dazzling light of reality. In the Jungian tradition archetype describes a deep, interconnected order of mind that is accompanied by extreme intensity of meaning. Self is described as Jung's 'God term' and as something akin to Plato's form of the Good. It is the underlying reality to all being and connects us in some fundamental, unconscious way. It is the 'primal unity from which archetypes flow'. Thus, it is distinct from the ego or personal self. The ego helps us mosey along day to day and keep busy enough to avert our 'gaze' from these unbearably intense, collective depths. This is a deceptive calm, however, as the ego pits itself against Self.

If you are keeping up, this is where it gets interesting. Read describes archetypal experiences breaking into our mental life, usually in states of personal crisis or deep meditation, but sometimes unbidden. As the ego loses its battle against Self, an 'archetypal crisis' ensues that can be overwhelming, in either an intensely positive or negative sense. How we negotiate these crises leads to growth or devastation. And I mean devastation – the general reader needs a strong stomach to take in what Read's patients do to themselves when the outcome is destructive. Archetypal crises may last minutes, hours or days, but are regarded by Read as glimpses of the fundamental nature of reality. Thus, they often lead to a re-evaluation of one's life and its meaning. Read is fascinated by the idea of growth – what does it mean, when is it profound or superficial, and why does it matter? Is it our ability to experience Self unshielded by the ego and thereby grow to a new understanding of what it is to live fully? He interprets these crises in psychoanalytical language as processes in which the ego recedes and Self beckons from a deeper order connecting us all. Such numinous experiences evoke a sense of awe or terror and have enormous intensity of meaning. One has just walked out of Plato's cave into the light. Thus, how this fundamentally disorienting experience is navigated is crucial to