Obituary, David I. Tresan, 1937-2016

I’m honored, and saddened to write an obituary of our treasured colleague, David I Tresan, M.D., who died October 28, 2016. David was a man full of passionate feeling with a brilliant mind who encouraged individuality, creativity, and self-expression in all those he taught, analyzed, befriended, and touched in his full and rich life. He fought cancer from December 2013 till his death, fighting as he lived his life, going deeper and deeper into layers of understanding and possible cures. Always the physician as much as patient, he would not settle for simple answers. He saw patients until his death, sharing about dying. Tresan would remind his loved ones: “It’s all a mystery”... “you don’t come to the essence.”

He was born in Memphis is 1937, the oldest son with two sisters. He married Sandra in 1962. They had three sons. Each speaking at the funeral connected to a passion of their father: for the eldest, the love of animals particularly dogs. (1) For the middle, David’s ardor for the outdoors, hiking, camping, fishing. And, for the youngest, a college professor of philosophy, David’s endlessly curious and questioning mind. Psychiatrist, philosopher, author, musician. He played the clarinet for 30 years for the Bohemian Club Concert Band and participated regularly in Chamber Music Workshops at Chico and Sacramento State.

David’s contributions to the Jungian community were enormous. He joined the San Francisco Jung Institute in 1974. He was known as the analyst’s analyst, treating many candidates for decades. He served on committees, including the Board of Govenors and often negotiated complicated decisions through his understanding of philosophy and literature. On the Scientific Program for the 2013 IAAP Conference in Copenhagen there he gave a break-through talk on Jung’s ambivalence about faith and his misunderstanding of Abelard (Jung, CW 4).

His range of curiosity was wide, philosophy, literature, history, science. Tresan delved into Kabbalah, Eric Voegelin, Bernard Lonergan, Xavier Zubiri, and Wilfred Bion, relentlessly examining the human mind. After 1996, when Tresan wrote *Jungian metapsychology and neurobiological theory* (2), Joe Cambray acknowledged, “David was the undisputed
groundbreaker for bringing the concept of ‘emergence’ to analytical psychology.” In his continued search for the unseen measure of Solon (640 to 558 BC): “It is very hard to grasp the invisible measure of the mind, which alone possesses the bounds of all things,” (3) David embraced the work and friendship of the physicist, Harold Atmanspacher in his next to last published article, ‘A structural-phenomenological typology of mind-matter correlations by Atmanspacher and W. Fach.”(4)

His collected works encompass two volumes of published articles, book reviews, and unpublished public lectures. Following two major works, the 2004 paper, This New Science of Ours: Consciousness and Transcendence, part 2, (5), and Thinking Individuation Forward (6), Tresan was called to task by Angela Connolly for his embrace of long term analysis. He responded with his usual heart filled mind, quintessential David Tresan:

“Ground rules of analysis include the highest, most tenacious, and most salutary degree of honesty, truth-telling, caring and loving, healing, and existential grounding that humans can hope for. ... At one time or another the conduct of analysis resembles friendship, mentoring, doctoring, parenting, and priesting, but it itself is potentially all and none of these.” (7)

His final article considers another passion, writing. In On the Process of Writing, he examines his early misunderstandings or mistakes, and concludes with

“writing, thinking, and living were really all equal partners for me,” “I have never written anything of any consequence for me that has not taken me to my knees.” (8)

He embedded in my own psyche that the truly great and memorable therapists love their patients and are not cold and distant. He would say,

“Without truth and love, analysis does not work.” We should remember what David Tresan wrote, “if I know that you love something or someone or that you are truly taken by a certain beauty, it is important that I respect and even, if possible, protect you, your world, your love, and your beauty. (9)
References


(5) Tresan, D. This new science of ours: A more or less systematic history of consciousness and transcendence. Journal Analytical Psychology, 2004, June 49(3), 369-96


Betsy Cohen, PhD. betscohen@aol.com