Grasping the Nettle and/or Brushing the Wing of the Butterfly

Modes and Metaphors for 'Handling' Psyche

JOSEPHINE EVETTS-SECKER

I take as my starting point Jung's intriguing remark : 'learn the best, know the best – and then forget everything when you face the patient' (Jung, 1959, par. 882). I want simply to resensitize certain problems inherent in our training and practice as analysts, framing them afresh through metaphor. The paper is personal and playful, part of the ongoing enterprise to express something of the 'irrational whole by means of imagery', for in Jung's own words, this 'guarantees a far better rendering of an irrational fact like the psyche' (Jung, 1940, par. 81).

The genesis of my paper is relevant to my subject. The title, in the form of a thematic image, came to me as I woke from sleep. The image came, but not the 'about'. I thought of a tired bit of eighteenth-century verse, expressing blatantly the relationship between two of my images:

> Tender-handed stroke a nettle,
> And it stings you for your pains;
> Grasp it like a man of mettle,
> And it soft as silk remains. (Aaron Hill)

There was no play in this. So where did my imagination want to go?

What came to mind was an experience I had years ago when I was staying

in my mother's wooden cabin out in the Rocky Mountains, a few days after she died unexpectedly. There was no indoor plumbing and I had to go out into the night to the outhouse at the far side of the field. I had woken from a deep sleep. As I returned to the house, I was conscious of the moon, almost full, up above the house. I was also aware that as I walked closer, the moon appeared to drop lower, falling nearer to the roof. I was aware that eventually the moon would disappear altogether. I was simultaneously aware that this was exactly what happens in a lyric by Wordsworth, in which a lover goes to see his beloved. The moon 'stood' above Lucy's cottage and as he rode nearer, the moon seemed to descend. Preoccupied with Lucy, he kept the two awarenesses in mind at once. Suddenly, the moon disappears and the poet exclaims:

> What fond and wayward thoughts will slide
> Into a lover's head!
> 'O mercy!' to myself I cried,
> 'If Lucy should be dead.'

Lucy wasn't dead, but she was suddenly lost to his fear. He describes this as a 'strange fit of passion' demonstrating an unusual state of consciousness, a 'fond waywardness' that can serve psyche well.

As I walked back to my Canadian cabin, I was full of my own experience of recent loss and simultaneously conscious of Wordsworth's experience. I anticipated that the moon would soon disappear. With all these awarenesses, I suddenly experienced the experience itself: the moon dropped and I was startled, so genuinely shocked, that I burst into tears. So much anticipation of the experience and yet when it happened, it hit me with all the impact of the unexpected, connecting me with my grief.

I thought also of an experience early in my training. I woke with a very powerful dream about a certain man. I walked to my hour with some apprehension that the dream be 'interpreted' as an 'animus' dream and so diminished. The session was spent, happily, with the two of us knowing and not knowing this, each knowing the other's sense of it, but knowing that it must not be known. It needed not to be apprehended as something known. This is a central problem in a training analysis. Getting the knowledge right is not the real difficulty. It's getting the 'knowing' right.

T. S. Eliot frames a pertinent experience in his *Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock*, when his tormented anti-hero agonizes about the deadness of feeling classified and understood.

And I have known the eyes already, known them all –
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
  And how should I presume?

How can he begin to tell his story, as a live butterfly that has been pinioned, preserved and exposed by the collector. This kind of *fixing* is a real danger in all our psychologies, especially in the making of our case histories. Jung commented on the 'dearth of fully elaborated case histories', being aware that to write a really good case history makes 'the highest demands on (our) descriptive capacity' (Jung, 1948 par. 1138). How can the individual psyche stay alive and flourish, having been captured and presented as 'case'? The problem is still with us.

A third personal experience shaped this paper. When I first went into analysis, I had a goal of symptom-relief . . . I wanted to cure my hayfever. Whilst still very intent on this particular symptom, I had a dream about a windmill. This sent me off to exhaust every tome I could find of its information about the symbolism of windmills, mills and millers, grain and flour. I found it all out and brought it to bear, with absolutely no *efficacy*, on this innocent little dream. It was some years later that I suddenly realized that the dream windmill was the very same windmill that had dominated the valley where I had lived in my early teens. It stood up on a hill and was called the *Cat and Fiddle*. My hasty chase to identify and explore a symbol, as content, had prevented me from seeing this obvious fact. It was a literal windmill I knew physically and not only a symbolic one. Then I remembered that it was in those very years, living beneath that windmill, that my hay-fever had begun; and that the stimulus to the allergy was our new cat. There it was, a simple dream location that reminded me of when my hayfever began and what triggered it. What came with that perception was the very painful memory of my father's final abandonment at exactly that traumatic time. I had destroyed my dream's vitality by following the signals of my education and modes of consciousness that were quite alien to what was needed, playing a game of hunt the symbol! All that acquired information about mills and archetypes of transformation had value, but it had been inappropriately known.

But the sails of this windmill still turn. For as I was thinking about this paper, this dream became a vividly preoccupying day-dream and I felt

freshly energized by the arrival of Don Quixote, tilting at windmills. Even more potently, I found myself singing the nursery rhyme that I hadn't even considered so far!

> Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle,
> The cow jumped over the moon.
> The little dog laughed to see such fun
> And the dish ran away with the spoon.

This is more than twenty years later, but that dream is still unfolding and speaking with relish. I began to see that what was happening was a complete turnaround in the psyche. I am now living in quite a different place, from which I can reject the discipline of *sense* that has formed me, and be fertilized by a *non-sense* that alone can enrich this stage of my life. Jung's profound insight into the prospective nature of dreams encompasses such experience. He points out that 'we are conditioned not only by the past, but by the future, which is sketched out in us long beforehand and gradually evolves out of us' (Jung, 1946, par. 200). We grow into our past dreams. The windmills go on turning and becoming us. 'The imagination reveals to us . . . in striking analogies, what is in process of becoming,' Jung claims (Jung, 1916, par. 494).

With all these bits and pieces, I felt an odd delight, needing this imaginal place where, indeed, cows do very sensibly jump over moons. It is a place, at last, where metaphors can be mixed without academic opprobrium. It speaks of an attitude that I can only articulate in this way, and an attitude that we need, alongside other modes and methods, to work efficaciously with material from the unconscious hinterland.

Jung constantly insisted that life itself is the laboratory in which his new science could flourish. At the opening of his training Institute, he offered 'programmatic hints' at what issues it might tackle and saw particularly rich gains in the humanities, where there was 'a rich harvest to be reaped . . .' (Jung, par. 1140). In this he was in accord with Freud, who says that 'in the field of symptomatic acts . . . psycho-analytic observations must concede priority to imaginative writers. It can only repeat what they have said . . .' (Freud, 1901, p. 272) and what they continue to articulate. Both men wanted to create a place for imagination and art. Jung's own struggle to make what he calls 'our science' credible, by which he means respectable in academe, is with us still, but we no longer need to be so apologetic and find it much easier to concede priority to imaginative artists, at least in theory. I am concerned about this concession *in practice*, a concession to the imagination.

I want to explore a particular way of knowing, a particular form of appre-

hension, that is most elusive and yet most necessary in analytical work. We are accustomed to the ideas of Freud on elucidation and interpretation, and Jung's on confession, education and so on, as constituents of the analytical process and as means to enlightenment. We now have enough experience to assess the value and the insufficiencies of these as techniques. Such mechanisms must and will inevitably be in the atmosphere of our work, but we know only too well the harm that can be done by foregrounding them, by rushing to educate, by interpreting and thereby preventing 'dis-covery'. I want to evoke a complex and elusive form of knowing and foreknowing and not knowing, and perhaps even un-knowing, which are ways we must be willing to know if our work is to be most productive. I may here offer another sense to Samuels' category of 'unknowing Jungians' (Samuels, 1989, p. 7). It can be a peripheral or an expectant kind of knowing, able to anticipate that which is waiting off-stage, in the atmosphere, but which leaves us still utterly open and receptive to the freshness of the happening, as it happens. Our work is full of happenings, because that is the way ego experiences the emergence of unconscious energies.

This is all very unsubstantial, like chasing butterflies, a pastime traditionally associated with children and poets, reflecting a fascination with the butterfly, its intricacy, its beauty, its ephemerality, its vulnerability, its helplessness, its colour . . . all these and more. So let me now evoke the butterfly. Wordsworth was fascinated by childhood, and this is brought into play in his flimsy piece, *To a Butterfly*.

> Stay near me — do not take thy flight!
> A little longer stay in sight!
> Much converse do I find in thee,
> Historian of my infancy!
> Float near me; do not yet depart!
> Dead times revive in thee . . .
> Oh, pleasant, pleasant were the days,
> The time when in our childish plays,
> My sister Emmeline and I
> Together chased the butterfly!
> A very hunter did I rush
> Upon the prey; — with leaps and springs
> I followed on from brake to brush;
> But she, God love her! feared to brush
> The dust from off its wings.

The fugitive creature becomes childhood, and he wants it to defy its own transience.

Wordsworth delights in the moment of delicate beauty while for the moralizing John Bunyan, that is a vain trap. He frames the butterfly as evanescent and negatively unsubstantial, using it as an emblem to preach to children:

> Behold how eager this our little boy
> Is for a butterfly, as if all joy
> All profits, honours, yea and lasting pleasures,
> Were wrapped up in her, or the richest treasures
> Found in her would be bundled up together,
> When all her all is lighter than a feather . . .
> . . . (he) runs again, as one bereft of wits;
> And all his labour and his large outcry
> Is only for a silly butterfly. (Opie, 1974, p. 35)

What folly to chase the insubstantial when one might be seeking the solid reality of heaven, he laments, with some irony!

When Shakespeare invokes the butterfly, it is with a sense of these ironies and fragilities, as when Lear, reunited with his loved and wronged daughter and enlightened by his pain, fantasies a future that captures beauty and sadness.

> So we'll live,
> And pray and sing and tell old tales and laugh
> At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
> Talk of court news. (*King Lear* V.3.13–16)

Folly has become its wisdom; insubstantiality, weight. The wit of life.

It is the ethereal qualities of the insect that make it the companion of Titania, who tells her fairies how to treat the mortal, Bottom:

> Hop in his walks and gambol in his eyes.
> Feed him with apricocks and dewberries, . . .
> The honey-bags steal from the humble bees,
> And for night-tapers crop their waxen thighs
> And light them at the fairy glow-worms eyes . . .
> And pluck the wings from painted butterflies
> To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes.
> (*Midsummer Night's Dream* 3.1.175ff.)

Titania's instructions represent a desire to make the earthbound mortal less gross, more accessible to immaterial reality. This is perhaps the process we need to be fostering in the making of an analyst!

The tendency to assault the vulnerable is part of nature. Our yearning to capture the ephemeral and nugatory is also an archetypal drive. How then do we deal with, *handle,* the butterfly? Like Bunyan's bewitched boy, running

through nettles heedlessly, bent only on catching that which is elusive? Or more crudely, like the boys Shakespeare speaks of in *Coriolanus:*

> They follow him
> As brats with no less confidence
> Than boys pursuing summer butterflies
> Or butchers killing flies. (4.6.14)

Pursuit destroys; to catch the insect is to lose it. The pattern on the butterfly's wing comes from fragile scales that are easily detached, so that the colour comes off on the fingers on contact. Entomologists speak of 'the remarkable resiliency of insects' claiming that 'their short life-spans and tremendous reproductive capacity result in their being extraordinarily responsive to environmental changes that would stress the populations of other organisms . . . they are the dominant life form on earth,' with tremendous power to thrive through adaptability (Imes, 1992, p. 6). Butterflies can detect various degrees of light and experience taste, smell and touch through chemosensory *setae*, and perceive sound through phonoreceptors. Colour is the butterfly's camouflage in its natural habitat; aesthetic and functional. We should not undervalue what might seem nugatory.

In his eighteenth-century collection of *Fables*, John Gay asks, 'And what's a butterfly? At best/He's but a caterpillar,' (1.xxiv.41) but a transformed grub. The association of the butterfly with social or intellectual giddiness brings it into bad repute with those who have not learned Lear's wisdom. Gay's response represents the rational world view of the Enlightenment that darkened so many minds, one of its most serious effects being its contempt for wonder. Such delight as seventeenth-century writers like Thomas Browne found in the natural world with its 'prodigies,' or Wordsworth's a century later, is quite lost. However, there was a resurgence of this wonder, allied to scientific purpose, in the evolutionary work of nineteenth-century Darwinians, a wonder captured in the twentieth-century novella of A. S. Byatt, *Angels and Insects,* which is full of passionate evocations of butterfly textures.

The voice that disapproved of wonder before a mere creature has bullied our educational system. We hear that voice as poets have wrestled with it, right into our own century. D. H. Lawrence struggles against it in *The Snake*, where he comes to his water trough on a hot Italian morning to find a snake drinking there. Transfixed by its splendour, he is honoured to share his trough with what he responds to as 'one of the Lords of life'. But his natural awe sits too close to the fear instilled in him by western culture. But he does

go out to engage with the majesty of the creature, caught up in its archetypal force.

> He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do,
> And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do,
> And flickered his two-forked tongue from his lips, and mused a moment,
> And stopped and drank a little more,
> Being earth-brown, earth-golden from the burning bowels of the earth
> On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna smoking . . .

Despite his awe at this 'king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld', he cannot resist his schooling.

> The voice of my education said to me
> He must be killed,
> For in Sicily the black, black snakes are innocent, the gold are venomous.

Despite innate and numinous reverence, the rational voice gains ascendancy and, though he doesn't kill the snake, he throws a log at it and drives it back into 'the black hole, the earth-lipped fissure in the wall-front'. Then he stares with fascination, hyper-conscious of the impact of his 'accursed human education'. The poem ends sadly, with profound regret and guilt:

> So I missed my chance with one of the lords
> Of life.
> And I have something to expiate;
> A pettiness.

This is perhaps the most terrible indictment of the system that has formed our knowledge, its methods and its content: that it can be petty. This is my worst fear for our psychological practice: that we heed too rigorously the directions of our training and injure imaginative participation in psyche.

The poet has been robbed and we would do well to heed his urgency. It is very easy for even well-trained analysts to be robbed in exactly the same way by their education, especially when that very training sets out very specifically and consciously to give *official* value to snakes and butterflies. 'Achtung! Serious symbol at work' can so often be the *attitude* pervading seminars, and then the creatures can't accomplish soul's work, because they are too observed, too exposed, too officially approved of and enforced. Symbols are subversive when most alive.

In the blatant still-life *vanitas* paintings of the seventeenth century, we see conventional symbols trudging along carrying their huge load becoming, increasingly, merely semiotic and psychically tired. Seduced by the beauty

and colour of flowers and creatures and the neo-classical delight in the object, painters produced hundreds of still life flower arrangements, in the midst of which we find the ubiquitous butterfly, forced to carry symbolic purpose on its filigree wings. It is poised on the flowers, themselves emblems of decay and mutability. The butterfly doesn't just die after a brief life, like the flowers or fruits on which it alights, for it has already died and been born into a new form, from crysalis to winged insect.

If we linger with the still-life paintings, we can learn more about butterfly consciousness. We need to inhabit the implicit more, for to say the thing is often to lose it; to assert the symbol is to stain one's fingers. This is the problem with such paintings and such practice. They assert self-consciously, in too knowing a way, what should stay an inner, even a secret, correspondence. To make a symbol explicit is to grasp it, confronting us with what the art historian calls, paradoxically, the literal symbol. Interesting, but not carrying psyche's possibilities. A literal, translatable sign or set of signs, no more. Pleasing aesthetically perhaps, but with few, or no, reverberations.

Since antiquity, images of the butterfly emerged from its pupa represented the soul leaving the body at death, developing the sense of the resurrected soul. And of course, for the Greek, butterfly is psyche, rich carrier of transformation energy. What designed wit in these things. Yet all this is far too laboured to catch psyche. So why do we try so hard? How concretely words trouble us. We are victims of the urge to *handle*, like Mary Magdalene and doubting Thomas, urgent around the risen body of Christ. It is not surprising that Christ discriminated carefully between those for whom touching was expedient and those for whom it was prohibited. To Mary, the refusal, 'Noli me tangere;' and to Thomas, the invitation, 'Handle me and see.'

The gospels claim that whenever Christ was touched there was a powerful registration of it. Even when one woman touched him in a large crowd, he was instantly aware: 'who touched my clothes?' (Mark 5.30). And the cry of faith: 'If I may but touch his garment . . . .' (Mat. 9.21). No more than a *touch*. Think then of the *laboriousness* of so much of our work!

So perhaps the butterfly will serve us well in our training and in our practice, if we learn wisdom in approaching it. What is paramount here is that if we exert too much effort, too much force, too much intellect, too much consciousness, psyche will shed her colour. We come away with stained fingers. How often that happens in an analytical hour! How sad that makes us. We feel guilt at our own violation. For we do know better. And we know too much. We cannot un-know, we cannot become non-conscious of things we have made conscious; but we have to find ways of holding this knowing in

gentle tension with unknowing, suspended knowing. We might do well to keep in mind that image Wordsworth treasured of his sister's 'fear to brush/The dust from off its wing', while he had been carried away by his desire to hunt.

One touches and feels touched by fragile butterfly intensities in many of the later paintings of Odilon Redon. (1840–1916) He loved to paint 'what never was' and claimed that his works were 'not self-defining; they inspire. They determine nothing. Like music they place us in the ambiguous world of the indeterminate' (Q. In Gibson, 1996, p. 23). Elsewhere he says that a title is justified only when 'vague, indeterminate; when it aspires confusedly to the ambiguous' (p. 27). He rejects outlines for similar reasons. 'I feel only the shadows, the apparent depths; all outline is indubitably an abstraction' (p. 23). We might look particularly at the painting, *The Chariot of Apollo*. In this work the dragon has become a fat worm, lying on the grass with butterflies flitting around it playfully. Up above, the chariot of the sun with its flying horses goes about its work of illumination, full of tireless energy and allowing its light to the butterflies below. There are several paintings with the title *Papillons*. These derive from those later experiments with colour, light and lightness, with which we particularly associate Redon. Susceptible to the butterfly himself as artist, he insists that 'The artist . . . is an accident.' Perhaps this ought to be true of the analyst too.

A patch of nettles is also butterfly territory, for it attracts butterflies. How odd that a plant that stings so shrilly should seduce such delicate creatures. The trick is to land lightly, as they do on the leaves. But we are incapable of settling so aerially; even our lightest touch ensures that we are stung. The answer then, is to grasp firmly, for then we overwhelm the stinging mechanism and so are spared.

The stinging nettle, genus *Urtica doica,* is a prolific and ruderal plant, discussed in Herbals and cookery books since the middle ages. They grow in clumps, often in hedgerows, walls and by gates, liking all soils and light conditions, in urban and wilderness habitats. Nettles were used by the freezing soldiers in the Roman occupation of Britain. 'Take nettles, seethe in oil, smear and rub all thy body therewith; the cold will depart away.' They knew its capacity to stimulate the circulation. The nettle was used in beer and soups and stews, as well as in the production of thick, strong sacking material and was considered effective in the treatment of haemorrhoids and provocation of venery, 'a herb that Mars claims dominion over,' both being hot and dry (Culpepper). In Paracelsian medicine, nettles were collected in May when the sting was most strong and so the nettle-water most efficacious.

In traditional usage the plant's name has been metamorphosed to verb, inevitably meaning to be stung, pricked, bitten. One could be 'nettled by love' in 1592, or one might still 'nettle a prancing steed' in 1841. Being nettled is a necessary experience in analysis.

Many of Shakespeare's great souls get nettled, by every kind of stimulus imaginable, and their reaction is the substance of the dramatic action. Sometimes, his mad characters (Lear, Ophelia) carry nettles, rendered harmless, while heroic characters are sharply nettled. Hotspur, aptly, is drawn to this image.

> Why, look you, I am whipp'd and scourg'd with rods,
> Nettled and stung with pismires, when I hear
> Of this vile politician, Bolingbroke.
> (*Henry IVth, Part 1*, 1.3.240)

And later, 'I tell you, my lord fool, out of this nettle danger, we pluck the flower, safety.' Leontes, in *The Winter's Tale* is quite unable to pluck peace of mind from his jealousy, when he thinks that anyone might have 'sullied'

> The purity and whiteness of my sheets
> Which to preserve is sleep, which being spotted
> Is goads, thorns, nettles, tails of wasps.
> (*The Winter's Tale*, 1.2.329)

So Shakespeare registers psychic disturbance.

The nettles in the analytical process might be significant, often painful issues where complexes or conscience trouble us. How do we deal with them? We might land on them like butterflies sometimes. That can be very appropriate. To be there, without obvious motion for a while, reflecting, taking things in. But the real peril is to succumb to the very sensible tactic of grasping to avoid the sting, in laying hold of psyche. To confront an analysand with shadow phenomena might be one way of grasping. But then the pain itself might become the focus of consciousness and the engagement with shadow avoided. Such a confrontation might sometimes be appropriate, but it is more often numbing. When we work reductively, we are perhaps most susceptible to grasping. And of course, this is so often what our analysands plead for, reducing their experience to something manageable. How apt Jung's comment, 'For mankind it was always like a deliverance from a nightmare when the new name was found' (Jung, 1918, par. 14). What a relief to name the thing and exorcise the unknown. Then I don't have to deal with the anguish and chaos of a world in which cows jump over moons and rattle my reason and knowledge.

The reality is that we are not in the business of good sense, comfort or even

of making things better. In day to day practice, it is essential that we feel the nettle. It is dangerous to do as our education has instructed us, that is, be 'men of mettle', grasping nettles boldly, with resolve and goal oriented intention. That is usually the attitude of the heroic ego and heroic therapies. Rather, we must remain 'tender-handed', willing to 'stroke' past the nettle in our accidental encounters. We need to be stung. And such stinging is, most efficaciously, accidental. We don't know where these nettles are, though eventually we begin to guess where they might be. Often at the boundaries, in hedges, beside walls. Stinging is most efficaciously accidental – one might call this the efficacy of the inadvertent.

Let these invocations of butterfly and nettle energize these words: stroke, brush, handle, all phenomena of *touch*. Grasping, plucking and seizing manage to avoid touch. I am associating touch with forms of realization, of making real. Actual physical touch has been taboo in our practice; we are denied much that physical touch might access for us. So how do we *handle* psyche and handle our analysands and their material, as well as our own, by touching and being touched. To be touchable, is to be alive. We are dead when, as Macbeth says of Duncan, 'Nothing can touch him further.' But though the dead cannot be touched, the dead can still touch. When Tennyson mourns Arthur Hallam in a highly fraught lyric, he groans at the end,

> But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,
> And the sound of a voice that is still.

He pleads to be touched by the vanished hand. *In Memoriam* records the experiences, post mortem, of this touch, with its constant metaphors of hands stretching out and even old letters of the loved friend reaching through time:

> So word by word and line by line,
> The dead man touch'd me from the past,
> And all at once it seem'd at last
> Thy living soul was flash'd on mine. (XCI)

The invisible, intangible touch has more power to move than the actual sense experience. Grasping exerts a force that overwhelms a natural mechanism. Psyche always seems to work with Nature, though paradoxically, Jung insists, individuation is a work against Nature. But it is easier sometimes to grasp, to 'take the bull by the horns'. Many proverbs have to do with the way we touch, in order to engage with the world without or within us. There is often a violence in our engagement with the world and with psyche, a violence that we often resort to by naming. We use language to overcome an

insecurity, to solidify an unknown with which we cannot deal. Grasping is often a form of resistance.

Touch is a word with manifold senses and implications in English, absorbed into common usage, hijacked and loaded with special senses in different technical areas. For example, in geometry, medicine, art, rugby; the touchstone tests the quality of gold; it is used in the field of magnetism and is a nautical term for being close to the wind. In communication we keep in touch or lose it; we speak of a trace of some quality, a touch of it; a twinge of an illness, a touch of flu; a trace, a little bit, as in a touch of frost. There was a time when touch was a euphemism for sexual contact. We use the word particularly when we want to hedge or skirt, that is, not engage too directly. To touch is to bring into mutual contact. We are familiar with the practice of 'the King's touch', the healing contact with a divinely appointed monarch. The laying on of hands is a universal gesture of transmission. Today, it seems that we appreciate the efficacy of lightness of touch over more aggressively interventionist modes in massage techniques such as 'healing touch'. Touch is light but potent. Interestingly, we call the fuse made to ignite an explosive the 'touch-paper'. The merest touch is needed.

We are dealing with contact issues, with an engagement that is tangible, palpable, tactile, that needs to be highly differentiated. Metaphorically, the gesture enables us, in its tentativeness, to call upon the allusive, the referential, the slight. Physiologically, we are endowed with touch cells, 'minute bodies of connective and nervous tissue occurring in the skin of the hands, feet, lips and other parts', also called 'tactile corpuscles'. These are psychic potentialities too, and the problem for a Jungian training programme is how such mechanisms can be mobilized. Can we develop a pedagogy in which such capacities can be nurtured without being schooled or examined? Need I say more than enunciate the problem? Jung was certainly aware of it. Perhaps all we can do is to sensitize trainees to such a modality, and to place our trust in it in actual practice, to give it value, to encourage response. We can learn to rub the lamp, but we cannot make the genie come.

It would seem to be an archetypal constraint, to want to make contact with *mana* persons or objects. We find Old Testament prohibitions about touching that can contaminate. There can be intra-psychic and inter-psychic negative influence too. There are so many ways in which analysts touch their analysands; so many ways in which the analyst is touched; so many ways in which we must stay open to this touching, and work with it. These are ways in which we handle psyche. It is largely through metaphor and symbol that we find a suitable modality in our *praxis*.

In the myth of Danae, the consuming touch of the god permeated stone walls, deep in the earth. This touch can penetrate any barrier; a fertilizing touch that creates new life, thwarting a father's defence without the merest hiccough! No force needed to break through. Zeus often worked so. Io was also fertilized by the mere touch of the god and her child was called Epaphos, that is, 'he of the touch'. There are, of course, other myths of Zeus' snatching and raping: Persephone, Europa. But we are concerned with another kind of impingement, creative and almost imperceptible. There is no lovelier evocation of this moment when the god's touch permeates the human soul, than this medieval lyric:

I syng of a mayden pat is makeles
Kyng of alle kynges to here sone che ches.

he cam also stylle per his moder was
as dew in aprylle pat fallyt on pe gras.

he cam also stylle to his moderers bowr
as dew in aprylle pat fallyt on pe flour.

he cam also stylle per his moder lay
as dew in aprylle pat fallyt on pe spray.

moder & mayden was neuer non but che –
wel may swych a lady godes moder be. (Brown, 1962, p.119)

Dew-drops land on flowers, on grass, and on a human recipient, with amazing consequence. Often, the most crucial psychic events are imperceptible, only known by their effects. I remember a moment like this in the analysis of a woman in her sixties who had been struggling for months with painful issues. I was concerned about the strain, for she did have a heart condition. I wasn't sure whether I should try to deflect energy elsewhere, but decided to let things be for a while longer, waiting to see what would happen in the next hour. My office looked right into the branches of a large poplar. It was autumn and the golden leaves had fallen. She gazed with fascination at a single leaf that was holding on, at the very top of the tree. I followed her gaze and saw what I realized I had in fact already seen without noticing. We sat together looking at it, saying nothing. I don't know what happened in her inner world as we sat transfixed by this thing. After some time of silence, she turned back towards me and smiled and started to talk. Something had shifted. Something in her had let go and this had somehow created a new attitude. It was an unspeakable experience. In her case, as in Danae's, the barriers around her soul had been put there by a violent father; but the

golden rain fell where it must. It touched her through her imprisoning walls and it touched me in transit. We must all have such experiences that defy classification. They must not be grasped or they simply lose colour and leave our interfering fingers stained.

A fairy tale that moves me is Grimms' *Jorinda and Joringel,* perhaps because it challenges my interfering fingers, to lighten their touch. In the beginning, a young couple, recently betrothed, walks out into the forest, touched by melancholy. 'They were as sad as if they were going to die.' This is not depression like Aschenputtel's. A sadness touches them that remains quite mysterious and undiagnosable. Jorinda weeps and Joringel is helpless to assuage her tears. She needs to be alone and goes off with Joringel's warning in her ears. But of course, Jorinda needs to fall into the hands of the witch, which then necessitates Joringel's solitary journey. But first,

> he walked round and round the castle, but not too near it. At last he dreamed that he found a blood-red flower, in the middle of which was a beautiful large pearl; that he picked and went with it to the castle and everything that he touched with the flower was freed from enchantment; he also dreamed that by means of it he recovered his Joringel.

This dream directs his search for the flower and his return to the castle. When he approached the witch with the flower,

> she could not come within two paces of him . . . (then) Swiftly he sprang towards her, touched the cage with the flower and also the old woman. She could no longer bewitch anyone; and Jorinda was standing there, clasping him round the neck . . .

The tale counsels tenderness of touch in order to open fortified castle doors, to free birds from stone and to release maidens from paralysis. It would seem that the more concrete the prison, the more gentle the release needs to be. But before that touch, we need to 'walk round and round . . . but not too near.' This is very wise counsel.

This kind of touch feels utterly appropriate. In it lies a particular kind of strength. It is a touch that is often called for in analytical *praxis*. And yet, simultaneously, the constant need of the analysand is for very firm *holding*. The confidence, or lack of it, with which the infant is held will shape and form its sense of self and world. This holding must be operative in the analytical bond. But what is the holding of the 'mother' really like? We speak of it so glibly, as though we know. It is indeed a mysterious thing. It comprises both firmness and strength, and the delicacy of touch that I have been evoking. It

must not grasp or grip. But it must be confident enough to convince of security. It seems to be both tough as iron and as gentle as Titania's aerial things. The mother's holding might also relate to her 'fondling', that touching of the infant's body, that caressing demarcation of body's limits and extremities, that enables the infant to begin to know its boundaries, to feel where it begins and ends. This touch sensitizes skin and feeling and establishes the filters through which the child, and later the adult, will experience him/herself. This touching and holding is often necessary and fruitful, in analytical engagement. It manifests itself accidentally, most often. I think of an analysand who said early in our work, 'I feel your touch every time that you say my name.' For some reason with this analysand, I had begun to use his name in direct address more frequently than was usual for me. Why? Why was I moved to touch him in this way? For some analysands, particularly those with very early damage, voice seems to be profoundly and symbolically efficacious.

We can meet our analysands' needs for contact in diverse ways: by the words we say; by the way we look at them. And sometimes by an actual or accidental touch. It is sometimes apparent what kind of touching is being felt, but we can't arrange it as part of any therapeutic plan. Such touching most often reaches out to the infant or the child, but it is sometimes the adult who draws erotic healing from it. I was very powerfully struck recently by a charged fictional description of loving touch, resonant with physical sensation. Every pore a channel for the profoundest communication of sinew and flesh and soul provided a stirring inventory of the powers and minuscule transmissions that close gaps between human hearts and loosen memory. When Jakob discovers Michaela in *Fugitive Pieces*, he reflects:

> I begin to trace every line, her lengths and shapes . . . given most extravagant permission to roam the surface of her. Only after I explore her this way, so slowly, an animal outlining territory, does she burst into touch.
>
> I'm paralyzed in the cave her hair makes. Then my hands move to feel her slim waist and suddenly I know how she would bend after a shower . . . feel the shape her back would make leaning over . . . there is no tinge of death in Michaela's skin. Even as she sleeps, I see in her nakedness, the invisible manifest, flooding the surface of her . . . I see that she will again open her eyes and embrace me. (p. 180)

Such is often the *psychic* intimacy constellated in the analytic encounter; such is the 'extravagant permission' given the analyst to know and to touch. These things happen in practice. How then do we learn to respond and refine touch to assist psyche's healing intentions. How do we learn to hold such energies

within transference and counter-transference conjunctions? Acting out captures and hijacks energy, injuring the butterfly. We are so afraid of 'acting out', and sometimes with good cause, that we can hinder the work of the image. For acting out is like reification. Making the image into a thing is not realization, is not materialization, is not substantiation, though we often seem to behave as though it is. By materialization, substantiation or realization, we bring senses to attend the image. We need to allow dream and fantasy images such reality, to see where the imagination wants to move from there, for it always does want to probe and evoke more richly into the mind. But the senses can enrich and intensify the image. Such materialization can assist the image evocatively. Jung always insisted that the senses help construct the symbol, along with emotion, intellect and intuition. We have been good puritans in our mistrust of sensuality in our practice, probably because of its association with 'acting out'.

How do we know this touch, how to evoke it, and even more ticklishly, how do we promote such knowing and such touching, in training? Perhaps this can only be done through metaphoric discourse, through the poetic, however apprehended. And all this alongside our attention to the legitimately 'scientific'. Alongside. Not replacing or displacing either by the other. The *true* scientist is sometimes true poet and can arouse wonder, bringing alive the taxonomy of species and functions and with intimate observation.

It seems to me that if we live with the problematical questions with integrity, passion and concern, the answers are often lived rather than formulated. If we only formulate them, we have certainly gained; but then we lose something too, creating a new problem and a new deficit. Such is the history of complex psychology since Jung inaugurated it. Each time a problem is articulated and a solution formulated, another problem seems to arise out of that very formulation. This is an essential reality; we cannot change it and we should not try.The most serious problems seem to inhere in the *use* we make of language, rather than in language itself. Jung needed a terminology to begin to talk about his discoveries, to create his tentative map of psyche. That very map became our problem, since the map has, in Plaut's sense, become confused with the territory. So we need to become wordless again. We must become *as if* wordless, so that we can again speak. But the taxonomy of psyche is essential and it is impossible for us not to pursue it. However, we must know it and not know it simultaneously, so that we can experience psyche freshly and for the first time, each time we encounter its actions in our own and our analysands' stories. We need to begin each session with the attitude of the children's hymn:

Morning has broken, like the first morning,
Blackbird has spoken, like the first bird.
Praise for the singing, praise for the morning,
Praise for them springing fresh from the word.

Each time we are presented with a snake or a tree or a windmill in an analysand's dream, it must be in a vital way, the very first one we have ever encountered, as in some sense it is. No other snake *like this* has ever appeared. But we must also have as many snakes or windmills in our mental and imaginative reservoirs as we can, which we must simultaneously know and not know. Filling the reservoirs is legitimate and necessary in training; but a full reservoir doesn't make an effective analyst. If we practise this hymn mentally, imaginatively, we might not only be preserved from becoming stale in our work, but we retain that sense of wonder, allied to the numinosity Jung so valued, in his approach to psyche. There is a common disease in the Jungian community that we might call symbolic overload. We have become symbolically saddle-sore, if you'll delight in a mixture of metaphors. This can hinder and violate the work of psyche, for deep calls unto deep and subliminally, at least, our analysands know when their material is met by the unspoken response, 'O yes, of course. A snake dream.' We know various ways to deal with an analysis that has become stuck, and the cause is usually looked for first in the analysand. But it may be that the stuckness is a healthy response to a tired or blase attitude to the symbolic material in the analyst, who after all, might encounter several snake or tree dreams a week.

How can we make language serve our 'scientific' art? I have just contended that the language Jung wrestled to the ground can now impede us, unless we really do know how to 'not use' it. Jung warned us so often of the danger of reification in these matters. It is not so much a problem of language *per se*, but of our approach to it. Words can *materialize* reality for us, without falling into reification. So often this reification is enacted by the preface of the innocuous definite article. How psyche is diminished by that simple pre-modifying interference, '*the* psyche'. Samuels reports personal communications with Alfred Plaut, who argued the gains to be derived from using verbal forms, particularly gerunds, instead of nouns in our analytical discourse. This I have also enacted in my reflections on 'knowing' (Samuels, 1985, p. 7).

We are perhaps fortunate to be living in post decontructionist times. The post-modern (almost post-post-modern) destabilization of language has perhaps served us well, helping us not to expect language to stand still while it means. But our mistrust of language, as we moved from a logocentric

absolutism, need not, nay, must not, make us not trust language at all. We can approach language as a poet does, inviting and cajoling, complaining and delighting, allowing it its necessary vagaries, inconsistencies and fragilities, its terrible power and its *essential silence*. If we welcome these attributes and do not demand stability and definiteness, it can begin to *say* without feeling *said*. We need to touch on our subject and not feel driven to exhaust and codify. Here the butterfly might pollinate.

Of course there are times when we want a definition of words to be stable; the cardiac surgeon's textbook needs as narrow a semantic field as can be achieved in the denotation of such words as *heart*. But the depth psychologist is more like the poet in needing as wide a semantic field as s/he can accomplish, with every connotation of *heart* pulsing with possibility. Consider this dream:

> I am encased in bandages, almost like a mummy. Oddly, it's because I've had a heart attack. The experience is painful. It feels calm and dark inside the bandages but I am disturbed by uncertainty . . . have I attacked my heart or has my heart attacked me?

If we receive this dream only like a cardiologist, we will have stained fingers and psyche will have fled. We must keep metaphors alive to ensure that language serves us in our work and not let them dissolve in our need for unambiguous utterance, grasping nettles to avoid the sting. These are problems that we need. Jung explains our use of the symbol itself as 'a process of comprehension by means of analogy' (4.553). Analogies must retain all the freshness of their psychic conception when we meet them in unconscious fantasy, and everywhere in analytical communication. They are, as it were, our doors and windows. Hence my use of images . . . butterflies and nettles.

If we accept that touch is a primary mechanism of our work, we do well to keep its metaphoric energies pulsing. To touch is to affect; to be touched is to be affected. We work with effect and affect. But not usually by direct interventions. We value the curves and the indirections. The physics of the mobile is apt as a kinetic image for the energy-transfers through which we work. We touch this symbol and that symptom fades. We cannot often understand these dynamics. We need to stay attuned to the metaphors at work in all their material efficacy. Jung's description of the symbol as an energy-transformer is illuminating. It is the symbol that touches, that moves us. Symbols are 'shaped energies' he says, not things (Jung, 1921, par. 425). The symbol 'compels unconscious participation' and has a 'life-giving and life-enhancing effect' (par. 819). The living symbol, he claims 'touches a corresponding chord in every psyche' (par. 820). The symbol works by 'suggestion', Jung

insists, not by exposition. This *suggestion* is the means to transforming energy. It is often through suggestion that touch is initiated.

Knowing that a dream is a counter-transference dream is necessary; but such knowing must not become knowledge and must be kept in suspension with a *necessary unknowing* for the process really to work. Jung suggested that as with wave-lengths of light and sound frequencies, there are varying degrees of intensity in consciousness, a range of possible perceptibilities (Jung, 1954, par. 366ff.). These different degrees of consciousness must be constantly at work, shifting and shaping throughout each session. In this way must ego be content to work. As with the Jungian lexicon, so with clinical knowing, the analyst must work surreptitiously.

We must often leave the butterfly in flight or at rest on its nettle leaf. An analysand in the midst of a critical phase of his analysis dreamed that he was undergoing a heart operation; micro-surgery performed by angels. This is territory inhabited by angels, fairies and butterflies; these are sometimes our messengers, not postmen or ambassadors with Holbeinish solidity. Hermes is winged.

Impossibilities and simultaneities are our heritage as analytical psychologists. Such papers as this must fail to articulate. But we are, and must remain, fascinated by the butterfly and track its flight to its resting places; we will continue to feel the urge to capture it; but in the end, we must allow ourselves not to succeed, else we find ourselves mourning the dead creature as we look down sadly on our painted fingers. So we leave our butterfly safely touching the lethal nettle, whose sting we must not prevent.

REFERENCES

Brown, Carleton, ed. (1962) *Religious Lyrics of the XIV Century*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Byatt, A. S. (1993) *Angels and Insects*. London: Vintage.

Freud, S. (1901) *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. Penguin: Pelican Freud' Library, Vol. 5.

Gibson, M. (1996) *Odilon Redon: The Prince of Dreams*. London: Taschen.

Imes, R. (1992) *The Practical Entomologist*. London: Aurum Press.

Jung, C. G. (1916) 'The Structure of the Unconscious'. *CW* 7: London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970.

—(1921) 'The Type Problem in Poetry' and 'Psychological Types: Definitions'. *CW* 6. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970.

—(1940) 'Psychology and Religion'. *CW* 11. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970.

—(1946) 'Analytical Psychology and Education' *CW* 11. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970.

—(1948) 'Address on the Occasion of the Founding of the C. G. Jung Institute, Zurich'. *CW* 18. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970.
—(1954) 'On the Nature of the Psyche'. *CW* 8. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
—(1959) 'Good and Evil in Analytical Psychology'. *CW* 10. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970.
Michaels, A. (1996) *Fugitive Pieces*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.
Opie, I. & P. (eds.) (1951) *The Oxford Book of Children's Verse*. Oxford: Clarendon.
Samuels, A. (1985) *Jung and the Post-Jungians*. London & Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
—(1989) *The Plural Psyche: Personality, Morality and the Father*. London: Karnac Books.