Part A:
Hannibal and the dizzied world
Chapter 1 The evil and the good

I'm waiting in my room for a new client, a fifteen-year-old boy named Joseph. His mother, an American diplomat who separated from Joseph's father a year or so ago, rang last week to see if I would see him. 'I'm worried about him socially,' she said. 'He's doing well academically at his small independent school, but he seems to be lonely and he doesn't make friends easily with kids his own age. He never has. We've been in Canberra just on a year and maybe it's just a matter of settling in, though this has been his pattern ever since kindergarten, apparently doing all right but at the edges of the group, sometimes teased, and occasionally doing strangely anti-social things.'

'What kind of things?' I asked and his mother told me that there'd been an incident at a school in Amsterdam where Joseph, then aged twelve, had been discovered one wintry afternoon digging what he later called 'traps for little kids' along a path near the local kindergarten. He was reported to the school authorities, the parents were contacted, but no further action was taken. His parents were at a loss as to how to understand or respond to this incident. 'We didn't really talk to him about it,' she said, 'I guess because we didn't really know what to say and were hoping that it was just a passing thing.'

But she'd found herself remembering the incident when she saw the way Joseph was with his middle brother William who is 13. 'They fight a lot,' she said, 'and it really upsets me, Joseph can be quite cruel. The fighting's got worse recently.'

'He's the middle brother?' I asked.

'Yes, I've got another son called Davie who is just 5, very much the baby of the family. Joseph is very protective towards him, especially if there's
conflict with William, though even with Davie Joseph's lost interest recently. He spends more and more time in front of the computer screen or the TV. He seems to be withdrawing, but won't talk about it, not to me anyway. I was hoping that maybe you could bring him out a bit, see what's bothering him.'

'And the marriage breakup, was that difficult for the boys?' I asked.

'It was so hard to tell,' she said, 'maybe because it was so hard for me and I wasn't as available or as attentive as I might have been. There was another man, someone who has since come over from the States and is living with us, and the breakup was actually very sudden, though the seeds of it had been there for a long time. Joseph said that the breakup didn't really bother him but I don't know, I should have spent more time with them I guess, but you know how it is.'

'So, tell me what's brought you here,' I say as Joseph settles down next to me on the couch in my room, his large brown eyes looking faintly bemused, as if to suggest that if this is a place for kids who have problems then he doesn't belong here. He is ginger haired, fine boned, carefully and fashionably dressed (more formal than the majority of his peers) and with a cultured American accent.

'Oh I don't know,' he says with a smile and a shrug. 'I thought I'd give it a try.'

'You thought you'd like to give it a try.'

'Yes ... maybe it would help me.'

'You think it might help.'

'It might.'

'I wonder what sorts of things it might help with,' I say.

'Well, there are problems at school sometimes,' Joseph says, his tone now less airy. 'There's this boy in the class at school called Russell who's always teasing me, he calls me things, he can be really nasty sometimes.'

'He can be really nasty.'

'Yes, he gets the other boys against me, he whispers stuff to them and they snigger and sneer, and so I find myself putting up a kind of barrier between me and them to keep the nastiness out.'
‘You put up a barrier.’
‘Yes, but then it feels lonely on my side of the barrier, because none of the other boys in the class are on my side of it.’ I’m surprised, given what his mother has said, how quickly he’s talking about his distress.
‘You feel cut off from the others.’
‘I do stuff on my own, but sometimes I’d like to be doing more with the other boys in the class.’
‘The barrier protects you from their nastiness, but it also cuts you off from what’s going on in the group.’
‘Yeah, and the fact that I go to a small school in a wealthy suburb also makes me feel cut off a bit. It’s like our little school is protected from the world out there, there’s a barrier there too.’
‘There are two barriers then. The one between you and the other boys, and the one between your school and the outside world.’
‘Yes, so I worry about being ready to face up to life when neither of these walls is there to protect me.’
‘The walls give you a sense of safety, but they also feel overly protective.’
‘I’ve tried to do something about the first wall,’ he says. ‘In the last couple of days I’ve made a decision to just walk up to Russell and the other boys and join in with whatever they are doing, and that’s been working pretty well. I’m also thinking that maybe I’d like to move schools and try a government high school.’
‘You’d like to try another school, something less protected,’ I say.
‘That’s right,’ he says.
‘You’d like to get out into the world a bit more,’ I say. ‘There’s much more worldly energy here than I’d expected. So many of the young people I see are passive, withdrawn, wanting to retreat from the world in some necessary but developmentally problematical way. Joseph, on the other hand, seems to be wanting to get out there and into it.’
‘I want to, but I worry about whether I’ll be able to cope,’ he says.
We sit in silence for a while. He’s articulated his difficulty very quickly and clearly, though for some reason I have a sense that something is being left out or by-passed. I decide to suggest a second way into things.

‘You see the figures over there,’ I say, pointing to a book case full of tiny figures and objects, the kind of array usually available for sand-tray work. ‘I wonder if you might use some of them to create a scene on the carpet.’

‘A scene?’ asks Joseph. ‘What kind of scene?’

‘Anything,’ I say. ‘If you like it could be something which corresponds in some way to what it is that we’ve been talking about, or it might be something that simply forms itself out of the figures and objects you find yourself drawn to.’

Joseph nods and goes over to the shelf. He takes down two groups of figures and two boxes, and then spends about ten minutes carefully arranging them on each side of a space on the carpet.

‘There,’ he says. ‘The carpet there, the space between the two groups, that’s the sea.’

‘What I’d like you to do now,’ I say, ‘is to tell me a story based on the scene that you have just created. Imagine yourself as a storyteller. I’ll type as you tell me your story.’ I go over to the computer and turn it on as he prepares himself.

‘OK,’ he says when I give him the signal. ‘There’s the evil and the good, and between them is the sea and at each end of sea there are two boxes of mystery. At one side of the sea there are the good things, the sweet smelling, the comfortable and the good ruler. On the other side, there is the evil and it’s all enclosed in bushes, a sense of not letting the rest of the world know what’s going on inside. There are the sour smelling things, the funny and evil kind of things, and an evil kind of a ruler. And also on the evil side there is a part that the good side has conquered, and its armour is being taken off and it is being exposed and converted to the good. And in the middle of the sea, and between the two sides, there is a sun which is a meeting point, not very high where neither will fight, like a conference area where they talk.’

As he tells me his story, I feel myself drawn into the imaginative world that he is creating. I’m particularly taken with the juxtaposition of the two
sides and the way the sweet is separated from the ‘sour smelling things’ by the ocean barrier. This erecting of a barrier is a strategy that I know well from my own school days, from my own childhood response to teasing. I used to take a book to my boarding school bed, draw the covers over my head after the lights had been turned off, switch on my torch and lose myself in the adventures on the page. As I type Joseph’s story I lose myself in my own reverie. I know about the soothing realm of the imaginal. I know its restorative powers. I feel the two of us erecting the barriers together, shutting out the painful tauntings from Russell and his friends.

‘That’s a wonderful story Joseph,’ I say as he finishes. ‘You’ve created a very rich and dramatic scene there and I feel your story has laid out for us some of the places we might explore together: the good and the evil places, the sense of evil being won over to the good, the meeting place which is the sun. It’s wonderful. You’ve laid out the territory which is full of mystery, the territory for us to explore.’

Joseph beams. ‘That would be great,’ he says.

There are just a few minutes to go, and I ask Joseph if he has had any dreams recently.

‘I dreamt this last night,’ he says. ‘There was a girl from my class, and she was sitting on the amphitheatre steps playing with something she usually plays with and that she’s been playing with for the last few days, and Mr Rogers the geography teacher gets really incensed by what she is doing, and I was looking on with my new found friends and we were talking and saying, “She isn’t doing anything wrong,” but Mr Rogers was getting angrier and angrier about something that wasn’t wrong at all.’

‘So,’ I say when he’s finished, conscious that our hour is up but feeling that I need to make some response to the dream, however inadequate, ‘you and your friends know that the girl isn’t doing anything wrong but the teacher is getting angrier and angrier.’

‘Yes, that’s about it,’ he says. He’s looking enlivened and engaged, quite different from how he was at the beginning of our time together.

But I’m aware as Joseph leaves that I’m relieved that our time has run out, that I’m feeling oddly in awe of the material he’s brought along, the
story in particular, but also the dream. It’s as though someone has given me carefully wrapped artefacts of great value and significance, and I’m not sure what to do with them, how to unwrap them or contemplate them in a way that will be therapeutically useful. I feel myself to be witness to some kind of mystery. I actually feel a little useless, which is strange given the obvious effect of the session on Joseph’s demeanour.

Later in the week I ring my supervisor Giles Clark, having already sent him some notes about the session. As is our custom, we begin with me outlining what it is that I’d like help to think about. My preamble is often lengthy and discursive.

‘I want to talk about Joseph today Giles,’ I say, ‘and about our first session. In particular I want to talk about the story he told me about ‘the Evil and the Good’ and about how I felt as I was listening to it. It was like I was being taken into a world with only tenuous links with the world of everyday realities … I’ve been reading Hillman’s Dream and the Underworld this week so I want to talk about Joseph’s story in relation to some of the ideas in that wonderful book. And I also want to put these things side-by-side with my feeling of uselessness at the end of the session, a feeling I don’t understand because the session itself was so obviously an enlivening one for Joseph himself.’

‘Fine,’ says Giles.

‘Maybe I can start with Hillman,’ I say. ‘I assume that you don’t much like him, given what he’s said about developmental psychology!’

‘On the contrary Steve, I like Hillman. He’s imaginative and rigorous, always stimulating and seems to me to be one of three thinkers – the other two being Klein and Bion – who have most to say about psychosis, to have had the deepest feeling for madness.’

‘But you’d have significant squabbles with him?’

‘Let’s not be diverted just yet from what you’re wanting to think about here. If it’s relevant, perhaps some of my differences with Hillman – actually it’s more with some of Hillman’s followers – will come out. But do go on.’
‘Well,’ I say, ‘I’ve been reading *Dream and the Underworld* and I find it exhilarating reading. It’s Hillman’s view – and this seems to me connected to Joseph’s story and why I felt so in awe of it – that our waking lives are shaped by the dynamics of this underground world, the world of our psyches, about which we know so little directly but which manifests in our lives in the vivid images of our dreams, in the things we find ourselves almost unaccountably doing. Our lives, says Hillman, are shaped and ordered less by the past (as traditional psychoanalytic theory has it) than by what goes on in this internal world, this underground populated by the gods. ‘All daylight consciousness begins in the night and bears its shadows,’ he says. ‘What goes on in the life of the ego is merely the reflection of one’s deeper essence contained in the shadow’ … Dreams have no father, no call upwards. They come only from Night, and they have no home other than in that dark realm ... No longer: Ego casting Shadow after it; instead, a shade literalizing an ego in front of it and behind which it can remain hidden.’

‘And you’re saying that this is connected to your response to Joseph’s story,’ says Giles.

‘Yes. As I listened to Joseph telling me his story, I felt drawn down into the Underworld. It was like I was being invited to view with him an intrapsychic drama of great consequence, a story fashioned by the complexes and gods of his psyche. It was like I was being invited to follow Joseph down into the Underworld and I suppose I found myself operating out of the assumption that this glimpse of the Underworld – or perhaps the journey that we were taking together into those regions – would reveal meanings, directions and would tap into something that might be healing or restorative or energising in some important way. It’s like being given a glimpse of the contents of the collective unconscious, of an archetypal pattern which is being enacted deep in Joseph’s psyche, so that the worst thing I could do would be to interfere too much in the process.’

‘Your experience was one of being awed. It was awesome.’

‘In a sense, yes, though maybe that’s not quite right because there was concurrently a part of me that was saying that this wasn’t real. I suppose I
was moved and sceptical at the same time. Or not so much sceptical as unsure. I suppose that’s what I want to talk with you about today.’

‘And not only unsure but also useless,’ says Giles.

‘Yes, and it wasn’t only because I wasn’t sure about what was being revealed. I also had this sense of not having a role to play, of being superfluous. I mean, what do you do in the presence of material that feelsnuminous in some way?’

Instead of responding directly to my question, Giles is quiet for a while.

‘I think,’ he says at last, ‘that one of the less helpful legacies we Jungians have been saddled with is what seems to me to be a one-sided emphasis on the intrapsychic, together with a way of talking about the intrapsychic as if it were a physical space. There’s a kind of fascination with images that leads us to miss what might actually be happening with the person in front of us. You find this in some of Jung’s writing and amongst the Hillmanians.’

‘You’re saying that when I listen to Joseph’s story through ears somehow attuned to Hillman’s prose, I’m missing something of the actual Joseph sitting in front of me?’

‘I want to talk more generally for the moment, because I don’t want you to come away from our conversation feeling that I’m in any way critical of your deep listenings to dreams and stories. I see you in some ways as an evoker, maybe even as revealer, a fierce revealer, and a defender of people’s deeply important treasures … no, not treasures, that’s too static an image … their stories. What’s happening when Joseph tells you his story is crucial, it’s therapeutic, it’s an abreaction, an opportunity to express, to confess, to let it all out. That mustn’t go in any attempt to relate more actively to Joseph, to be a more useful therapist. This ‘safe place’ or haven idea is important too: therapy can only take place where fears and frustrations can be safely expressed, in conditions which must be different from the intolerable repressions or missings that occur in the outside world. So providing Joseph with a haven is no mean thing; this also mustn’t be thrown out with whatever bath water you’re wanting to replace or cleanse or get rid of. But feeling useless … now that’s another thing!’

‘Feeling useless implies that I’m missing something?’
‘Not at all. Or at least not in itself. There are many times when we therapists feel useless because the client needs us to feel useless. They either need to disable us because we’re a threat, or they need us to know in our bodies how they themselves are feeling, which might be useless.’

‘I don’t think I was particularly threatening during our first session,’ I say.

‘You are a fierce revealer, or you have that capacity. Perhaps Joseph sensed this.’

‘Or perhaps he needed me to feel useless. Or to know uselessness because that’s what he feels in the playground.’

‘Or in relation to the disintegration of his parents’ marriage,’ says Giles. ‘There was nothing he could do, presumably, though his world was split apart as a result of it.’

‘How can you say that Giles? How can you know that he felt split apart? His mother told me that it hadn’t seemed to have affected him much.’

‘I cannot know these things,’ says Giles, ‘but I can allow the imagery from his stories and dreams to inform my sense of him. His story is about the sourness of evil and his dream is about some problematical anger. It would be missing something essential in Joseph if we were to ignore the possibility that these are descriptions of his experiences of himself.’

‘Jung said that the collective unconscious was unconnected to the personal events of a person’s life,’ I say. ‘You’re saying that this story and the dream are not manifestations of the collective unconscious.’

‘I think that too great an emphasis on the intrapsychic, whether it be in terms of the collective unconscious or the underworld or the gods or the archetypes, can lead to a missing of the patient. Hillman brings alive the primordial depths, but it can be too general. The question we’re needing to ask ourselves here is not, ‘What is the Underworld like?’ but ‘What is Joseph’s Underworld like?’ And we need to remain mindful of the probability that Joseph’s Underworld is telling us something essential about his experience of the world.’

‘Hillman would say, wouldn’t he Giles, that the characters in Joseph’s story have their own autonomous life, their existence in an Underworld
which is at one and the same time non-personal and profoundly important in the unravelling of our own destinies.'

‘On the contrary, these characters are intensely personal! Though it’s early days and we cannot know yet how Joseph’s early life is connected to the images in this story, connected they most certainly are! Joseph is at present hoping that the good and the sweet smelling has the capacity to unmask and convert the evil and the sour smelling. This is about you and the therapy, and about what he feels oppressively about his internal realities. He wants to be rescued by you, he feels rotten inside.’

‘Maybe it’s like there are two processes at work here’ I say, for the moment attempting a reconciliation of Giles and Hillman. ‘On the one hand there’s a kind of inevitable human experience which Joseph would encounter in his waking life or in his dreams whether or not his parents had had this messy ending to their relationship on the one hand, and on the other there’s the working out of the consequences of that real life event.’

‘Mmm,’ says Giles. My attempt has failed so I revert to my anti-developmental perspective.

‘But Hillman would say that this is to look in the wrong direction for the meaning behind this story,’ I say. ‘As soon as you try to make a connection between historical event and present psychic image, you’re allowing yourself to be seduced by the developmental fantasy that our psychology is caused by some historical happening. No doubt Joseph’s family circumstances are giving his present dreams and stories a particular shape, but it would be more fruitful, perhaps, to look not to the past but in a sense to the future, to what it is that Joseph is becoming. Hillman’s acorn theory of life.’ Joseph is going to become a dancer, or a writer, or ... well, we don’t know what yet ... but we do know (from looking at the lives of others) that childhood experiences are as much a preparation for ‘becoming the oak tree’ as they are the unravelling of childhood trauma in a developmental sense. So that looking at Joseph’s story more as a glimpse of what is emerging, respecting that, paying attention to it – watering it or providing it with sunshine, if we’re going to continue the metaphor of the acorn – is more helpful to him than seeing it purely in terms of the tensions set up in him as a result of historical events.’
‘For god’s sake, Steve,’ exclaims Giles, ‘can’t you see how far you are straying from what is before your eyes! These reflections are all very soulful, all very poetic, but they’re nourishing your psyche, not Joseph’s. Joseph is crying out for a particular kind of attention, something disciplined and rigorous and specific, and it’s to do with having someone understand that his need to be physically close, his digging pits for kindergarten children in Amsterdam and his story about the two worlds are all different versions of the same cry, a sense of being abandoned, unheld, ignored and unseen while those who he feels should be holding him are so immersed in their own pain that they cannot see what is happening. Here is a boy who is hurting because he has been evicted from the Garden of Eden, and his behaviour is saying, ‘Help, listen, I need my pain to be noticed right now, and if no-one is going to notice then I’m going to go to some pretty extreme lengths to bring the focus back onto me.’

‘Giles I can see that and I worry all the time that I’m tending my own wounds and not his, but …’

‘For what it’s worth, I don’t think you’re over-expressing your internal world here, otherwise Joseph would be behaving as if you were stealing from him. I was venting my spleen on more narcissistic and unknowing therapeutic stances than yours.’

‘OK, but all this still begs the question of what kind of focus it is that Joseph wants. Does he want to talk about his parents and the separation and his own feelings at the time? Does he want the focusing to be that direct? Maybe instead he just wants to have time each week when the focus is unequivocally on him … whether that’s on his dreams, his stories, his drawings, his musings, the events of the week, working with the figures. What I like about Hillman is his insistence that we need to pay attention to the spontaneous images being thrown up by the psyche. This isn’t Joseph wanting the focus on him, Hillman would say, but the gods clamouring for some elbow room. Joseph himself isn’t especially aware of what’s going on. He’s on the deck of the ship and it’s all happening down there in the engine room.’
'But you're leaving yourself out of this picture,' says Giles. 'If he's on the
deck of the ship and the gods are down in the engine room, where are you?'

I have the uncomfortable thought that I'm some kind of albatross
hovering around and watching, but can't bring myself to admit this to Giles.

'You're saying that Joseph needs me to be more involved,' I say. 'He
wants me to be in the picture.'

'Not just in it, Steve, but doing things. You sometimes say to me that
you're worried about imposing your own stuff onto your clients, but a much
more immediate danger is that you'll be too passive, too much simply a
listener. You worry about using your authority to influence your clients'
behaviour, and perhaps as a result you hang back too much and don't
influence them enough. Joseph requires specific things from you. He wants
you to understand things that he feels overwhelmed by and which he feels he
cannot grapple with alone, he wants you to be in there helping to push back
the armour of the evil side so that it can be converted to the good. This is
why he's telling you the story, this is why he's taking you so quickly into the
painful world that he experiences at school. Perhaps my main problem with
some Hillmanites is that their extreme inwardsness and fascination with an
image can be symptomatic of an analyst's schizoid fear of messy, emotional
intimacy, of desire, love and hate.'

'You feel I have to be more active,' I say.

'More involved, less the observer,' says Giles. 'Closer to the action.'

'I'm missing things at the moment,' I say, knowing that Giles is touching
on something essential about my feelings of uselessness and wanting to
understand exactly what he means, but finding it difficult to let go of the
soulful poetry of Hillman's evocation of the depths.

'I'm not sure why I'm saying this,' says Giles, 'but perhaps you're less
missing something in Joseph than missing something in yourself. Your
dreams, the ones you've told me about, are full of rage and longing and yet I
don't sense these things present at all in your work with Joseph. You're
being moved by it at some level, but overall I'm most conscious of how
careful you're being. Where are your rage and your longing? Where are your
healthy passions? You've got this fierce task here, and you need to be in
touch with an anger which your dreams know but about which your waking therapist self is unaware. I'm talking about a raw energy which can get angry with the self-effacing you.'

'If I were more in touch with it, I'd be more active?' I ask.

'I don't know about what comes first. I can't say anything more about the relationship of the healthy passions with activity, not as it applies to you and Joseph at the moment. I just think that Joseph is needing you in there connecting, personalising, differentiating, grounding, so that he knows that you see him.'

'Someone once said that the trouble with having Jung as your analyst was that he saw archetypes when what you wanted was for him to see you.'

'Yes, it's something along those lines,' says Giles. 'An overly intrapsychic focus can lead to a terrible missing of a patient's real needs. Of course this is terribly complex stuff we're working with but thinking in terms of our work as being present at a mystery can marginalise us, render us powerless. It's just a job. Perhaps thinking about it in more everyday terms is not a bad idea.'

'Giles,' I say suddenly, 'I've just remembered a dream I had this week about Joseph.'

'You've just this moment remembered it?' asks Giles.

'Yes, and it seems connected to what we're talking about here. In my dream I'm taking part in some very big ceremony. I'm one of two leaders and we're preparing Joseph who is about to be sacrificed. But he doesn't realize this, he thinks he's being prepared for something great. I play on this grandiose feeling by telling him that only he, of all the boys in the community, is ready for what is about to happen. Joseph is listening intently and I realise that my words are getting him into the right psychological state. But my co-organiser keeps butting in with his or her own way of talking to Joseph and it's not in the same spirit as what I am telling him. Still, we're getting closer to being ready, even though it's taking much more time than expected. I cut up some apples, which have poison in them, but which are there just for ceremonial purposes. In fact Joseph is going to be burnt to death with very hot water. My co-organiser whispers to me that he doesn't
think Joseph has understood what we’ve been saying to him, and so he doubts this is going to work as planned. I say it doesn’t really matter, the event is in bigger hands than our own.’

‘Goodness,’ says Giles.

‘It’s all there, isn’t it?’ I say. ‘Avoiding the painful realities in order to feel better, feeling that I’m powerless because it’s all in bigger hands than my own, getting poor Joseph into hot water which will be fatal!’

‘Reification can be a dangerous thing,’ says Giles.

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‘I want to tell you about a dream I’ve had,’ I say to Giles at the beginning of a supervision session the following week. ‘A dream from a couple of years ago.’

‘You want to tell it to me because of something we’ve been talking about?’

‘Well yes and no,’ I say. ‘It’s a very big dream and I’ve talked a lot about different aspects of it with my therapist. It’s been like getting to know an unfamiliar part of myself, seeing its relevance to all sorts of areas in my life, and now I’m thinking that the dream has got a connection to the work we’re doing in this supervision, maybe with the rage that you were talking about when I first told you about this new client Joseph. I’ve been wanting to tell it to you for weeks but until now I’ve resisted the impulse. But it won’t go away.’

‘Fine,’ says Giles, ‘tell me your dream.’

‘I dreamt that I’d gone to Pentridge Jail in Melbourne, along with two friends and my baby son. Have you seen Pentridge Jail, Giles?’

‘No, it’s in Melbourne you say?’ Giles has recently settled in Australia from England.

‘Yes in Melbourne, an old jail with big black stone walls, it’s where Ned Kelly was hanged. It’s a dark and brooding kind of place and in my dream I’ve arrived carrying my baby son and two journalist friends and we’re here to interview a criminal whose name is Hannibal.’
‘Hannibal,’ says Giles. ‘Like the Hannibal in the film Silence of the Lambs?’

‘Yes, though I hadn’t seen the film when I had the dream. It was such a shock when I actually saw the film, Giles, the character of Hannibal, the chilling atmosphere in the prison ... they were so like what I experienced in the dream ... Anyway, we are let into the prison and we adults are immediately separated, and for a while I find myself wandering around the corridors. I begin to feel edgy. Then I rejoin the others and we are taken to Hannibal’s cell. It is a big room and I can see that it’s crowded with prisoners and warders. There is a big man in a brown tweed jacket sitting with his back to us. He’s playing chess and I know that this is Hannibal. He comes out to meet us – he’s enormous, over seven feet tall and immensely powerful. I shake his hand and he’s very polite in a Mafiosi godfather kind of way. He’s got a hair lip so that when he speaks his words are indistinct. I’m holding my baby as we speak. Some of the prisoners and all the warders leave, and there are about ten left in the room, Hannibal’s closest colleagues. We chat for a while, and then the three of us start to ask questions. The first question is personal, but Hannibal avoids all personal stuff in his answer. Instead he twists the answer so that he can talk about his ‘organisation’, which is some kind of a business or political party – existing either inside the prison or outside, I’m not sure. I’m beginning to be concerned about my son and try to keep him on my knee, but he crawls off and under the furniture and so I have to get down on the floor to fetch him. Then one of my colleagues asks Hannibal if the fact that he always vomits after eating is connected to what he did to the baby and I suddenly realise that his crime was murdering and then eating a baby. The atmosphere in the cell switches from polite to chilling and Hannibal is suddenly furious. He says that we are determined just to write terrible things about him. He stands up and silences some loud music that’s blaring away in the background, and then the lights go off and we’re suddenly in pitch blackness. It’s hellish - me with my baby son, not knowing what the prisoners will do, wondering where they are, where the warders are. I have my son in my arms and I’m rocking and making soothing sounds to him even though I can sense that he’s not upset at all. I feel the
prisoners moving around me and one of us screams. I keep worrying that Hannibal is looking for us, that he’ll come for my boy. I think this will never end, and start praying and silently chanting for the warders to come. Then the lights go on. I’m unharmed, and Hannibal is sitting quietly at a piano, hunched over it but not playing. We leave hurriedly out into the pouring rain. I tuck my son under my jacket to keep him dry. Then we get into a car.

‘He’s sitting by the piano,’ says Giles.

‘Hunched over it, looking really sad I think, his great heavy shoulders hunched over the piano ... as if he wanted to play, as if he had lots of music inside him but no way of getting it out.’

‘Yes indeed,’ says Giles.

‘It was terrifying though,’ I add. ‘The dream itself woke me up — that’s rare for me — and I remember lying in the dark aware that my back and neck and face were wet with hot sweat. My first terrified thought was that Hannibal was in the room, it took me some time to realize where I was.’

‘And you had this impulse that wouldn’t go away to tell this dream to me,’ says Giles.

‘Yes, I wanted to tell it to you because you’re my supervisor and I have a feeling that at least one aspect of it is connected to my professional life at the moment.’

‘Go on,’ says Giles.

‘Well just recently I’ve found myself thinking about the kind of therapist I’ve become,’ I say. ‘I’ve always prided myself on my thoroughness, on my reliability I suppose. I’ve always had this as part of my make-up, being the eldest of three children and having found a place for myself in the world as the responsible one.’

‘So you’re thorough and reliable,’ says Giles.

‘I’m organised too. I think a lot about the clients who come to see me and I write up long notes after sessions ... but there’s something missing. All the thinking and talking with my analyst about this dream has helped bring something a bit closer to my awareness which I’m imagining might be connected to this sense of something being missing.’

‘Which is ... ?’
'It's to do with a feeling that there's a part of me imprisoned, like Hannibal, a part of me capable of extensive organisation which has a controlling aspect to it, controlling and limiting, somehow connected to the shutting out of feeling which is present in the dream. In my personal life I go through periods of intense feelings of being shut out from life, of not having the charisma of my brother or the worldliness of my sister, of being trapped in some world which is in some ways a world of my own making and is lonely and frustrating and full of rage. These rages have been increasingly coming out in my personal life, almost like an accumulation of frustrated energy concentrated in some fury in order to blast down barriers, but the barriers keep surviving. I'm conscious of a cruelty I'm capable of in these moods, and the image of Hannibal eating babies, killing off potential life, is unsettlingly apt. And then there's that final image of Hannibal sitting at the piano, hunched over it, wanting to play. That's how I feel. About a year ago an adolescent client of mine told me a story of himself as a prince trapped in a prison and hearing music coming in from the outside world through his cell windows, and how this experience led him to focus his energies on escaping from the prison. For me it's the music I have inside which I want to get out, Hannibal at the piano wanting to play so that those outside can hear him. It's something to do with making connections with a bigger world outside the confines of the prison. Beyond the self. I'm a thorough therapist, self-contained in a way, but there's something missing.'

'You're wanting to play the piano so that others will hear you,' says Giles.

'And I'm wanting to get rid of my extensive organisation so that I can experience others more fully,' I say.

'You're wanting me to know that you've had this dream, that you're feeling this frustration.'

'I suppose I'm wanting this dream that has got into me to get into you too,' I say, remembering some of the discussions Giles and I have had about Kleinian mechanisms. 'I'm wanting it to be a part of what we can talk about together.'
‘You’re hoping that telling it to me is going to shift something,’ says Giles.

‘I guess that’s why we tell our dreams to others isn’t it?’ I say. ‘I guess that’s exactly why we tell our stories to others, in order to shift something, to make a difference.’

‘To shift something ... to change something,’ says Giles. ‘Or to keep things the same when they’re being challenged.’

‘Stories as progressive, stories as conservative,’ I say. ‘You often emphasize the negative Giles.’

‘It must be my innate pessimism,’ says Giles.

‘Or your instinctive reaction to my innate optimism,’ I say.
Chapter 2 Feeling useless

The arrangement is that Joseph will get the bus here from school each Tuesday afternoon, but today he is late. I stand at the window of my study looking out onto the path he’ll walk up, breathing deeply to still a fluttering of discouragement. Even fifteen minutes into the session time he is not here. I ring his father’s home but there’s no answer. Finally with half our time gone he arrives, a little breathless from running.

‘I’m sorry Steve, I just completely forgot!’ He flops down next to me on the sofa. ‘I got home and was watching the TV when suddenly I remembered that it was Tuesday and that I should be at Steve’s!’

‘Well you’re here now,’ I say soothingly (soothing him or me?), ‘and it’s good to see you again.’

Should I say more? I suspect that there’s a meaning embedded in this lateness, a gesture to his parents who have sent him here, a statement that he’s making to himself or to me. But it’s probably unconscious, and despite the breathlessness he’s already got that detached air about him that he had at the beginning of our first session. Perhaps I say nothing because unconsciously I suspect it’s my fault.

‘How are things?’ I ask.

‘Very good actually,’ he says.

‘Things are good at school?’ The doubting tone in my voice is out before I can stop it, making almost inevitable an adolescent tendency to deny that there’s anything the matter. Why couldn’t I have said simply, ‘Things are very good’ and left it to him to fill this out, respond to? Probably because I’m so worried about doing my job properly, about getting to the heart of matters as quickly as possible. Or maybe I’m worried that the doors to the Underworld have been prematurely shut, that I’m being refused admittance.
‘Yes fine,’ he says, looking me deliberately and almost defiantly in the eye. Yet his smile is so sweet! I feel trapped now in my role as cross-examiner.

‘How are things with Russell?’

‘Oh they’re not bothering me at all at the moment. Everything’s fine.’

‘You were telling me last week that you’d decided to try to bridge the barrier by approaching them and joining in with whatever Russell and his friends were doing.’

‘Mmm,’ he says distractedly, looking over towards my desk and the computer. ‘I was wondering if I could have a go on your computer? I’d really like to do that.’

This is going from bad to worse and I’m needing to work hard to prevent it from slipping away altogether. We’d gone in deeply last week and it was clear that Joseph was enlivened by the encouragement I’d given him to tell his story and relate his dream, but now he’s rushing away from our engagement. Did we go in too deep last time and is this a reaction? Is he testing the boundaries, seeing how resolute I am about the task? Or perhaps things really have improved at school, and my doubting and resistance is undermining the therapeutic effect of a good session?

‘When you told me your story about the Evil and the Good last week,’ I say not terribly confidently, ‘it was like introducing me to a world, your private world. It was like you were inviting me in, you were wanting to show me around a bit. Going to the computer feels like something of an escape from the work that we’re being asked to do.’

‘I’d really like to play on the computer,’ he says.

‘I don’t think so,’ I reply. ‘Let’s sit and talk for a while.’

‘OK,’ says Joseph with a shrug. He turns to face me again, his eyes again full on me and somewhat challenging. ‘What will we talk about?’

‘What about dreams?’ I ask but I can’t manage to get the tone in my voice right. Again I’m asking questions, somehow inviting Joseph to be passive, reactive, in touch with thoughts rather than feelings.

‘I’ve had some dreams,’ he says, ‘but I can’t remember any of them.’

‘Any fragments from your dreams?’
‘No, nothing. It’s really frustrating when you know you’ve dreamed something but it’s gone, completely gone.’ He smiles charmingly as if saying rather condescendingly, ‘I’d help you if I could, Steve, you seem to be a nice sort of person and I’m sure you’d feel a whole lot better if you had a good dream to get your teeth into. But I just can’t remember them. Sorry.

We talk for a while about a school production of Dante’s Inferno he’s in. He’s a singer and a dancer in it. As soon as he mentions it, my mind thinks of the Underworld again. Here, surely, there is a way in? But for Joseph it seems to be just a production and he resists my attempts to explore the content, to see if there are connections between Dante’s story and what we were talking about last week.

The shortened session is soon over, and as Joseph leaves I’m acutely aware that I feel as if I’m knocking at a huge door and am getting no response. I’m feeling powerless, constrained and tentative.

Before ringing Giles, I sit grumpily with my feelings of inadequacy. I’ve always viewed developmental psychology – Giles’s psychology – with a certain antipathy. All that emphasis on damage done in childhood! All that tracing of neuroses and psychoses to childhood trauma or deprivation! It seems so limiting a view of what it is to be a person. And it sits so uneasily with my experience (as a teacher and a therapist) of the vitality and creativity of even the most battered or distraught children. I’m unconvinced by the Freudian emphases on incest and genitalia, the Kleinian obsessions with breasts and turds. Post-Freudians and some post-Jungians talk of ‘false self structures’, ‘self-objects’, ‘de-integration’ and ‘projective identification’, but these are concepts expressed in language that I can’t stomach, can’t bring myself to read. I’m much more drawn to Hillman’s view:

Physicists, theologians, Zen teachers – all said the map is not the territory. Psychologists seem not to have learned that. All these explanations of human life are for me fictions, fantasies. I like to engage them on that level, but only as fictions, as archetypal fantasies. They may have therapeutic value, like any story can have. They may help the therapist get a second-level structure, an ordering grid, while he is in the middle of the
confusion. But psychodynamics – and I don’t care whether role-
playing theories, infantile development theories, or the Gods
themselves – keeps us in explanations. We cannot explain the
psyche. We are the psyche. The soul wants imaginative
responses that move it, delight it, deepen it ... explanatory
responses just put us back into positivism and science – or worse,
into delusion, a kind of maya or avidya, an ignorance that makes
us believe we know.¹

Or, as he puts it in another book:

Essential for working with what is unknown is an attitude of
unknowing. This leaves room for the phenomenon itself to speak.
It alone may keep us from delusions.²

There’s some comfort in this emphasis on not knowing – I’m certainly
full of it! – but I feel out-of-sorts nonetheless. And worried. I know that
Giles’s supervision is offering me another way of thinking about things, one
that might perhaps address the feelings of inadequacy which continually
beset me. But will there be a price to pay? Will being a more confident
therapist mean that I’ll have to jettison my attempts to sit soulfully with
deeper mysteries, that I’ll have to shut ‘the dark eye that makes our
brightness unsure’?³

And, of course, underlying this defensiveness is a terrible fear, and one
that I’ve known all my professional life. Will Giles reveal a fundamental
flaw in my Hillmanian-informed stance? Do the attacks he makes on the
classical Jungians and some of Hillman’s followers actually apply to me?

‘Today,’ I say to Giles as we begin our supervisory session, ‘I want to
talk about Joseph’s retreat, the way he forgot the session and then had
nothing to talk about, as if he were closing a door that he’d opened the week
before. I want you to help me to think about why this might have happened.
And at the same time I’m wanting to try to understand better your thoughts
about therapy, about what’s actually going on in the room in a session. I’ve
been reading some of your articles and thinking about them in relation to our
conversation last week. It’s as if you’re saying to me, ‘Steve, the reason why
Joseph didn’t turn up and why he was so withdrawn was that you’d let him
down in some way, that you’d missed something essential.’
‘I don’t think I’d say it quite like that!’ says Giles. ‘But go on.’

‘I guess I’m thinking about the dream I had,’ I say, ‘the one where Joseph is getting sacrificed and it’s all out of my hands. I suppose I’ve been reflecting on what you said last week about the danger that a therapist might want to avoid messy intimacies, might want to keep his hands clean, might need in some way to stay distanced ... and that maybe one way of staying distanced or unengaged is for a therapist to say, “it’s all out of my hands”.’

‘You’re talking about an impulse to keep him at arm’s length, to keep your hands clean.’

‘Maybe ... but these are not conscious feelings, Giles. Consciously I’m wanting to get closer. At one level, at least on one level, it’s Joseph who is doing the distancing, not me. But my dream seems to be implying a distancing. Maybe unconsciously I’m not wanting to get into something messy. I understand this as a possibility but I can’t actually feel it.’

‘What do you feel, Steve? What did you feel when Joseph didn’t turn up, or when he told you he had no dreams.’

‘Blocked out,’ I say. ‘Inadequate ... stuck.’

‘Which made you want to work harder.’

‘Possibly, but more I wanted to sink myself into something ... I don’t know how to put this ... I wanted to ... Giles, can I read you something, it might help.’

‘Of course.’

‘It’s a passage from The Great World by David Malouf where he’s describing the main character’s experience of the world.’

I find the book from my shelves and then read out loud:

Digger was dizzied by the world. He could never, he felt, see it steady enough or at a sufficient distance to comprehend what it was, let alone to act on it. This was a disadvantage; but he had long since come to the conclusion that his perplexity about life which did not prevent him from living it, was essential to him.

A nailhead. That was clear enough. Round, flanged, with ridges that allowed the hammerhead a grip. The weight of the hammer, too. Driving a nail in, feeling the point go through the soft grain to bite on the last two blows - that was the only action
he knew that was simple. Everything else, the moment you really looked at it, developed complications.

Even the least event had lines, all tangled, going back into the past, and beyond that into the unknown past, and other lines leading out, also tangled, into the future. Every moment was dense with causes, possibilities, consequences; too many, even in the simplest case, to grasp. Every moment was dense too with lives, all crossing and interconnecting or exerting pressure on one another, and not just human lives either; the narrowest patch of earth at the Crossing, as he had known since he was two years old, was crowded with little centres of activity, visible or invisible, that made up a web so intricate that your mind, if you went into it, was immediately stuck — fierce cannibalistic occasions without number, each one of which could deafen you if you had ears to hear what was going on there. And beyond that were what you could not even call lives or existences; they were mere processes — the slow burning of gases for example in the veins of leaves — that were invisibly and forever changing the state of things; heat, sunlight, electric charges to which everything alive enough responded and held itself erect, hairs and fibres that were very nearly invisible but subtly vibrating, nerve ends touched and stroked.

This was how he saw things unless he deliberately held back and shut himself off.

'That’s how I feel Giles, dizzied by the complexity of things ... It’s like I have two possibilities here with Joseph, a kind of sinking into the experience which means saying to myself that it’s too complicated for my mind to grasp and all I can do is to trust it, to trust that something is working away in its own way in there, or to step back and be disengaged... No, that’s not right ... that’s not right! ... Being dizzied by it is also a kind of disengagement. Like in my dream, where I’m getting the boy into hot water and I’m thinking all the while that I’m taking part in a mystery.'

'It keeps your hands clean, or your conscience clean. Outcomes are not your fault,' says Giles.

'I’m missing something here, Giles. Consciously I’m trying to engage. I’m trying to go deeper into the experience, to pay close and deep attention to what Hillman once called the oozings and spurtings of the creative
imagination. But at the same time I feel unconnected, that I’m missing something, and I sense that Joseph is retreating.’

‘The oozings and spurtings are all very well,’ says Giles, ‘but an unrelational fascination with oozings and spurtings can lead to a missing of the actual patient. It can lead to blind spots, which seems to be what you’re describing here. You can’t see something.’

‘You’re saying that I’ve developed some blind spots which prevent me from seeing important things?’

‘I’m not talking about ‘seeing through’ his story or his dream to some truth,’ says Giles. ‘It’s not a Freudian or Kleinian stance that I’m talking about, each of which can in their own way be terribly persecutory. It’s more an awareness – a way of thinking about and perceiving what is going on in the room – that the therapist must develop.’

‘I understand your sentences but I don’t know what you mean,’ I say. ‘If you’re right that there are blind spots, then of course I can’t know what you’re describing because I can’t see them. How can I cure a blind spot?’

‘If we think about the blind spot when you’re driving …’

‘You don’t have to cure it. You just turn your head.’

‘You look in a slightly different direction, you see and experience things differently.’

‘So where am I looking at the moment?’

‘What are you seeing at the moment?’ asks Giles.

‘I’m seeing a boy who is telling me a story and who then wants to disappear. I’m seeing a rather confused therapist, moved by what the story evokes but unable to work with it … Are you saying that the story is a distraction, that by focusing so much of my attention on this amazing story of his I have a blind spot to more pressing realities?’

‘No, it’s not the story that’s the distraction, though it might be something to do with your attitude towards it … the way you look at it, the way you think about it and talk about it. Joseph’s story is fascinating, evocative of biblical passages, old stories, creation stuff. But we can get too focussed on the content, too preoccupied for instance with images of good and evil and battles and unmaskings which leads us to miss the patient’s real need, his
lonely love or frightening hate or fear of cunning madness. We have to
develop the ability to connect these evocative images to the patient’s current
realities, which are often messy and painful.’

As Giles is speaking, I’m madly trying to match what he’s saying with the
Joseph I experience in our sessions. I don’t see the loneliness so much as the
inwardness, the hate so much as a rather aloof distancing, the fear so much as
an adolescent suspicion of a prying stranger. Are these my blind spots? Or
am I responding to a flesh-and-blood person where Giles is articulating a
theory? The possibility is fleetingly reassuring.

‘Some of Hillman’s followers,’ he continues, ‘are so caught up in the
chambers of their own highly introverted vibrating psychic contents that they
undervalue the relatedness of this work. Their missing of the patient’s real
need comes out of their unrelated narcissism and stems from a sense of
fearful weakness. Not you, Steve, I’m not talking about you. Some of
Hillman’s followers.’

‘Not me?’ I say doubtfully, imagining that in fact it’s me he’s describing.
The phrases he has used seem so penetrating. Vibrating chambers sound like
Hannibal’s cell. To talk of unrelated narcissism is to remind me of my
continual worry that I’m treating my own wounds rather than tending those
of my clients. And haven’t I been talking about my ‘sense of fearful
weakness’ all along?

Again I remember a dream, a nightmare of a few nights back. I’m at my
fiftieth birthday party, announcing to the guests that soon people will be
telling stories and that telling stories is telling a person’s life and not telling
stories is like death ... but no-one is listening. People are leaving the room in
which I make my announcement, and I’m full of rage and frustration. I look
down and notice that I am holding in my hands the blackened and dead
something that was once my ‘heart’s soul’. It’s like standing at the window
waiting for Joseph to arrive, feeling that we’ve got all this life and death stuff
to grapple with, all this good and evil business, but he has forgotten to come.

‘No, not you.’

I remain unconvinced, but don’t want to get stuck here.
‘The real needs of the patient?’ I ask. ‘What do you mean here? What are Joseph’s real needs?’

‘I’m not going to answer that question,’ says Giles. ‘I can’t. Not yet.’

‘But even if you’re saying it’s not me, Giles, you are saying that there’s a blind spot that I have.’

‘It’s something to do with what gets excluded when you focus exclusively on the story,’ he says. ‘And what gets excluded is the interaction between you, the fact that the psychotherapeutic crucible is two people, not one. We mustn’t lose sight of the inter-relatedness of this work, of the transference if you like. If we get too carried away by the images, then we forget about the transference, we forget to notice what’s happening between the two of us. Our clients are trying to establish relationships with us, particular kinds of crucial relationships, ones that they attempted long ago with their parents but which didn’t work well enough. They’re likely to make all the old mistakes, to fall into old patterns, to provoke us into ways of acting that have the potential to repeat old wounds and create new harm. We’ve got to keep trying to make links – to connect current interpersonal stuff to the past, to relate current inner and outer experience to the here and now.’

‘When I think too much about the content of the story, then I develop a blind spot for what’s happening between us when he tells it to me’ I say, aware as I’m saying it that while the words may be right, an embodied sense of what this means is missing.

‘It’s what’s happening between the two people that’s the crucial thing,’ says Giles. ‘When the therapist is able to find language for this, or when the two of you find the language, then what is created is a shared world, a body of mutual experience. Initially this is the patient’s world which the two of you are talking about, finding language for, but it’s a world into which the analyst is necessarily sucked. The analyst’s task is to think like bloody mad and to know or find a way out of this sometimes sickening confusion into our separateness and difference, a process which helps the patient (and the analyst) to a new relationship with himself, a new psyche–soma co-ordination.’
'Something is created in the interaction,' I say. 'Something that didn’t exist before.'

'Well it sort of existed before,' says Giles. 'The transference is a recreation of a world gone wrong. It’s the expansion of a basic fault. We’re going back and doing it in a different way.'

'Winnicott once said, didn’t he, that there was no such thing as a baby, just a mother–baby dyad.' I’ve been thinking about that and about what he might have meant. I’m wondering if this is what you’re talking about here, that in a sense there’s no such thing as a patient, just the patient–therapist dyad. The oozings and spurtings of Joseph’s creative imagination make no sense, or at least cannot be therapeutically worked with, unless they’re somehow englobed in the dyad.'

'That’s exactly right. That’s it,' says Giles. 'The oozings and spurtings remain disembodied if there’s only one body to claim them, if there’s no relationship.'

I feel more in tune with what Giles is saying than I was at the beginning of the session and it occurs to me that remembering my dream of a blackened heart’s soul has something to do with this.

'But,' Giles continues, 'this isn’t an either–or. Hillman and I aren’t as polarised as this discussion is implying. I think we’re both trying to find a way to include in our work both thoughtful imagination and intuitive knowledge on the one hand and subtlety and relatedness on the other. And for me this must include trying to find shareable words, trying to find a common language, to make meaning of the images and sensations we experience in the analytic relationship. These words, this language, helps makes sense of internal chaos and unknowing. The words shift something along.'

'And isn’t this connected, Giles, with what you’ve written about ‘relational energy’?'

'What are you thinking about?' asks Giles.

'Well, as I’ve been thinking about this business of “blind spots”, I’ve been wondering if there’s some way of thinking about the world, about reality, I guess ... some way of thinking philosophically or metaphysically about
things ... which might open a door ... or take the blinkers off. I mean, I'm feeling stuck. I can understand what you say, but when Joseph walks in the door, it's as if I go into a way of thinking that makes what you say unavailable to me. This must be to do with philosophical assumptions, with what I'm assuming is going on in a room when two people meet. I suppose I'm trying to think philosophically ... or think differently philosophically, as I assume we're all thinking philosophically all the time even when we don't think we are. We're always making assumptions about what a person is, what a person wants, what moves him or her at the deepest levels ... So I'm thinking about Freud and Klein and the whole of that tradition ... I'm sorry to go on like this Giles, and I'll get to the relational energy bit in a minute ...

'Don't apologise. Do go on. This is important,' says Giles.

'Well Freud and Klein take a particular philosophical stance, don't they? They both say that what's going on in a therapy is to do with the management of instincts, and at times they seem to be saying that it's the struggle between the life and the death instincts, or between love and hate.'

'They also talk about the struggle between the acceptable and the unacceptable, and therefore about repression and resistance,' says Giles.

'So theirs is an intrapsychic focus, informed by philosophical assumptions about what it is to be a human being,' I say. 'You're now encouraging me to think about things differently, but I don't as yet have an alternative metaphysic to underpin or shape my experience. It's like I hear your words, and yet when a client enters the room I still tend to see before me an ego trying to cope with conflicting instincts, or (if I shift to a more Jungian perspective) a self trying to cope with the demands of many internal gods or complexes.'

'This is how you see your clients because, perhaps, this is how you see yourself,' says Giles.

'Absolutely,' I say. 'It's not easy for me to think about my Hannibal dream other than in terms of trying to cope with an unwelcome visitor from within! That sounds strange, 'visitor from within', but you know what I mean. There are internal happenings, which I guess I connect with an instinctual life, which seem to be the source of my experiences. Sometimes I
feel full of zing, full of a life force that seems to charge me up – Freud’s life instinct, I guess, or Schopenhauer’s will…”

‘Or the Romantics’ nature flowing through you,’ says Giles, ‘Schelling’s world spirit, Fichte’s reason in action…”

‘… and sometimes I’m visited by these Hannibal moods, where I feel imprisoned, artificially and desperately controlling, full of rage or despair or hopelessness or ineffectiveness … and it feels like a death instinct, it feels like some kind of preparation for a leave-taking, like saying that my time is over, the energy is running out, the zing is elsewhere.’

‘You feel shaped and ruled by what you experience internally,’ says Giles.

‘So many images come to me when we talk like this!’ I say breathlessly. ‘Reading The Faraway Tree as a child, reading about the lands that rotated at the top of the tree, which the children would find themselves in, trapped in for good or for ill, and from which they couldn’t escape until the rotating world of these lands turned a full circle … this image has always struck a chord in me, as it’s seemed to me that we’re each constantly finding ourselves in these unexpected lands from which we cannot escape, lands which are somehow related to our moods. We get stuck in despair, or filled up with elation, or have a time deeply connected to a kind of creative productivity…”

‘These lands are the different internal worlds,’ says Giles.

‘So when Schopenhauer talks about the “will as being the “thing-in-itself”, the one blind irresistible energy which animates the whole world…”

‘He doesn’t say it’s irresistible,’ says Giles. ‘Schopenhauer says there’s a way to escape its miserable grip on your life.’

‘Yes, but it’s still an intrapsychic escape route,’ I say. ‘If you can think about the world in the right way, you can escape the suffering … but it’s still intrapsychic … So when he talks about the will, and Nietzsche talks about the “will to power”, or the Romantics talk about nature as source, then there’s this overwhelming metaphysical underpinning to the way we see things, to the way I see things when Joseph is in the room. I see a person with some kind of essential and probably problematical relationship with forces or urges
or instincts or energies that operate within or through him in some kind of a way."

I've got quite stirred up and pause for a moment, but feel the engagement with Giles and with ideas. This is fun.

'So you're looking for some alternative philosophy,' says Giles.

'For a while I thought I'd found it in Jung,' I say. 'And, I guess, in Hillman. Not that their perspectives were less intrapsychic, it's just that they seemed to have a more exciting ... or a less hemmed in ... notion of what the intrapsychic consisted of. Like for Jung there was this inescapable connection to the collective unconscious, this sense too that we were connected to the gods through the archetypal patternings of our experience. And with both of them, Hillman and Jung, there was the teleology of it, the sense that we weren't simply coming from somewhere (usually a damaged past), but we were moving towards something which was a kind of fulfilment.'

'All much too rosy for a pessimist like me, I'm afraid,' says Giles. 'Too rosy?' I ask.

'Your teleological focus puts too much emphasis on health for my liking,' says Giles. 'It skips over some of the less palatable features of human life, some of its darker features. Our philosophical tradition has forgotten its Hobbes.'

'That life is nasty, brutish and short,' I say.

'Too great an emphasis on the good, on the possibility of fulfilment and contentment can blind us to the existence of limit, cruelty, suffering and immovable stuckness. You're working with a model of health when you're thinking that Joseph is moved on by teleological urges towards fulfilment, but our clients are also struggling with terrible losses, defeats, absences, lacks. Not everything is going forward.'

'You're saying that blind spots can come out of too rosy a view of things ...'

'We can ignore painful realities ...'
'And that, I suppose, is one aspect of my wanting a metaphysical viewpoint broadened, or changed ... or something ... so I can see things differently.'

'Your Hannibal dream seems to be partly about stuckness and limits ...'

'Yes, though I feel buoyed up by its final image, of Hannibal wanting to play.'

'But he can't. He wants to, but he can't.'

'Yes Giles but isn't the important thing that he wants to. He's filled with this longing which surely is also an energy, something which moves him towards playing.'

'Perhaps,' says Giles. Again there's a pause into which many thoughts press.

'Giles, can I go back a few steps? I was saying something about the tradition that seems to take an intrapsychic focus, and was saying that perhaps there's another way of thinking about this. So I wanted you to talk some more about your thoughts about a 'relational energy'.'

'There's been a shift since the first generation of analysts, since Freud and Jung and Klein. Well, even these three were beginning the shift themselves in their thinking about transference. But it was people like Winnicott (among the post-Freudians) and Fordham (amongst the post-Jungians) who began to focus on dyads, on what was going on between mother and infant, for example.'

'And so you write, Giles, about a 'relational energy' which you see as fundamental, in the same way that Schopenhauer would say the will was fundamental, or Nietzsche would say the will to power was fundamental.'

'The way I've sometimes described this is as a vital force which leads us instinctively to make contact with others in the world. It's like an urge which energetically permeates the psyche-soma and naturally and necessarily reaches out to mate with the human environment, in other words with other embodied vital persons.'

'It sounds not unlike what Freud would have called the sex drive,' I say.

'Or Schopenhauer the will.'
‘It is very like these concepts,’ says Giles. ‘It is like a primal vital spark which instinctively lives itself out between me and the world, making life between me and the world, seeming to find it.’ My difference with Freud, though, is that I experience it in the therapy whereas Freud instinctively excluded it and attempted to remain disengaged and objective.’

‘He saw the sex drive operating between Dora and every man that crossed her path, but not between Dora and Freud.’

‘Freud knew about the erotic transference. His friend Jung succumbed to it and wrote to him asking advice! But he wasn’t one to allow for messiness or confusion.’

‘So you’re saying that this vital spark is present in the therapeutic relationship.’

‘It is essential. Without it, things are dead. Without it there is nothing actually happening.’

‘It’s a reaching out?’ I ask.

‘It’s not a simple instinct, but a mix of things. I sometimes think of the people who walk into my room as being a bundle of mixed-up emotions, and I think that this is what this relational energy thing is, a mix up of chaotic emotions, a mix up of love and hate. In the infant it’s present, it’s the still small and frightened but potentially strong and passionate instinctual self’.

‘It’s what makes the baby and the mother a dyad rather than two separate units.’

‘I think so,’ says Giles. ‘And it’s running both ways of course.’

‘From the mother to the baby too.’

‘Yes, though some of the time there’s a kind of digesting by the mother – and it’s useful to think about it this way when we think of therapy as being a kind of redoing of the not-good-enough primal relationship – there’s a digesting by the mother of the infant’s chaotic instincts and feelings. She needs to take them in, to digest them and to think and feel them out, and then, having sorted them out, to return them to the child so he can see what life energies belong to him, and how they belong to him.’
‘You’re saying, the developmentalists are saying, that the people who come to see us, people like Joseph, are people for whom this digesting and returning process has somehow gone wrong.’

‘When, for whatever reason, the environment is not good enough, feelings remain chaotic, overwhelming in some core way,’ says Giles. ‘The feelings are experienced as invasions of envy or resentment, hatred or primitive desire, as stealings of life and joy.’

‘What Winnicott called “unbearable anxieties”’?

‘Yes indeed,’ says Giles. ‘Threats of disintegration and the terror of isolation. To ward these off, narcissistic or even autistic defences get set up to hold things together.’ I think this is what you’re seeing with Joseph.

‘And you’re saying, presumably, that this isn’t the end of the story because the essential vitality and relational energy continue to reach out (however tentatively) to the world, and the resulting confusions eventually begin to unsettle the defences.’

‘That’s right, and I think this is what Joseph is trying to find a way through. But it’s not easy. He wants to connect with you but he can’t do it, his defences (if you like) are too entrenched. He offers you what he can: his confusions, his images, his dreams, his stories of painful encounters in the playground, and he wants you to do something with these. He wants you to do more than just admire them!’

‘He wants a relationship,’ I say.

‘Not just a relationship, but a relationship that’s doing something,’ says Giles. ‘More than approval or encouragement, though of course it can include these things. When are you seeing him again?’

‘Later today,’ I say. ‘If he turns up.’

‘Hi Joseph,’ I say as I open the door to him. He’s on time, and as he stands at the doorstep he’s disentangling a pair of earphones which have got caught up in his collar. He explains to me later that he sits alone on the bus on the way here, listening to his music.

‘Hi,’ he says brightly as he sits down. ‘Today I remembered! Sorry about last week.’
'Before we begin today,' I say, 'I wonder if it would be all right with you if I used your story in a talk I’m giving next week.'

'Yeah, that’s cool!' he says. 'What’s the talk?'

'I’ve been asked by the local Jung Society ...'

'Jung Society?'

'Jung was a Swiss psychologist whose ideas have been quite influential. The Jung Society is an organisation made up of people interested in his ideas, and they have monthly talks. They’ve asked me to talk about adolescence and I thought I’d use your story in my talk.'

'In what way? Are you going to be talking about me or just reading my story?'

'Just the story. In part of my talk I want to say something about the kinds of thoughts and feelings that adolescents have about good and evil, ugliness and beauty, that kind of thing, and your story fits in really well there.'

'Yes, that’s fine then. That’s cool.' Joseph says brightly. He’s smiling in that big open way that sometimes sits uneasily with the hint of steel in his eyes.

'So what are we going to do today?' he asks.

'Yes,' I say. 'Where will we start today?'

He looks at me enquiringly. 'What do you think?' he asks, the emphasis clear. 'What would you like to do?'

This is a delicate moment. On the one hand, I want him to feel supported and secure and can hear his request that I take the initiative. On the other, I have to be careful not to set myself up as the parent, inviting either acquiescence or rebellion. To use Hillman’s terms, I have to leave room for the phenomenon to speak.

'I feel you putting the ball into my court,' I say. 'You’re wanting me to decide what we should do.'

Joseph is silent. I hold up an imaginary ball, and say, 'You want to put the ball in my court, for me to decide, and I want to put it back into your hands'. I give him the ball and he sits quietly for a moment. 'I wonder if it might help if I talked about some possible ways we might start, then you can decide.'
'Yes,' he says, 'that would be good.'

'OK,' I say, 'well, there are a number of ways you might like to start. Maybe you'd like to use the figures to make another scene on the carpet and perhaps tell me another story. Or maybe you'd like to begin with a drawing. Perhaps there are things happening at school that you'd like to talk about, or things you've been thinking or feeling that you want to tell me.'

The use of 'you' rather than 'we' sits uneasily given what Giles has been saying about the shared space, the psychotherapeutic crucible being made up of two people. Perhaps it would have been better to talk about what 'we' might do.

But it seems that my formulation has been good-enough. 'Well,' Joseph says immediately, 'there are some things that have been happening at school. There's this boy at school, not Russell but a boy called Henry, and when we play cricket he calls me useless.'

'He calls you useless.'

'He calls everyone useless, I suppose, but it doesn't seem to bother the others. I'm not all that good at cricket, and I know there are things I do wrong. I just don't know as much about it as the others, I'm not as skilled.'

'So it hurts when he calls you useless.'

'A bit I guess. I try not to let it bother me, and I just go off to the library or something.'

'You get away from it.'

'Yes, it's not so bad really. Russell is still up to his old tricks a bit too. The other day in the art class he was teasing me a bit but I just ignored it and got on with my stuff and didn't let it bother me.'

'He was teasing you again.'

'Just a bit but it didn't really bother me.'

'I noticed that you said a couple of times that you didn't let the teasing bother you.'

'Well, I guess it bothered me a bit,' he says.

'It bothered you a bit.'

'Yes, well I get pretty upset inside about some of these things sometimes. But I just make myself forget about it. I don't let it affect me too much.'
‘You feel things pretty intensely at times but you make yourself forget about it.’

‘Yes, I guess I do.’

‘You feel pretty vulnerable to those kinds of things but you’ve worked out ways of dealing with them.’

‘Yes, you’ve just got to ignore them and get on with things. That’s not the only problem I’ve got though …’ Joseph says.

I want to slow him down, as I have this feeling there’s something being revealed and then quickly put away back out of sight again. In particular I’m wanting to say something about the connection between the ‘too-muchness’ of his feelings leading to a disengagement which keeps him on the outside, but I haven’t quite got the words for it yet. In the meantime he’s on to something else.

‘I’ve got this other problem,’ he continues. ‘I’m finding it really difficult to get into my homework, I keep procrastinating.’

‘You keep procrastinating.’

‘Yes, I’d always rather read than do my schoolwork.’

Quite right too, I think to myself! Why do we set up things at school so that kids feel guilty about preferring the soulfully rich to the intellectually trite? Joseph has touched one of my hobby horses. I half-listen as Joseph tells me about some deadly project he’s got to do for school. He’s got to list the imports and exports of the Netherlands, for heaven’s sake! And no doubt he’ll be instructed to ‘present his work neatly and without spelling errors’! What, I wonder, does he do with the dancing and singing Joseph (he’s told me how much he loves these things, how alive he felt in the production of the Inferno) in the midst of this school drudgery? Does that side of him go underground, along with the young philosopher who wonders about the relationship between good and evil?

‘But my mum and dad could tell you more about this,’ he says, perhaps sensing that he’s lost my full attention for the moment, ‘because they have to deal with the consequences.’

‘They have to deal with the consequences.’

‘Yes, they’re the ones who have to keep nagging me about my work.’
‘They nag you about it.’

‘Well, I’m glad they do really, because I’ve got very high standards for myself and I get upset when I don’t live up to them.’

‘You like to do well,’ I say, and am aware that he’s withdrawing energy from the conversation, that his eyes are again moving around the room.

‘I’d really like to play a game on your computer, or maybe explore the Internet a bit,’ he says.

‘I don’t think so,’ I say again. ‘That’s not the business we’re engaged in here.’

‘What exactly is your job?’ he asks.

‘I’m a psychotherapist,’ I say.

‘Yes, I thought so,’ he says. I’m feeling alarmed as once again the session slips away from my grasp, once again we drift into disconnection. He sits silently for a while and then turns to me, wide-eyed and expectant. I smile and remind him that he’s still holding the ball.

‘What was that list again?’ he asks, and again I talk about the things he might like to do, adding this time the possibility of doing some more with the story about the two lands.

‘Yes, that’s what I’ll do I think,’ he says. ‘I’ll do some more with my story.’

For the next twenty minutes he sits quietly in the middle of my room, carefully arranging figures he’s gathered from my shelves. There’s nothing desultory about this play, unlike some of our conversation. Occasionally he breaks the silence by asking if I’ve got something that would do for the sea (I bring him a blue towel) or a boat (I point one out that he hasn’t seen in the shelves).

‘There,’ he says with satisfaction when his scene is done. I can see a coastal strip or island populated by animals and little humans and on which there are three prominent statues of sages. Out at sea there is an alien spaceship. ‘This is the world of the good,’ he continues, ‘and I’m now going to give you a detailed description of the good side. There are two main rulers of the good side, which are represented in statue figures. One is Quon Yen ... here ... and the other is Buddha ... here. The ruler at the moment is King
Jung ... this one ... and he is the representative of the main rulers' spirit. The people and animals that live in this half of the world have all gathered towards the seashore here. You can see the whales near the shore, and all the other creatures are there on the sand. They've gathered because every year on this day their alien friends from Outer Space ... see that alien ship there? ... that's just come from outer space. They come to deliver one animal and one human that they have taken to their planet for a complete holiday. When they return, the person and the animal will swim to shore on the whale's back and will be greeted by the King and Scarecrow. Scarecrow will read from a special parchment the names of the person and the animal which are to spend the next year holidaying with their alien friends. After Scarecrow has read the parchment, he folds it up and the whale takes the animal and the person out to the alien's ship where the aliens will take them up and fly them away to their home. After they have left, the great decision will come again to the King on who will go next year. While he is making these decisions, all the animals and people go back to their daily lives of work, rest and play.'

'So,' I say, 'there's this annual ritual on the good side.'

It feels like such a lairne comment, unconnected to anything really, though I guess it's a kind of a summary of the story that's just been enacted in front of me.

'Yes,' says Joseph, withdrawing again, my sense of inadequacy perhaps communicating itself to him. It's time for him to leave, and as he goes I wonder in a passive kind of way what it is that is slowly being revealed here, when it will be that I'll hear the phenomenon's words clearly.

'Did you get my notes on the session, Giles?'

'I did indeed.'

'I feel as far away as I ever was from being able to use what you're telling me!' I say. 'It makes sense when we're talking together but it's somehow unusable when I'm actually in the room with Joseph.'

'This is a considerable adjustment, this is a different way of thinking about things. It's bound to take some time before it's usable. And it's early days yet.'
CHAPTER 2 FEELING USELESS

'The alarming thing, though, is that Joseph seems to be retreating rather than engaging. The trend is away from the kind of shared world that you seem to be talking about, not towards it.'

'Perhaps,' says Giles, 'We'll see.'

'You've been saying that there may be blind spots, and that these may be to do with an overly intrapsychic focus, a way of sitting with a client which casts the therapist in the role of observer of a drama rather than participant in a process.'

'That's right,' says Giles.

'It seems to me that it's not just Hillman who is guilty of the sin of talking about therapy as if it were observation rather than participation,' I say. 'Isn't this what Freud was doing with his metapsychological models of the struggles between id, ego and superego, or Jung when he talked about complexes and the collective unconscious, the layers of the house (as he put it in that famous dream), or Klein with her conflicting instincts of love and hate?'

'Quite possibly,' says Giles.

I expected a fuller response and am momentarily thrown. It's as if he's waiting for more, as if the point of my opening is not clear yet.

'I suppose I'm trying to understand better why I find myself so often cast into the role of observer. Is it the psychoanalytic tradition, or a character trait of my own, or is it something that Joseph is doing to me?'

'Probably all of the above I would imagine,' says Giles.

'It happened again in that last session,' I say. 'I just didn't know how to respond to Joseph's story. It felt like a response was necessary, that without one there'd be another withdrawal, but I didn't know how to think about the story.'

'Hmm,' says Giles. 'That's not something you would often feel, is it? I mean, you work with young people's stories such a lot. It's an area where you feel comfortable, generally speaking.'

'Well it is and it isn't,' I say. 'Yes, I've worked a lot with stories, but somehow it's been in a different spirit. I enjoy them and I know that young people enjoy telling them to me. I think I listen in a particular way to these
stories, and I like Hillman’s description of them as ‘tales of our souls’. I think this is so different to the way young people’s stories are generally listened to, in schools especially though things are changing there. Generally in schools the stories are seen as immature literary attempts, and they get subjected to the kind of critical attention that makes the more sensitive story tellers clam up. So yes, I do feel comfortable in this area, I know that I’m able to set up the conditions where young people want to tell stories and I think my enjoyment of them matters profoundly in many cases .... But Giles you’re making me aware of something else about stories, or maybe it’s something else about Joseph, I’m not sure which yet. You were saying last week that he’s wanting a relationship which is to do with more than encouragement and approval, and this is where I start to get into less familiar territory with stories. I know that Joseph is wanting more than just my warm response, important though that is. But it’s as if I don’t know how to think about his stories, I don’t have a perspective on what a story is. This is why I find people like Freud and Jung and Klein so fascinating but also so intimidating. They each had a clear theoretical perspective which enabled them to respond to a dream or an anecdote. Freud would see a repression, Jung a compensation and Klein some manifestation of the struggle between loving and hating. The clear theoretical stance would lead to an unambiguous interpretation. But I can’t believe in their theories. I can’t believe in any simple theory. And so I get stuck. I don’t know what a story or a dream or an anecdote is. These things seem too complex to me. I can’t say any one thing about them. What’s a story? Something deep and mysterious and intensely personal, something vital, life-engaging ... I know these things. These are the things I was saying in that dream last week about my birthday party, and no-one wanted to listen! ...What do you think a story is Giles? What are you thinking when you’re listening to a story or a dream? What kind of theoretical thoughts would you have had in mind had Joseph been your client and had told you this story about the detailed side of the good?’

‘Not theoretical thoughts, I wouldn’t have been thinking theoretical thoughts. They would have got in the way. I would have been thinking something like, “What’s happening here?”’ ... “What bits of Joseph are being
expressed in these images?" And maybe I’d be thinking, “What’s happening between us here? What effect is his story having?” By the way, what were you feeling as he was telling you this new story?

‘Earnest and anxious!’ I say exasperatedly. ‘I feel burdened by my earnestness, by an image of myself as the conscientious and sensitive therapist. It gets in the way!’

‘It stops you from playing,’ says Giles. ‘It stops the flow of communication.’

‘But it’s not just a matter of playing, is it? It’s not just a matter of relaxing and enjoying the experience and then the right response will come? I can’t believe that Winnicott played with no theoretical background to his perceptions, or that you respond to a dream in an entirely untheoretical frame of mind?’

‘No, you’re right. Despite Bion ... you know what Bion said about this?’

‘Remind me,’ I say.

‘Bion said that in order to receive the patient’s communications which are often at a psychotic and unconscious level, we must approach each session without memory and without ambition.’

‘Meaning?’ I ask.

‘Meaning that we must receive each patient at the beginning of a session as if this were the first time we’d seen them (this was also an idea of Fordham’s), as if we knew nothing about them, and we must listen without theoretical restraints and without hopes of any particular outcomes. Impossible, of course, even for Bion. You’re right, there are always theoretical thoughts there. But he has a point. Too much thinking of a particular kind can get in the way. That’s what’s so good about Winnicott, the sense of playfulness which he manages to bring to his work. It’s rigorous, informed, highly disciplined no doubt, but it’s also engaging, flirtatious and fun.’

‘Flirtatious?’

‘I’m thinking of Joseph. I’m thinking of your sense of him trying to make contact and then withdrawing. He’s trying to mate with you, he’s trying to find a way of creating something new. Of course I’m not talking literally,
I'm not talking about something literally sexual here, though I am talking about bodies and putting things into others and withdrawals and encounters that lead to orgasms and coitus interruptus.'

'And so you are talking about theory here,' I say. 'In one sense. You're saying that there's a way of thinking about what's going on in therapy, what's happening when Joseph tells me his story, which help you listen in a helpful and engaged way, which allow you to respond in helpful and engaged ways. This is what I'm searching for Giles! A way of thinking that's going to help!'

'Way of thinking? Mmm, perhaps,' he says. 'But I see what you mean.'

'I'm wanting to understand your way of thinking here, Giles. Your theoretical perspective. I want to know what, according to Giles, a story is!'

'Well, to be terribly banal, a story is something that one person tells in order to get something out and into another person. Isn't it? Isn't that what a story is? So it's not a thing, it's a process, it's something happening.'

'You can think of a story as a thing,' I say. 'Surely that's the way it's most often thought about. There's the story, that's the thing, and there's the telling, and that's the process.'

'But I don't think that actually helps here,' says Giles. 'As soon as you think about the story like that, as an object, then you immediately leave yourself out. You immediately objectify things, you cast yourself in the role of the observer. Isn't that what's happening here, with Joseph?'

'You mean if I think of the story as a thing, as an object, then it makes it more difficult to see it as a relational thing, as some manifestation of relational energy, of him trying to do something to me, or with me, or something like that?'

'That's it, I think,' says Giles. 'I like to think about images and ideas not as something separate from bodies and processes. That was Descartes tragic move, to separate bodies and thoughts, to say that they're essentially different. That's taken us down a very bumpy problematical road.'

'As I'm listening to you, Giles, I'm trying to think about this story Joseph told me as if it were a process. Not a thing that he's handing over to me, but like a gesture I suppose, an act, an attempt to do something.'
'Go on.'
'A minute ago you used the word "flirtatious". I’m trying to think about
his story as an attempt by Joseph to flirt with me, to engage my interest if
you like.'
'Yes.'
'Well, the image that comes to me is of someone who’s not very good at
it. Or who’s frightened.'
'Go on, this is good, this is getting somewhere.'
'I guess I’m responding here not just to his story but to the bigger process,
to what happens when he tells me the story, to this sense I keep getting of
him retreating. He wants to show me something secret, or personal …'
'He wants to expose himself a bit,' says Giles.
'But he’s not really sure how to do it. It’s that game we play at the
beginning of our session, where he says ‘you go first,’ and I say, ‘no, you go
first’. He wants help, he’s shy or timid. Then he talks about things at school
and very tentatively allows me to see that there’s real distress in there, but he
rushes on before it gets too exposed. He wants me to know but he’s scared
what I’ll do with it, with his vulnerability I guess. Then he tells me this story
which begins with a leader called King Jung … and I’ve just been telling him
that I’m wanting to read his story to the Jung Society, so this is him telling
me that he likes the way his earlier story has got into me, and he wants to
mate with that bit again … something like that …'
'I think so,' says Giles. 'He’s wanting you to know that he’s pleased that
his story got into your Jung bit, and now he’s putting your Jung bit into one
of his stories …'
'... but even in the story there’s a sense of the tentativeness of this whole
mating process, of comings and goings, of engagement (with the world) and
regular zippings away into outer space …'
'... into disengagement, to holidays, to safety …'
'He’s wanting me to know what’s going on. All unconsciously of course.'
'Steve, this is right, I’m sure what you’re saying is right.'
'But it’s not the whole story,' I say.
'Nothing ever is,' says Giles. 'But this is a useful part of the story. Images are connected to feelings which are connected to bodies. You asked earlier what a story was. Another way of answering your question might be to say that stories are body bits transformed into communicable and therefore relational form. Ideas and images are what you use for mating when you're not using your body.'

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I'm pouring myself a cup of coffee at a Jungian conference in Melbourne when a friend comes up and asks for some help selling some journals. I immediately feel resentful, intruded upon, my person somehow violated, and I say something terse and distancing. I've come to the conference to soak up the presentations, to withdraw in the highly introverted way that I sometimes fall into. The suggestion that I sit at a table marketing a journal feels like an insensitive tearing of me away from where I need to be.

I sit down and become aware of what I haven't been aware of until this moment, that I am filled with a wordless dread which seems mad. My friend has asked me to help, and I've been plunged into some kind of despair which leaves me feeling utterly alone (yet in the company of some of my closest friends). I feel both violated and abandoned (yet no-one has done or said anything hostile). I desperately want them to see my despair and to do something about it, and yet I know that if any of them approaches I would spit. I feel everyone talking to each other and nobody wanting to know me, everyone confident and 'on the inside', me pathetic and outside the boundaries. I know it is mad, but I am stuck in it.

For the rest of the day, breaks of any kind in the proceedings are terrible, for it is then that (in my fantasy) everyone sees the blackness surrounding me and feels the venom seeping out from my insides. At tea breaks I sit alone. At lunch, my journal friend sits with me but I have to flee. I approach another friend hoping that making the awful effort will break the spell but she is preoccupied and I run away back to my walled rage and self-loathing.

Giles gives a paper later in the day called 'The necessities of confusion', and I feel a kind of perverse relief when he gives words to a psychotic state I
think I'm experiencing. He talks about 'necessary regressions to confusions destructive of a false neurotic order', of 'our ever present under-realm of pre-order', of the possibility that 'we live in a place of disintegration'. There are psychotic states, says Giles, which are pre-verbal and which therefore can only be expressed (for example, in analysis) through affect-laden non-verbal attacks on others. He seems to be talking about my present targetless and seemingly causeless rage and paranoia.

This state is not new to me, by any means. My family, friends and colleagues have all seen it and many have been stung by it. It has gone by several names in my own analysis.

At last, at the end of the conference proceedings for the day, I approach my journal friend and suggest we go for a walk. I am then able to talk about how I've been feeling during the day, and as I talk I recall how as a boy at boarding school I'd experienced these feeling of exclusion regularly, sometimes daily for weeks or even months. Everyone else at school seemed to know how to conduct themselves, what opinions or feelings it was necessary to express or hide in order to be accepted in the in-crowds. I could never get it. The day my younger brother left me off his birthday list so that I was excluded from the special table with its cake and candles was just the most public example of a humiliation that I felt privately all the time.

Bedtime – drawing the covers over me and shutting out a world that I did not belong to – was the best moment of the day.

My own psychological wounds help me empathise with young people like Joseph, but there's a danger too. I have an instinctive tendency to avoid the opening up of old wounds, a fear of the psychotic, and tendency to engage thoughtfully and thoroughly rather than emotionally. I can end up missing what it is that a Joseph is asking of me. Perhaps at one level he's wanting me as an ally in making a safe haven, but he's also wanting more. So much of the material in his dreams and stories is about making connections, about wanting to dismantle the barriers. Is there something operating powerfully in my psychology – Hannibal and his powerful underground organisation perhaps – that makes it difficult for me to engage with this reality-focused struggle?
Chapter 3 Trouble at school

It's just over a month since Joseph told me his 'detailed description of the good side', and we've had four further sessions. I'm now again standing by the window looking out into the street, again trying to calm and clear my mind. A lot has happened, and he's due to arrive for our eighth session at any moment.

The first three of these intervening sessions were rather drifty affairs, with an elusive underlying dynamic to do with who was going to take the initiative, who was going to take responsibility for the direction we took. Joseph himself seemed not to care very much. It was as though having failed to persuade me to let him use the computer he was shrugging his shoulders and saying, 'Well, if not that, then I don't care what we do. You tell me Steve.'

He'd drawn and painted (after asking me to make a choice about what he should do) and in the sixth session he'd taken out scores of toy animals and a group of cavemen from my shelves and made a long line with them which he called 'Evolution', the dinosaurs at one end and people at the other.

There were clever thoughts that occurred to me as I watched him setting out these figures. Was he, for example, wondering about where he fitted into the scheme of things, or making a statement about his own evolution? Was he unconsciously trying to connect some of his more primitive drives with superego controls? Was this another version of his adolescent wondering about the nature of things?

But none of these attempts on my part to find meaning in his offerings could allay the growing suspicion that I'd somehow lost touch with what was going on, that we'd begun to drift without purpose. He'd drawn, during the fourth session, a big black and white question mark, and then on the same
page a plus sign. I understood the question mark as coming out of our mutual puzzlement and wondered if the plus sign signified a wish for something more. I said something along these lines but he’d just shrugged his shoulders. I tried another tack and asked him where these two enigmatic drawings might be placed within his story of the Evil and the Good, and we read his story out loud again.

‘In this part,’ he said, pointing over my shoulder to the paragraph about the meeting point between the two sides. ‘The conference area where they can talk. I think that’s where the picture belongs.’ But he couldn’t say more than that and again clammed up when I tried to explore it. I felt him leaving crucial things up to me.

Perhaps, I’d begun to think, the work was already done and we were ready to finish. I’d recently found myself talking with Giles about other clients rather than Joseph. Perhaps all that Joseph had needed from me was the opportunity to describe his predicament at school and to give voice to his stunning story about ‘The Evil and the Good’? Perhaps everything else was superfluous?

So I’d begun to talk to him, during the fifth and sixth session, about ending our sessions, not proposing it but wanting to know what he thought. At first he wasn’t sure but then concluded that he’d like ‘one or two more sessions to wind things up, and then perhaps some time with the computer.’ After that we’d stop. I began to relax, to withdraw energy from the work, to let the puzzlement go and to refocus my energies onto other clients whose needs seemed more urgent.

Then, a couple of days after our sixth session, the phone rang late one night. It was Joseph’s mother to tell me that she’d had a phone call from Joseph’s teacher earlier in the day.

‘Something’s going on, Steve, and it really worries me,’ she said.

‘Apparently yesterday at school Joseph was making little trip wires out of string around the kindergarten playground. One of the little kids tripped over a wire and ended up with a bloody nose, not hurt seriously but he could have been. Somehow they discovered that Joseph was responsible. I tried to talk to Joseph about it when he got back from school today but all he would say was
‘I don’t know, something came over me so I did it.’ Then he went outside and vanished for about an hour. When I finally went looking for him I found that he was in the back garden clearing a patch of weeds that we’d been meaning to get to for some weeks. But he hadn’t just cleared the weeds. He’d pulled out the plants as well. He was very proud of what he’d done and the effort he must have expended in that hour was enormous, it was a big job. My initial reaction, though, was one of disappointment. He just didn’t seem aware that he’d pulled out the plants as well. Not that I care about the plants really, it’s just that I don’t know what gets into him ... There have been other incidents at school too, fights with girls and little kids, and Joseph has been told that if there are more then he’ll be given time-out from school for a few days to reflect on what he’s done, or even asked to leave the school ... Steve, there have been things happening at home, too. A couple of weeks ago, his younger brother’s new toy car kept disappearing and it turns out that Joseph first hid it and then put it in the bin. When I tackled him about this he just said, ‘Something came over me and so I did it.’ ... And the strange thing is that while all this is going on Joseph’s school work is really excellent, he’s working hard and doing well and passing up chances to do fun things with me and his two brothers in order to do his school work. His teacher says that he’s very worried about what he calls ‘the split’ in Joseph.

The effect of the phone call was to bring me back to my confusions, to reharness my energies. At the session last week, I suggested to Joseph that it seemed that our work wasn’t over after all, that there was more going on beneath the surface than we’d been aware of. He insisted that everything was OK and that he was ready to finish. The more I tried to keep our attention fixed on what had been happening at school and at home, the more defensive and fixed he became. I wondered aloud about his first story, about the existence of the two worlds and the mystery, and suggested that something of the quality of that story was present in what had been going on during the previous weeks at home and at school. Joseph reacted strongly. Was I, he wanted to know, suggesting that what he’d been doing at school was evil?

‘There is something going on here, Joseph,’ I said, both concerned that he was feeling misunderstood but also relieved that there was a renewed sense
of re-engagement in this conversation. 'I'm not saying that what you're doing is evil, but there is a mystery, something that I can't put my finger on and which is puzzling you too, it seems. You don't know why these things happen. Something comes over you.'

He shrugged and looked challengingly into my eyes.

'I don't want us to finish if there's still work for us to do,' I said.

He shrugged again. 'What sort of work?'

'I don't know,' I said.

We sat silently for a while, and then he said, 'Well what now?'

Talking about it directly wasn't helping. And I had unconsciously linked his actions with evil. It was all getting messy.

'Have you been dreaming?' I asked, feeling quite sure he would say, 'No, not really, not that I can remember anyway.'

'Well yes, as a matter of fact,' he said. 'The other night I had a very strange dream, all about me and my mum. We went to Sydney and we became somehow involved in producing counterfeit money. Somehow we lost touch with the money and then became involved in drugs, buying from the producer and then selling to users and it was all illegal. When we had finished with the drugs and made our profits, we then came back to Canberra, banked all the money and then we were arrested and found guilty of producing counterfeit money and smuggling drugs into the country. After we had finished our sentences and paid our hefty fines, we started producing soaps as a cottage industry and made large profits, but this time it was all legal.'

'So,' I said. 'You're involved in some kind of counterfeit operation and then in some drug dealing.'

'That's right,' said Joseph.

'But you're found out and arrested, and when you've served your sentence and paid your fines you turn your attention to producing soap.'

'Yes, strange isn't it?' he said.

'There's something familiar here, in this dream,' I said. 'It's reminding me of something, connecting me to something that's been present, or half-hidden, as we've been working together.'
‘Oh?’ said Joseph. ‘What’s that?’
‘I can’t really identify it,’ I said. ‘Does it feel at all familiar to you?’
‘I don’t think so,’ said Joseph. ‘I can’t think of what else it might be connected to.’ I was noticing as he talked how he did seem to be genuinely engaged with this question, not dismissive as he sometimes was.

It’s time to finish now,’ I said, ‘and I don’t really know what I want to say here, but there is something. Perhaps this is where we’ll start next time.’

I sent Giles an account of these four sessions. ‘I’ve read your notes,’ he said at the beginning of our next session. ‘You’re sensing that there is something half-hidden but you don’t know what it is.’

‘It’s like it’s just out of sight, or just out of my sight,’ I said. ‘I suppose I have this fantasy that it’s clear to you, that you’ll be able to tell me exactly what’s going on!’

‘Ah, the fantasy of omniscience,’ said Giles. ‘The fantasy that if we separate ourselves from the phenomena, if we cut off our emotional involvement and look at the thing objectively, then we’ll see it more clearly. But it’s just a fantasy I’m afraid. I need you to take me more into the experience, to talk about it a bit more. To tell me more about what you’re seeing or experiencing.’

‘Well,’ I said. ‘You know that I’m feeling puzzled, that I’m feeling this onus on me to see something clearly, to get it, and it’s almost as though the requirement to see it makes it more difficult for me to see anything.’

‘You’ve talked before about this sense of being intuitively blocked because you’re so seriously focused. You’re wanting to loosen the hold of your narrowing seriousness …’

‘… without losing touch with psychological realities that perhaps I’ve not been taking seriously enough.’

‘What are you referring to here Steve?’

‘I don’t want to lose sight of the seriousness of his situation. I think I have lost sight of that recently. I’ve been talking with him about ending these sessions and it’s almost as if there’s a link between me being less concerned about him and the recent incidents.’
'He’s feeling that you’re not getting it,' said Giles.
'That’s right. He’s feeling that no-one is getting it. Everyone’s perplexed. His teacher, his mother, me. Himself. We’re all in the dark about what this is that keeps coming over him.'
'I wonder,' said Giles. 'Are we so in the dark? You talked in your notes about feeling his dream ‘connected to something present’. It’s not just half-hidden, it’s also present: present in his dreams and in his stories, present in his actions in the playground, present in his interactions with you.'
'Tell me!' I said. 'Tell me what you’re seeing.'
'You have been telling me about a boy who is experiencing a split world, a polarised world. This is his parents’ world. This is his most important world and it’s split with the two halves at war with each other. He’s been tumbled out of Eden. Something evil has happened.'
'Do you mean literally evil? That he thinks that some bad force in the world has come into his life? Or are we talking about evil in a different sense?'
'Steve you are trying to be clear about something that is not clear. We have to go into the confusion first, into the undifferentiated space, to find words for it, to find words to describe our mutual experience of this space. Then, perhaps, some clarity may come. But we can’t impose clarity from the outside, as it were. We must puzzle this out together.'
'You’re talking about Joseph and me rather than you and me, aren’t you?'
'Both I suppose. We must learn to operate from within the experience, not shying away from confusing mixes of love and hate …'
'Or from what you’ve called before cunning madnesses,' I said. 'There’s something cunning, or coldly calculating … or confusedly dissembling … I feel the presence of an overcurrent of artifice in these sessions, a compulsive need to thwart my therapeutic intent, to throw me off the track, to unsettle me.'
'At some level he’s feeling shame, or the potential of shame. He’s frightened you’ll uncover some dark, dirty secret about him. He’s sensing the presence of evil in his world. We don’t as yet know what he means by this, what this experience of evil is for him, though from his story and his dream
and his actions we can say some things. We can say that it comes from out of
the blue, that it destroys the good, that it’s like a force that takes possession
of the world – his world – in painful ways. It splits. He’s desperately trying
to find a way to overcome this split, which is why the image of the meeting
place is so important to him. That’s where he locates the question mark and
the plus sign. He’s also trying to find a way of living with it, which
sometimes translates to a project in denial.’

‘He’s sitting there in our sessions saying that everything is OK, but
unconsciously he’s full of uncontained raw feeling which is somehow
inexpressible.’

‘I think that’s right Steve. The split has torn him apart and angered him
more than he can say. Literally more than he can say. He cannot speak about
this, only act it out. And his actions are not understood, not by him or by
anyone and he’s saying “Nobody’s got the message.” He’s saying “I’m going
to try every trick in the book until someone gets the message.”’

‘He can’t get the message himself,’ I said. ‘He needs someone else to get
it. This is what you were saying to me last time we talked about Joseph, isn’t
it, that there are things that the baby needs to push into the mother, for the
mother to digest (so to speak) and then return to the baby in a form that’s
assimilable.’

‘Steve is the place where it must happen. Where you and he are working
is the meeting place, Joseph’s place of mystery where the two sides can talk.
That story he told you is the beginning of the story. He’s battling with evil
out there, in the unheld space. The clearing of his mother’s garden is a heroic
task, but frenzied, undifferentiated, full of unconscious and conflicting intent.
He was possessed by a terrible energy, a warrior strength. Was he trying to
do an heroic task to help his mother, to take his father’s place as the man
around the place? How did he feel about his mother’s perplexed reaction?
Would this have pleased him or devastated him? Does he have to do
upsetting things to make an impression on her, to move his distracted mother
to take notice? These are questions that you can’t ask him but which events
make us ask ourselves. Perhaps he’s both furious with his parents and he
loves them fanatically.’
'I can't ask these questions,' I said half-regretfully. 'So often I want to be direct, to ask the questions, to get to the bottom of things.'

'You can't ask the questions because he cannot know the answers. These things won't even have framed themselves inside him as questions, just as impulses which manifest as actions and images. Hacking away at the garden. The mask of evil being partially revealed. Intimate partnerships with his mother in a life of crime. Asking questions about chaotic internal realities are just going to confuse him, scare him. He's too young to think about the evil as residing inside, he's needing to live it out in the world, doing his heroic tasks. Only much later will you be able to talk about how his own world is being torn apart.

'So if I can't talk to him about this now,' I say a little exasperatedly, 'what can I talk with him about? I don't want to just be the listener, I want to engage, that's what you keep urging. But engagement is going to be too threatening for him, isn't it? Isn't this what you're saying?'

'Well, maybe there are questions you can raise. Questions you can engage him with, coming out of what he's given you ... questions for example about the nature of evil. Engage him philosophically, safely. Perhaps you can ask him about the nature of evil. Evil has been revealed. Say something about the nature of evil.'

'Like what?'

'Give words to something that he seems to be hinting at, something like "Evil is that which destroys the good". See what he makes of that.'

'Because he's trying to understand something about the nature of evil?'

'No,' says Giles, 'because he's trying to come to terms with feelings or impulses that for him, for some reason, he's found the word 'evil' a good-enough label for. It seems that for Joseph evil is the incomprehensible quality that divides and destroys the good unities. He's clinging to the sides very, very hard. He's trying to mend the worlds, keep things together internally. Evil is a problem in his world.'

'And you're saying that he doesn't want to stop seeing me. At some level he's wanting us to engage here with these difficult and elusive things.'
‘He’s wanting you to be authoritative, not wishy washy. He’s wanting something solid from you. Say to him that it’s not yet time to finish. Use the metaphors that spring from his story. There’s more talking that needs to be done in the meeting place, there’s more work to be done in getting the two sides together.’

Joseph’s coming up the path now. I’ve just been rereading the ‘counterfeit money’ dream and am struck by its pervading mood of being entangled in a covert and underground operation, of being unmasked, and then of coming over to the good side where the cottage industry produces soaps. Soaps smell good and get rid of the dirt. I remember from his first story his description of the good side as ‘sweet smelling’. I’m trying to keep in mind what I think Giles has been telling me, that these dreams and images are the product of raw, unprocessed feeling, internal conflicting impulses, hates and loves, fears and yearnings, all unformed, preverbal, only expressible in images which describe a split world or which describe two polarised worlds which are wanting some kind of relationship with each other. Two worlds between which he darkly moves in his waking life, in ways which perplex mother, teacher, me ... and most of all, Joseph himself. I’m trying to keep in mind that Joseph is wanting me to play a role in this process, that he’s unconsciously drawing me into his confused and conflicted internal world and is hoping that together we can find a way through it, find words which will in some way alter things.

I open the door as he walks up the steps, and again he’s untangling earphones. He sits down, looks me in the eye and says, ‘Well?’

I pass the imaginary ball to him but he shakes his head. ‘No,’ he says. ‘Last week you said that you had more that you wanted to say.’

‘Well, in a sense I’m reluctant to say too much,’ I say. ‘I talked too much last week and felt you retreating as a result. I also was wrong to make that link between the evil that you wrote about in your story (which was all about the teasing and Russell) and your actions in the playground. But there is something important going on here, something which is hidden. I don’t know
what all this is about but I feel that it's important, that our work together isn't
finished yet.'

Joseph is listening very closely. He's not looking at me as I speak, not
staring boldly into my eyes as he sometimes does. I feel my concern being
received.

'In your stories, in your dreams, there is often a sense of evil being
present,' I say. 'Evil seems to be a part of things.'

'Without evil, there would be no balance,' he says. 'Evil is needed to
redress the balance.'

'To redress the balance,' I say.

'Yes... If too much space gets taken up by the good, then evil has to
come into things.'

There's a silence. Joseph appears to be deeply inside himself, much less
aware than usual of holding up a mask.

'Like the Garden of Eden,' I say. We had been talking about paradise
when he'd told me he was performing in Dante's Inferno.

'Yes,' he says. 'You can't just have paradise. Evil needs to enter the
picture.'

'The snake needs to come into the garden,' I say.

'Yes,' he says. 'Without the snake, there's too much good.'

'And when the snake comes and tells Eve to eat the apple,' I say, 'then
Adam and Eve are expelled from Paradise, then they have a knowledge of
good and evil.'

'Yes,' says Joseph.

I'm feeling balanced on a knife-edge here. In Hillman's writings there are
continual urgings to stay with the image, not to try to literalise it as the
literalisation limits it, takes away its spirit, scares it off and makes it vanish:
this is what had happened when I linked Joseph's story with what happened
at school. Giles, on the other hand, is continually encouraging me to make
links, to name what it is that is preoccupying my client, to bring it out into
the open where it can be thought about: this is what had happened in the first
session when I helped Joseph think about the actual barriers he was
experiencing in his life.
‘I wonder,’ I say, ‘if you had a sense of being expelled from Paradise when your parents split up.’

‘No, not really,’ says Joseph looking up. ‘That never really bothered me. It bothered William much more than me, he was really upset about it.’

‘It bothered William a lot.’

‘Yes, he used to cry and get really upset. He still does.’

‘He still gets pretty upset about it,’ I say.

‘Yes, it really annoys me to tell you the truth.’

‘It annoys you that he gets so worked up about it.’

‘Yes, William goes on and on about it in this whiny way and it really gets to me, I get really annoyed.’

‘He felt it at the time and still feels it.’

‘He should just accept that what’s happened has happened,’ says Joseph.

‘I have. I’ve completely accepted what’s happened.’

‘What did happen?’ I ask.

‘What do you mean?’

‘I was wondering what actually happened between your parents.’

‘Well, it all happened more than a year ago, before Mum brought us over here to Australia. Apparently, though I’m not sure about this, there was some argument about property and Dad was really upset about this. There were mumblings at dinner one night and then they were really upset with each other and I think Mum wanted to take me and William and Davie away somewhere to get away from Dad. Dad hid the car keys so that she couldn’t.’

‘This all happened out of the blue? Or had things been bad for a while?’ I ask.

‘If they were happening before that, I didn’t know about it. It just seemed to blow up out of nothing. It was very unexpected.’

‘It was a bit of a shock,’ I say.

‘You could say that,’ says Joseph. ‘But you get used to it, you have to just accept that these things happen.’

‘So you haven’t seen much of your dad since.’

‘Mum didn’t want us to have anything to do with Dad at first and we didn’t see him for six months.’
‘You didn’t see him for six months.’
‘Yes that’s right, but then we started to go to visit him, and then to stay with him. But William didn’t like all the coming and going and then there were more arguments and Mum told us one day that we were going to live in Australia.’
‘And you miss him.’
‘I guess, a bit. I don’t think about it much really.’
‘So your life has changed a lot from how it was when you were little.’
‘I guess so,’ he says. ‘But you get used to it....’
‘You, but not William,’ I say.
‘Yeah, it really bothers him still.’
‘I wonder whether it’s possible that underneath it really bothers you too. Maybe you cope with your feelings differently from William, but you both feel it intensely, painfully.’
‘I don’t let it bother me,’ he says dismissively, and then immediately follows this up with, ‘And by the way, I’ve decided to change schools. I’m going to leave my little school at the end of the week, and next term I’m going to start at a big government high school.’
‘You’re moving out of the safe place and into the big bad world,’ I say.
‘Yeah, I guess so,’ he says with a shrug. We’re both conscious that the hour is up and I can hear the winding up tone in his voice. ‘But I’m quite looking forward to it. We’re off on holidays next week so I won’t see you for a while, but I’ll tell you all about it when I get back.’

He’s gone, suddenly, abruptly. He’s scooted off again, away from an engagement he wants (or so Giles keeps telling me) but which it seems he cannot actually tolerate. He’s whooshed off and is soon out of sight and I don’t know whether the gossamer threads that have been joined between us can survive the whoosh and the gap.

Things beneath the surface. A necessary and forceful redressing of elemental balance, potentially violent and destructive if too long delayed. A boy for whom parental eruptions break out unexpectedly from an apparently peaceful landscape, and where now eruptions of a different kind – trip wires
in a children's playground, an heroic and manic weeding — come out of an apparently stoical acceptance of life. 'I don’t know what gets into him,' says his mother. 'Something came over me, so I did it,' says Joseph.

I, also, am in the grip of underworld pressures, as my Hannibal dream and my experience at the Melbourne conference demonstrate, and while these pressures give me much pain at times I’m also oddly attached to them. I want to be released from their constricting clutch, yet I don’t want them to be exposed, stripped back, reduced to an infantile state and banished from my experience of things. They feel too connected to how life necessarily is.

Joseph’s dreams of drugs and prison constellate my own thoughts and feelings about Hannibal. His confusions become mine, they get into me, I feel unable to think, overwhelmed by the apparent numinosity and import of what Joseph is telling or showing me. Freud would know what’s going on here (I’d think to myself); Klein would know what to say; Jung would know the archetypal forces being played out and would have a wealth of mythical or alchemical symbolism to bring to bear, to clarify and move things on; Giles too. I just feel at a loss. I remember this same mental blankness and panic when as a child doing some homework from school my father would stand behind me quietly but intensely repeating the word ‘concentrate’; or when in the middle of a chess game with a teaching colleague a rather intimidating science teacher wandered over as I tried to think my way out of trouble. I could fill pages with similar examples. Freud, Klein and Jung and Giles become fused somehow with my father and the science teacher; their intelligent and intimidating presence are with me at crucial times when I am with Joseph. I feel myself alone, required to come up with the goods, unheld in the moment, peered into, weighed in the balance and found wanting, shamed and impotent. I flee to the intrapsychic, Joseph’s and mine, and experience our internal worlds as cut off, self-sufficient and fated. All of this happens in an instant, and usually it leads to a new engagement. With Joseph’s help I find a way out of the panicked blank moment: I think and write about these dreams and moments, and talk them over with Giles; Joseph reminds me that there is more that I was going to say and then describes the ways in which evil enters a world out of balance. Our own
engagement and uneasy equilibrium is for the moment restored. And then it goes again.

‘Giles, you’ve read my notes from the last session?’
‘I’ve read your notes Steve.’
‘Today I want to talk about what I’m experiencing here. It seems to be more than can be encompassed by thinking about the emerging dynamics of our relationship, the way Joseph and I come in and out of contact.’
‘Go on.’
‘You were saying some time ago, when we were talking about stories, that ideas and images are what you use for mating with when you’re not using your body. I really enjoyed that image, it resonated with so much of my own experience. I remember the thrill of recognition when I heard the children’s author Mem Fox once say that we write in order to be loved. Mating seems so much at the core of what we’re doing all the time …’
‘Not mating Steve, attempting to mate …’
‘OK attempting to mate … but why is the distinction important?’
‘Because attempts go wrong,’ says Giles. ‘There are failed attempts.’
‘Yes sure, but …’
‘I’m not just splitting hairs here, or I hope I’m not. As I’m listening to you I’ve got the phone in one hand and your notes in the other: I’m listening to you and thinking about your last session with Joseph. So when you said ‘mating is at the core of what we’re doing’, I instantly thought, ‘no, that’s not what Joseph is doing with Steve, or with the world. He’s attempting to mate and the attempts are going wrong. With the world, with you.’
‘Yes, I see what you mean. We were talking that time about how he’s not very good at it. And yet he comes across as being so confident, so at ease in the world of adults. His mother says this too.’
‘But he’s not, you see,’ says Giles. ‘It keeps going wrong.’
‘He’s not close to anyone. That’s at least what his mother and his teachers say.’
‘He doesn’t know how to do it,’ says Giles. ‘He wants to do it but he can’t…. But Steve, you began by saying that there seems to be something
more going on than just the relationship between you. There was something else you wanted to talk about.’

‘Yes, but I want to stay with this idea of ‘failed attempts’ for a bit longer … I’m wondering if there’s something fatalistic in what you’re saying to me. It’s almost as if you’re implying that the thinness in our connection, Joseph’s and mine, is symptomatic of his difficulties in the wider world, that he unconsciously keeps severing the link between us (as he does in the outer world), that he’ll keep on doing this unless I can find a way of altering the dynamic, unless I can find a way to keep a connection in tact despite his attempts to destroy it … No, I’m confusing myself here, because at one moment I’m talking about him trying but not being good enough at it, and the next I’m talking about an active destroying.’

‘It’s an impotent good and a potent bad,’ says Giles.

‘Yes, it’s both. It’s as though the relational energy that we talked about some time ago is weak … that’s the impotent good … and the defences that he’s constructed to ward of the painful feelings of loss and failure are strong … that’s the potent bad.’

‘I wonder whether it’s accurate to say that the energy is weak, as if there’s a deficiency of some vital force,’ says Giles. ‘That doesn’t seem consistent with the picture he’s presenting. Joseph is full of strong energies, strong impulses, perhaps stronger now because blocked, like the build-up of water behind a dam, looking for some weak spot to blindly, angrily, break through.’

‘When you say it like that,’ I say, ‘it as though the good has turned to evil. It’s like when there’s no meeting place, the evil gets stronger.’

‘I think this is right,’ says Giles.

‘But we never really got into it in the session,’ I say. ‘It’s easier to get into it when I’m talking with you. With Joseph I worry that he may feel his immature ideas are being exposed when we talk deeply about good and evil.’

‘But we’re not talking about ideas here,’ says Giles. ‘We’re talking about impulses, chaotic states which exist in an ever present under-realm of pre-order. These are the states I was trying to describe in my paper at the conference, psychotic states which are pre-verbal and which therefore can
only be expressed (for example, in analysis) through affect-laden non-verbal attacks on others. When you’re talking with Joseph about the nature of good and evil, you’re engaging him not in a philosophical discussion, you’re not working at the level of ideas, but instead you’re making contact with impulses which, despite your talking about them, will remain in large measure in a pre-verbal realm. And, Steve, he did engage with you here. He talked about evil needing to come in when there was too much good. It would have been interesting to have gone further with this, though perhaps this was not possible. You might perhaps have said, given your intuitions about the impotent good and the potent bad, that evil had to come into the picture because the good was too weak to keep it at bay.’

‘But Giles, I was reading Winnicott the other day and he said something about therapy being a painstaking giving back to the patient what they have given to you.’ You seem to disagree with this. You keep adding things, giving back more than has been given. Shouldn’t I just be mirroring Joseph’s comments here, to see what he will do with them?’

‘You’ve got to add something Steve. That’s what people come to see us for, to get added value. They’re struggling, confused, failing, not coping. They need our active help, our accepting bodies and responsive minds. They need us to do things with what they give us, to be alive and active with their material.’

‘So it’s OK to feed back to Joseph an intuition or an interpretation that is purely my own?’

‘As long as your interpretation comes out of his material and not out of your unrelating mind. As long as you’re inspired by his predicament and not your own. In this case I think it highly likely that this idea of the good being too weak was in some sense put into you by Joseph, the idea was implanted …’

‘… like a seed …’

‘… in some kind of raw, unprocessed form. In making an interpretation like this one, you are giving back to him what he’s put into you, it’s just that you’ve done something with it, you’ve worked it a bit. Watered it or whatever. There’s a chemistry happening. Things are being added to the soil
by you both. It’s a generative process. Or that’s what we’re hoping is happening.’

‘He’s put it into me, you’re saying.’

‘Not necessarily in words or concepts,’ says Giles. ‘Have you read any of Zinkin? I’ll send you an article. He talks about the nonverbal cues and stimuli patients give us (and we give patients), that babies give their parents. There’s an unseen exchange going on all the time, often of more vital importance (literally vital) than what’s being exchanged through the words that are being used.’

‘Giles,’ I say after a few moments of silence. ‘I want to step back a bit. I want to try to explain what I meant at the beginning when I said there was more happening than what was happening between us. This might be a bit discursive, and I’m not sure where it’s going to end up . . .’

‘Just plunge into it,’ says Giles. ‘I do so enjoy this kind of talk.’

‘You’re saying to me, if I’ve got it right, that here is a boy, Joseph, who is trying to mate with the world but it keeps going wrong. He’s not very good at it, presumably for environmental reasons rather than constitutional ones . . .’

‘Something has gone wrong with his first world,’ says Giles. ‘There have been traumas and non-happenings, both, which have led to certain relational deficiencies or difficulties or failures . . .’

‘And he’s developed defences to cope with the painful feelings which come out of the repeated failures,’ I say.

‘Something like that has happened, I would imagine,’ says Giles.

‘And you’re encouraging me to see his stories and experiences as expressions of these painful realities . . .’

‘And sometimes as attempts to relate successfully, new attempts to mate . . .’

‘. . . which fail.’

‘Yes, which keep failing.’

‘. . . which keep collapsing because the structure is faulty or because the defence’s forces destroy it.’

‘Yes, both those seem to be occurring.’
'But there's more, isn't there? There's more happening here than just futile attempts to bridge a gap.'

'You mean that you're now in the picture as well?'

'No, though I know what you're saying. I'm trying here to get at something bigger, or something more that's going on than environmental adaptation. I suppose I'm talking about the teleological again, and you once said that the teleological was too involved with a picture of health for your liking.'

'You must have caught me on a bad day,' says Giles. 'But it's true, I have a pessimist's aversion to models of health which exclude the unrelenting destruction of the good by the bad, the inability of the good to survive the attacks of the bad. As a therapist we come up against inevitable disharmonies, interpersonal ineffectiveness and unbridgeable gaps all the time. We have experiences of sadism, chaos, psychotic destructiveness and often these things are untransformable.'

I find these pessimistic outbursts by Giles difficult to digest and yet wholesome, like some stodgy porridge which doesn't appeal to my sensibilities but which I know I ought to eat anyway. And I'm beginning to be aware of an odd relief of tension in me as I allow gloomier, more limiting, less boundless views of human nature a place in my mental picturing of the world. Nevertheless, when Giles speaks like this my gut rumbles and I try to find words for my reluctance to swallow his porridge unsweetened.

'I'm trying to get at something more, Giles,' I say, 'at what I feel is another force at work in Joseph's life, one that's not simply relational (or the-relation-gone-sour, which seems to be the way we're thinking here about the evil that Joseph is experiencing). I've been reading some more Hillman, this time The Soul's Code, and I agree with him about the existence within each of us of some kind of unique individuating coding which is moving us, or trying to move us, in the direction of an expression of our uniqueness. I mean, sure, Joseph's hacking away at the garden or dreams about illicit operations with his mother are connected to frustrated relational energy ... but I also think there are elements in it of a different kind of frustration or attempted expression ... something to do with Joseph trying to find out or be
what he’s got it in himself to potentially be. This is nothing to do with the new-agey idea that we can all be whatever we want to be. In fact it’s the opposite. It’s more like there’s only one thing we can possibly be, and we spend our lives either trying to get closer or giving up the struggle.’

‘Yes,’ says Giles. ‘I don’t disagree with any of that.’

‘I suppose what I’m trying to get at is an intrapsychic perspective which remains valid, one that can be thought of independently of relational or environmental factors.’

‘You’re talking about something which is living itself out unrelationally, within Joseph.’

‘I’m not saying that it’s necessarily unconnected to the relational, that would be absurd. A person’s destiny has all sorts of relational implications. I’m just saying that there is a sense in which it is also illuminating, as a therapist, to position myself as an observer and an encourager, someone on the look-out for intrapsychic intimations of a unique unfolding, someone who encourages that to develop, if only by recognizing its existence and not reducing everything to a kind of Lockean ‘clean-slate-ism’.’

‘As long as an eye on the intrapsychic doesn’t preclude an openness to the dynamics of the relational,’ says Giles. ‘As long as a desire to encourage the development of some of life’s sunnier possibilities doesn’t blind us to painful limit and psychotic illness which can remain stuck. Yes, there is the teleological, but let’s keep thoughts about it grounded, anchored to actual events and lives.’

‘Keeping thoughts grounded ... This is emerging as a big thing for me,’ I say. ‘It’s so easy for me to go off on some flight into the ether which is thrilling at the time but never gets anywhere that makes any difference. I think that’s why I’m spending so much time talking to you about one particular client of mine, so that my thoughts stay grounded in an actual experience, so I’m continually brought back to what is actually happening in the life of a real person.’

‘It’s easy for thoughts to take off,’ says Giles.

‘It’s easy for me to take off,’ I say. ‘And this brings me to something else I’m becoming more and more aware of. Do you remember we were
talking some time ago about Winnicott’s notion that there’s no such thing as a baby, just the mother–baby dyad?’

‘I remember it.’

‘And we were talking about Winnicott’s idea that when there is not a good-enough environment, then the child has to develop a mind that will take the place of the good-enough mother, the unheld child has to learn to hold himself and he does this by holding himself with his own thoughts.’

‘The mind has taken over the function of the mother as a result of environmental deficiency. Winnicott describes this as the development of a false self in the shape of an exploited intellect.’

‘Yes, well for me this is related to the struggle I’m having to keep my own mind grounded. I’m guessing that I’ve exploited my intellect, that I’ve found ways of using it to compensate for certain environmental lacks, and while it’s kept me relatively sane it’s also contributed to some relational difficulties. I’m thinking about that Melbourne conference. There’s a tendency in me when I’m feeling stressed to disappear into myself, to tell myself stories which reassure me (because they tell me I’m superior in some kind of a way) but which isolate me too. These stories cut me off from life … These thoughts, these stories that I tell myself about the way things are, become a refuge, a disembodied and unrelational safe place to which I retreat.’

‘You’re describing a living of life in the mind,’ says Giles.

‘Look, I know this is very common, that we all do it to a certain extent. But I’m trying to relate this to other ideas we’ve talked about. Deprived children develop minds that act as self-objects. Steve has developed such a mind. These minds are at home in the purely ideational, but struggle with the relational. Crises – problems – are tackled not by re-engaging with the painful business of getting on with life but by withdrawing from it and trying to think a way out of the dilemma. There’s a tendency for such people, and for me, to lose touch with life and with bodies and to live life in the mind.’

‘Becoming clever therapists, for instance,’ says Giles.

‘Or writing clever theses,’ I say.
‘That’s why you’re wanting to continually bring the thoughts back to the experience,’ says Giles.

‘That’s why I need this supervision,’ I say. ‘It seems to bring me back to what is happening. You keep encouraging me to be messily involved, where my natural inclination is to tidily think myself out of a difficulty.’

‘You want to find the right way to think about things,’ says Giles.

‘It’s not that thinking is useless, of course I don’t think it’s useless. It’s to do with the quality of groundedness or relatedness that is attached to the particular thought.’

‘There are embodied thoughts and disembodied thoughts,’ says Giles.

‘Yes, embodied stories and disembodied stories. Ones that connect us to life, and ones that insulate us from it.’

‘I wonder if this might be connected to something we were talking about earlier,’ says Giles. ‘We were talking about the difference between successful and unsuccessful attempts at mating with the world.’

‘Yes! Giles, this is bringing a whole lot of things together for me! If we think about a story as any expression of an impulse – so it could be a gesture, or speech, or an artistic representation like a piece of music or a painting, or a dream …’

‘… or a punch, or a come-on, or a sulk …’

‘Yes, any of these things could be thought of as a story …’

‘Then they’re all attempts at relationship, they’re all relational …’

‘And some fail, and some succeed,’ I say. ‘Some are successfully connected with the world, and some have meaning only in the psychic chambers of the subject.’

‘The successful stories,’ says Giles, ‘are connected to bodies in some vital way. They are not split off, either from the body of the subject or the body of the world.’

‘And that’s important,’ I say, ‘because these two bodies both nourish the subject, afford the subject relational possibility. I am not only me, I’m also a part of the world. When I cut myself off from the world, when I attempt to look after myself, I cut myself off from a vital source.’
‘Jung would say we cut ourselves off from soul,’ says Giles. ‘Do you know that wonderful quotation where Jung describes soul as that which lives of itself and causes life?’

‘No,’ I say, though it does ring a faint bell.

‘Just a minute Steve, I can find it quite quickly if you’d like to hear it.’

I hear Giles put the phone down, then the shuffling of papers or the turning of pages in a book. I wonder, as I’m waiting, about this room that I’ve never seen, what it’s like. Lined with books? Giles is so often telling me about books. A mess? I’ve seen Giles giving workshops where the papers are literally tumbling out of his lap and onto the floor as he speaks. With big windows to the outside world? He often tells me at the beginning of our conversations about the weather in Sydney, how oppressive the heat is or how blissfully sunny and still.

‘I’ve got it Steve. Are you there?’

‘I’m here Giles.’

‘I’m quoting from Jung now Steve. “Soul is the living thing in man, that which lives of itself and causes life ... With her cunning play of illusions the soul lures into life the inertness of matter that does not want to live. She makes us believe incredible things, that life may be lived. She is full of snares and traps in order that man should fall, should reach the earth, entangle himself there and stay caught, so that life should be lived ... Were it not for the leaping and twinkling of the soul, man would rot away in his greatest passion, idleness ... To have soul is the whole venture of life, for soul is a life-giving daemon who plays his elfin game above and below human existence ... It is something that lives of itself and makes us live.”’

‘I remember that quote!’ I say. ‘It’s wonderful. You used it in one of your articles, the one about animating images that come to exist in the space made by the analytic relationship. I remember now! You described having a hippopotamus dream that you later discovered to be a central animating image in the psyche of one of your patients. It was as if the dream had been put into you by the patient, or that it had been created in the psychoid space created by the analytic relationship. Am I getting this right Giles?’
‘Yes, that’s what I was writing about in the article, about these archetypal anima–animal images which can only be realized in relationship, in mutually experienced, emotionally loaded images and sensations.’

‘But that’s the bit I’m questioning Giles! That they can only be realized in relationship, that they can only be animating if they live there. I agree that they’ll be more animating, more realized, more potentially connecting to life if they find their way into relationship, but it seems important to me to hold onto the idea that they can exist intrapsychically and un-relationally as well, and that they don’t necessarily die in that restricted space. In the quote you read to me from Jung he says that soul is a life-giving daemon who plays his elfin game above and below human existence. Doesn’t this mean both within relationship and outside of it?’

‘Relate this to something for me Steve,’ says Giles. ‘What are you actually talking about?’

‘The nature of unrelational, disembodied images, I guess,’ I say.

‘Whether my Hannibal dream or Joseph’s story of the Evil and the Good are only animating if they find their way into a relationship. Of course they’re more animating if they do. I know that, I know how my Hannibal dream continues to live and to enliven me because I’m talking about it to an analyst, because I’m bringing it into my work with Joseph and into this supervision with you. But the dream is still essentially vital, life-giving, animating, central, even of itself, by itself, insulated. It’s not a wank. Winnicott once wrote that certain types of fantasy stand as a substitute for life, as if a person’s life had more chance if the fantasy did not exist.’ I want to see these disembodied fantasies more as attempts to make connections, rather than wrong moves. This changes the way we work with them when our patients bring them. Disembodied stories are attempts at mating with the world. Soul is present in even the most banal and enclosed story, trying to find its way into the world.’

‘If you say so, though I’m as yet unconvinced,’ says Giles. ‘I continue to have a bleaker view, an experience which tells me that some images are useless, some keep us stuck, indeed worse than that … there are images that
attack the good, that are (if you like) in fact evil. But we'll no doubt talk more about this.'

'No doubt,' I say.

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When our four-year-old son and I got back from doing the market shopping last Saturday, there was a note for us saying that the baby was asleep and that Jo my wife was using the opportunity to catch up on some sleep herself. When later she came out to join us for lunch she was withdrawn and quiet and after a while told me that she was feeling 'a bit down'.

I went into a familiar mode. How might I make this easier for her. 'Do you want to go out for a while on your own?' I asked. 'Or maybe I could take the boys out and you could have the house to yourself?'

I know how important solitude and a break from the children are when she's feeling this way but there wasn't an immediate response and I could feel some irritation building up inside me. Did she want me to do all the work? But I didn't say anything. After a while she said she thought she'd go out for a while and I began to think about the things I might do to lighten her mood. I decided to tidy the house. As she got ready to go, I did the dishes that we'd left in the sink overnight and just before she left, I asked her if she'd finished reading the newspapers that had accumulated during the week on the dining table, thinking I'd take what were no longer needed out to the recycling bin.

'What do you mean?' she asked sharply, as if I were getting at her. She knows I like to have a clear table when I put out the food for the main meal at night and sometimes the newspapers she hasn't read are still sitting there as I bring the food from the kitchen. Perhaps, in the tangle of her own mood, she was expecting some attack from me and was assuming that my question was a prelude to a confrontation over the dinner table issue. 'Why do you want to know?'

'Because I was thinking of tidying the room when you were out, that's why,' I hissed back, now giving vent to a build-up of tension that I hadn't
really been aware of, indeed that I’d thought I’d avoided this time. ‘I wanted
to tidy up the room and I didn’t want to tidy away newspapers that you still
wanted!’

Jo left soon afterwards and Oliver and I decided to build a cubby out of
sheets and cushions. My body was animated by an almost uncontrollable fury
and I threw myself into the rearrangement of all the furniture and the making
of a dark, low-ceilinged cubby. I found myself impatient for it to be finished
so that I could crawl into the darkness myself. I felt I just wanted to take a
pillow and blanket in there and go to sleep.

But I also kept thinking about what was happening. Why, I wondered, do
I handle Jo’s depression so badly? Why does it get to me like this? Why the
inevitable pattern where at first I feel full of patience and concern and want
to do things that make things easier, and then there is some misunderstanding
that leaves me feeling unappreciated and furious? It’s worse than
unappreciated. I feel pissed on and humiliated. It happens over and over.

When Jo is depressed, in my bones I want to help. I need to help. I gather
together my resources, work out what to do. I feel energised by the prospect.
I’m a psychotherapist, for goodness sake. And then it doesn’t work and I’m
devastated, furious, full of despair, all felt with such intensity that it’s out of
all proportion and I don’t understand. It feels like there’s nothing left for me
to fall back on except the black rage and sleep.
Chapter 4 Mother’s breasts

Last week, at the end of our tenth session, Joseph and I had somehow found our way back to this question of what was going on beneath the surface. ‘It’s as though,’ I said as we talked about some of the events of the past couple of months, ‘there is something in there that is wanting to be unravelled.’

‘What do you mean ‘unravelled’?’ he asked. ‘I’m not sure what you mean?’

‘I don’t know,’ I said. ‘Unravelled or revealed. Something that’s out of reach at the moment, that we can’t see too clearly, that we just gets hints of.’

We’d returned to this theme by a circuitous route. Joseph had come back from his holiday in a sunny (though still slightly guarded) mood, animatedly telling me at our ninth session about his new school. ‘It’s just like on TV!’ he’d said, smiling broadly and shaking his head disbelievingly. ‘Just like Heartbreak High! It’s just packed with kids, the classes are really big, and it’s so noisy! Kids talk to each other and muck around while the lesson’s going on, it’s just so different! It’s amazing! But I like it. I like the size and the bustle and the atmosphere, and so far I like the classes. Yes, I think it’s going to be really good! Really good!’

We’d talked, too, about his grandfather’s death which had happened some time before he first came to see me. ‘I got a real shock when we all went to visit him for the last time, just a few days before he actually died. I was really shocked and I remember I cried afterwards.’ He was lost in thought for a moment. At first I thought he may be thinking it strange that he had ever felt such deep sadness, but perhaps it was more that the sadness had gone.
that was unsettling. I asked him, perhaps too clumsily, about this but he just shrugged his shoulders.

We sat quietly for a while and then he asked if he could read to me.

'Sure,' I said. 'What would you like to read?' thinking that perhaps he'd brought something along which was connected to what we'd just been talking about.

'I don't know,' he said. 'What do you think?'

I tried to delve a bit into this impulse to read something, anything, but got nowhere. So I mentally shrugged my shoulders and suggested a couple of books of traditional stories. Almost at random he opened a book of Scandinavian stories and began reading one called 'The Wild Swans'.

On a winter's day in the long long ago, [Joseph read] in a land between the forest and the sea, a yellow-haired Queen went driving over the new-fallen snow of Yule. Her sleigh was rosy as the setting sun, with yellow birchen runners, and her horses were black, with scarlet steamy nostrils. As they rushed headlong past the fir trees she felt like a great white swan, feather-bright, wing-borne, piercing the glassy air. 'Oh, joy!' she cried. 'Oh, wonder of life!' Was anyone so happy as I? Twice she uttered these words. The first time they rang full and warm as golden bells, the second time they tinkled thin and cold as breaking icicles.

Then a strange thing happened. Her nose began to bleed. Soft molten drops plopped heavily upon the white bearskin which enwrapped her, so that she must rein in those fiery horses and bring the sleigh to a stand. Throwing back the bearskin, she alighted, and at once the horses were as still as though they had been carved in jet and ebony. Two great blood-drops fell upon the snow, and suddenly it seemed to the Queen as though her happiness was lost in longing, and what she longed for was this: a daughter whose hair's blackness should be as the blackness of those horses, and the whiteness of whose flesh should be as the whiteness of the snow, and in whose cheeks there should be two red spots as red as the blood-drops glowing before her.

'To have a daughter like that,' she cried, 'I would give my twelve fine sons!'
I felt, as Joseph read this beginning, that stilling of the air and sudden presence of invisibles, even though Joseph was reading too quickly and was stumbling over some of the words.

For much of this and the following session, Joseph read me the story. A troll granted the Queen a daughter, called Asa, but took away her sons and turned them into swans. The young Asa grew up with a growing awareness that something was wrong and when she heard the story of her missing brothers she set out to find and release them. She discovered that she could only succeed if she could go three years without uttering a sound. During this period of enforced silence she met a young king who persuaded her to marry him. At first all was happiness and a son was born but the king’s jealous step-mother secretly snatched away the baby and then publicly accused the young queen of eating her own son. Asa’s vow of silence meant she could not defend herself, nor could she cry out her grief and frustrated rage. Twice more a baby boy was born, twice more the baby disappeared and the finger pointed at the queen. But she survived, eventually releasing her enchanted brothers and recovering her babies from the snake pit into which the step mother had cast them. The step-mother was then tied to twelve wild horses and torn to bits as punishment for her wickedness, and ‘all was joy and gladness, then and forever’.

For Joseph, this reading-out-loud had been essentially a performance, and there were times when I felt he was barely conscious of the story itself. I, too, had sat at some little distance from the folktales, despite its drama, as I wondered whether we were just passing time in the least threatening way possible, whether the hardbacked book on Joseph’s lap and the story in the airwaves between us were actually preventing rather than enhancing a connection between us, between us and ‘the mystery’.

But I’d also been affected by the story’s mood which itself seemed to speak of the hidden, of the unseen. When, for example, the wicked step-mother accused the silent Asa of murdering her first baby, the king echoed words that were present in my sessions with Joseph. ‘Not so,’ he said, ‘There is a meaning here which will yet be made known to us.’ ‘Not so,’ he says again later in the story, ‘There is more in this than we have yet seen.’
Indeed thinking back on it now, on Joseph’s reading of the story, I feel that almost imperceptible internal tremor that hints at some not-quite-grasped-at-the-time synchronicity. I’m remembering, now, Joseph’s words about evil. ‘Without evil, there would be no balance,’ he had said in an earlier session. ‘Evil is needed to redress the balance. If too much space gets taken up by the good, then evil has to come into things.’ The story, with its two drops of blood on the snow heralding the imminent presence of something sinister, seems now as I look back a poetic exploration of Joseph’s thought, as if something were wanting to keep us in the territory of our brief philosophic exchange.

Anyway we had put the book away, and talked for a bit about parts of the story. Then the conversation moved again to the nature of our sessions, about their aimless quality, whether or not we should plan our time, and finally we returned to this question of whether there was something that needed to be revealed or unravelled.

‘I can’t think of anything,’ he said as he left. ‘School’s fine, I’ve had a good holiday.’

‘Perhaps we’re not talking about something that’s present in your awareness of things at the moment,’ I said as he stood up to go. ‘Maybe it’s something that’s going to reveal itself in its own way, in its own time. That’s the way it is with mysteries. It’s a bit like the two great blood drops on the snow. We don’t know what they’re all about until later in the story.’

‘Well, I’ve been thinking about what you said,’ says Joseph as he sits down for our eleventh session. ‘About there being something that wants to be unravelled.’

‘Did I say that?’ I ask.

‘Yes... didn’t you?’

‘Well, I think I said something less definite,’ I say. ‘I’m not that certain. It’s more that I wonder about it and that I think it might be a good idea to wonder about it together, to see if there is something there that wants to unravel or reveal itself. Maybe there’s nothing.’
I'm trying very hard not to be the omnipotent and omniscient expert here. I'm too aware of my potential power, of my ability to determine the agenda, twist all the available evidence to fit my developing hypothesis, and to subtly insist that because I'm older and wiser there's stuff about his unconscious that I know and that he cannot see. I'm aware, too, of the complexity and of the possibility that I'm wrong. On the other hand, I'm not wanting to let go of my strong feeling that there are significant undercurrents going on beneath the surface.

'Well,' says Joseph, 'I really can't think of anything. I can't think of anything about my life that wants to be unravelled.'

'There's nothing that you're aware of that is hidden and wants to be shown.'

'Nothing that I can think of,' he says again, acknowledging now rather than denying the possibility of something outside his conscious awareness. I have this image, as I listen to him, of us as a lighthouse beacon illuminating first the rocks and then the sea and then the coastal bushland. No wildlife is revealed, but not because no wildlife is there. The creatures scuttle or dive away from the light. Perhaps Joseph's internal creatures are just as shy. I toy for a moment with the idea of sharing this image with Joseph but I'm never quick enough it seems. He's already moving on.

'But I have had a couple of dreams,' he says. 'One of them is really embarrassing. God, I don't know if I can tell you the first one, it's really embarrassing. Like I'm really sure that I must have blushed every time I've told this dream to someone ...'

'You've told quite a few people,' I say, a bit surprised given the level of embarrassment he's professing.

'Yes, I've even told it to my mum and she thought it was really funny which is weird, she just laughed and laughed, but I think it's just so embarrassing!'

I remain silent, though again I'm thrown off balance by the conflicting messages I'm receiving. It's embarrassing but he's told lots of people. He's talking about blushing but it's an embarrassment he's relishing.
'In the first dream,' he says, 'I'm going to a doctor's surgery with my brothers and my mum, and then ... oh this is so embarrassing, it's so weird ... Mum is standing outside the surgery and she strips off to the waist and she starts dancing with her breasts exposed. In the dream, as you can imagine, me and my brothers are just dying of embarrassment. She's just there in full view and everyone's looking and it's terrible.'

'She has exposed herself,' I say.

'Yes,' he says. 'Can you imagine what it's like to be there when your mum does something like that!'

'When she shows something that shouldn't be revealed in public.'

'Exactly,' says Joseph. 'And she seems to be enjoying it so much.'

'She's acting as though it's a release, as though she's really pleased to be doing this.'

'Yes, she's having a great time.'

'But you are embarrassed.'

'Yeah, absolutely... Well? ... Is this one of those dreams that has a meaning?'

'Well what is it that she's doing in the dream?'

'She's showing her breasts and dancing.'

'She's showing something that isn't normally revealed, and she's enjoying it.'

'Something is being revealed. Right. I sort of get it. It's what we were talking about before, something being revealed. But why is it my mum who's doing the revealing in my dream? Why isn't it me, if in fact this is all about me?'

'Perhaps because the dream needs to also express the embarrassment that you feel, the sense of something private being wrongly revealed.'

'Like I feel both things. I feel that it's enjoyable and I feel embarrassed.'

'That's exactly the way you seemed to be when you were telling me the dream. You seemed to be enjoying telling me and you seemed embarrassed at the same time.'
So I still don’t get it. What is this thing? What is it that I’m feeling these two feelings about? What is it that I could reveal except I feel embarrassed?’

‘Something about breasts? Something to do with your mother? Something to do with joy or dancing?’

‘We’re not ringing any bells here,’ says Joseph. ‘It’s pretty weird if you ask me.’

‘And you’re feeling embarrassed, or part of you is, as we talk about it,’ I say.

‘Yeah.’ He shudders, as if trying to shake himself free.

‘You mentioned a second dream.’

‘In my second dream I’m fishing next to a stream which runs close to my old school and I’m catching these tiny fish. There are a whole lot of men watching. The fish are really small but the men are waiting for something and I can see that they are expecting that the little fish will grow into big fish as they wait.’

‘You are catching little fish, and then men are waiting for them to become big fish.’

‘Yes, they’re just sitting there watching me, certain that they’ll become bigger on the spot.’

‘And what about you in the dream? What do you think?’

‘I suppose I get the feeling that the fish will grow big too. It’s a strange idea to begin with, but the certainty of the men somehow convinces me that they may well be right.’

‘As if they know something that you don’t know.’

‘Yes, I guess so.’

‘I wonder if this might describe your feelings about what we’re doing here?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Well, you and I have been talking about whether there’s something to be revealed or unravelled. Perhaps you’re feeling that you keep dipping into the stream but all you seem to catch are little fish, fish of little consequence. They’re nothing really. But all the time you’re aware that I’m also looking at what you’re pulling out,’
'And you’re a man and you seem to be waiting for something, just like the men in my dream. You seem quite confident that there’s something big, or potentially big, that will come out of this pond,’ he says. ‘Maybe ... but there’s something else that this dream is reminding me of ...’

‘There’s something else,’ I say.

‘Yes ... it’s this feeling of being watched ... I know! It’s something that happened at school last week ... There’s this one class where there are these three boys, and sometimes they sit behind me and make comments. Usually I just ignore it, but one day this week they started to call me gay and to say all this bad stuff about me, like offering to arrange for me to have sex with some of their mates. And one of them exposed his bare chest to me, and then they started hitting me on a sore spot on my arm and making me cry. It was quite annoying really.’

As I listen I consciously shrug off my psychotherapist side that wants to analyse, to connect, and instead allow other feelings to emerge. I’m feeling appalled and I say so. ‘That’s just terrible. It must have been awful. Surely more than just quite annoying!’

‘Well, it wasn’t very nice,’ he says.

‘What was the teacher doing during all of this?’ I ask. ‘What they were doing wasn’t just cruel and hurtful, it’s also a kind of abuse that schools are trying to confront.’

‘Well I went to talk to the teacher afterwards, and she is going to take it to the head of the department. She’s asked me to write down what happened, and I wondered if I could do that now and show it to you when I’ve finished.’

‘Of course,’ I say, and I set him up at my desk.

Joseph writes carefully for about ten minutes and then reads out loud pretty much what he has already told me.

As he’s been writing, I’ve been thinking. ‘Do you know,’ I say as we both stand and walk towards the door, ‘maybe all this talk about unravelling or revealing is just chasing away whatever it is that at the moment is too shy to come out. You’ve used our session today to tell me things you want to tell me about and for us to talk things over together. It seems we’ve managed to
set up a safe place here where you can feel you can talk about whatever you want. Maybe that’s what’s important, a safe and accepting place.’

‘Yes,’ says Joseph. ‘That sounds good. A safe place.’

‘A bit like the meeting place in your story,’ I say.

‘The place where Good and Evil can talk to each other,’ says Joseph, then stands up and goes back out into the day.

‘Giles?’

‘Hullo Steve.’

‘Hullo Giles … Look, I’m a bit worried about today’s supervision session. I’ve got so much stuff here, I’m worried that it’s going to be unmanageable, that we’re going to be swamped by too much material …’

‘You’re feeling the weight of it all,’ says Giles.

‘I’m not feeling burdened, if that’s what you’re thinking. It’s not that. If I describe what my room looks like at the moment, then maybe that will give you some idea of my state of mind … I’m sitting at my desk and the floor all around me is covered with papers and books. Since I last talked to you about Joseph, before the holidays, I’ve been doing lots of reading. I’ve been reading Ellenberger’s book about the history of the unconscious, so I’ve got pages of notes from that on one part of the floor describing all those pre-Freudian philosophers and theorists who wrote about dreams, the unconscious, the will, vitality, hysteria, energy, animal magnetism and other ‘vital forces’, the nature of reality, ‘the-thing-in-itself’, the nature of knowledge, the Enlightenment thinkers, the Idealists, the Romantics … Then in another part of the room I’ve got notes from the workshop that you gave about the philosophical roots of Jung, so there’s stuff there about Descartes and dualism and Spinoza and what you called his ‘ethics of joy’, Rousseau and Kant, Herder, Coleridge, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and lots of others, all of them seeming to have things to say which bear on the conversations we’ve been having Giles … my mind starts to swim! … Then there are reams of notes from my reading of Nietzsche, his ideas are so zingy! I just find it exciting stuff, I haven’t read any of this kind of philosophy before, the stuff I did in one unit at university was so dry and
pedantic, this is about life! It’s about the experience of living ... Then from Nietzsche I’ve found my way to Schopenhauer, and I’ve been dipping into The World as Will and Idea⁶ and then the other day there was this video I borrowed about Wittgenstein, a film by Derek Jarman,⁶ and I found what he was saying so apposite that I slowed the film down and wrote down chunks of the dialogue ... and that’s led me to Ray Monk’s biography of Wittgenstein⁶ ... then spread around another part of my floor there are my notes from the sessions with Joseph, and the story about the Wild Swans ... and then there are some notes I took from our last conversation about things I wanted to follow up with you .... Lots of stuff Giles ...

‘You’re really buzzing at the moment Steve!’

‘Well I am, and I guess the first thing I want to talk about is the nature of this buzzing. Whether it’s helpful or not. Whether it helps me grapple with real things or whether it’s a kind of sickness of the mind.’

‘Did you say “sickness of the mind”? What do you mean?’

‘I’m remembering a phrase of Wittgenstein’s, Didn’t he once say that all philosophy is a sickness of the mind?’ And didn’t Winnicott once say that thinking is only necessary because we feel trauma?’

‘That’s surely something different,’ says Giles. ‘Winnicott surely wasn’t implying that either trauma or thinking were unnatural, sick, aberrations.’

‘No, you’re right. But let me try to explain how it is that I’m thinking these thoughts at the moment,’ I say. ‘I went for an early morning walk this morning, to try to settle down the buzzing, to try to get my mind into a state where I could be coherent talking to you. I was walking with our dog, Bella, through a little forest here in the middle of Canberra, and I was thinking about Nietzsche and Kant and about what is real and what is hidden, and how this might relate to Joseph ... then suddenly I realized that I’d disappeared into my head! I was in the forest but I could have been anywhere, I wasn’t experiencing anything, I wasn’t noticing what was all around me ... the morning summer light on the forest floor, the yellowed grass, the pine cones, the rabbit droppings. And all the while Bella was sniffing and fossicking and rooting and nuzzling, and then I became aware of the sharp scents around me, the pine-scented air, the damp earth smell ... and I started to feel
differently in my body, like I was a part things of things, not apart from them. And I suddenly thought, This is the way I get with Joseph! I forget his actual presence, his physical being, our physical beings! This is what happens when I disappear into my too-analytical head! I lose touch … Sometimes I can get back into touch when I write my notes or when I’m talking to you … sometimes then I start to feel again the corporeal presences in the room. Like in that moment when Joseph was trying to tell me the dream and he was embarrassed and exultant all at the same time … That’s the forest floor that I sometimes miss when I get analytical or theoretical or when I worry that I’m not understanding, not getting it, or when I worry that I’m not being a good therapist … When I get into this thinky frame-of-mind I keep asking myself questions about the nature of the stories clients tell, questions about the nature of stories as if they were objects, nouns … so I find myself wondering, is Freud right that the dream is a defence, or is Jung right when he says it’s a compensation, or is Hillman right when he says that it’s an object from another world? But these are distracting questions, they distract me from what’s actually happening right in front of me … Joseph is telling me a dream – that’s the forest floor, that’s the pine smell! And his dream and his telling excite his senses in a particular way and his dream and its telling excite mine in a particular way, and that’s it, that’s the thing-in-itself, whether I see or understand it or not. That is what is there! ‘You know what Nietzsche said about this kind of stuff?’ asks Giles. ‘You know his thing about the “testimony of the senses”?’ ‘No, I don’t think so, though I’ve been reading so much Nietzsche in the past week or so that maybe I’ve read it and forgotten it.’ ‘It was his definition of the scientific project,’ says Giles. ‘Nietzsche said that we have to accept the testimony of our senses, make them the basis of our knowing. For him, then, the scientific project was about sharpening the senses, strengthening them with the will and making them central.’ ‘Yes, this is what I’m talking about, I think,’ I say. ‘When you were talking about your walk in the forest and your forgetting of life, I was thinking back to our last talk about stories, about embodied and disembodied stories. On your walk a story which was becoming disembodied
came back into some kind of relationship with life through your bodily senses. And this reminded me of what Winnicott has said about play. Too much earnestness gets in the way of play, and play is the most important therapeutic activity.

'Consciously I think so highly of play,' I say to Giles. 'I've written a book about it, for goodness sake, about the nature of play in the classroom. But when I work as a therapist rather than as a teacher, it's as if I'm suspicious of it as well. It's as if there's some kind of shadowed partner to my trust in the unconscious life, which is my suspicion of it. This shadowed partner fears that fantasy is an escape from, rather than an entering into, the necessary territory.'

'It's difficult for you to engage playfully with the idea that there is something hidden in this work with Joseph,' says Giles.

'All the time I'm wanting to know what it is, I'm seeing it as my job to strip back the layers to reveal what's there at the bottom.'

'But there's no bottom. Things can be continually deconstructed,' says Giles.

'Behind every cave there is another cave, then another, then another, and so on. Didn't Nietzsche say something like this?' I ask.

'He did,' says Giles, 'though perhaps what's behind the cave is not a thing so much as a process. Verbs, not nouns. With Joseph at the moment, there's some dynamic process happening that is making him blush and boast. There's pleasure and pain.'

'He's embarrassed but he wants to tell everyone.'

'Exactly.'

'But isn't this something we all feel, Giles,' I say, 'something to do with the human condition, something you'd find in everyone, so in a sense not to do with the business of therapy? We all feel incomplete, don't we? Wasn't it Plato who said that we were separated from our other half in some mythic past and that we spend our lives looking to be re-united with this missing half? We all have this urge to reach out into the unknown, to take part in an adventure, to find a lost treasure, even though we know that the belief in 'finding-the-missing-bit-and-being-made-whole' is a fantasy, never to be
realised except in fleeting ecstatic moments I suppose. Isn’t this an aspect of our unconscious yearning for death?’

‘Quite possibly Steve, though as I was listening to you just then, to these thoughts about incompleteness, I suddenly realised that the mental picture of Joseph that I’d had just a little while ago had gone! Vanished! As if these thoughts had chased it away, or excluded it. It made me wonder if we’re losing sight of the boy.’

‘A bit like being in the forest and not smelling the air,’ I say.

‘Yes, a bit like that. Joseph’s feelings of incompleteness are somehow more immediate than the generalised human condition that you’re describing here Steve. There is something particular missing here in Joseph’s life.’

‘Some denied or split-off pain,’ I say.

‘Yes, and perhaps also some repressed reaching out towards joy. Some basic frustration which wants release. This seems present in his Mother’s Breasts image.’

‘There are layers of feeling … or denied feeling … here.’

‘Painful present realities, a desire to bring two worlds together,’ says Giles. ‘I like the Nietzsche image of the cave behind the cave, but I’m more comfortable if it’s particularised.’

‘Behind Joseph’s evasive charm there is a defence which hides a shadow born of a yearning which compensates for a wound which … and so on,’ I say.

‘Yes, something like that, though it’s still general. It’s still a step away from your dog in the forest, if you see what I mean.’

‘Giles, I keep floating away from the particular! Our conversations set me thinking and my thoughts have this tendency to take me away from the particular.’

‘We’ve got to be allowed to think Steve! It’s not a sin you know!’

‘But there are thoughts which feel satisfying in the expression of them which become increasingly disembodied.’

‘You don’t stay disembodied, though, do you Steve? You keep trying to bring yourself back into relation to what you have actually experienced.’
'I keep trying,' I say, 'though I'm often tempted to give up the engagement, to float away. I keep hearing your voice saying that engagements and connections are made by bodies rather than disembodied ideas, by our senses rather than by concepts.'

'I don't think I'd draw the distinctions as sharply as that,' says Giles. 'There's a relationship between these different things, between bodies and ideas, senses and concepts. But I know what you mean.'

'It's how to stay with the senses,' I say. 'It's something to do with aspects and essences, isn't it? ... I'm trying to keep this related to what I'm experiencing with Joseph, Giles ... It's related to the question, 'What can I know?' ... What can I know in relation to Joseph? Not any bedrock certain self, not any 'thing-in-itself', not any fundamental self from which everything flows ...'

'There is no such fundamental self,' says Giles.

'There is no thing-in-itself here, no single thing that is unrevealed. All I can know are aspects and essences, which reveal themselves in anecdotes, body language, voice inflexions, facial expressions, dreams, fantasies, pauses and play ... in his interactions with me ... in our successful and unsuccessful attempts to mate ...'

'The sorts of thing Zinkin was writing about,' says Giles. 'The vitality affects, for example.'

'And these things are captured better in novels than in textbooks, case studies than in quantitative research, diaries than in diagnostic descriptions. That's why I'm writing my thesis in the form of a story.'

'You're wanting to show aspects and essences,' says Giles. 'This is at the heart of your research, the telling of this story of aspects and essences.'

'The story is the research,' I say. 'Telling the story is revealing ... to me as well ... to me especially!'

'When you tell the story, more of this engagement, this seeking-out-together is revealed. And not just in your research. In the therapy as well. You're trying to create a story there too.'
The more I can put in front of us, on the table as it were, this thing that we're both experiencing, Joseph and I, the more we can find words for it ... tell a story about it ...'
'This making a story is an animating thing ... it excites the senses ...'
'It has the potential to move something along ...'
'And it's stuck at the moment,' says Giles, 'because you -- I mean the two of you, you and Joseph -- you haven't found a way to bring this hidden thing into relationship. It remains disembodied, hovering around somewhere out of sight yet potentially lethal, destructive of things ...'
'It's connected, surely, to his anger,' I say, remembering again the trip wires, the tormenting of his brother, his unconscious ripping out of his mother's plants, the steely challenge when our eyes meet, his missing of a session, his deliberate incomprehension.'
'He's furious,' says Giles. 'More furious than he knows, certainly more furious than he can tell.'
'And because he can't feel it, the pressure builds up inside ...'
'This seems to be a part of what is happening,' says Giles. 'But I want to get back to smells, the equivalent of the pine-and-rabbit-poo stuff. Joseph's first story talks about smells.'
'Yes,' I say. 'There's the sweet smelling on the side of the Good -- the image of the sweet smelling soaps came up again in his dream -- and the sour smelling on the side of the Evil.'
'And the Evil side is shut up,' says Giles, 'enclosed somehow. There's no fresh air, so things go off, they get stale and sour.'
'It's as if there's something hidden in an airless cellar.'
'A body perhaps. Something that's been murdered,' says Giles.
'Is this fanciful Giles? Are these thoughts embodied, or are we just having fun talking about the first clever things that come into our minds?'
'I think they're relevant, or at least that they're ideas that are worth playing with. These are the images brought up in us through our contemplation of Joseph's pine-and-poo stuff. He describes the smells; we have the images. We could be wrong, of course we could be wrong, but we
also have to learn to take the stuff of the psyche seriously. There are processes at work here.’

‘I seem to find it more difficult than you to take these images seriously, to let them work away at me. You keep having these thoughts or reactions which I find helpful … and wish I could have thought of myself!’

‘Perhaps this is Steve finding it difficult to credit his own psychic activity.’

‘My Hannibal self unable to play!’
‘It’s possible,’ says Giles.
‘So,’ I say, ‘getting back to Joseph and these smells from an airless room … there may be this decomposing body down there … or that’s an image that might express something essential about what is being hidden …’

‘And it’s being hidden because it inspires fear … and shame .. and it’s also exciting,’ says Giles.

‘And it will stay hidden because the world, which includes me, is unwilling or unable to help him talk about it. The world too prefers to stick with the sweet smelling soaps.’

‘Yet things keep happening, don’t they, to remind us of the sour side? Two drops of blood plop onto the snow white cloak of the Queen!’

‘Things keep reminding us of some other reality, beneath what is presented at the surface.’

‘Secret pleasures and pains in his world,’ says Giles. ‘Pleasures and pains, goods and bads, at home with his family and at school with the bullies.’

‘This is really puzzling Giles, because when we talk like this I feel no reluctance in myself to go into these areas, yet it still feels right to say that there’s something holding me back from these sour smelling places when I’m with Joseph… I don’t know what it is … something about the idea of pleasure and pain being involved with the bullying I think … There’s something here that is difficult for me to assimilate, that I want to run away from …’ As I’m speaking I’m aware that I’m having a kind of deja-vu feeling and I try to explain this to Giles. ‘Right at this moment, as I’m telling you this, I’m reliving the moment when Joseph told me about the bullying at school last week. I felt outraged, indignant … I wanted him to know that I
was on his side, that he was supported here. I remember deliberately coming 
out from behind my psychotherapists' mask ... And right now, as we're 
speaking Giles, I'm feeling this reluctance in me to think about the bullying 
as involving pleasures as well as pains.'

'It's difficult for you to credit that there might be pleasure involved in 
being the victim,' says Giles.

'It's just doesn't feel right.'

'So instead you rush to his defence. You become his ally instead of his 
therapist. He is stirring something unconscious in you, some tender area.'

'I guess I felt something a bit like panic,' I say. 'A kind of primitive 
reaction that got covered over by my indignation.'

'Perhaps this takes you into an unexamined part of your own internal 
happenings,' says Giles. 'I don't know of course, only you can be the judge 
of that. But I do know that Joseph doesn't need you to be his ally here.'

'He wants someone more dispassionate,' I say.

'No, not dispassionate. It's not at all a bad thing that you're feeling 
ambivalence and confusion here. The important thing, though, is to recognize 
it and to do something with it.'

'So I am in a better position to help him with confusing thoughts about 
pleasure and pain, good and evil,' I say.

'Exactly,' says Giles. 'He wants someone who sees more than he can see, 
who'll help him understand things he can't understand. If you're just his ally, 
seeing things the way he sees them on the surface, then you're abandoning 
your role ... you're abandoning him to his fate. He wants you to see both of 
the boxes of mystery in his story, the good and the evil, not just the one. He 
wants you to see hidden pleasures as well as obvious pains.'

'You seem to be suggesting, Giles, that he enjoys being bullied! That 
there's some sado-masochism involved here!'

'No, I'm not saying that. What I am saying is we must train ourselves to 
allow that possibility a place in our minds ... And now I'm wondering why 
that possibility has entered my mind, whether it's just some errant thought of 
my own or whether it's somehow been put there by something you've said.
Is there really pleasure and pain in the world of the bullies, pleasure and pain for Joseph?

'I guess what this makes me think about is the pain and pleasure he seemed to feel when telling me the dream about his mother’s breasts being exposed.'

'And there is something, isn’t there Steve, which connects this to his account of the bullies! Didn’t he say something about the bullies exposing their bare chests?'

'He did say that!' I say. 'I hadn’t thought about that connection! He said that one of them exposed his bare chest and then started hitting him until he was crying.'

'And at that moment you abandoned your therapist self,' says Giles. 'Perhaps it is just too much for me to contemplate the possibility that Joseph, at one level, finds this exciting.'

'And of course at one level it’s not at all exciting. It’s hellish. Nevertheless we must keep in mind the possibility that is being suggested here, otherwise we cannot engage with this evil side that is so perplexing and problematical.'

'So there might be pleasure involved in the pain, I can see that I need to somehow open myself up to this possibility ... But Giles, isn’t there another problem involved with thinking like this? Isn’t the temptation always to say that behind whatever is being presented there is something else, something sinister, to the extent that patients are never believed unless they’re talking about the darker sides of human motivation? Doesn’t this lead to a kind of reductive investigating, a process of whittling things away until we find the true self with its real intentions, which are probably base, repressed, unacceptable to the ego? This is sounding so like Freud. There’s an assumption in all of this that there’s a single motivation at the source — sex if you’re a Freudian, economic if you’re a Marxist, the will if you go along with Schopenhauer — and that in a way this is the true self, the authentic self, and all the others are diversions or overlays or rationalisations or repressions or whatever.'
‘There are selves,’ says Giles, ‘many selves. Selves in a state of flux. Our selves are like twinkling stars that keep appearing and disappearing.’

‘So it would make more sense not to think of Joseph as someone feeling pain at the surface but pleasure underneath, not as someone putting on masks or adopting disguises in order to hide a true self, but as an agglomeration of selves.’

‘Yes, you’re right, and there is sometimes this tendency to simplify things by assuming a basic drive. Do you know the books of Adam Phillips?’ says Giles. ‘Provocative stuff, I think. You’d like them. He’s got a nice way of putting this. He says that dreams – and I suppose the same might apply to all stories in the way we’re using this word in these conversations – are an always contentious collaboration of different parts of the self, that they’re an attempt to incorporate an excess in points of view, that they try to conciliate rival internal claims. I think this is what we’re getting at here.’

‘Yes,’ I say. ‘He’s not just the slightly distanced adolescent, or heroic vandal …’

‘… or the playground sadist or Dionysian dancer …’

‘… or the conscientious student or the adventure seeker or the troubled victim, the philosopher, the guilty possessor of some dark secret …’

‘… or the lover of sweet smells and his mother’s partner in crime …’

‘… he’s all of these things,’ I say.

‘Yes,’ says Giles, ‘he’s all of these things, though you mustn’t be too catholic in all of this, don’t be too multicultural.’

‘Meaning?’

‘Don’t be seduced into thinking that the multiplicity always works towards the good, or that each player in the drama is working for the good of the whole. Some are destructive, psychotic and fearfully limiting. Some are enemies.’

‘Some need to be exposed, you’re saying.’

‘Grappled with. Kept in mind. Made allowance for. Not just ignored or idealised or etherealised.’

‘Some are wanting to promote the good, some are wanting to attack it. Goodness, it’s no wonder I sometimes feel dizzy!’
‘It’s no wonder,’ says Giles, ‘but we’ve got to think our way beyond the dizziness. We have to reduce the whirl, the temptation towards passivity, the throwing up of the hands in despair at the complexity.’

‘I’ve got to find ways of living more actively with the complexity, of engaging with it. I do find it difficult though. I was reading an article about Nietzsche the other day, about his view that knowledge is always perspectival, that there are no immaculate perceptions. There’s no possibility of an all-inclusive perspective which will contain all others and make reality available as it is in itself.’

‘You can’t see all of an object from every possible vantage point simultaneously,’ says Giles.

‘And when I attempt to, when I try to see the whole picture or the essential core or whatever, then I’m clinging to an idea that my investigations or thinking can reveal to me the truth about him, can reveal the truth behind the apparent…’

‘… when in fact,’ says Giles, ‘what we’re seeing … no, what we’re involved in … is a revolving, changing, evolving, multi-faceted and mutually contradictory dynamic process. And it’s un-pin-down-able.’

‘… but when we bring our minds to bear on this process,’ I say, ‘when we reflect on it in the kinds of ways we try to do in therapy and we’re trying to do in these conversations … in embodied ways … then we begin to see a certain kind of order. It’s not just chaotic.’

‘You’ve said this to me before, Steve. You’ve said it in relation to your writing.’

‘The more I write about something, the more drafts I do, the more I see an underlying order. Layers, and connections within and between layers, become clearer. They come into sharper focus.’

‘Yes but you see I wonder about this,’ says Giles. ‘I wonder if we’re seeing an underlying order, or whether we’re creating it.’

This is an unsettling idea for me. Surely there is something which is not just random chaos there? Surely we’re finding an order, not creating one? And yet I’ve been reading about Kant over recent weeks, about the capacity of our minds to make meaning through the exercise of categories of thought.’
‘The question can be asked about relationship too,’ continues Giles. ‘We’ve been talking about embodied and disembodied stories, relational and unrelational impulses, grounded and ungrounded ideas. When we encounter the embodied, the relational and the grounded, are the connections we discover ones that we create (through the act) or that we find? Do they exist independently of the discovering. I doubt it.’

‘It’s like you’re saying that we have a self – or selves – only in so far as we create them through our interactions with the world,’ I say.

‘It’s Winnicott and the dyad thing again,’ says Giles. ‘There’s no such thing as a baby, just a dyad made up of relational processes.’

‘It’s only when we’re creating ourselves through relationship that we can be said to have a being,’ I say, not really sure whether these are grounded thoughts or flights of fancy, but being enlivened by the exchange nevertheless.

‘We’re continually in the act of creating,’ says Giles, ‘It’s the creating, the embodying, the relating, that makes something real.’

‘We need other people in our lives for us to feel real,’ I say. ‘We need to be engaged in this creative process of living, which means feeling connected to a world which is bigger than ourselves.’

Giles is silent and I have a hunch as to why. What I’ve just said is something of a revelation to me, the introvert who so often retreats into his own individual boundaried world. To think of myself as, in a sense, unboundaried, as connected to the world, as continually engaged in the business of creation through my interactions with it, is to shift something internally. Of course I’ve had these thoughts before, but this time the thought is felt more viscerally.

‘There’s a sense, then,’ I continue, ‘in which people can’t be thought about meaningfully if they’re thought about simply as individuals. We’re connected to webs, the soul that animates us is in some important sense an unboundaried one.’

‘Yet this is precisely what we think when we’re unhinged,’ says Giles, ‘that the solution to all our problems is to be found within the boundaries of the individual psyche.’
'It's a great word in this context, Giles ... "unhinged" ... we've lost our connection to the bigger structure. We're no longer connected ... I want to rabbit on a bit here, Giles, is that OK? It's connected to something I've been trying to think about for a while now.'

'Rabbit on,' says Giles.

'It's about this idea that soul ... life ... isn't contained within an individual's skin. I guess this is just another way of talking about things like projective identification ... What am I trying to say here? ... To try to locate meaning within an individual, to suggest that things will make sense by peering into the space defined by the boundaries of an individual's life, is to mark off far too small a territory isn't it? To the extent that anything can be said to have meaning at all, it can only be in terms of the whole, the unity, which in this case means in terms of all of creation. There's no hope of grasping ... conceptually incorporating ... all of what goes together to influence the shape of Joseph's life unless we think in terms like the unboundaried soul ...'

'We were talking about this earlier today,' says Giles, 'when we were saying that to lose our connection to the body (our own body, the body of the world) is to cut ourselves off from a source.'

'We've got to keep thinking in this wider context, of a field that includes the relational and therefore transcends the personal.'

'You're pointing to the impossibility of understanding the cell unless you think about the organism in which it lives,' says Giles.

'Yes. The cell in the organism, the brick in the building, the limb in the body, the city in the nation, the planet in the solar system. It's only as within the context of the interrelated web of complex relationships that there is meaning,' I say.

'Which means that there are many different possible factors at work in Joseph's life, factors which include much more than the individual.'

'Yes,' I say. 'So his dream about his mother's breasts, for example, could be connected to an aspect of any one of his many sub-personalities, and it could be connected to his family history, his society's pre-occupations, the
instinctual life he shares with all adolescents, the collective unconscious, the
first stirrings of some future shock or a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil.'

I’m rather pleased with this formulation though I’m wondering if Giles
has really been carried along by it. I’m expecting, I suppose, some
reservations.

‘This is another take on your attachment to the teleological,’ says Giles. ‘I
don’t disagree with any of this by the way. There is more to this world than
any notion of it can contain, much more happening than any developmental
theory of an individual life can illuminate. We can know bits of it.’

‘Aspects and essences maybe.’

‘Twinkling stars perhaps.’

‘A part of what we can know is that the soul is unboundaried.’

‘Yet the individual is important too. We must keep in mind that you’ve
got an individual boy – a Joseph – coming to see you right now.’

‘Not the collective unconscious or the world spirit!’

‘No indeed! You’re seeing an individual boy with a particular set of
knotty difficulties and who is telling you these stories, shaping them in
particular ways, in order to make a particular kind of relationship with a
particular you.’

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I’m at the coast for a week on my own, to write and to get away from an
intolerable build-up of internal pressures that keep spilling out in my daily
life and damaging relationships. I’m aware of holding inside a rage that
threatens to burst its banks, which sometimes does burst its banks, regularly
in my dreams and through the cracks in my waking life.

I’m dreaming of children who provoke my rage by refusing to do as I tell
them. They threaten my sense of control. I want to lash out at them, murder
them. There’s an internal raw energy that doesn’t want to be imprisoned and
I’m at war with myself, trying to tame what must be expressed.

I dreamt last night that I was lost and searching for Field Avenue. What’s
the field I’m searching for? I think I know. I need to find a big enough field
for my current energies, that otherwise they’ll seep out in all sorts of
inappropriate ways, like Joseph with his trip wires. Where is the field big enough for the inexplicable rages and frustrations I feel eating me up inside?

More dreams. Of deposed leaders. Of the beautiful repainting of an old house. And then this one last night:

There is a ceremony that I watch where some natives come out of the forest and dance some dance of deep significance, and any tourists who want to be there must learn the steps and have a red leather hood put over their heads so they don’t see the ceremony. If anyone actually sees the ceremony, the natives turn their white reflectors (they look like big shields) onto the person and they’re blinded. The ceremony has already begun when I arrive but I want to join in, so I start to do the dance without looking at anyone, just concentrating on getting the steps right. At the appropriate moment in the ceremony, I have the red hood put over my head, but, because I don’t know the steps and now can’t see the way the dancing line is moving, I have to sit down during this part of the ceremony.

This is how I feel as a therapist, that I’m wanting to take part in some primal ceremony but have to have the hood put over my head. I can be in it, in a limited and confused way, but I cannot peer directly at it or even take part in some of it. I don’t know the steps.

In the shower I suddenly realize that I trust no-one and nothing, except my dreams. They, alone, seem real somehow. They continue to create fresh and alive images at a time when my thoughts seem stifling, decaying, tending towards some kind of death. My dreams connect me to outside realities or a deeper mysterious ground of my being ... something beyond the confines of my boundaried and racked self.

I have this sense of my unconscious psyche being preoccupied with an attempt to create something out of raw and formless but energetic matter. It’s trying to link me with something beyond myself, something that can carry me forward. That’s the attraction of Schopenhauer for me, the thought that I’m being carried along by something blind to my individual welfare but connected to life.

As I walk along the beach at twilight I feel heavy in my body, as though in mourning. I want a mother’s breast to lie on, to drink from, but know that
no such thing exists in the world out there. The sea understands. Death understands. My dreams understand. Perhaps to hope for more is part of the omnipotent baby’s illusion.
Chapter 5 Keeping shadows out

It’s now over a month since Joseph told me the dream of his mother
dancing bare-breasted outside the doctor’s surgery, and we’ve had five
sessions since then. Joseph tells me that he’s very pleased with how the
bullying was handled by the school. ‘My work’s going well,’ he told me over
the phone on a day when he caught the wrong bus and missed our session.
‘I’m getting good marks and I’m getting my assignments in on time. I’m glad
I made the move to this bigger school.’

But still there are hints of shadows. He’s had a birthday recently, and
during one of our sessions he chatted brightly about the presents he got but
mentioned in passing that his mother hadn’t been at his party.

‘She’s got a new boyfriend, did I tell you?’

‘No, you haven’t mentioned that,’ I said. ‘There’s a new man in her life.’

‘Apparently,’ he said, bringing his hand to his mouth to cover a contrived
yawn. ‘But that’s fine with me. I’m not at all bothered by that.’

‘And she missed your birthday party,’ I said. ‘Because of the boyfriend?’

‘No,’ he said briskly. ‘She had to go to my uncle’s birthday and so she
couldn’t make it. But she rang me.’

‘I wonder how it felt for you to have your party without your mum being
there,’ I said.

‘It was fine. No big deal really.’

I’ve decided to let Joseph play on the computer.

I’ve been worrying away at this for some time, wrestling with my career-
long nagging sense of guilt whenever I let children play. In the light of what
Giles has been saying to me, this move seems like a dropping of my bundle.
Yet I keep being drawn back to what I’ve actually experienced, which is to
do with the efficacy of unstructured and uninterpreted play. So many times before in my teaching and therapeutic life this kind of play seems to have moved things along."

Joseph was surprised to hear that I'd changed my mind as I'd seemed so firm in my resolve. He hasn't been entirely sure what to do with this new opportunity and he never wants to spend the whole of the hour at the computer. Despite this he's become deeply involved in the computer simulation called *Civilisation*.

He was hooked from the very beginning. The game begins with a fanfare of trumpets and a creation story:

In the beginning,  
the earth was without form, and void.

The sun shone upon this earth,  
and deep inside its hard crust  
sleeping forces stirred and were released.

I looked quickly at Joseph's face as these words scrolled across the screen. His lips were moving as he read them silently to himself, his face a study in excited anticipation. I felt sleeping forces stirring within him too.

The seas parted,  
continents formed,  
mountains pushed their way upwards,  
earthquakes split the earth, releasing lava, landslides and gases.

These strange gases charged the atmosphere.  
Within this maelstrom of Fire, Water, Air and Earth life stirred.  
Tiny organisms found footholds in protected places.

The seeds of life grew,  
strengthened,  
spread,  
diversified  
and prospered.  
And soon all earth teemed with life.

And with instinct, came  
the first glimmers of intelligence,
and then its fruits:
fire, tools, weapons, the hunt, farming, roads, family, the tribe.

Now it needed just one more ingredient:
a great Leader
to unite the warring tribes
to build a legacy that would stand the test of time:
a Civilisation.

The words faded and the screen went black except for a tiny flashing picture of a wagon on what appeared to be the fragment of a map.

‘What’s that?’ asked Joseph, pointing to the flashing picture.

‘That’s the wagon which represents you and your tribe,’ I explained.

‘There you are, surrounded by blackness, the unknown world, and you have no idea what you will find if you decide to move your undefended wagon into this unknown territory.’

‘So what do I do?’

‘It’s up to you,’ I said, suddenly aware that I too was feeling the stirring of sleeping forces, feeling the release of being a teacher again and having a guiding role, allowing a kind of uninhibited involvement which was absent for too much of the time as I struggled to be a good therapist. ‘You’re the leader of this tiny tribe of Monguls. You can set off to explore the surrounding blackness, to push back the frontiers, and you may find exploitable resources or hostile armies. Or you can decide to stay put for the time being, to build a city right here where you find yourself and you can then farm the land, build roads and market places — in other words, get an economy started. Do you want to explore or consolidate?’

The dilemma serves as a metaphor for an aspect of adolescence. Do you stay put in your safe nest, or break out? Do you remain your parents’ boy or venture out into the adult world beyond the borders of your known territory?

‘Can I do both?’ Joseph asked.

‘Not yet. You’ve got a small tribe at the moment, not enough to divide into two groups. But if you build a city and get things developing nicely, then soon your population will grow and you’ll find yourself with more options. The more you grow and develop, Prince Joseph, the bigger the population
your tribe can support, and that in turn will lead to further development.
Soon, if you build a prosperous city, you’ll be able to form armies who can
do the exploring from a safer base."

‘So can I build a city right where I am?’

‘You can,’ I said. ‘And it looks like a good spot for a city. You can see
that it’s on a river, which is always good for trade, and there’s some good
farming land by the river. There’s also a swamp, poor farming land, but later
on you’ll be able to order some of your people to drain it and turn it into
pasture. There’s no forest nearby as far as we can see and that may be a
problem, but there are some hills just there, see? Later on you’ll be able to
mine those hills.’

‘Mine the hills? What do you mean? How?’

So we talked for a while about mining and about how the ore could be
used, first of all (given that the date was 4000BC!) to make simple stone
tools and weapons, and later, once smelting was discovered, to make iron,
bronze and eventually steel.

We talked too, for a while, about technology in general and I turned to the
chart at the end of the Civilisation manual which showed the various
discoveries, from the wheel at one end of the spectrum to the ability to send
rockets into space at the other. ‘Your scientists will work to make these
discoveries,’ I told him, ‘and obviously the quicker they do it, the better off
your civilisation will be. You’ll be able to build more secure cities, stronger
armies, better trade routes. The scientists will help you keep ahead of your
rivals, and I’ll show you later some ways in which you can encourage your
scientists to work more quickly.’

And so he began to make decisions. He decided to build his first city,
which he called Timeland, and was soon working on a rudimentary defence
of the city, first by building a barracks when the resources were available and
then by arming some small groups of settlers. He sent farmers out to till the
fields, and then to harvest them and store the grain. The population began to
grow and soon he was able to send out an exploratory party which followed
the river until they discovered the sea, and there he prepared the land so that
he could build a second city, this one a port. Now the boundaries of the
known world were extended so that he knew that there were no rival cities in
the immediate vicinity, though still the vast majority of the world remained
unexplored and unpredictable. His scientists and elders brought significant
advances to his growing community, and by the end of our half an hour at the
computer, a thousand years had passed, the wheel was in use and an army of
charioteers was being trained. The population had grown to 60 000 and
Prince Joseph Khan had a palace which his contented subjects had built for
him.

The following session we returned to *Civilisation*. This time a further 500
years passed, his population doubled, and his scientists continued to advance
his civilisation. He was poor but now his engineers were more
mathematically sophisticated and had developed the catapult, making his
armies amongst the strongest in the world. His explorers were making more
extensive use of better maps, making the prospect of venturing over the sea a
real possibility, and Timeland was now the third biggest city in the world.
We still hadn’t sighted any other cities: they lay beyond the boundaries,
hinted at by diplomats and traders but essentially unknown. Rumour had it
that there were two particularly strong rival civilisations, the English and the
Russians.

These rumours fuelled a sense of urgency as together we discussed
options and strategies. Sooner or later a big power would make contact with
our expanding civilisation. Would we be strong enough to stand our ground?

Joseph told me how much he was loving the game. ‘It’s just like the
whole of history,’ he said, ‘it’s like you’re involved in all the big events. One
day I’d like to use all your figures to build my civilisation on the carpet, just
like I did with my first story.’

I too was loving the game, and perhaps for this very reason I found it very
difficult to talk with Giles about these sessions. He would surely think it a
cop-out that we were playing a computer game. He’d surely judge me
harshly for caving in. Despite these misgivings I launched during one of our
supervisory sessions into a description of what Joseph and I had been doing,
and then told Giles how I was feeling about it all.
'I can think of a thousand reasons in favour of what I'm doing, Giles, and perhaps as we're talking I'll find myself telling some of them to you. But I want to begin somewhere else. I'm aware of how secretive I feel about it, how reluctant I am to tell you about it, how it almost feels shameful that we're enjoying ourselves in this way when there are clearly things that are troubling the boy.'

'Did you say "shameful" Steve?' asked Giles.

'I did. That's how it feels. Like we're taking part in some conspiracy behind closed doors, some private little thing ... Christ, I know what you're thinking, Giles! Like we're having a bit of fun together, like we're playing with each other and it would be awful if anyone found out!'

'Didn't Joseph have a dream along these lines Steve? Wasn't there something about a conspiracy in one of the dreams you told me?'

'There was,' I said, relieved that Giles was involving himself in the psychological raw material rather than standing back and judging. 'Joseph had a dream a month or so ago about being involved in some undercover operation with his mother to do with counterfeit money and drugs. And that's just how it feels to me, that we're involved in a secret and pleasurable undercover operation.'

'And in that dream,' said Giles, 'didn't he get caught?'

'He did,' I said. 'Then he and his mother turned their attention to the production of sweet-smelling soaps. '

'The sweet and the sour, the good and the bad,' said Giles. 'He wants to identify himself with the good, but it's the bad that excites him.'

'What do you mean?' I asked.

'I'm not sure yet,' said Giles.

Neither of us spoke for a moment and I've come to take these silences as part-invitation to go further into the experience.

'I feel a kind of shame,' I said, 'and I try to either hide it or talk it out of existence. The shame I feel makes me want to think of a million reasons why this play is actually connected to the therapeutic project.'

'Mmm,' said Giles. 'Look, I think this shame has two sides to it Steve. There's stuff going on here for you, and no doubt there are many reasons to
do with your personal history why this particular development evokes a
sense of shame here. This is a question of management, if we look at it
totally relatively as ‘your stuff’. You’ve got to manage your feelings, not let them
take over, not allow them to take the therapy in a direction determined solely
by your own psychological story.’

‘You think that maybe that’s what I’m doing here?’ I asked. ‘Letting him
play to satisfy my own needs?’

‘It’s possible Steve, and we mustn’t discount that. But it’s not what I’m
interested in at the moment. There’s stuff going on for you here, but there’s
also stuff going on for Joseph. It’s what this move means to Joseph that I’m
trying to get at. Why has he pressured you to cave in? Why does he find it so
exciting to be in this secret world with you?’

‘This is so complicated for me Giles,’ I said. ‘It’s so mixed up, there are
so many possible factors why he’s enjoying it. First of all he’s encountering a
more animated and alive me here, I’m enjoying it, I’m knowledgeable in this
realm and can contribute in obvious ways to his pleasure of it … that’s one
thing. Then there’s this power play which I feel is present, where he’s seeing
if he can distract the serious Steve, the task-oriented therapist, and he’s won
that power play, he’s broken me down … that’s another thing. I also think
this Civilisation is an excellent game, it works on many different visceral,
intellectual and metaphorical levels. And we know that Joseph is attracted to
the thought of himself as hero, and this gives him a chance to play the hero.
There are lots of possible reasons … But Giles, as I’ve been talking, what’s
coming to me is something else … I think he’s enjoying it because it’s solid,
it’s a held experience.’

‘Did you say, Steve, it’s a held experience?’

‘Yes, that’s what it feels like. I’ve been thinking a lot about what you’ve
been saying about the need to find words for our experiences, that it’s the
creation of a common language that creates the relational space which is
animating and potentially mutative. I’ve been watching my infant son over
the past week or so with these thoughts in mind. Surely what holds our
psyches together, what prevents them from the unintegration of Winnicott’s
‘unthinkable anxiety’ and Bion’s experience of catastrophe, is more than just
the language? Surely sometimes it’s things other than the language? My wife and I don’t calm our baby Solomon when he’s upset by explaining something but by changing a nappy, providing a feed, rocking, holding, singing, soothing. And I’ve been thinking that this is how play works, the kind of uninterpreted play that Joseph’s involved with in Civilisation. This sitting at the computer is setting up shapes and patterns and connections which he experiences as safe, as reminders of an existing (or a created) order, in exactly the same way as the games played with a baby, or the rockings and soothers and murmurings, work. This is Zinkin’s vitality affects isn’t it Giles, those non-verbal cues conveyed as much by the expressions on the face, the tone of the voice, the positionings and shiftings of the body?*2

‘This is what he was writing about,’ says Giles.

‘There’s more I want to say here Giles, but please interrupt … cut in when you want to.’

‘No, keep going Steve.’

‘This non-verbal thing, this ability to hold non-verbally … isn’t this what Ogden is talking about when he adds a third position – what he calls ‘the autistic-contiguous mode’ – to the two traditional Kleinian positions? In his The Primitive Edge of Experience he’s saying that our fear of fragmentation is contained not only by our thoughts (which are linked to the depressive mode) but also by what he calls ‘the sensory continuity, rhymicity, and boundedness of the autistic-contiguous mode.’ I came across what I thought was a really wonderful example of this the other day in Herman Hesse’s The Glass Bead Game. It’s quite long, Giles, but I’d really like to read it to you.’

‘Go on Steve,’ said Giles.

‘It’s in one of the stories at the end of the book, where Knecht is the Rainmaker in an ancient tribe. One night there’s this shocking sight: the villagers look up and see what appears to be a collapsing of the stars in the night sky. There’s immediately a panic, a kind of group madness, as the villagers are confronted with this catastrophe beyond their minds’ capacity to comprehend. And it starts to spread, to snowball, The Rainmaker realises that he’s got to do something. So here’s the passage I want to read:
Up to the moment he reached the group, Knecht had hoped to be able to check the panic by example, reason, speech, explanations, and encouragement. But his brief conversation with the tribal mother had shown him that it was too late for anything of the sort. He had hoped to let the others share in his own experience, to make them a gift of it. He had hoped to persuade them that the stars themselves were not falling, or not all of them, that no cosmic storm was sweeping them away. He had imagined that by such urging he would be able to move them from helpless dismay to active observation, so that they would be able to bear the shock. But he quickly saw that there were very few villagers who would hearken to him, and by the time he won them over all the others would have utterly given way to madness. No, as was often the case, reason and sensible speech could accomplish nothing here.

Fortunately there were other means. Although it was impossible to dispel their mortal terror by appeal to reason, this terror could still be guided, organized, given shape, so that the confusion of maddened people could be made into a solid unity, the wild single voices merged into a chorus. But there was no time to be lost. Knecht stepped before the people, loudly crying the well-known prayers that opened public ceremonies of penance and mourning: the lamenting for the death of a tribal mother, or the ceremony of sacrifice and atonement in the face of perils such as epidemics and floods. He shouted the words in rhythm and reinforced the rhythm by clapping his hands; and in the same rhythm, shouting and clapping his hands all the while, he stooped almost to the ground, straightened up, stooped again, and straightened up. Almost at once ten or twenty others joined in his movements. The white-haired mother of the village murmured in the same rhythm and with tiny bows sketched the ritual movements. Those who were still flocking to the assemblage from the huts at once joined in the beat and the spirit of the ceremony; the few who had gone off their heads collapsed exhausted, and lay motionless, or else were caught up in the murmur of the chorus and the religious genuflexions. His method was effective. Instead of a demoralised horde of madmen, there now stood a reverent populace prepared for sacrifice and penance, each one benefiting, each one encouraged by now having to lock his horror and fear of death within himself, or bellow it crazily for himself alone. Each now fitted
into his place in the orderly chorus of the multitude, keeping to the rhythm of the exorcist ceremony. Many mysterious powers are present in such a rite. Its greatest comfort is its uniformity, confirming the sense of community; its infallible medicine metre and order, rhythm and music.'

'And so your point is . . .?' asked Giles.

'That it's not always the words that matter. That uninterpreted play can work. Sometimes it's all that does work. I'm arguing for my decision to let Joseph play on the computer, and I'm assuming that this puts me at odds with what you're saying about the necessity to find a language.'

'Mmm,' murmured Giles. 'I wonder if it might help open things up a bit here if we tried to see this not as an 'either-or', but as a situation where both positions are appropriate at different times. You said, Steve, that Joseph feels 'held' by this play and I think from your account this is clearly the case. Do you know Winnicott's writings about holding, handling and object-presenting?'

'I've read it in that same article where he talks about it being pointless to describe babies except in terms of their mother's functioning,' I said.

'Well you'll remember that he talks about there being these three things: holding, handling and object-presenting. He's talking about ego integration and he's saying for it to take place, for the infant to be authentically and creatively joined with the world, then all three must take place. Surely, Steve, this is true for Joseph as well. The holding you're talking about is vital and it's happening, but there's handling and object presenting as well. Your infant son, the villagers . . . yes, they need the ritual which holds them back from the brink, that sensory continuity, rhythmicity, and boundedness that Ogden talks about, but at some stage . . . indeed at the same time . . . they need the language as well, the linkages and connections and the verbalisations that will provide them with a more conscious sense of how the world might be experienced. It's difficult to imagine that the Rainmaker's ritual would be enough, he would surely be required at some stage to sit down with the calmed villagers and talk to them about the experience. Indeed, if my memory serves me correctly, isn't the Rainmaker actually run out of the village some time after these events, doesn't he lose the confidence of the
villagers? It's the same with Joseph, surely? He needs to be held, yes, absolutely, unquestionably ... and he also needs to be handled, to be interacted with, to be a part of a responsive relationship ... and he also needs to be handed some of your objects, some of your thoughts, your interpretations ... at the right time, of course, and in a language that he can take in, that in essential ways comes from him. At some point you're going to have think about this play so that you can talk about it, so you can relate it to the experiences he's having in other areas of his life.'

'But how Giles? Perhaps it's my sense of shame, of doing something illicit behind closed doors, but it doesn't feel related in that direct way? It's feels more like a refuge, time-out, a sanctuary. If it's related to the outside world, then it's only as a safe place where energies can be restored for some future engagement.'

'Is it? I'm not so sure,' Giles said. 'Steve I don't want you to think too much about this next question of mine. I'm not wanting a considered response but a gut reaction. What turns him on about the game? What scares him?'

'Being the hero, that's what turns him on,' I said. 'And he's panicky about what might happen.'

'He's frightened about what might happen?' asked Giles. 'What gives you that impression?'

'It's nothing he's said Giles, and I might be completely wrong about this, but he conveys a sense of expecting some kind of disaster which will be too much for him. I've played this game with lots of young people and most of them are much more gung-ho than Joseph is. Most of them want to get out there and conquer the world whereas with Joseph I get this feeling that he's sure some huge army will come thundering out of the unknown darkness and destroy his cities.'

'That evil will come into the picture to redress the balance. If there's too much good, as he once said to you Steve, then evil will come into the picture. It's the story of his psychological life. Bad things burst onto the scene and the good isn't strong enough to withstand them. Or that's what he fears.'
‘We keep being brought back to the same spot, don’t we Giles,’ I said, both relieved and in a sense incredulous that Giles’s confidence in the reality of the psyche had been affirmed. ‘Whatever we do in a session, whether it’s talk about the past or what’s happening in the room, whether it’s play or making up stories and talking about dreams, we keep being brought back to the same thing. This is an aspect of Nietzsche’s eternal return, isn’t it, that everything in our psyche conspires to represent, to recreate, a single recurring scene?’

‘Everything perhaps has that tendency,’ said Giles, ‘But again we can’t let ourselves stop there. We’ve got to enter this moment with him, look around, find words for what we experience and discover. If all we do with the ‘eternal moment’ is revisit it over and over again with Joseph, if nothing’s done with it, if it’s not played with or expanded through our involvement in it, then it’s just going to continue to be suffocating for him, limiting. I mean poor Nietzsche just had himself to play with, he was one of those ‘lonely brooding souls’ who in the end was broken down completely by the pressure. No Steve, these moments have to be got at, grappled with, worked on. The dough doesn’t rise if it’s not kneaded.’

For an instant I thought he’d said ‘the dough doesn’t rise if it’s not needed’ and I was tempted to play with this double-meaning. It seems to be speaking all at once to the relational, the teleological and perhaps even the theological, and recently I’ve found myself wondering where God is in all business about the relative strength of good and evil. But I wanted to stay with Giles’s perspective for longer, to allow it once again to enter me, hoping that one day it would have a grounding effect on my tendency to escape into airier regions.

‘You’re saying, aren’t you Giles, that the play is OK as long as it’s played with, related back to things, and that play by itself doesn’t change anything.’

‘I’m saying that if something goes wrong with the first play in the parental home, then no amount of subsequent play can change things, even if the therapist with whom the child is playing has different parameters. The play needs to be explained because otherwise from within the child there is still the undifferentiated chaos where there is only distortion, confusion and
fear. This is an earthquake and gap-filled surreal landscape. You can't play your way out of bad and dangerous landscapes full of unheld fear and desire.' Sometimes I experience what Giles says as so full of condensed meaning that I can only scribble it down as he talks and then think about it later. 'There is a need for something extra,' he continued. 'Words have to be used that show that you understand what the other person cannot possibly understand.'

'For the play to be useful, I've got to make interpretations,' I said. 'I've got to make connections between the play and what's going on in Joseph's wider life.'

'This is why the Kleinians for example can be so good and so safe' said Giles. 'They interpret, they set up shapes and patterns and connections which take hold and transform the play. Kleinians provide an alternative story upon which the child can build a supporting and connecting structure, rather than one that is insulating.'

'But they can also be so relentless and persecutory,' I said, thinking particularly of an account I'd just read by a Kleinian in which her interpretations seemed to me to provoke a justifiable fury in her client as old wounds were reopened.

'They can be persecutory, Steve, but the best of the Kleinians know a real and possible truth about the situation, something the client gripped by these primitive unheld fears cannot know.'

'Talking to Joseph about his depressive fear of retaliation might help him understand something which at the moment he cannot know.'

'You don't have to use that theoretical language Steve, you can ... you must ... use the words and ideas that Joseph gives you. Talk about evil and sour smells, about the good collapsing.'

'But so often when I try I feel Joseph retreating.'

'Then talk about the retreat! Tell him you feel him distancing himself and wonder aloud about what fears might be behind this. You're beginning to do these things Steve. You're getting better at playing with what you're imagining is going on.'
'You say what I'm 'imagining' is going on rather than what 'is' going on.'

'All we can do is build a structure which has meaning and coherence, so that our patients can see a shape with links. A shape, not the shape.'

'A truth, not the truth.'

'That's it. That's all. It's a big all, but that's all.'

I was geared up, before Joseph arrived for the next session, to explore some of this with Joseph were we to return to the game, but when he arrived he wanted to begin with a dream he'd had a few nights before.

'In my dream,' he told me, 'I was in a pine plantation and it was time for all the pine trees to be cut down. There was this huge, bright-yellow mechanical arm that would chop down these trees and then let them fall to the ground, then pick them up and load them into a truck. Then I was at a cottage with a huge verandah and a huge garden which belonged to a couple I'd never met before and we were having coffee and cakes. They showed me round their huge cottage garden, with big flowers at the front with lots of paths and a vegetable garden round the back. After we had visited the garden, I was suddenly with some friends at Kings Cross in Sydney at night, and there were all these people walking around with powdery drugs, and the police would just look at them and their bags, then let them be on their way and not caring about the drugs.'

'That's quite a dream,' I said.

'Yes I know,' he said with an enthusiasm that reminded me of his energy at the end of our first session when we'd talked about 'the mystery'. 'Things were so huge in the dream, the mechanical arm and the verandah and the garden, and especially the flowers in the garden. They were enormous.'

'I wonder how you felt in relation to it all.'

'It was like I was walking around in this giant land,' he said.

I was reminded of some of my favourite Grimm stories, in particular 'The Prince Afraid of Nothing', and wondered if I might tell it to him sometime. There was also something about his heroic hacking in his mother's garden
that had something of the same quality, Joseph tearing out the weeds like the yellow mechanical arm tearing out the pine trees.

‘And then that bit at King’s Cross!’ he continued. ‘I just couldn’t believe it. The police just didn’t seem to care, yet I knew that they’d seen the drugs. They just weren’t interested.’

‘Like the teachers at your new school,’ I said.

‘Exactly!’ said Joseph.

‘Steve,’ Joseph said as he sat down for our session last week. ‘It’s been an incredible week really. You know how I sometimes say to you that I don’t dream much, or that I don’t remember my dreams when I have them. Well I decided that I’d write them down each morning as you suggested, and I’ve got a whole lot here.’ He took out a little notebook which was full of scribbled dates and notes. ‘I’m so glad I’ve written these down. I can’t believe how many I’ve had, and they’re so interesting I think. Can I read them out to you?’

‘Of course,’ I said.

There were eight dreams in all. In one Joseph was attacked by a shark: he described to me how he overcame his fear, bit a piece out of the shark and then felt ‘safe, content and at rest’. There was a dream where he was driving his mother’s sports car in a race, and another where he was sitting at his father’s work desk and then becoming a senior director in a company. There was a dream of men dressed as women playing on a huge net filled with blue and pink flowers, and one where Joseph was being given a swimming award ‘in this amazing huge open space which is also enclosed with this dome’.

‘In another of my dreams,’ said Joseph, ‘I’m in another part of Sydney, not King’s Cross this time, but otherwise it’s very like my dream from last week, the one about the drugs that I told you. This time it’s not drugs that people are carrying around but guns. They’re all walking around with these guns in their belts. It’s like everyone has mobile phones, except they aren’t phones, they’re guns … And then there’s this dream where a man is getting into a castle and then is only able to leave by scrabbling down this tree. He keeps going into the castle and escaping down a tree and then getting
recaptured, but each time he gets down a tree he strips the branches and that
tree is then not available for his next exit. He does this many times, and in an
aerial view later on I realised with a feeling of alarm that maybe he would
use up all the trees and get trapped in there, unable to escape ... And then
there's this third dream which I had last night. In it my watch is an hour late
when I get home from school and I totally miss the bus to Steve's. Then all
other attempts to get to Steve's fail. I'd get to the bus stop on time but the
bus would be going. This happened about ten times and I had this great
feeling of frustration.'

'You felt frustrated that you couldn't get here,' I said.

'Yes, I did.' But, as Joseph closed the dream book, it was clear that the
sense of frustration was not what he was feeling at the moment. He looked
up at me with a beaming smile.

'You're beaming,' I said.

'I'm so glad I did this,' he said.

'You're looking very pleased, as if you've given birth to a stunning
family of babies. You're looking like a proud mum.' It's an unusually
feminine image for me to be using with an adolescent boy, but Joseph wasn't
displeased with it.

'Well, they're pretty interesting, don't you think?'

'Yes, they're wonderful dreams,' I said. 'It seems that there's a consistent
feeling of urgency running through some of them, especially these last three.'

'What do you mean?' asked Joseph.

'You've got to get to Steve's. You can see that the man may become
trapped in the castle. There are people wandering round Sydney with drugs
and guns, and no-one is taking any notice. In each of these dreams the
dreaming you is anxious or frustrated, and most of the anxiety is to do with
something not being seen as urgent or vital.'

'Mmm' Joseph murmured, and I found myself looking quickly into his
eyes. Have I taken him too quickly out of his comfort zone, at a moment
when he all he needed was to feel proud of his offspring? Have I gone too
quickly? To ignore the obvious sense of urgency would be a mistake, I knew
that. But was my timing out? Was I being too earnest, betraying my
underlying anxiety that the psyche is shy, presenting itself only for a split
second and then disappearing out of reach again if not responded to in just
the right way?

Joseph glanced at his watch. It was time to go and he picked up his book
of dreams.

‘It’s a fine collection,’ I said as he left. ‘You’ve given me a lot to think
about.’

‘I’m trying Giles, to put into practice the things you tell me, but I don’t
find it easy,’ I said at the beginning of our session last week. ‘It’s very
frustrating! You say the same things to me over and over again, I experience
them as helpful and relevant insights as we’re talking, but then I go back and
make the same kind of hamfisted and overly conscientious moves when
Joseph and I are actually together.’

‘Meaning?’

‘Except when we’re playing at the computer, it feels as though I’m
continually being engaged at a thinking level. I find myself trying to engage
Joseph with thoughts. Like at the moment I’m trying to get him to think
about this underlying theme of urgency from his dreams. Giles, do you know
Nietzsche’s image of being the carriage?’

‘I most surely do, Steve, but please read it all the same for our mutual
pleasure.’

I looked up at the wall next to my desk where I’d stuck the quotation.
‘Here it is Giles,’ I said, and then read:

I want to awaken the greatest mistrust of myself: I speak only
of things I have experienced and do not offer only events in the
head.

One must want to experience the great problems with one’s
body and one’s soul.

I have at all times written my writings with my whole heart
and soul: I do not know what purely intellectual problems are.

You know these things as thoughts, but your thoughts are not
your experiences, they are an echo and after-effect of your
experiences: as when your room trembles when a carriage goes
past. I however am sitting in the carriage, and often I am the carriage itself.

'You're feeling frustrated because you feel yourself in the room not the carriage,' said Giles.

'It's this thing about my relationship to the world being through ideas rather than experience,' I said. 'Look, I understand what you've said before about ideas and impulses being two sides of the one coin, about the Cartesian "wrong move" which splits body and mind. Yet I feel blocked Giles, as if my only way of getting in touch with the world is through my head, through ideas ... or through its opposite, through the other end of the spectrum, through 'no thought', through non-interpretive play ... Here, in this session, I was trying to engage with Joseph's dreams ... but I'm trying to engage him with my thoughts about his dreams, and I'm trying to make contact with him through his thoughts about things and it all-too-cerebral, as if the ideas are separated from the actual experience of the panic or urgency that they express. It's like we're both in the room and just hear the carriage rumbling past outside, beyond our sphere of influence.'

'He cannot talk about his feelings Steve. They are precisely like the carriage, only hearable through thick walls. He -- and you -- just hear the snorting horses, the shouts of the driver, the crunching of the wheels. And there seems to be something else, doesn't there, some potential danger ... maybe you're also hearing shouts which suggest that someone's been run over, or there's going to be a hold-up ... or the passengers on board aren't who they say they are ... I don't know ... but the muffled sounds are there in your room and your interest has been aroused! Now you've got to find the words to maintain and deepen that interest, to encourage Joseph to peek out the window, even to contemplate a move towards the carriage.'

'I can get at these feelings when you and I are talking Giles, but I cannot do it so easily when I'm with Joseph.'

'The chemistry is different,' says Giles. 'You must stop blaming yourself for this and start seeing it as something essentially puzzling and important about Joseph and his relationship to his feeling life. His fear of collapse, for example. His fear of evil, which is also his love of it.'
‘You mentioned something like this last week Giles. You said that Joseph wanted to identify with the good but that it was the bad that really excited him.’

‘This is Milton’s dilemma is it not, Steve, that Hell is a vital place – it excites the senses – whereas Heaven is just a tad boring.’

‘When you talk like this Giles, I sometimes wonder if you’re not stepping outside of Joseph’s world and telling me about yours. This is the way you experience things.’

‘And don’t we all?’ said Giles. ‘Don’t you? Aren’t you more stirred up when there’s a whiff of sulphur in the air?’

‘I’m not sure,’ I said. ‘Consciously I’ve always wanted to align myself to the good. I’m an eldest child, remember! We see ourselves at the parents’ right hand, on the side of the good, responsible, upright and true!’

‘Dreaming your compensatory Hannibal dreams!’ said Giles.

‘True Giles. And recently I’ve been dreaming of murdering children!’

‘It’s the power of evil that turns us on,’ said Giles. ‘It excites us and it frightens us. We’re are animated by it. It’s the knowledge that evil is potent and invasive that gets our juices going. We’re not in the business of promoting the good so much as defending ourselves against an invader, an evil which comes too close.’

‘You’ve said before to me Giles that life isn’t a heroic task.’

‘We’re not in the missionary business, we’re not trying to spread the light or pump life into what’s dead. All that’s so altruistic, so outward-going, and it simply doesn’t get very far.’

‘Pump life into what’s dead? What do you mean?’

‘This project you’re describing of trying to connect idea to body, trying to get Joseph moving by giving him good ideas. We cannot energise lethargy, we cannot animate this monstrous force of inertia. Some of us therapists go out with the idea of waking up sleeping monsters, and it simply doesn’t work. It’s the Trotskyite fantasy. Trotsky was the crusader, the communist missionary and he simply didn’t get very far...’
'Trotsky was my kind of communist!' I said. 'Out of all those Bolshevik leaders, it was Trotsky who caught my imagination when I was studying that stuff at university.'

'But he failed,' said Giles, 'as all idealogues ultimately fail. And in the end communism itself fails because its ideological, it's out of touch with its baser drives, it hasn't enough appetite, enough greed, enough hunger. Iran works because of its Zoroastrian basis, the belief that it's a tiny island of goodness surrounded by a sea of evil. It's brought alive by that gut feeling. It's animted by its sense of a potentially invasive evil.'

'You're talking about energy as existing when evil is present. What about the energetic good?' I said.

'The good is only energetic when evil is around,' said Giles. 'Otherwise it's lethargic. Peace and security are not enough. They always lead to lethargy. Joseph is right. Evil always comes to redress the balance.'

'The plough of evil,' I said. 'You're talking about Nietzsche's plough of evil.'

'Remind me,' said Giles.

There was a short break while I put the phone down and tried to find the quotation amongst my notes. I'm a collector of quotations. Sometimes I fear it's my substitute for having thoughts of my own.

'Here it is Giles,' I said, and then read:

*What preserves the species.* The strongest and most evil spirits have so far advanced humanity the most: they have always rekindled the drowsing passions — all ordered society puts the passions to sleep; they have always reawakened the sense of comparison, of contradiction, of joy in the new, the daring, and the untried; they force men to meet opinion with opinion, model with model. For the most part by arms, by the overthrow of boundary stones, and by offence to the pieties, but also by new religions and moralities. The same 'malice' is to be found in every teacher and preacher of the new... The new is always the evil, as that which wants to conquer, to overthrow the old boundary stones and the old pieties; and only the old is the good. The good men of every age are those who dig the old ideas deep down and bear fruit with them, the husbandmen of the spirit. But
all land is finally exhausted, and the plough of evil must always return."

'The potency of evil is animating,' said Giles.

Our conversation was reviving memories of Joseph's excited face, of moments when he'd seemed especially animated. 'It's when Joseph is remembering his cruelty to his younger brother,' I said to Giles, 'or is watching the class erupt out of control in his new school, that he seems most excited.'

And here is now, for our seventeenth session. I've been thinking about his dreams again, about the sense of urgency, and feel that it's important to come back to it if I can. I'm also keeping in mind Joseph's rhythms, the way revelation and indifference tend to succeed each other, one week an opening up and the next a shutting out. Will he want to play *Civilisation* for the whole of today's session? How will I handle it if he does?

'Hi Steve,' he says brightly as he packs his Walkman into his school bag and settles into his seat. We exchange some pleasantries, and then he says, 'Well I've had no more dreams this week.'

'You haven't been dreaming,' I say.

'Well actually I have been dreaming. I've had at least two, but I can't remember what they were.'

'Maybe you're not going to dream much until we've paid some more attention to the dreams you told me about last week,' I say.

'What do you mean?' he asks.

'I've been thinking about your dreams,' I say. 'The drugs and the guns. The man who doesn't realise that he's cutting off his escape route. I think there's something in there that's wanting to be taken more seriously, that's feeling ignored.'

'Something wants to be taken more seriously,' Joseph echoes, inviting me to say more.

'It's as though your dreaming self, the Joseph in the gun dream for example, realises something that no-one else does. The dreaming Joseph sees the guns and the drugs and he is alarmed. Something is wrong but nobody is
noticing it. And in your castle dream, the dreaming Joseph can see from his
aerial view something that no-one else can see, that the man is soon going to
be trapped.'

'Yes?' says Joseph, still feeling that my point is elusive.

'All along there's been this question about whether there's something
hidden, something that's just out of our sight, some mystery that wants to be
revealed. You and I haven't been able to put our finger on what it is, yet the
sense remains. It's here in your dreams. It's as though your dreaming self is
shouting, "There is something serious here that I want you all to notice, but
you keep turning your heads away. For goodness sake, this is serious!"'

'You know that reminds me of something that happened last year,' says
Joseph. 'I'd forgotten this until now, but thinking about the gun dream has
reminded me that I watched an armed hold-up last year. Mum and I had gone
to the shops, and Mum had just got out of the car when we saw these men
with guns running from a shop.'

Joseph is smiling as he recounts the incident. 'Goodness,' I say, perhaps
reacting to his sunny smile. 'You must have been frightened, especially with
your mum out of the car.'

'I don't know,' he says. 'Maybe. I can't really remember.' And then, after
a pause, 'Maybe it's like with the death of my pop. It didn't really hit me at
the time, maybe it's going to hit me later.'

'There are things that happen to you that affect you deeply, but something
stops you from feeling them at the time.'

'Maybe,' he says.

'Like the split up of your parents,' I say.

'I really think I've worked that one through,' he says. 'I've thought a lot
about that and I really don't think it bothers me any more.'

'Well, if I'm right about there being something that wants to be taken
more seriously, and if it's not your parent's separation, I wonder what it
might be?' I say.

'I don't know,' says Joseph. 'I don't feel upset or anything.'

'You weren't aware of feeling upset at the armed hold-up,' I say, 'but it's
difficult to imagine that there wasn't some strong feeling.'
‘I guess so,’ he says. ‘I’ll think about it. But can we play Civilisation today? It’s been a couple of weeks and I’m really looking forward to having another go.’

‘Let’s play Civilisation,’ I say. ‘But let’s also keep our eye out for signs that there’s something in distress somewhere just out of sight, something in you that’s feeling some pain and is wanting to be noticed.’

‘OK,’ says Joseph.

And so we move over to the computer and, as Joseph finds the game I sit next to him wondering if we’ll find some way of keeping the images from his dreams alive and present: the wounded shark, the men dressed as women bouncing amongst the flowers in the net, the unheeded guns and drugs, the missed buses to Steve’s house, the man in the castle destroying his own escape routes. In the chambers of my mind two sides of a vigorous debate compete and clamour for my attention, distracting me from my resolve to stay in the moment. If dreams reveal aspects of the self, says one, then the aspects will remain alive and present long after the dream images have disappeared. If the psyche is hinting that the predicament of the man in the castle can only be seen by taking an aerial view, counters the other, then some effort of will, some deliberate changing of perspective, may be needed to prevent the entrapment.

Again everything seems to go smoothly for Prince Joseph. His explorers have now uncovered a great deal of territory and there is no immediate danger of contact with one of the bigger civilisations. They are either on another continent or on the far reaches of this enormous island. Much of this uncovered territory is very promising land indeed, lush farming country, extensive coal and oil deposits and adjacent to coastal waters teeming with fish. If we can establish towns near some of these resources, our economy will certainly flourish. We’ve found an American city, but it’s small and the American civilisation appears weak. They’re certainly no threat to us as we’ve now got developed armies. There seems to be very little ground for any concern.
But right at the end of the session, when we look at the comparative
statistics, there's an unsettling trend evident. We're still poor and the health
of our citizens in declining. More alarming still is another trend: where 500
years ago we were the third biggest producer of goods in the world, we've
now dropped to fourth, despite having the biggest land mass.

'Do these things matter?' asks Joseph as we look at the figures. 'The
people seem happy enough with my performance. They keep wanting to
build extensions to my palace, and our approval rating is pretty good. And
we're still the most advanced.'

'It's hard to tell,' I say. 'It depends partly on the intentions of those
civilisations who are doing better than we are economically. If they turn out
to have aggressive intentions, then they're going to be able to build bigger
and better armies.

'So this might mean trouble,' he says. 'This could be serious.'

'It could be,' I say.

'What will we do?'

'Well, again we can cross our fingers, hope that our rivals turn out to be
peaceful and press on very much as we've been doing. Or we can take the
possible threat seriously and alter our priorities.'

'And how would we do that?' Joseph asks.

I show him how we might slow down the scientific and technological
push and instead get more of our people mining the hills, farming the land
and the forests.

'So what do you want to do?' I say. 'The session time is finished now, so
you've got a week to think about it.'

'I'll think about it,' he says.

'And that other business too,' I say. 'About your dreams and whether
there's something in your life that needs to be taken more seriously than it's
being taken at the moment.'

'OK,' says Joseph and disappears into the night.

'Giles,' I say, 'I can't get this business of the impotence of the good and
the exciting potency of the bad out of my mind. I want to fight this idea. I
want to marshal some arguments against it. I want to try to speak up for the potency of the good.’

‘Speak up, good sir,’ says Giles in a way that I experience as both gentle and ironic.

‘OK,’ I say. ‘As usual I don’t know where I’m going with this and it may be something of a ramble ... I want to begin with something I heard you once say in a lecture. You were talking about the idea, derived I suppose from the Romantics, that God dwells in the unconscious, that the unconscious is purposive, tireless and wise, that it has as one of its functions the healing power of Nature.’

‘You’re quoting Carus,’ says Giles. ‘He says that it is through the unconscious that we remain in connection with the rest of the world.’ These ideas influenced not only the Romantics but also Freud and Jung.’

‘So here’s God dwelling in this ever-present and influential unconscious,’ I say. ‘Indefatigable, as Carus would say. And yet you’re saying that the good spends much of its time asleep (until provoked by the bad). So there are two views here, one which suggests that God dwells tirelessly in the unconscious and the other which says that we need evil on the scene to wake God up. My own experience is of the former, of the unconscious mind relentlessly tending towards some kind of healing ... or, if not healing, avoidance of breakdown. I think about myself at boarding school, cut off from the other boys, and telling myself heroic stories that kept me ... I don’t know ... relatively sane. Terry Waite, the captive in Middle East, wrote about the way he told himself stories and how this kept him from going mad ... There are writers who believe a mad person’s hallucinations serve this same function, of separating them from intolerable stresses, and that in the hallucinations themselves are related symbols which hint at ways back into sanity. And I’m feeling the same principle operating here with Joseph, where all his fantasy is taking us into the territory of a kind of splitness which has the potential to be energetic and healing in some kind of a way. God, if you like, is present.’

‘Well,’ says Giles, ‘it could be put like that I suppose, but personally that way of seeing things simply isn’t alive-making. Not for me, anyway. The
God-hypothesis, put the way you’ve just put it, encourages the very things you’ve been complaining of, the sense of impotence, of not having a role to play, of being cast as the passive observer of an intrapsychic dwelling place where God works His mysterious ways. I mean, if you want to think of the intrapsychic as some kind of place — and personally I don’t want to make that move — but if you do, then surely it’s not simply God who is present there. Joseph’s fantasy is about a battle between Good and Evil, between God and Satan if you like. It’s the conflict that’s animating, the juxtaposition of opposites, the tension. And it’s a battle that requires our involvement. If we allow ourselves to imagine that God dwells in the unconscious, that God is indefatigable and is working towards the good, and furthermore if we allow ourselves to think that God is omnipotent and omniscient, then what’s the point of us involving ourselves in these things? And where does that get us? We simply go to sleep, like some Victorian high Anglican nodding off over his cigars and port in the knowledge that the known world was in very good hands, thank you very much. No Steve, that can’t be my picture of the world. I need to add some Freud to my Jung, some Bion and Klein to my Winnicott, some Kernberg to my Kohut. I want some more energetic colours in my picture of things: more reds and blacks and oranges. The notion that God’s involved is all too pastelly for me.’

Over and over again, as I talk with Giles, I have this sense that I’m being invited to join in with life, to be a part of things. It’s never a stirring call, there’s nothing salvational or optimistic about it. Indeed Giles continually manages to convey to me a sense that there’s really no option but to be involved, that it’s a part of the human condition to be a part of things, and that in all likelihood this is going to involve us in frustrations and failures and foolishnesses. He’s told me about his admiration of the modern day anti-hero, the fumbler who stuffs things up, whose personal life is a mess. And he identifies his own outlook with the philosophical pessimists — Hobbes, Spinoza, Schopenhauer and, in his own way, Nietzsche. As he said to me one day, ‘I’m drawn to the pessimists who have this dancing joy rather than to the optimists whose work is so often a dead weight. Nietzsche, for example, who wrote about saying ‘yes’ to the world when he was racked with pain, at
times barely able to function physically, hardly able to see, freezing in his unheated room. And Hobbes who wrote that all life is nasty, brutish and short but who himself lived into his nineties and beamed his way through life! This is what I like about Spinoza, who did a hatchet job on all the joys of life and then ended up by saying in effect, “There’s nothing left! What fun!” I’m a cheerful pessimist Steve, and I have this sense that you’re an optimist wondering what to do with your depressed side.” I feel envious of Giles’s cheerfulness. I want more of it for myself.

‘Giles,’ I say after thinking some of these thoughts, ‘if you’re right about what exists in the unconscious, in dreams, in fantasy … in our experience of life … if you’re right that it makes more sense to think about this in terms of goods and bads in continual conflict and opposition rather than in terms of some inevitable tendency towards the good, towards the healthy … and this does make better sense, I know that when I allow the thought into me … it makes better sense of what’s happening for Joseph … So I want to let this thought in … I want to somehow get it lodged inside me, get it embedded … But it’s not easy to let it in, or at least it comes in when we talk but it gets excluded so easily at other times … like I’ve got this other assumption so deeply embedded in me, this more optimistic one that things are working their way in favour of the good … this is difficult … I’m finding it difficult to find the words for this …’

‘Go on Steve, I’m following what you’re saying.’

‘It’s so deeply embedded, this assumption … it’s so difficult to dislodge it, to feel the reality or solidity of any alternative assumption that could take its place … Whenever I relax my mind, whenever I stop trying, the bleaker view ceases to exist for me … You see, I’m trying to allow myself to be infected by what you’re saying, I’m trying to keep hold of what you’re saying, because I notice how these ideas about good and evil, the existence of both, the reality of both, actually feels better than the one-sided optimistically teleological … this other perspective, the one you’re expressing, feels more empowering to me somehow, more solid … like the energy attached to it is weightier somehow.’

‘Weightier?’ asks Giles.
‘My sunnier thoughts keep taking me upwards, away from the place where action is possible. These thoughts reassure me, at times they excite me ... but they take me away somewhere else ... they don’t sustain me. They don’t feed me. They don’t become ballast. Or only for a limited time. They’re exciting, these heroic and life-affirming thoughts, and I feel deeply attached to them, I feel a kind of fear about the possibility of letting them go. But the excitement doesn’t last, it doesn’t lodge solidly in my body in an enduring, long-term life-connecting kind of way. Sometimes it’s as if they’re like candy floss, that stuff I used to buy as a kid which looked magic but disappeared when you put it in your mouth ... I find this when I write ... or when I make an interpretation in a session ... or have what feels like an insight about a situation or a client ... that the thoughts evaporate afterwards, they don’t stick around, they’ve got no ballast, no weight. They don’t keep me anchored in the relationship or the situation ...’

‘You’re looking for a fuller picture of things, one that’s less exclusive of the horrible, the mad, the destructive, the messy. You’re also looking for something solid and that, in this postmodern era, is not going to be easy to find.’

‘I know what you’re saying Giles, yet I still can’t help trying. We’ve got to, don’t we? Even if we know that we’re never going to find certainty, we’ve got to keep trying to anchor things, identify things, think about things ... and notice what’s being left out of the picture when we think or talk about things in a particular way, what’s still uncertain or unclear, or what’s changed since the last time we thought about it. I think this is why I’m so stirred up by this idea about embodied and disembodied stories. It’s an idea around which so many of my questions cluster. How has my own story become disembodied, unconnected in some vital way? Can good ideas affect disembodied stories? In what way can a relationship, which I guess is always an attempt at embodiment, help something disconnected become a part of things again? Are there internal dynamics in an disembodied story which have the potential to move it towards connection, or must there always be some relational input? How can we move stories from one state – disembodied and now limiting – to embodied and connected ... from
insulating to relational? For me it's the question of how Hannibal might be helped to play the piano (or how I might feel in my bones that I have the capacity to be a good-enough therapist). For Joseph it's the question of how to escape the 'eternal return' of the thrilling and destructive seepages of evil into his life.'

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Last week I had another terrible argument with Jo and for twenty four hours we barely talked to each other. I tried to garden the following morning but was feeling black and empty. In the afternoon I went to bed, shutting the doors between the bedroom and the main part of the house and getting in under the doona, sinking down into the mood completely, shutting my eyes and going to sleep. I slept for most of the afternoon and had the following dream:

I'm in the bedroom, feeling furious with Jo. She is trying to appease my anger, at one stage bringing some food as I lie in bed. I take the food but don't talk to her. Oliver pinches the bacon from my plate and I chase him and grab it back. Later I shout at Jo and throw rubbish on the floor to provoke her.

Then I discover that the driving test man has arrived and is waiting at the bottom of the garden. My licence has run out and I have to take a new test. I tell the man I'll just be a minute, that I have to change my clothes, but when I go inside I can't find the right clothes nothing fits. I'm possessed with an almost intolerable frustration which feels so great that my body is scarcely strong enough to contain it. It wants to burst out of me. Jo tries to help me but still things progress unbearably slowly. Finally, still without my shirt on, I run down to the garden but the man has already gone.

Since then the black cloud has slowly moved on but I'm worried about my family and my health. I feel fine, but am sure that the enormity of the frustration that I felt in the dream must, at some level, be damaging. There's so much energy in it, locked up, frustrated, straining and damaging the container.

I do feel swamped by all of this stuff that's happening, and at the same time aware that it comes and goes. The black cloud descends and I feel
enveloped in my own mess, and then it lifts and moves on and I seem to be able to function in the world again.

And now I’m down at the coast, this time to work on my thesis. I’ve been here for five days.

When I arrived I picked up a joke book from the bookshelf and read through it looking for something that would make me laugh. I read it for about twenty minutes and found nothing even faintly amusing. It seemed such a banal collection.

Then, after writing the following morning, I took a walk along the beach. At first I was conscious only of my gloomy thoughts and lethargic body. But after a while I began to notice the colour of the water and to hear the waves hissing on the sand. The next day I found myself looking forward to the walk and I went to a new beach and picked up some shells to take home to Oliver. I cooked fish that night, with crisp green beans from the farmer up the road. After dinner I went down to the beach again and sat in the dark on the sand, smelling the sea and realizing how much better I was feeling.

I realized, too, that for some time now I’ve been living in a kind of psychic chamber with echoing metallic walls ... clients for most of each weekday, a weekly session with my analyst revisiting Hannibal’s cell, supervisions with Giles, arguments with Jo which take me back to my childhood, and often reading Bion and Eigen and Rhode about madness before I put the lights out at night.

Sitting there on the beach, watching the moon light play on the water, I decided to try to clamber out of this chamber. It’s becoming oppressive. It’s feeding off itself, increasingly insulated from the outside.

Half an hour ago while packing up to go home I picked up the joke book again. Some of the jokes in it are really quite good after all.
Chapter 6 The end

We’ve had three more sessions, and Joseph has just now left for the last time. He’s not coming back and I’m left feeling flat.

It’s as though I’ve unexpectedly found myself at the end of a complex novel peopled by engrossing characters and a promising plot to find that there was no real climax, no revelation or resolution. And the simile that has come to mind is in itself revealing as I’ve again cast myself in the role of observer rather than participant, a reader of other people’s stories rather than someone in there grappling with issues that our relationship throws up. This has happened before and I’m guessing that it will happen again. Is this the story I’m stuck in? Is this my moment of ‘eternal return’, a gate through which I’ll never pass?

A more sanguine part of me says that this is just the way things are and it’s not such a big deal. People and events come into our lives, things progress in their own unpredictable way for some time, then the people and events pass. That’s the nature of things. In this case, Joseph’s mother thought that certain puzzling things in Joseph might be addressed through him coming to see me for a while, we’ve had our while (and it’s been rich and enigmatic and perhaps provocative in a way that only the future will reveal), and now it’s time to move on.

That, at least, seems to be Joseph’s mother’s view. She rang me soon after our seventeenth session and said she’d been thinking that perhaps it was time to finish. ‘This kind of thing can go on indefinitely,’ she said to me, ‘and it’s quite a drain on the finances. What do you think about winding things up in the next fortnight or so?’

I told her that there was this underlying sense in our work of something clamouring for attention, something insistent but which had as yet eluded our
grasp. ‘If we finish now,’ I said, ‘Joseph may be left with the feeling that an elusive something has been left hanging in the air.’

His mother said that she’d talk to Joseph, and later rang me again to say that they’d agreed to a further two sessions. ‘He seems pretty relaxed about finishing, Steve,’ she told me. ‘It doesn’t seem to bother him much either way.’

But I felt uneasy. There was something unresolved.

A dream that Joseph brought to our seventeenth session did nothing to reconcile me to what was looming as a premature parting of the ways.

‘There were these six houses,’ he told me, again with a bright smile. ‘Five of the houses have already been burgled, and in the dream I know that the sixth one, the one that I’m in, is about to be burgled as well. But I just can’t get the police to come.’

‘You can’t get the police to come,’ I said.

‘No,’ Joseph chuckled. ‘They just won’t come.’

‘I guess that must have been pretty frustrating for you,’ I said, trying to ignore his seductive and disarming smile.

‘Well it was pretty odd,’ he said. ‘You’d think that police would come if they knew that five houses had already been burgled.’

‘And yet they don’t take your concerns seriously,’ I said. ‘It’s just like the other dreams.’

‘It is, isn’t it!’ said Joseph cheerily. ‘I wonder what it’s all about? Is it something in me, or in my family that these dreams are referring to? Is it something at school, or something to do with the state the world is in? It’s a mystery. I just can’t think what it might be.’

His tone threw me. It was disengaged, a kind of intelligent musing about an interesting problem that had come his way. I felt shut out and again unable to think of a response.

When Joseph arrived this morning he told me he had a solution to our enigma.
‘I’ve worked it out Steve! It was right under my nose all the time and I didn’t see it! During the week I’ve been asking myself, “What is it that I’m not taking seriously enough?” and then I realised that it was to do with my health. I’ve got some kind of allergy to certain foods and for the past few months I’ve been eating lots of junk food and going to bed late at night. I’m sure that what all these dreams are about is the need to take my health more seriously.’

‘It’s all about your health,’ I said, feeling privately unconvincing but trying to stay with the sense of achievement that his buoyed up tone was conveying.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘I feel a lot better. It feels so good to have discovered it. I’m eating better now, and trying to get myself to sleep at a decent hour at night, and I’m sure my poor old body is heaving a huge sigh of relief!’

‘So it feels as though the meaning of your dreams has been revealed to you.’

‘Yes,’ Joseph said with his wide smile. ‘I was talking to Mum about this the other night and we think that it’s OK now to finish the sessions. It was really good talking to Mum, actually.’

‘So this insight seems to have turned some things around,’ I said.

‘Something has shifted in the way you and your mother talk to each other. And you’re now paying attention to your poor old body. Things are looking brighter.’ All the time, I was aware that I was forcing these words out over a sense of disappointment.

‘Well not everything is better,’ he said. ‘Things have been pretty grim at school. We’ve got these relief teachers at the moment who can’t control the class and some of the kids are making the most of it.’

I remembered how, when he first told me of the ‘wild’ behaviour at his new school, he’d done so as if really enjoying the noise and sense of chaos. But he was experiencing this new development as ‘grim’.

‘Some of the kids can’t be controlled,’ I said.

‘Some of them are teasing me quite a lot. But you can’t let that kind of thing worry you, cos it only encourages them to do it more.’
‘They’re teasing you in a distressing way,’ I said determined for a moment to keep hold of what I knew was an unacknowledged distress, a terrible pain.

‘No, not really. It doesn’t bother me. Can we play Civilisation now? I haven’t played it for a while, and I want to get as much done before we finish these sessions. It’s such a good game. It’s so good!’

Again I was filled with a sense of helplessness but didn’t know what to say, how to respond. I look to my mind in moments like this, for answers, for ways out of the confusion, for clever ways forward. It races. Sometimes it comes up with the goods, but when it fails me I give up the struggle and abandon myself to the mystery. Games seem to have helped in the past. I don’t know everything. Hell, let the boy play the game, let it go ... hope for the best.

So Joseph and I returned to the game for a final flurry. Things had turned sour in Timeland. His early successes had not been enough to stave off threats from more powerful civilisations abroad, and he spent our final half hour together taking a puzzling and almost manic delight in destroying his own cities, trying to eliminate them before the approaching enemy armies arrived. When I came to do my notes afterwards, I found myself writing about his ‘suicidal impulse’.

His mother came in at the end of the session to say thankyou and goodbye. Joseph stood to one side, looking embarrassed.

‘Thanyou Steve,’ she said. ‘It’s been very good and I’m sure it’s helped Joseph.’ She looked over to Joseph, silently inviting him to add something, but he was smiling awkwardly and looking away. ‘I’ve noticed changes in him ... and he’s made the transition to the new school very smoothly which I’m sure he wouldn’t have done without your help.’ Again she looked in vain to Joseph to add something. Now she too was feeling awkward. She thanked me again, I shook hands with them both and then they disappeared down the path for the last time.

‘Hello Giles ... you got my notes?’

‘I did Steve.’
‘I’m feeling very agitated,’ I say, ‘full of chaotic energies ... for the past 15 minutes or so I’ve been pacing up and down the house, partly to try to focus my thoughts before talking to you but also because I can’t keep still ... I’ve got so much going on inside me, so much I’m thinking about, so much I want to say ... Last night I dreamt about a boy in great distress spilling things all over my study floor, a boy who talked endlessly, sometimes saying a lot in a phrase, sometimes going on and on about nothing. It’s me, Giles, and I’m worried about the coherence of what I’m about to spill.’

‘You’re worried that maybe I won’t be able to follow ... or that I won’t like the mess.’

‘Or that the torrent of words that are about to come tumbling out won’t actually mean anything.’

‘I doubt it Steve ... but we shall see ... spill away! ... this isn’t a library or a church, spillages are quite permissible here!’

Already I can feel myself less agitated, less raw, less unformed somehow.

‘This isn’t a single spill I’ve got Giles, I want to spill from several different parts of me. God, Giles, I hope this isn’t going to be an impossible outpouring ... but I’m trying to get closer to something.’

‘To get closer to something that makes sense?’

‘Not quite, I don’t think. Closer to ... closer to something that’s usefully energetic I think ... This flatness I’m feeling about Joseph’s departure, this sense of inadequacy ... it doesn’t have much energy about it ... I just feel deflated, down ... there’s no spring left. But when I allow myself to feel the anger and agitation that’s there ... and that’s connected I think to a kind of humiliation ... then I’m not flat any more ... I’m agitated, restless ... there’s an energy there that I’m hoping is useful ... yes, that’s what I’m wanting to get closer to.’

‘An energy that might be useful,’ says Giles.

‘Yes. I want to start with one of my dreams ... well, a couple of dreams actually, but first of all with a dream about humiliation ... And I want you to interrupt me at any time, I’m worried that this is going to be impossible to follow.’

‘Go on Steve. I’ll let you know if I’m not with you.’
'I had this dream the other night that I was being vomited on by a man ... in my dream I stood there with his vomit over my head and face, and my head was bowed and I felt so abject, so defeated, drained of energy, weak and saggy in my shoulders ... I could feel the misery as if it were coursing around my veins, getting right into my bones ... But then ... in the dream ... this abject weakness passed and I suddenly had this sense of release, of being purged, and I knew that this was because I'd allowed myself to feel these desperate feelings. And suddenly I was out the door and meeting up with my wife in this crowded shopping mall, a part of things again, doing things ...'

'This abject weakness is how you felt when Joseph went away.'

'That's how I felt.'

'You felt defeated ... humiliated.'

'And useless. Yes ... drained of energy and saggy in the shoulders. Variations on this theme keep coming up in my dreams at the moment Giles ... Also this week I had a longer dream ... I know this is too much Giles, that I'm telling you too much, that it's unprocessable when I pour things out like this ...'

'It's all right Steve,' says Giles. 'You're speaking about humiliation and impotence, how they feel and how they might be useful.'

'... in this longer dream I am at some kind of a conference trying really hard to hear what the speaker is saying but the man next to me – an aboriginal man with glasses – keeps interrupting, whispering in my ear, wanting to tell me something but also being deliberately annoying. I finally get totally exasperated and throw his glasses over to the other side of the room and the conference breaks up in confusion. Later we are reconciled and I realise that he is being unconsciously impelled to provoke me so as to broaden my perceptions of what exists and what needs to be taken into account, and we sit together for the rest of the talk holding hands. Later we are all taken out and shown the primitive sewage system at the conference centre, and we each have to spend time sweeping partly processed shit down manholes.'
‘You’re covered in vomit, you’re sweeping raw shit,’ says Giles. ‘You’re pissed off, humiliated, furious … shouting, flinging things, your body filled with terrible humiliations.’

‘It’s dreadful, and *I experience it as dreadful*. I feel dreadful. And I get worked up, angry, agitated … this is what we were talking about the other week; isn’t it Giles! … really feeling this stuff, the bloody awfulness of it, the existence of the horrible, of evil if you like … it animates … or has the potential to animate … to rouse the body to do something!’

‘That’s what you seem to be doing in these dreams,’ says Giles. ‘It can have other less vitalising effects too of course.’

‘Yes, that’s exactly what’s so frustrating! It seems to animate me in my dreams but not in my work. It didn’t happen with Joseph! He and I needed to get into the horror of things and somehow get agitated and worked up and energetic … but it was all so cerebral … all so careful and intelligent and thinky … we never got going …’

‘The awfulness was denied,’ says Giles.

‘By us both,’ I say. ‘We’re each of us, Joseph and I, struggling with this business of denying strong feeling, of being divorced from feeling because it’s too terrible down there … too terrible for each of us in our own lives and too terrible for both of us together in his … the bullying, the sadism, the sense of a world being torn apart, of the good being too weak to resist the bad … The same thing seems to be happening for both of us! Both Joseph and I are struggling with issues to do with violent impulses and terrible humiliations and we both cope by denying their existence. We *both* manage by telling ourselves and the world that these things don’t really bother us, that we don’t feel weak, impotent, angry and humiliated. We’ve *each*, in our own way, split ourselves off from these bodily-felt pains and impulses and lead a kind of insipid life as a result … well, not insipid, I don’t think that applies to either of us, but limited, lacking a certain kind of vitality or connection … we’re both prone to depressions, or to a kind of passivity which denies us a sense of being agents in the world … Maybe that’s why we’re were both so taken with the *Civilisation* game … because it gives us
this sense of creating the world anew ... Giles, I could stop there and I know there would be lots to talk about, but I want to keep going ...

'Keep going Steve, I'm with you.'

'I'm trying to understand better what's operating inside me, why it is that I go through these cycles of optimistic and bubbly engagement followed by a kind of flatness which gets disguised as romanticism (god is working his magic in the unconscious), or as fatalism (it's all beyond my control or powers of comprehension) ... which always ends up somehow passive, with me as the observer, usually lost and impotent ... feeling useless, unimportant, not a part of things ... It's to do with excluding strong passions, isn't it? ... These supervisions are helping bring this question up into my consciousness, and the failure with Joseph too ... it's like these two things are making me look a bit closer at what's going on in my life, in my personal life, where I see the same kind of patterns, or I've been seeing the same kind of patterns in the last few days, anyway ... I want to talk about this now ... In my personal life I see the same things, the same sense of me being passive, being the observer, then feeling full of despair about the world passing me by, ignoring me ... of there being no obvious place for me in it ... I'm not connecting with it and I find myself wondering why, what it might have been about my own childhood that accounts for this, and for the mad rages, the Hannibal moods, that periodically visit me ... I'm wanting to please, to do the right thing but I don't get the response I'm seeking ... I don't experience the world as responsive to me, and I've been remembering stories I've heard about myself as a baby ...

'You're searching for clues in your first months as a baby,' says Giles.

'I know that as a baby I was left to cry until the clock's minute hand indicated that it was time for the four-hourly feed. My father used to boast that he had to hold onto my mother's ankles in bed to stop her responding to my cries, and such was the atmosphere in our family ... or in my internalised family, it was probably different for my siblings ... that I never experienced any distress when he told us these stories. We would just laugh. It was just the way things were ... Anyway, I've been wondering recently how I learnt to cope with what must have been an awful trauma for me as a baby, and so the
other day I asked my sister about what I was like as a little boy, especially in relation to my mother. ‘You were the perfect little boy in her eyes,’ she said. ‘It was like everything you did brought pleasure to Mum and Dad. It was just the way you were, their perfect son. It was just the way you were.’ ... For the first time in my life I felt very sad when I heard this ... I suddenly knew that as a very little boy I learnt to compensate for my distress ... the crying and hunger that weren’t responded to ...

‘... that were impotent ...

‘Yes ... and I responded by finding a different way to be potent ... by becoming the perfect eldest child. I worked out a way of living blissfully with my parents. It involved completely turning off primitive impulses in me, losing fundamental touch with any sense of myself as a sexual or angry or distressed or needy person.’

‘You turned off the healthy passions.’

‘Turned them off, or turned them inwards. And outwardly I constructing a self (what Winnicott would call a ‘false self’) that took its cues from the reactions of the people around me ... It took a marriage breakdown, my first analysis, and then the Hannibal dream to open some cracks and give me a glimpse of a less benign underworld .... These recent dreams, Giles, of being an abandoned child in the refugee camp, are bringing back other memories, of being ugly, dirty, repellent ... of desperate letters, literally tear-stained letters, written from boarding school but not being responded to, of soiling my pants as a small boy or getting drunk in my late teens and my mother’s disgust ... I know these things happened a long time ago, some of them more than 50 years ago, but I feel them freshly ... not the memories, but the feelings, I feel them in my present life ...’

‘You’re feeling them now, with Joseph gone.’

‘I’m feeling flat and I’m also feeling the impulse to deny that I’m feeling dreadful.’

‘These dreams and memories are helping you to feel what you are feeling.’
‘The memories also seemed to be connecting me to some kind of repressed energy, or at least I think that’s what this agitation that I’m feeling today is all about.’

‘A frustrated vitality.’

‘I remember a day when I was about nine, I think. My mother had taken us to see a film which had some wonderful music and dancing in it and later on that day while my mother was out (perhaps with my brother and sister) and I had the house to myself, I rearranged all the furniture in the main room so that I could jump from one cushioned chair to the next. Then I put on the soundtrack from the film, turned the gramophone up high, and began to dance, leaping from chair to chair and feeling myself alive and graceful, full of joy and to be almost hovering in the air ... I can feel it all over again, right now as I’m talking to you! ... It felt like magic, like a sublime experience, and when I heard my mother’s car pull up outside I couldn’t wait for her to see me. But when I looked up, her face was full of thunder. I was messing up the furniture. Perhaps, also, she could see that I was in danger of hurting myself on the hard floors. Whatever the reason, I felt crushed by her disapproval ... I came to know instinctively that while my distress and creative capacity were incapable of getting my mother’s attention, she would respond to me when I was uncomplicated, sunny ... helpful ...’

‘The world responded to your helpful side,’ says Giles.

‘Look I know this isn’t the whole story, it isn’t balanced and it’s certainly not fair ... it leaves out all that my good-enough and much-loved mother gave to me ...’

‘All that other side is there but it’s not a part of this story.’

‘That’s right. This is about how I came to have a sense of my self which was to do with being reliable, thorough, responsible, intelligent ...’

‘Rather than passionate, Dionysian even,’ says Giles.

‘It was, I suppose, a kind of creation of me that left other things out, a story that got told about the developing Steve which worked in one sense but which was also terribly limiting.’

‘And that has been told many times since, no doubt, by you and by others.’
'Yes, it's a story that's defined me ... given me a way of being in the world. And this is the role I've been playing in my work with Joseph, playing the elder sibling ... I gather together my resources, work out what to do to help, talk to you diligently and energetically every week ... And then it doesn't work and I'm left feeling depressed and only in touch with the deeper feelings when I'm dreaming ... and that leads to this morning's agitation, much of which is a kind of mad rage with myself, psychotherapy, my colleagues, with the way life seems to be ...'

'The frustrations become rageful,' says Giles. 'The rage is an attempt to break through to something.'

'The rage keeps me from disintegrating completely. When the rage takes possession of me, I have a sense of myself as an agent, as possessing some power, of bringing some raw order to what otherwise would be overwhelming and an experience of not existing. My rage is my crutch, what I hold onto when the false-self structure breaks down ... The rage gives me a sense of agency, a hope that I might be able to make something of the raw mess within, the partly unprocessed sewage. It's the rage that at terrible and mad times in my life spews out all over the place and destroys things. But I'm hoping that it can break through to something else ... that Hannibal can stop eating babies and frightening people and can play the piano ... Are you still there Giles?'

'I'm still here Steve. I'm still with you.'

'There's more I've got to say... I should stop there, but there's much more! Earlier in the week I came across the following in a book I was reading: 'Without a model or holding internal mother, mind enters into states of splitting and disintegration.'¹ That describes so well what happens to me when, like right now, my 'eldest sibling' efforts to do a good-enough job break down. I've learnt to cope with the world by constructing a model of health and sanity ... it's a model built around values such as thoroughness, intelligence, carefulness, honesty, punctuality, growth, order and reason.'

'And you're now finding that not all of life can be squeezed into such a model,' says Giles.
‘That’s right,’ I say. ‘There are times when the model breaks down and my sense of self with it.’
‘And you’re left either feeling useless or possessed by a blind rage’ says Giles. ‘Hannibal is the raging monster imprisoned inside you.’
‘His influence seeps through cracks.’
‘You’re wanting to open up the cracks Steve, to make the channels wider.’
‘It’s so stifling in there, so claustrophobic. I sense Hannibal’s power, but I also feel the impossibility of him playing the piano unless there’s … unless there’s … I don’t know Giles … unless there’s some greater connection to the overworld.’
‘He’s cramped in there.’
‘Getting angry helps.’
‘It can give you more room.’
‘Hannibal, in his cell, feels cut-off from the world, despite the seepages, despite the way he exerts this clandestine control … He looks powerful, but inside he sees life going on out there and he feels apart from it, cut off … It’s the way I feel when I’m at my most distressed … I feel at times like this closer to the ‘unthinkable anxiety’ which Winnicott says is the experience of the baby who is not held and cared for in a good-enough way by the mother.’
‘You’re overstating it of course,’ says Giles. ‘You are not ineffective, you are not a hermit. You’re not simply rigidly ordered or chaotically mad.’
‘I know, Giles,’ I say. ‘I know I’m able to orientate myself in some way that is useful, I know that clients feel animated, at times, by the particular kind of attention I bring to my listening.’
‘You’re a good elder brother.’
‘Yes, I guess that’s part of it. Also, perhaps for my own personal reasons, my own relationship with the compensatory pleasures of disembodied stories, I enjoy fantasy and play in a way that is exciting and developmentally vital. But it’s also limited, or limiting … constricted … too orderly somehow, too careful … coming too much from my responsible self and without enough gutsy, gusty passion somehow.’
‘It’s the gusty passion that you want filling your sails,’ says Giles.
'My sails feel limp ... I don't feel the presence of any gutsy wind.'

'You feel impotent.'

'Too limited by being just an elder brother. But I don't want to throw him overboard, I need him too, especially if there's a gutsy, gusty wind around. I want him at the tiller, or on the bridge, or whatever the nautical image is.'

'You value your ordering mind,' says Giles. 'The useless, destructive rages need your ordering mind to prevent disasters.'

'My mind ... it's limiting, but it also manages to keep me sane. My temporarily successful attempts to create order with my thoughts does seem to keep madness at arm's length. It prevents the psychotic from destroying the coherence of my conscious story. But it's also banished the greater part of my feeling life to a psychotic underworld, and I now experience these feelings in eruptions of rage or anxiety which are potent, exciting, uncontrollable and destructive of relationship.'

'Your mind give your life coherence though it limits your experience of life,' says Giles.

'This is Winnicott's mind-object which we've talked about before, isn't it Giles, where there is a splitting off of the mind from the body, a mind that has taken over the function of the mother. And this mind-object is feeling the pinch, it's feeling itself being undermined by events.'

'Things are happening in your life, and in the life around you, to loosen its grip,' says Giles.

'Yes. In the life around me! That's crucial, isn't it, it makes all the difference! We're not isolated units, operating according to our intrapsychic laws, we're also connected to a world and the world is a source.'

'There is no such thing as a baby!'

'If we return to the image of the sailing ship, we have to keep remembering that the ship is not only peopled by officers and crew, is not only a physical structure of wood and bolts and ropes ...'

'... it's also in the sea,' says Giles, 'like other ships, subject to gusty winds and currents and weather patterns.'

'I'm not only me, I'm in a world which includes my family and colleagues, clients like Joseph, you. When my mind observes me, it's not just
looking at itself, at an enclosed system. It’s also looking at a part of a much bigger whole. My world is connected to other worlds, and to THE world. Things happen which have their source not in me, and yet they happen to me and have an effect on me. I have a dream about Hannibal. I meet Joseph. I have an experience of searching for something missing. I begin to write a thesis. I discover that the thing that is missing in Joseph is something that is missing in me too, that our worlds are joined, that there are connections, that the shared world shapes and excites and animates ... that it’s a source ... These two perspectives ... the intrapsychic and the ... I can’t think of a word for the other one ... it’s more than the intersubjective, it feels more connected to ideas about the world being souled, about Gaia ... who was that philosopher, Giles, who said that we each of us have a soul but that the souls are contained within a larger circle which is the earth, which is in turn connected to God?"

‘This was Fechner, though similar ideas were very common amongst the romantic philosophers, ideas to do with anima mundi and unus mundus ...’

‘Well I’m discovering for myself that this bigger perspective makes all the difference in the world! If I view myself as an isolated entity, as a body with an environmental history and a mind with adaptive capabilities, I’ve overcome an early environmental deficiency by developing a mind that can keep myself together, despite considerable internal pressure. End of story. I’m trapped but managing, just like Hannibal in his prison cell. It’s only when viewed from the other perspective that the curious synchronicities have a meaning, that there’s room for something else to happen. At the end of my Hannibal dream, the giant is hunched over the piano. There is more to this story... But Giles, perhaps this is too rosy for you, not grim enough!’

‘You suspect me of wallowing in life’s limits, Steve, but that’s not the case at all. By accepting them, by accepting embarrassing and awkward and messy realities which are limits – by not ignoring the limiting realities of trade winds, coastal currents, weather conditions – sailing can be a more pleasurable, less frustrating business, perhaps even one with more possibility. I’m the jolly pessimist, remember!’
‘And this meeting of the depressed optimist and the jolly pessimist seems to be edging me closer to something, Giles, which I want to try to articulate here. This agitation seems to be nudging me closer to some kind of articulated thesis. To a different story that feels coherent in some way, that brings all these chaotic feelings and experiences into some kind of relationship with each other … I want to try to articulate this now …’

‘Go on Steve. There’s a momentum here. This is good.’

‘OK … so … I’m letting myself feel this agitation, I’m letting my body be moved by all this agitated energy that come from my dreams and these childhood memories … and I’m sensing a connection between that agitation and my experience with Joseph, as if the agitation, the pacings around my house, are not just in my body, not just filling up my body so that I can’t sit still, but are trying to move my thinking on too, somehow, trying to move it though some kind of restricting or claustrophobic space …’

‘Like Hannibal’s prison cell,’ says Giles.

‘Like Hannibal’s prison cell, exactly. I’m wanting to say something, right now Giles, about what this is meaning to me … as a therapist, I mean … How my agitations and frustrations seem connected to an attempt by me to … I don’t know if this is going to make sense, Giles, but it feels like I’m attempting to change the story I’m living … This is so difficult, at the moment … it’s like I’m trying to do two completely different things at the same time … I’m deeply immersed in the subjective experience of articulating a new story, and at the same time I’m trying to take a step back and watch what I’m doing and say something coherent about this process … Am I making any sense here Giles?’

‘Things are coming together Steve, I can hear it in your voice.’

‘That’s good! … OK … So, right now I want to try to take a step backwards from all this agitation …’

‘… from the dreams and memories …’

‘… from the personal stuff, this Steve process I’m immersed in … I want to take a step back from that and think about it for a moment …’

‘… you want to generalise from your personal experience …’
"... yes, I want to say some things about the story-telling that goes on inside therapy ..."

"... this attempt to mate with the world that we've talked about ..."

"I think so, but I want to start somewhere different. I want to start with Winnicott, with what he says about the baby's experience."

"And you're returning to Winnicott right now because the generalisations he makes about the baby's experience resonate with how it must have been for you as a baby."

"That's exactly what I'm feeling," I say. "Winnicott says that first there is no viable unit that can be described with the concept 'baby', that the baby is utterly helpless unless it's a part of a bigger unit, so that first there is the mother-baby, and it's only the mother's presence which stands between the baby and unthinkable anxiety ..."

"Without the mother, the baby would die."

"Yes, but with good-enough mothering, the baby gradually learns to act and speak and think."

"Thought, word and deed," says Giles. "And you're saying that ..."

"I don't know whether it's what I'm saying, or what we're saying Giles, or what Winnicott is saying ... or whether it's what the process is saying ... but yes, what I want to say right at the moment is that each of these - thought, word and deed - has an ordering function."

"And by "ordering function" you mean ..."

"I mean that while at first it's the mother alone who stands between the baby and unthinkable anxiety by giving order to experience, soon ... very soon ... in the first hours ... the baby's own thoughts, words and deeds begin to have an ordering function ..."

"The baby begins to experience an internal order ..."

"... which is not different from the order which researchers like Stern showed were created by the mother-baby interactions ..."

"... it's not unconnected, but increasingly it becomes differentiated ..."

"... so that gradually these three things begin to take the place of the mother as that which stands between the baby and unthinkable anxiety. If
things go well, these three lead to an extension of the network of relationships that hold the infant.'

'These thoughts, words and deeds are the stories that join the infant to a bigger world,' says Giles.

'They attempt to mate, to use the image we used some time ago,' I say. 'So they order and they connect,' says Giles. 'They are attempts at creation, they create the internal holding mother. They're also the means by which connections are made.'

'I know none of this is original Giles, it's all been said before. The point is that now I am saying it! I'm feeling it! All these agitations and memories and thoughts and conversations with you and experiences with Joseph are somehow constellating in a way that's enabling me to say and feel these things myself.'

There's a silence between us for a while, one of our mulling silences it seems to me.

'You're talking about these thoughts, words and deeds becoming a kind of mother-substitute,' says Giles.

'They become a kind of creation story ... this is what I feel, this is how I interact, this is how people respond to me, this is what I can do, this is the way I'm put together, this is me ...'

'The thoughts, words and deeds of the mother, and the thoughts, words and deeds of the baby, act in the intersubjective field, the shared world, and a story is created,' says Giles.

'A pretty bloody complicated story, with lots of hidden bits! I'm not doing justice to it here!'

'And this creation story,' says Giles, 'is created as much by the unspoken interactions - Zinkin's vitality affects - the music of the encounter ... as by the meaning of the words used'

'All of that,' I say, 'was a part of the making of the story of Steve, the one I've been talking about today ... my first story, my creation story if you like. The bounce in my mother's voice when I was being helpful, the tightness around her mouth when she looked at me jumping over the cushions ... Yes, this is also about the music ... the non-verbal undercurrent ... that goes with
the content, which is as much a part of the story as the content ... So when I’m talking about ‘story’ here, or ‘story-telling’, I’m wanting to include the rhythms and tonal range associated with thoughts, utterances and bodily gestures ... the way, in my own family, the story of holding mum’s ankles in bed was told and responded to ... the seductions and distancings and excitement and dissemblings which were so much a part of my interactions with Joseph but were rarely actually talked about ... I can’t talk about story without talking about its implied music ... We’re created not just by the articulated content of the stories we’re told and which we tell ourselves and others, but by the rhythms, the music ... the form ... the nonverbal messages ... which convey much of the emotional meaning ... The sounds and gestures and bodily shiftings and facial sets and flickerings ... the pitch and rhythm of speech ... the tonal range ... these are at least as important and vital ... as potentially vitalising ....

'... or destructive and damaging and limiting ...'

'Yes, that too ... these things are at least as important as the content.'

'It’s these that hold the infant,’ says Giles, ‘in the way that Hesse’s Rainmaker’s ritual was able to hold the panicke villagers.'

'That’s right. And as you pointed out then, there’s more to being in the world, to maturation, than being held. We’re needing to move from being babies to being creators, shapers, doers. So the stories – our creation stories – have this function of holding us back from the brink, of giving our lives a sense of order and meaning, and they’re also meant to help us be a part of the world, to be creators. But sometimes our creation stories don’t work so well beyond holding us, they sometimes limit our capacity to join the world.'

'Stories need to have the capacity to move us out into a world where our experiences are shareable and where lives are makeable,’ says Giles. ‘Stories attempt to bring us into relationship.'

'I feel held by my creation story, it gives me a sense of who I am in the world, but increasingly I’m feeling limited by this story ...'

'You’re beginning to experience yourself in ways that don’t fit this story.'

'My creation story holds my sense of self, but other stories keep popping into my consciousness now ... the story of Hannibal, of the rage in the
crowded front seat of the car, the story of my encounter with Joseph, the story of the encounter between the optimist and pessimist ... all these stories ... they’re attempts to do more, to create a new story which incorporates more ... incorporates bits that were left out of the original story ... ‘

‘You keep being brought back to this abiding interest of yours, which is to do with the nature of stories, the nature of storytelling.’

‘Stories have these different aspects, these different functions. They hold and they reach out. They express what we’ve experienced but they don’t stand still! Something enters the picture – soul or anima as Jung would say – and suddenly we become conscious of what’s missing. We start to have dreams or experiences that are reminders of what is denied to us. We start to feel frustration or agitation or desire, we try to find a way of expressing these things ... A new story starts to form itself ... Stories have the potential, then, to bring us into a deeper relationship with the world.’

‘And they have the capacity to keep us in our prison cells,’ says Giles.

‘So maybe there are healthy stories and unhealthy stories, embodied ones and disembodied ones.’

‘But we’re starting to think in terms of stories as nouns again. It seems more freeing to think of what the stories are doing, or attempting to do.’

‘In health our stories connect us to life, to the life we have and the life we do not have but are reaching out towards. In mental illness our stories have become split off and disconnect us from life.’

‘The creation story of Steve that you’ve described here seems to have both these elements in it. Joseph’s story too. They’re attempting to mate and at the same time they’re attempting to resist the attempt.’

‘An surely that’s true of all stories, isn’t it? Stories have elements of health and illness. We are all of us inhabited by internal characters at different points along the continuum between health and illness. Even in the most disembodied story there’s a part that’s trying to reach out, to mate.’

‘Perhaps,’ says Giles.

I can hear the note of reservation in his voice, but at the moment there’s more I want to get out.
'I want to say something about what happens when a disembodied story is told to someone else. Telling this story to another is an attempt to create something new, which is always a relationship. The hope is that the relationship will heal something, that it will lead to a new story.'

'That something new will be created,' says Giles. 'That a new creation story is made.'

'Yes. And the creation is therapeutic. The stories have a therapeutic effect on both teller and listener. The telling of the stories to each other creates a new story. The creation of this new story has a greater therapeutic potential than the telling of the personal stories.'

'So we’re not trying to get at the truth, we’re not trying to dig down to some solid bedrock of fact which will release the illness, as Freud might have suggested,' says Giles.

'No,' I say. 'All stories are fictions ... that is, imperfect attempts to express our dynamic experience.'

'Yes,' says Giles, 'the expression must resonate what has been experienced. Isn’t this perhaps what you mean by embodied. That it has as its source a body.'

'And it’s always an imperfect relationship, isn’t it,' I say. 'There’s always a tension ... there’s a tension between what is experienced and its expression.'

'Sometimes the gap between them, the tension, is big and sometimes not so big,' says Giles.

'It seems to be less in dreams and hallucinations and spontaneous free associations, slips and play,' I say, ‘and that includes the telling of deliberately fictional stories, than it is in more consciously told stories ... in anecdotes, in the stories we tell about our real lives, which have been more deliberately constructed by the mind.’

'So the therapist,' says Giles 'is continually matching, relating, letting these various stories rub up against each other, noting the tensions and the points of connection, worrying away at the gaps.'

'And a therapist’s stories ... his matchings, relating and so forth ... are therapeutic if they are convincing.'
'If they seem to express a possible or ordering meaning which resonate...’ says Giles.

‘Which is different from the question of whether they are the truth or not, whether they are right. It is sometimes more to do with whether they work musically for the client, whether they are in harmony with the client’s internal aesthetics, whether they reverberate, whether they excite something... provoke some bodily response...’

‘Whether they hit the mark... or, if we’re sticking to a more musical image, if they strike a chord...’

‘These chords set up reverberations... and the bouncing back and forth of these reverberations creates new chords, a new story, which can be therapeutic... I think this was happening very imperfectly between Joseph and me... where my chords and the chords we made together were touching one part of him but leaving other parts untouched.’

For a moment Giles says nothing and I’m wondering if he’s disagreeing with this. But when he speaks it’s clear that he’s been mulling over an earlier part of our conversation.

‘I’m wanting to go back a bit Steve, just for a moment if I may. We were talking about the teleological view that stories have a goal, and if we confine this to a relational goal, to an urge to connect with other people without which life would not be possible, then I can go along with that. But stories don’t just seek to connect, you’re saying. They have a defensive function as well.’

‘A disembodied story can insulate us from vital life processes,’ I say. ‘This is what’s so palpable from what I was saying earlier about the kinds of stories that Joseph and I find ourselves telling, in our own lives and in our failed time together.’

‘And you are also implying, aren’t you Steve, that the opposite is also true, that a disembodied story can connect us to vital life processes, to a psychotic core which is alive and dangerous and energetically straining to break out of its disembodied state and enter the lived life from which it has been expelled.’
‘Yes, that’s what I’m wanting to say, that the continual breakdown of my mind’s attempt to structure experience keeps me in touch with an animating psychotic dimension. My agitations and fallings-apart are therapeutically useful, for myself and for my clients.’

‘They have the potential to be useful,’ says Giles.

‘Yes they’re not necessarily useful, you’re right,’ I say. ‘I mustn’t let myself forget how my time with Joseph ended. We failed, in some essential way. But the disembodied story does hold some clues, or point to a direction … this is my quarrel with Winnicott when he calls fantasying useless, not worth our attention.’

‘For you Steve, these disembodied fantasies have a connection to something important,’ says Giles.

‘They’re connected to the one story. There’s only one basic story and all the others, embodied and disembodied, are variations on the one story. Even if a disembodied story has lost its connection to what we call everyday reality, it is still connected to the one story.’

‘This is a surprisingly monotheistic idea,’ says Giles, ‘from one who talks about complexity, the necessity of many perspectives, the plethora of internal characters!’

‘Is it?’ I say. ‘I’m not so sure. There’s the story of all the different sailing ships on the sea, each with their own internal dramas — leaks, mutinies, diseases, encounters with pirates and so on. But there’s also the single story of which they’re all a part, the story of the sea.’

‘Yes but why the insistence on the single story? Why is that important?’

‘I suppose because I can’t explain the synchronicities that have happened in this work with Joseph, and in particular the coming together of two worlds, the throwing together of two people with such similar issues, without insisting that everything is connected, without keeping hold of the idea that all our stories are reflections of the one story.’

‘It’s an idea that makes sense of your experience,’ says Giles.

‘That’s right. And it helps me make sense of the conviction that I have that my Hannibal dream, even though it’s all about being cut off from the world, is important, that it’s connected to something vital, that I’ve been
right to turn my attention to it. This Hannibal dream, and all the ones I've
had since which have felt like developments and variations of it, has exposed
an underlying organising story that I've been both living out and denying ...
and I'm trying to tell a story about that story ... to you, and in this thesis ...
in order to shift something ... or maybe it's also to document a shift, though
the writing of the thesis feels too active a process to be described like that ...
Anyway ... I've developed in my life a way of being that is now causing too
much pain and I'm trying to find a way through it ... So my feelings of rage
and agitation and impotence and humiliation ... they're doing a couple of
things, aren't they? ... they're my frustrated response to imprisonment and
they're also an attempt to reconnect to a primitive aliveness ... And this
helps me to understand my feelings of being useless, of being unconnected!
... These are a kind of unstructuring, a breakdown of a mental organisation
of experience which has limited my relational and emotional life ... so I then
experience the world as unheld, complex, chaotic ... which is untenable for
long, it just leads to greater impotence ... so then I get impelled to search for
a new way of making sense of things ... I feel constrained by perspectives
which are intrapsychic or even intersubjective ... I find myself full of an
agitated compulsion to write, to read, to talk to you ... I feel these things as
bodily agitations looking for some kind of satisfaction or resolution ... that's
why this continual use of the sexual metaphor, of the urge to attempt to mate,
is so appropriate here ... by following the urgings and agitations, and writing
and reading and talking like this, all these ideas find their way to the surface ...

'There's the urge to seek sexual release,' says Giles. 'To ejaculate.'
'So that's why, for me Giles, these disembodied stories — the stories that
come out of my present somewhat disembodied existence — have a
connection to something vital.'

'They contain a primitive, fundamental and raw energy,' says Giles.
'Yes, they may be cut off from reality, but they're still energetic,' I say.
'Even a wank is energetic and remains connected to our sexuality,' says
Giles.
‘Exactly,’ I say. ‘A wank is connected to the one story, even when it acts as a substitute for the real thing, for sex with someone else. A wank and the fantasies that accompany it are connected to the main plot. That’s why I can’t be as dismissive as Winnicott about what he calls fantasizing.’

‘Though surely Winnicott is right,’ says Giles, ‘when he says that the fantasizing can prevent an engagement with life. A wank can be a substitute for the business of finding a partner, of living a life.’

‘Yes,’ I say, ‘And this applies to the therapist as well as the client. A therapist’s own potency can be contained in, confined to, a disembodied story. If a therapist is unaware that his own stories are disembodied, then he’ll be stuck in the role of impotent observer, unable to take an active part in the creation of something new. Disembodied stories, stories that have become split off from the body of the therapist and the body of the world, get unhooked from relational energies and prevent a vital relationship with the client.’

‘They, too, can become a wank,’ says Giles.

‘This thesis is a potential wank,’ I say. ‘I’m trying to find a partner – you, Joseph, a psychoanalytic tradition, a philosophic tradition – to connect myself up with. I’m trying to find a body to put my semen into, or one where there’ll be an exchange of bodily fluids. But there are times when I feel like the boy in my dream, the one I began with, spilling things (maybe what he was spilling was his semen!) all over the study floor.’

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Giles has been giving talk here in Canberra and I’m in the car now driving him back to his hotel at the end of the day. We drive for a while in silence, my mind going back to something he had said in his lecture.

The history of ideas is a part of our existence. The study of this stuff is adventurous, challenging, and we all take part in this adventure unconsciously. The goal of thinking is not knowledge or self-awareness so much as living: we think in order to live life more fully, which usually means that we think in order to manage pain and difficult problems. ‘Without trauma,’ said Winnicott, ‘there is nothing worth knowing.’ ‘To understand a
philosophers work," said Iris Murdoch, 'you must know what
they're afraid of.' Ideas come out of actual experience, out of
struggling with the problems of living, out of our emotional
embodied minds, if you like; ideas and events, therefore, are
inseparable. Thinking is a part of our nature; thoughts emerge
naturally (though not without pain or effort) out of the lives we
are living.

‘Giles, are you needing to switch off, or can I ask you something about
today’s workshop,’ I say.

‘No, that’s fine, go ahead.’

‘When you were talking about the nature of ideas this morning, you were
linking them with events.’

‘It’s more than “linking”, I think Steve ... I’m wanting to suggest that
they’re inseparable ...’

‘This is actually quite difficult for my Cartesian mind to grasp, Giles.
Inseparable? Can’t I think something without it coming directly out of an
event? Can’t I have a train of thought that goes along on its merry way
without being embodied in the kinds of ways we’ve been talking about over
the last year or so?’

‘I don’t know Steve ... Probably ... But if it’s possible, and I’m not sure
that it is actually ... but if it’s possible, then these kinds of thoughts aren’t
very interesting, are they? ... they don’t seem to have much to do with
anything.’

‘So you’re saying that ideas are an aspect of an event.’

‘Thoughts come out of brains in bodies,’ says Giles. ‘It’s the relationship
between the body (and its events) and the thought that interests me. You
heard me talking about Spinoza this morning.’

‘I heard it Giles but I want to hear a lot more. His language, his
terminology, doesn’t mean a lot to me, all his talk about substance and
attributes and modes. I haven’t read anything of his, or much about him. It
seems so formidable.’

‘You’ll like Spinoza, Steve, I’m sure you will. He’s talking about the very
things you keep coming back to.’

‘Meaning?’
'Meaning all your wondering about aspects and essences, about whether you think about things in the right way, whether you’re being effective or not, about feeling useless and wanting to be more active … Spinoza has things to say about all of this, good things Steve …'

'Go on Giles, I’m all ears. What’s he saying about these things?'

'This is a very large subject, not easily entered. Some of his language is formidable, so unlike Hillman’s for example. But let me try. Let’s see where we get to."

'By now we’ve reached Giles’s hotel and I’ve switched off the engine, but neither of us makes a move to get out of the car.

'You’ve said to me before that you have this sense, Steve, that to think about an individual is too limiting … and at the same time that when you start to think more globally, more philosophically if you like, your ideas tend to float upwards and out of fruitful contact with your experienced world."

'I end up feeling limited and useless,' I say. ‘Cut-off. Like I’m living in this psychic chamber with my thoughts bouncing off the walls and never reaching the outside."

'Or like Hannibal in his prison, wanting to play but for some reason unable."

'So what’s Spinoza saying to me about all of this?'

'Be patient here Steve. There’s no one idea that Spinoza has that speaks directly to all this, it’s not like that at all. Spinoza has constructed this extraordinary body of interlocking ideas, and it’s not the effect of any particular idea so much as the effect of the whole edifice that I think you’re going to find useful … Spinoza looks at things globally, but also minutely … He talks about the nature of the world on the one hand, and he talks about the relationship of our thoughts to our bodies on the other."

'So does he also say that to think in terms of an individual is too limiting."

'Spinoza says that there is only one real thing, only one substance, that the “beings” we experience as separate – people, animals, trees, rocks, clouds, rivers – are modes of this one substance …'

'Mode? Meaning that all these things are the forms in which we experience God.'
‘Something like that,’ says Giles. ‘God is all there is, and therefore nature is another word for God. He talks about ‘nature naturing’, that’s what happens, that’s all that happens… And he says that this substance, God … or nature … has an infinite number of attributes, but that our human capacities are such that we know only two of these …’

‘Attributes? Is this different from modes?’

‘I’m using Spinoza’s terminology here Steve, but he uses these words in very specific ways. Let’s see … God or Nature is the only substance and this one substance is continually expressing itself through its modes … This I think is what Goethe was writing about in that passage called ‘Nature’ which you’ve used at the beginning of this thesis, Goethe was much influenced by Spinoza … Spinoza sets out to prove that God must have an infinite number of attributes, by which he means there are an infinite number of ways that the essence of God might be perceived. ‘An attribute I understand to be that which the intellect perceives as constituting the essence of a substance.’ “Spinoza says that each of these attributes can only be conceived through itself.’

‘Is he saying here that there are an infinite number of ways of seeing the complexity of this one substance, this single reality?’

‘Not in the way that you mean Steve, not in the way you’ve been writing about in the thesis. He’s actually addressing Descartes assertion that there are two substances, mind and body (or to use Descartes’ words, thought and extension). There is only one substance, says Spinoza, a substance with an infinite number of attributes each of which can only be conceived through itself, but that as humans we are limited to experiencing only two of these, the attribute of thought (which we can conceive only through the attribute of thought) and the attribute of extension (which we can conceive only through the attribute of extension).’

‘I’m in danger of getting very lost here Giles. So an attribute is what you see as being the essence when looked at in a certain way? Is that what he’s saying? Like if you look at a tree in a forest valley from a mountain top its essence seems to be something to do with the canopy and its relationship to the whole forest, and if you look at it from the forest floor you’re much more
aware of its individuality, its rootedness, its age, the fact that it's a home for birds? Is this about looking at something from different perspectives and consequently experiencing it as having different attributes? Is this another version of Nietzsche's multi-perspectivism?'

'Yes and no Steve. He is talking about different ways of perceiving but not in the spatial way that your example gives. This is more to do with the human capacity to experience the essence of a thing in two different ways, through thought and through bodies. He says somewhere in the *Ethics*, 'We neither feel nor perceive any individual things save bodies and modes of thinking.' These are the attributes of God that we're capable of conceiving, and we conceive each through itself, bodies through our bodies and thoughts through our thoughts.'

'I'm struggling, Giles, this is all so unfamiliar. Can you connect it up to specific things we've been talking about in our supervision sessions?'

'Think about the last few months with Joseph Steve. Spinoza would say that there are two ways you've experienced this slice of life, this bit of nature naturing. There's the experience through the attribute of thought, where you got excited by his story and decided to use it in your Jung Society talk and then you felt useless despite reading Hillman and you wondered if there were other ways of approaching this work and at the same time you were feeling depressed and angry and worried about aspects of your personal life and you had some ideas about all of this while you were down at the coast ... that, if you like, is how you perceived one attribute, the attribute of thought, through itself. And you've also experienced this, perceived this, in bodily terms (and straight away you'll see that we're not talking about two different things here, but about two attributes of the one substance, two ways of conceiving the one thing): a body called Joseph bumped into a body called Steve and there were some impressions made in both bodies and one effect of this collision was that the Steve-body bumped up against the Giles-body, and so on ..'

'A bit like billiard ball on a table, that's what it sounds like,' I say.

'Well Spinoza talks a lot about motion and rest, he's got a Seventeenth Century view of the mechanical world that informs the way he writes about
some of this stuff ... perhaps all of this is of limited interest in itself except that it does something about the way we experience bodies and minds ...'

'So what does it do, Giles? I'm still not seeing how any of this makes a difference.'

'Spinoza is someone who keeps reminding us of the reality of matter, about the reality of bodies, about the fact that we're each born into a particular place, into a particular family, with a particular body and a particular brain ...'

'... and is he saying that out of these material realities comes desires and pains, particular emotions which we attempt to manage through our meaning making?'

'As long as you're not implying something like because of x (bodies), therefore y (thoughts). Spinoza insists that these are two attributes of the one substance, that the body doesn't lead to thoughts, that thoughts don't control the body, but that these are two different ways of experiencing the one predetermined natural process, the one expression of the essence of God-in-action.'

'So if I try to translate all of this into the kind of language I've been using in the thesis, Giles, I'd say that the stories we tell are living aspects of the material lives we experience, that they're a part of the process of living and absolutely no different in kind from other bodily functions such as breathing ...'

'... we cry, we breathe, we sweat, we eat, we shit, we fuck, we speak, we touch, we tremble, we die ...'

'... all of these things can be viewed through the attribute of thinking,' I say, 'and all of these things can be viewed through the attribute of extension, but through whichever they're still a part of the one thing happening, which is nature naturing.'

'Thinking,' says Giles, 'is not a split off disembodied thing, as Descartes would have it.'

'And this is why the images of the psyche are so real for you, isn't it Giles. You see them bodily, like farts, whereas I tend to see them as ornaments, creations, clever manipulations or constructions.'
‘Surely you’re exaggerating! Surely you’re making a parody of yourself here! But Steve we were talking a minute ago about bodies bumping into each other. Spinoza is a body that’s worth bumping into.’

‘You like bumping into the Spinoza body and you think I’ll like it too.’

‘To read Spinoza is to feel in touch with the way things necessarily are.’

‘I felt the same when I read Hillman’s *Dream and the Underworld*. I felt exhilarated.’

‘You did, I remember.’

‘But my excitement took me to a lonely cut-off place where I felt useless.’

‘Spinoza is a useful philosopher,’ says Giles. ‘Bumping into him results in a greater engagement. That’s the effect on me, anyway.’
Part B:  
Attempts at Mating
Chapter 7 A demon came over me

A fortnight ago I got a phone call from Joseph’s mother, some six months after that final session. She sounded tense.

‘Steve, I’m sorry to bother you and I don’t know if you can help us here, but Joseph has got himself into some big trouble. The parent of a nine year old boy has approached the woman in charge of the library where Joseph spends some time after school, and she says that Joseph has been showing pornographic material to her son and a number of other young boys. At least once – probably more than once – he masturbated in front of them. Yesterday the librarian rang me. She’d already talked to Joseph and was upset by his lack of remorse. She was obviously angry, so angry that she and the parent have threatened to get in touch with the police. They’ve agreed to hold off only if I can arrange immediate counselling for Joseph. So I’ve rung you … I’ve just been talking to Joseph and he’s upset now and he’s admitted that things happened pretty much as the librarian has described, but he can’t explain it. All he could say was that it was as though a demon came over him. … I can’t help feeling that this is all my fault. I feel I’m letting him down, that I haven’t got a lot to offer him at the moment. I can’t talk to him, I feel tense and preoccupied myself a lot of the time and I’m sure that all this insecurity has an impact on all the kids. Our youngest, Davie, is wetting the bed again. I just don’t know what to do here.’

‘What has he said about the actual incident?’ I asked.

‘I’ve tried talking to him about it Steve, but he just clams up and looks miserable. But something has to be done. Will you see him? Do you think you might help?’

‘What does Joseph think?’
‘I don’t really know. When I mentioned your name he shrugged his shoulders and said “but Steve doesn’t know that side of me.” Still, I think he’ll come. He knows that the police are going to get involved if he doesn’t see someone. I’ll talk to him and see if he will agree, then I’ll ring you in the next day or so and we’ll make a time.’

I found myself thinking about this new development often during the next couple of days. My feelings were mixed.

On the one hand what Joseph had done didn’t sound all that terrible. It certainly didn’t sound like a police matter and I felt utterly out of sympathy with the high-minded and appalled librarian. As I thought about the scene in the library, my mind went back to my own early adolescence in an all-male high-Anglican boarding school and the teacher who told me that masturbation was wicked and unhealthy and how sleeping on my hands would help me avoid the sin. I remembered, too, the night around the same time when we boys crowded around a bed in an unsupervised dormitory and one of the more extrovert boys announced that he ‘could do it’, that the rubbing produced an emission and a sensation, a moment of high drama which I followed up after lights out by attempting the same thing, driven partly to see what it was like but mainly to enable me to take part in what was clearly an initiation into the world of ‘real boys’. Perhaps, I thought as I waited for Joseph’s mother to get back to me, Joseph’s impulse was similarly motivated.

On the other hand though, I remembered from his dream those images of the police in King’s Cross taking no notice of the drugs and the guns, and that underlying sense as I worked with him that something serious was being missed. When I told myself that this incident wasn’t such a big deal, was I taking the role of the blind policemen? Was Joseph in fact saying, ‘I need some urgent attention, and I’ll keep crossing the boundaries in increasingly risky ways until I get it?’

There was a part of me that was relieved when I heard nothing more from Joseph or his mother. It seemed they had decided to go elsewhere for help.
I mentioned some of this to Giles during one of our supervisory sessions and he strongly urged me to be less passive. ‘If Joseph ends up talking to someone else,’ he said, ‘the split between these different parts of himself is going to be exacerbated, the good and heroic shown to one therapist, the dark and dangerous to another. Ring his mother up. Show your willingness to take this on.’

And so I did. Joseph’s mother sounded unburdened by my initiative and an appointment for Joseph was arranged for today. He’ll be here soon.

But all morning I’ve been in something of a lather about it. It feels like such an important session, one where the foundations of our future work will be laid down, and I must be very clear about what our business is and how this might be best approached. Just letting things evolve, as I did when Joseph came earlier in the year, could invite the same kind of fruitless search for what has been hiding, the same meandering attempt to name what would rather remain unknown.

I talked with Giles about this yesterday in our supervisory session.

‘Keep in mind that when Joseph present his sunny exterior to you,’ said Giles, ‘that he’s got feelings within him that he experiences as dark, exciting, cruel and sexy.’

‘These are feelings that are often inaccessible to him,’ I said. ‘He can’t talk about them with his mother, he can’t imagine himself talking about them with me.’

‘They’ve been compartmentalised off,’ said Giles. ‘They operate like demons who act up and act out, take control at times in exciting and perhaps confusing or frightening ways.’

‘But Giles he’s likely to just sit there shrugging his shoulders, he’s likely to say something like, “I just don’t know what came over me.” Joseph feels that it’s too hard to talk about these things with me, the person who only knows the “good side” of him.’

‘You must try to find a way Steve. You must. From the very beginning he’s been talking to you about the existence of two worlds, of the gap between them, of his wanting to bridge the gap.’

‘That’s what his first story was all about,’ I said.
‘And you’ve been saying to me that these stories are not just about the way the world has been experienced, but are attempts to break through to something else. There is a gap and the two worlds must be bridged. If you stay with the sunny, unknowing, good exterior, then his world will remain split.’

‘I know you’re right Giles, but I keep imagining Joseph in front of me, intelligent, silent, challenging, and me with this impulse to talk too much. I’m worried that we’re going to fall back into a pattern which we’ll both experience as familiar but stuck.’

‘Talk to him about the “mad and bad” bits Steve. ‘Tell him that he’s worried about the mad and the bad parts.’

‘Isn’t that too confronting? Too Kleinian? Won’t he just shut up shop and act as if I’ve gone off my rocker?’

‘He might,’ said Giles. ‘So what?’

There was a silence during which I became aware of a familiar and uncomfortable feeling. ‘I’m aware,’ I said to Giles, ‘that I’m feeling a bit panicky at the moment. This is how I feel whenever I sense that a client is teetering on the edge of chaos, whenever meanings break down, whenever there seems to be nothing holding at the centre.’

‘This is perhaps your own struggle to take the Hannibal parts of you seriously, to allow yourself to see your own mad and bad bits as real,’ said Giles.

‘I know that’s true Giles. I’d rather be the elder brother. That’s the familiar role, that’s the part I know how to play safely.’

‘Joseph is also an elder brother,’ said Giles.

‘I feel … and perhaps Joseph feels this too … that the way I’ve consciously ordered the world in my mind is precarious, that it leaves too much out. In these moments with clients when we teeter on the edge of something, I have this bodily sensation that I’ll tip over the edge, that I’ll lose my grip on whatever it is that I’ve found keeps me from falling.’

‘It feels precarious,’ said Giles.

‘It feels as though these ordering thoughts exist only in a mental realm, that they’ll be swept away if I let too much in … if I let chaotic forces of
disorder in ... I guess this is what Joseph might be feeling too ... That if he thought too much about the impulses that led him to do what he did that he'd be admitting to a feeling life that he's so busily disowned and assigned to the unconscious, outside the boundaries of his constructions about the world. He's doing so well at school now, so his mother said. He sees himself as having a future, he's motivated and has a purpose ... What has happened has the potential to shatter the sense of stability.'

'It's like a nightmare for him,' said Giles.

'He's terrified that allowing the messy world in will undo that hard-won sense of coherence ... he's busy out there keeping things together, he's carrying around with him a way of thinking about things ....

'... what you called in an earlier session his 'creation story'...'

'... yes, he's carrying around a story which is being threatened by events external to it...'

'... and threatened also by impulses within his body,' said Giles.

'It's a disembodied story,' I said.

'Joseph will be feeling that mad and bad bits of him are present and very unsettling. You can begin there, surely. This is what he is experiencing at the moment.'

But the talk with Giles yesterday hasn't prevented my pre-session lather this morning, exacerbated perhaps by a dream I had last night. In it the headmaster from my schooldays (a teacher who played in my life then the kind of role Giles does now) had returned to the school after a short absence. He was furious with what he found, with how sloppy everything had become in his absence. He told me and the other senior boys to get ready for a church service and it was clear that he would not tolerate any lateness. I went off to get ready but couldn't find the right clothes. I could feel the anxiety building. Eventually I found them but then I kept putting my head through an arm hole and found that the shoes didn't fit and the laces wouldn't tie. Anxiety turned into a kind of panic, yet I just managed to get to the church door as the other senior boys began to file into the crowded cathedral or church. Everything was dark inside. Then each prefect was given a lighted candle and we began
to move slowly up the central aisle. Suddenly I was filled with a sense of the
beauty of the occasion, I began to choke and sob and the tears began to
course down my cheeks.

I feel now, as I wait for Joseph, very much as I felt in the early part of the
dream, trying to get everything ready but encountering frustrations because
my ideas aren't coming together and I'm finding it difficult to prepare or
compose myself. It's an agitation with which I'm familiar, a kind of
performance anxiety, an adrenaline-charged restlessness that I used to feel
before going in to bat in my cricket days or before running in a big race.

My mind flits between different scenarios of how it might be in our
session this morning: Joseph sitting in front of me, smiling but impassive and
me talking too much; me being filled with a familiar panic when we get into
territory where comforting meanings dissolve; me being so intelligent about
an underlying story that all possibility of chaotic and dangerous feeling is by-
passed.

"Everything is dark except for the candles." Can I pick up a candle and
illuminate just enough so that we enter a cathedral? What I like about the
image is the sense of entering a holy and alive place. It's true, surely, that
Joseph's exhibitionism is the result of a frustrated love, that what happens in
the dark places of his sexual fantasies and impulses is a frustrated expression
of what has been denied him in the cathedral, that there's a link between that
dark library corner and Joseph's love of heroic vitality. Unconsciously he's
trying to find something, to make contact with something vital. When we
light up the darkness, it's love we find revealed. That's what generates the
intense emotion in the dream.

But is this a kind of sloppy New Agey optimism, a gilding of the lily that
has already led once to Joseph saying that 'Steve doesn't know that side of
me'? Perhaps it's more useful to assume that talking about 'the mad and bad
bits' is going to take us to a different place, to a Hell which is thrilling,
steamy and dangerous. Too often my ungrounded impulse is to light up the
darkness, to dispel it, to banish it. Perhaps we must enter into the darkness
first.
Joseph has arrived with his mother and we exchange pleasantries about how much the garden had grown, how Joseph has changed. He’s actually looking paler, thinner, with less sparkle. He sits down in one of the two armchairs and comments on the changes in the room: the different pictures on the walls, the new rug, the two chairs instead of the sofa. Things have changed. Things aren’t as they used to be. We’re both aware of the significance of this. For a long moment we sit in an expectant silence.

“Well,” I say, “it seems as though we’ve got some work to do.”

Joseph nods, looking awkward, looking as though he wants to say something but is blocked.

“I wonder how we might get into this,” I say.

“I don’t know.”

“It feels very difficult,” I say, playing for time again, hoping that one of these responses will be taken up by him.

“Yes,” he says. There’s a short silence.

“I wonder if it would help if I talked about some different ways we might approach this.” Is the old pattern being re-established? Am I being cast in the role of initiator, him in the role of monosyllabic and non-committal respondent?

“Yes,” said Joseph. “That would be good.”

“It seems to me that we might go one of three ways. Either we could approach it directly, going straight in and talking about what happened in the library. Or we could approach it indirectly, through dreams and stories, and then work to link these dreams and stories to what happened. Or, thirdly, we could do a mixture of the two.”

“I think the last one, or the first,” says Joseph. He’s inviting me, perhaps even pleading for me, to take a strong lead.

“Well, perhaps we could begin,” I say, “by talking about what actually happened. Can you tell me about the event itself, and what led up to it?”

“It’s hard,” says Joseph after a silence. “It feels a long way away. I find I put a lot of distance between me and it.”

“It feels a long way away.”
'Well, I can't really forget it. I still feel very anxious about it. Like every time a car drives down the street at night, or every time the phone rings, I find myself thinking it's the police.'

'That you're in trouble.'

'Yes. I feel very stressed about that. It's hard because there's so much on at school at the moment, so many assignments that are due in, so much to do, and I have to distance myself so that I can focus on what has to be done.'

'Making a distance feels necessary at the moment.'

'Yes.'

'But you keep being reminded of it by the cars coming down the street and the phone ringing.'

'Yes, it really stresses me out.'

'So there's a part of you that is putting a distance between you and what happened, and yet you keep being reminded of it.'

'That's right.'

'I wonder if it would be possible, right now, to try to travel across that distance and to talk about what actually happened?'

A silence. 'That's hard. It's so far away.' Joseph is quiet for a while, and then says, 'What do you know about it already?'

'It's very difficult for you to own that you did this thing,' I say.

'It was a really stupid thing to do. I'll never do anything like that again. It was so thoughtless, I didn't think of how the boy would feel at all.'

I hear echoes here of a real or internalised parent, perhaps even the librarian. Though his distress is palpable, his moralistic criticisms of himself are delivered in a flat, disassociated voice.

'I wonder if it's possible for you to remember how you felt at the time?'

'Not really.'

'Sexy?'

'No, not particularly. It was different, something different I suppose.'

'Different and therefore perhaps exciting?'

'No, not really.'

We then lapse into a lengthy silence. Joseph looks around the room, again looking at the new pictures on the wall as if thinking that one of them might
provide us with something else to talk about. Then he brings his eyes up to meet mine. I hold his gaze, we sit like this for a second or two, and then, when I keep my silence, he looks away.

'I wonder what that kind of a silence is like for you,' I say.

'It's all quite difficult,' he says and then instinctively glances at this watch.

'I guess you're wishing that the session was over, that time would go a bit faster.'

'Not really. It's just that I've got a lot on at school at the moment.'
I find it easy to empathise with this need to 'get on with life', I feel a natural sympathy with his sense that these events (and the emotions that infused them) are somehow inaccessible.

'It's hard to remember how you felt at the time,' I say.

'I suppose I know that I have to go back into it but I don't want to. I just want to forget about it, get on with things.'

'I guess there's a part of you that worries that whatever made you do it is still down there somewhere and might return.'

'I'll never do anything like that again,' he says with feeling. 'I know I won't. If I ever did something like that again, then the consequences would be too awful. It would involve going to the police, and I just wouldn't be able to bear that. If I were faced with that situation, then I wouldn't be able to go through with it.'

'Do you mean that you would contemplate killing yourself?'

There is a pause, then, 'No, not really. No.'

'It's been like a nightmare,' I say.

'Yes it has. And I don't know that I want to go back into it.'

'Yet there is still something down there that feels bad.'

'Yes, I don't want to go back to this because I'm scared that I won't like what I find.'

With many of my clients I know that a reply from me like, 'You're scared that you won't like what you find' will allow the next step. It will be taken up as an invitation to go further. With Joseph it's quite different. I sense these moments not as steps taken and support looked for, but as reluctant
admissions that will evaporate unless I say something to anchor them, to weigh them down, to connect them to something that is less likely to vanish into thin air.

‘This is reminding me of something you once told me, Joseph. Do you remember the discussion we had about Dante’s *Inferno*?’

‘Yes,’ he says.

‘Do you remember the moment when Dante is standing in front of the gates of Hell. Like you, he was scared that he wouldn’t like what he would find.’

‘He knew it was going to be horrible.’

‘He wanted to turn back. He wanted to put a big distance between him and the horrible place.’

‘But he had a guide, didn’t he?’ asks Joseph.

‘Virgil,’ I said.

‘Yes, that’s him. And didn’t he find his mother or his sister or something when he came out the other side?’

‘He found Beatrice,’ I say. I understand Joseph’s interest in the guide, but I’m curious about why finding Beatrice had seemed of immediate significance to him. I make a note of it, thinking that perhaps it will become clearer as we proceed over the coming sessions.

‘I suppose I have to go down, I suppose I don’t have any choice really, but it’s not something I particularly want to do. It’s like I’m at the edge of this descent and I don’t want to go down, I don’t want to find out what’s down there. I’m going to need you to lead the way I think.’

‘You’re going to need my help,’ I say.

‘The thing I don’t get,’ he says, ‘is how we’ll know when we’ve got there, how we’ll know when we’ve finished.’

‘Well, I guess we’ll both feel we’ve been through something together, that we’ve travelled through something.’ This premature interest in the business of finishing is familiar. ‘When you were here last time there was the same question about whether we had finished or not, and I think it’s clear now that we ended our sessions too early, that something was unfinished.’

‘What do you mean?’ asks Joseph.
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‘Well there was that question that we kept talking about last time, about whether there was something hidden, something that was not being taken seriously enough. We now know that there was something hidden, and that we finished before we discovered what it was.’

‘But maybe whatever it was grew in the time between,’ he says. ‘Maybe whatever it was didn’t exist when I was seeing you before, and it only grew after we had finished.’

‘Maybe,’ I say. ‘Whether it’s new or has been there for a long time, our job is to try to make contact with whatever this thing is.’

‘And then to get rid of it,’ he says, again with feeling. ‘To go down their with our Zero weedkiller and get rid of it.’

I am brought up short by the image, jarred by it, challenged in some kind of a core way. What Joseph is saying implies an attitude towards the underworld that goes against the grain. He wants to eradicate it, cut it out, poison it, zap it, and his gut aversion echoes so much in our society. Stamp out behavioural problems with discipline and Ritalin.² Get rid of young offenders by getting them off the streets (and, if necessary, into the jails). Move the homeless out of view. Pretend that aging and death can be defeated. Undermine the confidence of those with intuitive and sense-based intelligence by calling them under-achievers and putting them in remedial classes. Cure depression with drugs, respond to loneliness and alienation with advertising — you too, frail and uncared for in your unheated unit, can be successful and popular. Was it Hillman or Jung who said that a god hides in every illness?³ Taking the Zero to a god could get us into serious trouble.

‘Well first we’d better get down there and find out where it is and what it looks like,’ I say. ‘Then we can decide what we might do about it.’

There’s a silence again which I decide to break.

‘I wonder if you’d had a dream last night?’

‘Oh yes I did,’ says Joseph, his face suddenly brightening in a way that is familiar to me. ‘I had this dream where I was in my mum’s house ... Mum lives in a very ordinary house, which I’m not happy about because I’d like to be living in something classier, one of the things about being a diplomat’s son is that you get used to living in classy houses! ... Anyway, in this dream
some of the girls I know from school had got inside our house and taken all our clothes and notepads, they'd taken the Christmas tree ... I love Christmas trees by the way! Mine's up already and it looks wonderful! ... In the dream these girls had washed the clothes and hung them out on the ovals. We could see all the red clothing from mum's place....

'Red clothing,' I say. 'What sort of things? Underwear, socks ...'

'No, not underwear. Shirts and tops, that kind of thing. Anyway, there were a whole lot of other kids there, it was really public and everyone was looking at the clothes. So I found a sawn-off shotgun. I tried to load it, but the bullets were really thin and small. It had a pump and I found that this pump would suck the bullets through and put them in the right place in the chamber. A choir came to the front door and I aimed the gun at them and said, 'You must know something!' They said 'yes, it's the girls from school'. I don't know if I was going to go off and shoot them or not. And that's where the dream ended. Weird, eh!' Again Joseph smiled widely.

'So, the girls from school had been hanging your dirty washing out in public,' I said.

'No, it wasn't dirty. They'd washed it.'

'They'd taken things that were personal and precious, your clothes and the Christmas tree, and you were so angry you wanted to kill them.'

'I guess so,' he says, looking at the small clock on the table between us. We've gone overtime and Joseph's mother is waiting outside. 'Well, has it got anything to do with anything?'

'I'd be very surprised if it doesn't,' I say. 'I guess we'll see as we get further into this.'

'So,' says Giles at our supervisory session the next day. 'On the one hand he likes living in classy houses with pretty Christmas trees and on the other he's murderously angry when people break in and put private things on view.'

'There's this big part of him that needs to keep me locked out.'
‘There’s a struggle, isn’t there, between locking you out and admitting you. He wants both. He wants you to be the clever one who finds a way into this stuff.’

‘He does and he doesn’t. His words say that he does and yet I feel him unconsciously attacking my attempts to make connections, to think clearly, to say things that are apposite.’

‘Bion’s “attacks on linking”,’ says Giles. He’s referred me to the paper before.4

‘A part of the uselessness I’ve felt in the past has been my sense that things are confused, that I am confused. That it’s all too complex for my brain. I suppose what I’m now beginning to feel that the dizzying is something that is done to me, that it’s a clue to what’s going on in the transference.’

‘To use Kleinian language, Joseph is putting the panicky confusion into you,’ says Giles.

‘But it’s Ps→D, isn’t it?’ I say following up on a conversation we’d had one day on the ideas of Bion. ‘He’s operating out of the paranoid-schizoid position when he attacks my attempts to link things, and he’s operating out of the depressive when he’s asking me to help him go into this difficult stuff. The Freudian fallacy was that the first was a neurotic resistance to the ‘truth’ of the second, that as therapists we needed to cut through the resistance to get to the bedrock of repressed material. It works better, doesn’t it, to see both positions as being valid and attempting the difficult task of paying attention to both.’5

‘You’re saying that Joseph is both wanting you to make links (he asks you if this dream has anything to do with anything) and at the same time he’s unconsciously trying to destroy your capacity to think.’

‘That’s the sense I’m getting from being with him Giles. He wants me to enter his house and he wants me to know that he’ll be murderously angry if I succeed.’

‘I wonder what would happen if you told him this?’ says Giles.

‘I think I did.’
'Yes, true, but indirectly. You said something about him wanting to murder the girls who stole the clothes. But he's saying something here about you, Steve. He doesn't know this consciously, but unconsciously he's working to destroy any capacity you may have to break into his house and he'll be mightily disappointed if he succeeds.'

***

It's the end of a hellish week of personal and family anguish and I'm having coffee with an old friend. I'm still feeling knocked about by all that's been going on over the past few days - there's been an internal cyclone of too-muchness which has left me feeling psychologically flattened - but these coffees with her have been a part of my week for so long that a part of me immediately relaxes into the familiar patterns and timbre of our talk.

As sometimes happens we quickly fall into a conversation which skirts unknown or uncomfortable territory for one of us - today we talk about recurring bouts that each of us has of 'knowing nothing' - and usually we traverse this kind of terrain with care.

But today, for some reason, I'm filled with an impulse to plunge more directly into what I'm all of a sudden perceiving as the shadowed territory of an un-lived part of her life. Suddenly it seems urgent that I find the words to describe to her exactly what it is that I'm dimly perceiving, and I start to describe a distinction between her pragmatic and rational and ordered daily life on the one hand and the passion and exuberance of her artistic life on the other. We started slowly, tentatively, but now I'm hurtling down a mountain with the car in neutral. I notice that she's looking shocked, uncomprehending, and in my reckless mood I shut my eyes and reach down very deep for the words that will convincingly and clearly convey what it is that this apparently intuitive side of me is seeing. It seems urgently important.

'You don't like feeling unsure,' I say. 'You want to be more confident about your knowing but it's as if you're looking in the wrong direction. You're trying to overcome this by drawing on your pragmatic and patient side when really the only way forward is through your passion and
exuberance. By being wild. By letting your anger lead you. You’re trying to find a rational knowing, a logical, careful, thorough, properly-evidenced knowing, but there’s not enough oomph in this to break through whatever it is that’s blocking things. You’ll only find your way to a more confident knowing by letting your passionate and irrational side off the leash, by letting yourself be unreasonable and angry and exuberant and seeing where that leads you.’

She doesn’t react – indeed she’s more than usually silent – and after what becomes an awkward and unusually unnatural conversation (the car is no longer careering down the mountain but pushing its way through an unexpected stretch of sand) our time together comes to an end. As we say goodbye I look into her face for some clue as to how she’s feeling but I can’t read the signs. In the car on the way home, and later that day when I think back on it, I feel increasingly uneasy.

‘I’m not sure if I’m talking about you or me,’ I had said to her in passing during one particularly intense formulation of my perception, and it’s this that I now keep thinking about. Why did I feel so compelled to lecture her on the nature of her knowing, when it’s me that’s trying to complete a PhD, it’s me, at the moment, who is full of doubts about the validity of my knowing, and it’s me who feels this desperate need to break through?

And then I remember that all morning before having the coffee with my friend I’d been bumping into professionals who seemed to know: the local GP telling me about my skin spots, a psychiatrist explaining the pharmacology of an anti-depressant he had prescribed for a patient of ours, a psychologist giving practical and authoritative advice on how a client must think about a particular problem. After each encounter I’d found myself comparing their confidence, their apparent mastery of their subjects, with my own dizziness and lack of conviction. I have been lecturing my friend about her ‘not-knowing’ when it is my own that is clearly preoccupying me.

Later I ring her to apologise. ‘No need,’ she says, ‘I knew then that you were talking about yourself.’ We go on to talk about other things, the air apparently cleared.
Later, sitting alone in my study with the family asleep, I think about the fragile structures that cluster together to make up my knowing. They’re so often blown away, leaving me exposed, unable to act, collapsed in on myself and only able to feel a dreadful pain which weighs me down further and out of which I can only speak ragefully, vindictively, accusingly, destructively, damaging in their unconscious lashings out of other structures such as those formed by my closest relationships. What can I do about this? The internal psychotic metaphysics (despite Rhode’s confidence) lead only to an intensification of the tormenting echoes off the walls of my psychic chamber. Nothing moves on if its fed only by what happens in ‘the unconnected within’.

Yet things do move on. I am always more than I am, my skin insufficiently impervious to keep the world out, my body sensorily attuned in ways I know nothing about. I’m instinctively reaching for Biblical language and I can hear a voice: ‘Be still then and know that I am God.’ It’s a line I remember from Anglican school days. Spinoza’s Ethics is lying opened on my floor and I can hear his voice, too, telling me that there is only one Substance which can be called God or Nature, that God is the only reality, that all that there is in this world is nature naturing, that I am a part of this naturing and that to have sufficient knowledge of this fact is to live actively and joyfully. Even to write these words, to hear them being spoken to me by Spinoza, shifts something in me.

There’s another book open on my study floor tonight. It’s David Abram’s The Spell of the Sensuous. This too is a book that says to me, ‘Be still then and know that I am God’, though again the Biblical quotation doesn’t appear anywhere in the text. We are, says Abram, a part of nature, not something separate. The body, ‘the mind’s own sensuous aspect’, ‘this poised and animate power that initiates all our projects and suffers our passions’, is an active and open system ‘continually improvising its relation to things and to the world’, engaged incessantly in an ‘improvised duet ...[with] the fluid, breathing landscape that it inhabits’. This is my experience of the pine-and-poo air in the forest, or of the waves at the beach a few weeks ago. This
carnal participation," through the senses and through language (defined as primarily expressive, gestural and poetic rather than denotative and which therefore is an attribute shared with the barking dog, the chattering monkey, the whispering breeze and even the granite cliffs that speak to our sensibilities") is what gives the world we experience its shape and dynamic stability. Our lives are sustained through our ecological sensibility.

... [As] we know from our everyday experience, the phenomenal world is remarkably stable and solid; we are able to count on it in so many ways, and we take for granted much of its structure and character. This experienced solidarity is precisely sustained by the continual encounter with others, with other embodied subjects, other centers of experience. The encounter with other perceivers continually assures me that there is more to any thing, or to the world, than I myself can perceive at any moment. Besides which I directly see of a particular oak tree or building, I know or intuit that there are also those facets of the oak or building that are visible to the others perceivers that I see. I sense that the tree is much more than what I directly see of it, since it is also what the others whom I see perceive of it; I sense that as a perceivable presence it already existed before I came to look at it, and indeed that it will not dissipate when I turn away from it, since it remains an experience for others— not just for other persons, but ... for other sentient organisms, for the birds that nest in its branches and for the insects that move along its bark, and even, finally, for the sensitive cells and tissues of the oak itself, quietly drinking sunlight through its leaves. It is this informing of my perceptions by the evident perceptions and sensations of other bodily entities that establishes, for me, the relative solidity and stability of the world.

Again this is so like Spinoza though the philosopher is not mentioned anywhere in Abram’s book. It is also so like the spirit of Giles’s thinking that our lives are expressions of our natural relational urge to mate with the world. This is why I feel better not by privately thinking penetrating thoughts about the nature of my specific psychological pain, but by talking to Giles, digging in the garden or riding my bike with Jo, cooking, walking through the forest or along the beach, attending to the poetics of Joseph’s stories and dreams, talking about life with my daughters, playing roly-poly games with
my sons or allowing myself to be moved along by the music of Mozart or the rhythms of Goethe’s prose. These connections, these ‘conversations’ (in Abram’s sense of the word) have a sustaining and stabilising effect.

I am a part of the one world, there is only one Substance, I am stilled (and at the same time taken up again by the rhythms of life around me) knowing that the I AM that I experience from within is God. Or, to quote Abram,

We might as well say that we are organs of this world, flesh of its flesh, and that the world is perceiving itself through us.\(^3\)
Chapter 8 An evil slug

Joseph didn’t turn up for our next session, and my immediate thought was that the old pattern of revelation followed by retreat was re-establishing itself. But, about ten minutes after the session was due to start, he rang.

‘Steve, I’m sorry I’m not there, but Mum seems to have forgotten. She was meant to pick me up from home, but she’s not here. I don’t know what to do. If I got on a bus now, I’d wouldn’t be there until near the end of our session.’

‘Let’s talk on the phone,’ I suggested.

‘Fine,’ said Joseph. ‘She must have just forgotten.’

There was a short silence, as if each was wanting the other to begin. Only after the session did I realize that he had begun, that we was unconsciously needing me to pick up on the disappointment he was feeling, the buried sense of having been let down again.

‘Well, where do we start?’ he asked.

‘What about filling me in on how things have been since we talked last Wednesday,’ I suggested, pushing to one side the vague sense that I’d missed something.

‘I’ve been working really hard on school things, getting everything finished. I burn myself out, have late nights, do all my assignments and then collapse. I’ve got them all done now and went to bed the other night thinking I’ve got a stress-free life for a while now, til college starts. I went to bed savouring the moment.’

‘It felt good to have all your work done.’

‘It did. But I haven’t really been able to relax. I got sick as soon as the last piece of work was finished and that night I was delirious and had nightmares.’
‘Delirious? You had fevers? Hallucinations?’
‘Kind of. I had sweaty nights and nightmares. One of the nightmares was that my quilt grew really big and it smothered me. In these nightmares, which I have about every month or so, my quilt, the lights, something grows big and tries to kill me. It’s weird! When this happens, my body just stops, chucks a spack! …’
‘Chucks a spack?’
‘Yeah, freezes, shuts down … sort of is paralysed … It’s funny talking about it now, but it’s not funny when you’re in it. It would be funny if they weren’t trying to kill you. I guess it would also be better if there were more people in there. It’s a bit solitary.’
‘You’re on your own in the nightmares,’ I said, ‘and that makes it worse. You’ve had these dreams before.’
‘That’s right, But this last week hasn’t been all bad,’ he said, leaving to one side my implied invitation to talk more about his dreams. ‘Remember how I was feeling anxious when police cars drove by or when the phone rang? Well last week, after our session, maybe because of our session, the anxiety went away. It’s come back a bit since but it’s not as bad as it was before.’
‘Except when you’re having nightmares,’ I said, thinking that it was almost as if the badness was shifting away from the outside world of police cars and inside to his Joseph’s internal world.
‘Hang on a minute Steve,’ said Joseph before I could say anything.
‘Mum’s just got back. I’ll just go through to the other room where I can talk in private.’
When he picked the phone up again in his bedroom, there was something distant about his voice.
‘Where were we?’ he asked.
‘You were talking about the anxiety being less late last week and that it’s recently come back a bit.’
‘Mmm.’ Then silence. Joseph’s former engagement had disappeared. I decided to explore a thought that had come to me while he was moving phones.
‘I wonder whether there might be any connection between the feelings in the library and the feelings in the delirium?’

‘No connection,’ he said quickly. I felt the silence between us as a dead space from which nothing was going to grow. The ground had been Zero-ed. ‘It’s nothing like that.’

‘There’s no connection,’ I said, and we lapsed again into silence. ‘I’m wondering how you’re feeling right now,’ I said at last.

‘I’m feeling nothing. Like there’s no connection, that it doesn’t matter.’

There was palpable hostility in his voice.

‘It seems as though a feeling state you were in when we first started to talk has changed.’

‘I kind of feel, not so much that it’s changed, but that it’s gone, it’s cut off, it’s hung up.’

‘So it hasn’t changed. It’s still there feeling whatever it was feeling. It’s just that we’re cut off from it. We can’t hear it any more.’

‘It’s as though it’s behind a closed door.’

‘It’s feeling what it’s feeling behind a closed door.’

‘I don’t know. I don’t even know if there’s anything behind the closed door.’

‘It’s getting further away as we speak. You’re feeling even more cut off from it.’

‘It’s just like being alone ... solitary ... nothing.’

‘Like in the delirium,’ I suggested.

‘Maybe. I’m not sure.’ Joseph’s voice had regained some of its earlier engagement, though I was still conscious of having to work much harder.

‘It sounds to me as though you’ve just been giving words to what it is that we’re attempting to address here.’ Inwardly I cringed! These words were hopeless, a long way away from what I was actually thinking. I’d meant to say something like, ‘We’re trying to find some words, we’re trying to get closer to something’. What I said was not right at all, but Joseph continued as if the right words had in fact been found.

‘It’s like I’ve identified it,’ he said, his tone dry, cut off, disengaged.

‘Now we know what it is, what do we do about it?’
This was horribly familiar, an arid intellectual exchange that would get us nowhere. I tried to find a way back to the feeling life he'd been talking about when we started.

'Perhaps we might think about what enables the feelings to be felt. You could feel them when we started today.'

'Yes,' he said. 'We have to create a setting where they'll feel safe.'

'Something felt safe and then it didn't feel safe. Something changed.'

'Mum coming home?' he said. 'Someone else here? Having to share the space? Feeling unsettled? Something along those lines?'

Again the distancing intellectualisations were familiar. Again I felt him giving me the ball. There was another silence.

'Is there any way we can beat the silence blues?' he said sharply. 'It feels like these silences drag on, that nothing's happening. We're waiting for each other to speak and no-one's doing anything.'

'I wonder if you feel irritated, pissed off, during the silences.'

'Not pissed off or irritated. Just frustrated, frustrated because nothing's happening ...' There was a short pause, and then he continued, 'I'm going to say something so we've got something to talk about, so there won't be another silence. When I'm riding through Civic, when I see a young boy, I think to myself 'Will it be him? Will it be one of the kids who was there on the day?' I try to keep my sunglasses on. I'm hiding from it. If they say something to their parents or the police, then it will all start over again, it will all be sparked off again. I'm hiding from it, I suppose, I don't want to go through the same thing again. If someone says something to their parents and they go to the police, then the whole thing will be sparked off again.'

'It's like sitting on a time bomb.'

'I'm sitting on a time bomb and the question is how to defuse it.'

'Yes,' I said, 'what might we do that would defuse the time bomb.'

'Maybe talking together?' Again there's this question which puts it back to me. Am I reluctant to take the initiative because, unlike someone like Winnicott, I don't credit myself with knowledge or authority in these matters? Is it that at moments like this I'm too much in the grip of Hillman's
or Malouf's view that we cannot grasp essences, that things are too complicated, that there are always a quarrelling group of gods present?"

'It seems to me,' I said in an attempt to acknowledge complexity without losing the plot, 'as though there are actually a couple of worrying time bombs. There's the one out there in the world as you ride your bike, to do with one of the boys recognizing you and making a complaint to the police. Maybe there's also a worry that that there is a time bomb inside you that could, in certain circumstances, be ignited again as it was in the library.'

'Maybe,' he said and I noted that he hadn't objected to the suggestion this time.

'It's time to finish,' I said.

'Already? So it is. OK then, I'll see you next week.'

'Today it's felt like we've been in and out of connection with each other,' I said.

'Has it?' said Joseph. 'I guess so.'

'It was as if he'd been caught with his pants down,' said Giles after I'd described the telephone conversation to him and the effect that his mother's return had had on Joseph. 'As if he'd been caught in the act.'

'What act?' I asked. 'What do you mean?'

'I don't exactly know,' said Giles. 'I'm just responding, I suppose, to the sense of it that I get from your description. It was like in that moment where his mother came back he'd been caught with his pants down or with an erection and he was doing everything he could to hide it. He was showing you something one minute, then whipping it away out of sight the next.'

'When we talk like this Giles,' I said, 'I realize how suffocated I've become by the Freudian story of things.'

'What do you mean? Does my Freudian imagery suffocate you?'

'No, not at all. It's not what you're saying that's suffocating, it's the picture I have lodged deep inside me of what therapy is all about, a picture that we get from Freud I think. It's something to do with the static picture that Freud has left us with, of a psyche with layers, of an essential unchanging truth about people. Freud casts us as Oedipus sitting at the foot
of the Sphinx trying to work out its essential riddle. Too often that's the way I sit with Joseph, looking for what's essential, what's fixed, what's unchanging. Looking for the single answer to the question.'

'You've lost me here Steve. Why this thought at this time?'

'Because of the way you said, "One minute he's showing you something and the next he's whipping it out of sight". It's dynamic, what's happening inside Joseph and what's happening between the two of us. Things keep changing. I keep missing these because I'm looking for what's fixed, what's essential, what's unchanging.'

'It's changing all the time,' said Giles. 'And you don't always miss it, you talked to Joseph about things changing during the phonecall.'

'I could feel it,' I said. 'First it was there, between us, we were talking about something. Then it was behind a closed door. Then it was as if it didn't exist, it was nothing and Joseph was feeling alone, solitary. Things were happening as we spoke, a scene from a story was being enacted, it was dynamic.'

'Sometimes all we can do is notice this play of fast-moving shadows on the surface of the water and try to find words for them.'

'I find that difficult.'

'We all find it difficult. You're finding it less difficult than you used to.'

'I found it easier when I was a teacher than I do now that I'm a therapist.'

'You sometimes try too hard Steve. State the obvious. It's sometimes the most banal comment that has the greatest impact.'

'I'm doing this work experience at a computer shop at the moment,' says Joseph as we begin our third session since the incident in the library. 'I love it! I'm being given all these interesting things to do, looking at codes, fixing dud machines. It's great.'

'You're feeling really good at the moment.'

'It's like all this other business is disappearing, getting further away.'

'If you could fill your life with stimulating things to do, then the anxiety that you were feeling would disappear. You'd no longer be worried about the ticking of time bombs.'
'No, it's more like this thing, what happened, this anxiety, is drifting out to sea on the tide, but I know that tides turn, and that it will come back. I want to make contact with it ... so I can work on it ... get rid of it as quickly as possible. Get on with the rest of my life.'

'You want to get rid of it so you can get on with the rest of your life.'

'Yes, it's like I'm a computer with a hard disk that is full, something needs to be deleted before more can be added. This is how I feel about the problem, this is what I've got to do. I once saw this episode on TV where this man has to get to this enemy computer to delete certain files. He's let down on a rope from a hole in the ceiling. It's like you're the one letting me down, you're up there holding the rope.'

'And,' I said, 'we have to keep in constant touch with each other as this operation is being carried out, you have to keep letting me know what you're finding down there and how you're feeling, so that I know when to let you down further, when to pull you up, when to give the rope a bit of a shake. It might also be that we'll find files that need to be retained and protected.'

Joseph ignores this last suggestion and instead closes his eyes and tells me that he is visualising the rope, the room, the computer.

'There is a man sitting there,' he says, 'someone who knows that I am approaching but he doesn't know exactly where I am. He's determined to sit there pretending to play on the computer just to prevent me from reaching it.'

'He's sitting there so you can't get at the computer,' I say.

'Yes. Perhaps I'll get a knife and stab him in the head!' He opens his eyes, looking surprised by his own image, then looks for my reaction.

I remind him of his murderous rage in the dream, wanting to shoot someone. He doesn't react. I suggest to him that it's difficult for him to talk about anger.

'I try to ignore my anger, or control it. Control sounds better, it sounds more powerful. If I act as though I'm not angry, then that frustrates people who are trying to make me angry. Like there was this boy who was getting at me at school and I simply ignored him and he went away. He wanted me to lose it, to lose my temper, but I didn't. I controlled it. That felt great.'

'You don't express it. You don't lose it.'
‘I felt I lost it when that thing happened.’
‘You felt you lost it in the library when you masturbated.’
‘I think I was feeling a bit angry or something ... I’m not sure ... It’s not easy to think about ... I think that earlier I’d been feeling angry and that somehow I’d not expressed or got rid of it all and it had built up and was a kind of a push to what happened ... I don’t know.’
‘I wonder whether what you’re saying is something like this,’ I say. ‘That over time you have been in lots of positions where you’ve felt got at by powerful people, and the anger has built up in you, and at this time you were able to let some of it out, to feel powerful in an exciting way.’
‘Yes,’ he says. ‘That sounds accurate.’
Then, suddenly, he raises his eyes from his lap and looks at me.
‘You’ve suddenly looked into my face,’ I say. ‘You’re dangling on the rope and you’ve suddenly looked at me. Checking to see if I’m still here?’
‘It’s more to see if you’re still interested. I suppose there was a worry that maybe you’d been distracted by something, or maybe you’d noticed a danger in the room.’
‘You’re wondering if perhaps I can see something that you can’t.’
‘Mmm,’ he says lethargically and I have that familiar feeling of the energy having been instantly drained out of the connection between us. Just like during the phone call. Something has happened. We sit silently while I try to make something of these feelings, while I try to think of something to say.
Perhaps to circumvent a looming silence, Joseph suddenly says, ‘Now it’s as though I’ve gone to sleep while dangling on the rope.’
‘You’re asleep on the rope,’ I say.
‘Yes.’ Joseph is smiling, though he’s also giving a sense of wanting to renew our lost contact. This quite unlike how he was on the phone immediately after his mother came back.
‘And what about me?’ I ask. ‘What am I doing at the other end of the rope while you’re sleeping?’
‘I have the feeling that you’ve gone to sleep too. You’re really tired and you’re hoping that it’s OK that you’ve tied the rope up and you’ve gone to sleep.’

‘I wonder how that feels. I wonder whether it’s a relief for you that I’m asleep too.’

‘No I don’t think so,’ says Joseph. ‘It’s not a relief.’

‘What would you like me to be doing?’

‘Maybe give the rope a bit of a shake.’

‘Is that what you’d like me to do? Give the rope a bit of a shake.’

‘Mmm.’

‘You don’t like it when it seems I’ve gone to sleep. You want me to be alert.’

‘Shaking the rope.’

‘Keeping you alert and on the ball.’

‘That’s right.’

‘You’re wanting this mission to be successful.’

‘I want it to be over!’

‘But we’ve got a man down there preventing you from getting into the computer. There’s someone there blocking things.’

‘Mmm.’

We’ve run out of steam again. I decide to try a slightly different tack.

‘I wonder if the man sitting in the chair below you is a father?’

‘My father or someone else’s father?’

‘Either?’

‘No, he’s not my father... He’s not a father at all...’

‘What are your feeling towards him?’

‘Nothing really.’

‘You’re no longer feeling the impulse to use your knife to stab him in the head?’

‘Actually he’s not there any more. He knows that I’m asleep and so he’s left the place, he’s gone, he’s not there any more.’

‘He only guards the computer when he feels there’s a bit of a threat. He comes and goes ... A bit like your feelings sometimes,’ I say, casting around
for something that he’ll nibble at. ‘They’re there for a moment but then they disappear, leave, they’re not there any more.’

‘Mmm,’ seemingly only half listening to me, and suddenly I see that he’s actually following his own train of thought. ‘Actually he’s gone off to have sex with his secretary,’ says Joseph with a little laugh, as if surprised and maybe a little embarrassed by his thought, but enjoying it as well. ‘They’ve gone off to his place, but it’s just sex really, nothing else. There’s no real relationship, no friendship. He’s quite alone, bored, with nothing in his life except his TV set really. And the sex doesn’t do much for him either, it doesn’t make him feel any better. He needs something to wake him up, to put a bit of life into him.’

As Joseph talks I struggle unsuccessfully to quiet my sleuth-mind, the part of me that wants to see every expression and gesture as the vital clue to the single riddle. I lose sight of what’s happening at moments like this. I miss the poo-scented air because I’m too busy thinking clever thoughts.

‘I wonder, Joseph,’ I say, vaguely allowing these thoughts to form some kind of intuitive interpretation, ‘if one motivation behind your masturbating in front of the boy was to wake your parents up. Or perhaps yourself?’

‘No,’ he says after a short pause. ‘I don’t think that’s right. I don’t think that was a part of it at all. I don’t think that was an element …’ And then his tone changes. ‘I think it’s wrong the way Mum has had to get involved in this … It’s as though I let her down, or … having to talk to the librarian on the phone … having to … It’s like I’ve let her through something … It’s like I’ve let her down … or …’

Joseph is struggling to find something here, actively searching (in a way that I’ve hoped he would) for something elusive.

‘It sounds like “letting her down” is not quite right,” I say, responding to the furrow on his brow.

‘It’s not,’ says Joseph, who for much of the rest of the session sits with his eyes closed, concentrating on the images that are forming in his mind. ‘There’s something in my feelings here that has something to do with malice. With evil. With being naughty. Being defiant. There’s something angry in there … It’s like there’s a worm … no, a slug … that has these evil qualities,
and it's burrowing further and further down, making a hole as it goes, but the
hole closes up after it, and eventually the closing of the hole will go faster
than the slug and it will be squashed, it will become a paste. Then it will be
washed out of my system.'

'That's your hope,' I say. 'You're hoping that it will be washed away in
the natural course of things.'

'Mmm,' said Joseph.

'We've got to make sure that it's washed away rather than becoming part
of your blood stream,' I say.

'Actually it's not really the blood stream,' he says. 'It's more in my head,
and around my face. My chest maybe. And eventually this slug is going to hit
some kind of barrier and then it will turn, and when it turns, that's when the
closing hole will catch up with it.'

'So perhaps our work is to do with making the barrier?'

'No,' says Joseph. 'I have a feeling that the barrier is already there... The
slug is moving through my feeling right now,' he says, his eyes still tightly
closed. 'The field it's moving through is surrounded by barbed wire barriers
that it can't get through... I feel angry!'

After a little pause (I feel both a fascination for what's emerging and a
niggling suspicion that he's putting on a performance) I say, 'You're feeling
angry.'

'Yes,' he says, 'just then, for a second. It felt hot... as I talk about it, it's
disappearing, it's gone ... but it felt hot, like lava, like I had become the lava...
' He opens his eyes now, wincing as if the light were too strong. 'Weird,'
he says, a little shakily. 'I felt I was on some steps there which were leading
down into a volcano crater filled with lava, that the lava was down there,
quite a way away. I'm closer to it now than I was at the beginning of this
session, but not as close as I was a few moments ago and it's still a way
away. It's like I'm surrounded by the fumes or haze of it.'

'You felt the lava, you were the lava, you felt the hot anger,' I say, not
knowing myself what to make of all of this.

'It's almost like I'm being given an experience of anger so that I know
what anger is, so that I will be able to recognise it.'
Again I don’t know how to respond, what to say. I notice the clock. We’ve gone overtime.

‘Can I have some paper do you think?’ he asks me. ‘I want to draw some of this stuff before it goes, while I’m waiting to be picked up.’ I give him the paper and he goes out to sit by the road.

‘Mmm,’ says Giles when we speak on the phone the following day. ‘I’ve read your faxed notes from the session. Where do you want us to begin?’

‘I don’t know what to make of it Giles,’ I say.

‘Go on.’

‘It was all so unexpected, I suppose ... there’s this pattern Joseph and I have which has become familiar to me, of him offering up little bits and then retreating into silence, or subtly attacking my thinking in the ways we’ve talked about before ... so usually I have this sense of trying to edge him closer and closer to some place where his feelings are more present ...’

‘A bit like a sheep dog moving a sheep towards a pen,’ says Giles.

‘Yes, something like that, that’s what I’m usually feeling, like a sheep dog, but not a very clever one.’

‘... trying to edge him closer to some place where his feelings are more present,’ you say.

‘Yes, and he’s reluctant to go there ...’

‘He’s frightened of that place. And he tries to put you off, or distract you ...’

‘And at the same time ... or this is what I’m now feeling Giles ... at the same time he’s alarmed if he feels that he’s successfully put me to sleep ...’

‘He doesn’t like it when you fall asleep on the rope.’

‘He wants to wake me up.’

‘He keeps feeling things briefly but then they go. He’s wanting to make contact with something but he keeps losing it. He can’t succeed here on his own. He needs you to keep things in your active mind. There was that moment when he suddenly looked at you to see if you were still interested.’
'Something seemed to be actually happening inside his body,' I say. 'As we were talking, something seemed to be happening. Spontaneous things, unexpected things. Images ...'

'Like the man guarding the computer files. He wanted to talk about this man.'

'Guarding the files. Preventing access. It's Joseph himself, isn't it. That's the role he often plays in our conversations.'

'And this is the man who goes off and has meaningless sex because he's bored,' says Giles. 'This was Joseph finding a way of talking about what happened in the library.'

'But we didn't follow it up. I was too full of my clever Oedipal thoughts.'

'There are undoubtedly Oedipal elements present here. Your clever thoughts weren't wrong, Steve, they're a part of this picture surely.'

'But my thoughts stifled a less thinky way of playing with Joseph's image of the man going off to have sex.'

'It would have been interesting to have heard Joseph going further into that. The man at the computer is an aspect of Joseph. This was an exciting and perhaps unsettling moment for him, dangling on the rope and seeing a problematic aspect of himself. He wanted to get a knife and stab him in the head.'

'It's the Zero impulse again. Murdering the girls in the dream...'

'It's related to those, but it's more immediate, more violent. More out-of-control angry.'

'Present for just a split second,' I say, remembering the way he suddenly opened his eyes and then didn't respond when I talked about the anger.

'Anger is a terrifying emotion for him. To be avoided at all costs.'

'But he's full of anger,' I say. 'I feel it when I'm with him. Behind the charming smile and the disarming questions about what I think might be the next step there's this buried fury.'

'Buried? Did you say 'buried' Steve?'

'Yes, buried.'

'It's the slug!' says Giles. 'I've been trying to place the slug, and this is it, isn't it?'
"The slug is the anger?"

'I'm not being quite as literal as that, I don't think. No, what I'm saying is that his experience in his head and chest ... that's where it was located wasn't it?...'

'Yes, his head and his chest, and around his face.'

'... this sensation of feeling a malicious, evil slug burrowing through his insides, this is the feeling he gets because he can't shout out his rage. It's internalised, it eats away at the insides of him ... this is why he has the sensation of being eaten by the slug ...'

'And then,' I say, 'suddenly he's the lava, of feeling the hot anger ... but just for a moment ... it's something he can't tolerate for long ... he can't be angry with the world, with the bullies, because he's then out of control ...'

'It's the same in his family no doubt,' says Giles. 'He has power in as much as he can control his rage ...'

'... I feel that when I sit with him, yes, that he's got some kind of power, that he can successfully stir me up or unsettle me, because he's got these strong angry feelings under tight control.'

'So he can't be angry openly ... he doesn't even know that he's angry a lot of the time ... so what does he do with the anger?'

'He turns it inside,' I say.

'At crucial moments like in this session, he can actually feel it burrowing its way through his insides.'

'Moving through a field, boxed in with barbed wire barriers.'

'Feeling increasingly angry! Explosive.'

'But only for an instant. As soon as he feels it, it's gone again. Talking about it makes it go away.'

'Talking about it took him into it Steve. He made contact with it. What was it he said at the end, "It's almost as if I have been shown what anger is like so that I will recognize it in the future." That's very important. He's absolutely right!'
I’ve been thinking recently how when I began this work with Joseph I was in a pleasant state of Hillman-intoxication. Reading *Dream and the Underworld* took me into that blissful space that I fall into when I read a good book or listen to a particularly good piece of music, where I feel closer to how life deeply is, closer to things-in-themselves, nearer to (to quote David Malouf)

all those unique and repeatable events, the little sacraments of daily existence, movements of the heart and intimations of the close but inexpressible grandeur and terror of things, that is our other history, the one that goes on, in a quiet way, under the noise and chatter of events and is the major part of what happens each day in the life of the planet, and has been from the very beginning. To find words for that; to make glow with significance what is usually unseen, and unspoken too - that, when it occurs, is what binds us all, since it speaks immediately out of the centre of each one of us; giving shape to what we too have experienced and did not till then have words for, though as soon as they are spoken we know them as our own.]

This was the place to which Hillman’s prose took me, into that deeply known but until now unarticulated space beneath the noise and chatter.

Reading Hillman continually had the effect of giving validation to (making glow with significance) my internal world, the one to which I turned as a boy when feeling abandoned to boarding school life, an internal world where another life (was it compensation? was it more deeply real and sustaining?) was being lived. It was here that I read about the bushrangers defying the authorities in Boldewood’s *Robbery Under Arms* and it was here that I imagined myself playing full-forward for the Demons and kicking the winning goal after the siren. Like Malouf, Hillman speaks up for the archetypal, the inner realm of eternal significances. To quote Hillman:

It is as if consciousness rests upon a self-sustaining and imagining substrate - an inner place or deeper person or ongoing presence - that is simply there even when all our subjectivity, ego, and consciousness go into eclipse. Soul appears as a factor independent of the events in which we are immersed.
I suppose it was this very lack of connection ('independent of the events') that I experienced as such a solace. Hillman drew me inward and downward, to an 'inscape of personified images' where mental events 'do not require and cannot acquire further validation by reference to external events'. He says that paying attention to the imaginal world returns the human psyche 'to its nonhuman imaginal essence'. In one of his rare passages of clinical material, he talks about how attention to images helped Hillman and his patient to avoid the vicissitudes of a potentially stormy and unstable working relationship:

Images provided the main place of connection between us. Rather than premature attempts at personal relatedness (which tended each time to develop into paranoid accusations and defensive denials - her usual pattern with others), feeling was given to the products of her soul. Our connection was below our disparities and was less in terms of the fluctuations of personal feelings toward each other, than it was valuing the impersonal psychic movements that went on at the common collective level.

My intoxication with Hillman was intensified as I'd just finished a Masters thesis in which I'd used an Hillmanian perspective to illuminate some work I'd done with two young clients. It was a necessary intoxication, a vital balancing of the world's tendency to read events according to what is on the surface, an intoxication which remains deeply important to me. Thomas Moore tells how Hillman was once asked to advise some town planners on the desirability of installing a recreational lake and his response was to reflect (with the planners) on the parched nature of the town's soul. Hillman's continual move is to look beyond the measurable and the visible and the literal, to stir up our complacencies, our acceptance of appearances. In this he reminds me of Nietzsche and it's a perspective which I hope continues to inform my attitude whenever a Joseph arrives for a session. Hillman argues that the psyche is polycentric, that mythology speaks to the psyche's fundamental experiences, that symptoms are evidence of neglected or repressed parts of the self, that pathology is not an aberration to be cured but an essential aspect of the human experience, that the significance of our actions is missed if only seen through a reductive historical lens, and that
our experiences have “inside meaning”\textsuperscript{11} to which dreams and fantasies and impulses give us some access. I particularly value Hillman’s love of language and have been guided in the writing of this thesis by ideas such as the following:

Psychological rememberance is given by the kind of speech that carries remembrance within it. This language is both of culture and uncultured, is both of art and artless. It is a mythic, metaphorical language, a speech of ambiguities that is evocative and detailed, yet not definitive, not productive of dictionaries, textbooks, or even abstract descriptions. Rather it is a speech that leads to participation, in the Platonic sense, in and with the thing spoken of, a speech of stories and insights which evoke, in the other who listens, new stories and insights, the way one poem and one tune ignite another verse and another song. It is conversation, letters, tales, in which we reveal our dreams and fantasies - and our psychopathology. It evokes, calls forth, and creates psyche as it speaks.\textsuperscript{12}

But I’m beginning to realize that while my Hillman-intoxication was necessary and continues to be essential to me, it has also at times acted as a drug, as a kind of Lotos soul food insulating me from the painful realities of an actual lived life and taking the place of real relationships with real people. I find myself when under Hillman’s spell like those of Odysseus’s men who, when they ate this honeyed plant, the Lotos,

\begin{quote}
Never cared to report, nor to return;
they longed to stay forever, browsing on
that native bloom, forgetful of their homeland.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

What alerted me to this tendency, as I’ve tried to show in the narrative of those early sessions with Joseph, was my feelings of uselessness, of casting myself in the role of an observer of some Olympian drama in which I had no role to play. And, as I try to free myself from the temptation to remain blissfully and soulfully on the island, I find when I look back that there are parts of Hillman’s perspective which are unrelational and which imply a kind of imaginal-real dualism which in the end I’ve found restrictive.
There's an implication in Hillman that either we're in the therapy room or we're out on the street engaged in the issues of the world. Whilst I agree that the therapeutic tendency to interiorise all experience can lead us to ignore ideological crassness and environmental breakdown, the dualism he implicitly assumes leaves out what the client is actually doing in the therapy session, which is to tell a story which not only expresses what is going on inside but is attempting to change something (in the first instance, the relationship with the therapist) on the outside. In other words, what happens in the therapy room, what happens when a dream is told or a feeling described, is to do with a present relationship (that between the client and the therapist) and is an attempt to live more relationally and actively with the world. Archetypal psychology implies that the meaning of communications is inner, poetic, or (to use Hillman's latest metaphor) that it unfolds according to its inner structure and coding like an acorn seed growing into an oak tree. This is to miss its relational aspect, and in particular to imply that the individual grows according to inner processes, essentially untouched by current interpersonal experience.

What seems to me now to be a more fruitful perspective — and one that contains all that is exciting and necessarily corrective about the Hillmanian perspective without falling down one of the polar traps of solipsism or unconscious activism — is one that sees the world as being minded (having a mind). In such a cosmology individual minds are not unique and isolated and unconnected, not encoded with unique patterns which then seek out their fulfilment in the world, but are rather ideas of the one mind and connected with each in some complex way which gives them both individual and collective being. This is a Spinozan viewpoint taken up by the Romantic philosophers and of course is not at all foreign to Hillmanian discourse though it can be missed by too 'individually-soulful' a reading of it.

And of course what I'm commenting on here is not Hillman (whose writing is many-faceted, polycentric, deliberately shifting and subtle) so much as my too-individually-soulful reading of him, a one-sided intoxication which has supported my tendency to be an observer of archetypal affairs rather than a participant in human ones.
Chapter 9 Angry rumblings

A week later we had our next session and Joseph began by telling me about a new incident that had involved the police. I was surprised by the lightness in his voice. This time there was no hint of the sweaty anxiety he'd felt when cars in the street or a phone ringing reminded him that the police might get involved.

'We had our school formal last night, and it was so fun, Steve,' he told me, his narrative punctuated by giggles. 'You should have seen the girls! They were wearing these hairdos full of hairspray, combustible material just waiting to be set off! Then after the formal me and some of my male friends walked home and when we came to this main road some of my friends started to 'moon' at the cars ... you know, pulling down their pants and showing their bare bums to the drivers! It was a riot! We were laughing and carrying on, and then this car stopped and I saw it was a police car. The policeman came over and told us we could get into trouble for this kind of thing, he gave us a warning and told us to go home, then he drove off.'

'Your heart must have been in your mouth,' I said, struggling to make contact with what I still suspected was an underlying panic.

'No, not at all. I didn't feel any of the old anxiety. That's gone now, almost entirely gone, except sometimes when I hear Mum on the phone and think the conversation might be about what happened, that there might be another parent who has complained or something. No, last night was just good fun. I seem to have disconnected myself from all of that old anxiety.'

'You've cut yourself off,' I said. 'You're no longer connected.'

'That's the way it seems,' said Joseph. 'You know, I had a dream last night that I've suddenly remembered. For some reason it's just come into my head. In my dream I was walking somewhere in my pyjamas, going nowhere
in particular, through the streets of this city, and then I was floating or flying high up or walking through the air above the streets, walking between these high buildings. It was weird.' Again he laughed, in the same kind of way he'd laughed telling me about the mooning. He seemed in a particularly good mood.

'Does telling me the dream bring anything else to mind?' I asked. 'Does it remind you of anything?'

'Well, again I'm not sure why, but it reminds me of when I was really little and wandering around the house one night. Sort of just wandering around going nowhere. I must have been about 2 or 3 at the time.' Again Joseph laughed almost mockingly, as if the little Joseph were a figure of fun, like the girls with their extravagant and combustible hairdos. There was something about this little Joseph that he didn't like.

'So little Joseph was just wandering aimlessly around the house at night,' I said.

'Yes, he'd lost his teddy bear,' said Joseph. 'I don't really remember what happened except that I was upset because I couldn't find my teddy bear. I guess I was wandering around looking for it.'

'Miserable,' I said.

'Yes, probably,' Joseph said lightly. 'Crying probably.'

'I notice that you're laughing now as you talk about this distressed little boy who was you.'

'Yes, it's like there's a gap between the sixteen-year-old me looking back and the three-year-old distress ... it's like the distress no longer matters ... it's unreal.'

'The sixteen-year-old you is floating up there above like in the dream, looking down on the little three-year-old, not feeling the distress. There's a gap between the observer and the hurt little boy.'

'Yes, that's it,' he said. 'That's the connection with my dream.'

'The gap exists because of the time, because you're looking back over time. But the gap also exists right now. It was there in the library when you masturbated, when "something came over you", as if it had happened to another person.'
‘That’s spot on,’ he said. ‘I think that’s absolutely right.’

‘There’s something that the little distressed boy had which you’ve lost. He could feel his little boy feelings. He could feel upset and angry and distressed. These things are difficult for you now. It’s difficult for the big boy to feel these things.’

‘My “big boy” feelings are to do with computers and the TV,’ he said.

‘No,’ I said. ‘That’s what the observing you says. But what that leaves out are the big boy feelings to do with sex, power, hate, malice, evil...’

‘And anger,’ he said. ‘I think you’re absolutely right here. I feel that I’m being pushed... that’s not quite the right word, but it will do... pushed back into my feelings.’

‘And perhaps you’re feeling very angry with me because you feel I’m pushing you back to your feelings.’

‘No,’ he said. ‘I feel relieved. I feel that I have to be pushed, that it’s necessary, and it’s a relief. I think this is somehow to do with discovering who I really am... I’ve always had this thing about not crying... It’s so hard to show my feelings, even to feel them... I didn’t cry at all at my pop’s funeral and people commented on that because I really loved him... It was only when I got a glimpse of him in the bed in the hospital that I felt full of grief and I cried in the corridor...’

He was quiet for a while. At the end of our session I asked if perhaps we might make another appointment before our scheduled session a week away, but he thought not. ‘I’m glad I talked about this,’ he said, ‘but I don’t think I want to talk about it any more.’

After he’d gone I wrote up some notes in which I reflected on the session we’d just had. It had been a good one. He’d arrived feeling distanced from the anxieties that had beset him, a dream and a memory had taken us into a conversation which laid out very clearly the way he cut himself off from strong feeling, and we’d connected this to what had happened in the library. Joseph’s disowning of his distressed self created a cut-off part that acted outside of his conscious control. He could see this as we talked, he seemed animated by the insight. He felt he was being pushed back into connection
with this disowned part, and was feeling ‘relieved’. The work we were doing, he had said, was ‘somehow to do with discovering who I really am’.

So I was feeling quite buoyed up when I rang Giles.

‘You’re sounding very pleased with how it went,’ said Giles after I’d told him about the session. ‘Quite right too. You’re sounding more confident, more able to access what you think and to say it.’

‘I’m feeling more like I used to as a teacher,’ I said. ‘Less careful, more able to jump in and take part in what is happening in the room.’

‘That comes across,’ said Giles.

‘So today I want to talk a bit more theoretically about what is happening in the room. I want to revisit a conversation you and I have had on and off over the past while, to do with what’s real and what’s created.’

‘You’re not talking about these two as if they’re different things are you?’

I was silent for a moment. That had been my presumption. I’d been thinking about the session with Joseph and how it had seemed that we’d got closer to something that was real, something that had existed all the time Joseph had been coming to see me, which was his tendency to shy away from deep feeling. And I’d been thinking about how Joseph had created a story around this (‘Things don’t really bother me, you have to just get on with things’), and how internal and external realities were threatening this story, making it difficult to keep hold of, breaking it down in some kind of way. So, yes, I was seeing the two as different, the creation being threatened by the real.

‘I suppose that’s exactly what I want to talk about,’ I said. ‘There’s still a part of me that wants to see what is real and what is created as belonging to two different categories, even though I’m saying in my thesis that our stories are creations which determine our reality ... But ... and this is what is confusing to me... I do feel the distinction lodged somewhere deep inside me, a deeply ingrained conviction that there’s a reality which exists separately from our experience or perception or thinking ... and maybe it’s this conviction that keeps interfering with my ability to stay in the moment ... I’m continually on the look out for what’s real, what’s hidden, what’s
behind the creation or the story presently being told ... and that feels both inescapable and limiting ... Is any of this making sense?'

'Perfect sense Steve. I know exactly what you mean. To use the language of the philosophers, are there just appearances or is there a ‘thing-in-itself’?' You, I take it, believe that there is a fundamental reality, something perhaps unknowable but real, something existing behind the appearances, in some kind of non-causal but intimate relationship with them?'

'I want to try to keep this grounded,' I said, 'I want to relate it to the session I’ve just had with Joseph. What felt good about the session is that we seemed to make some kind of contact with something that was real, that resonated with Joseph’s experience of himself. It wasn’t just a clever and articulate interpretation of events by me, invested with my adult and psychological experience, it wasn’t just a clever creation which worked well enough. Our session took us closer to something that was real.'

'Closer to Bion’s O,' I said Giles.

'Exactly. For some reason ... perhaps because of all the work we’d already done together ... Joseph and I found ourselves able to meet in some new territory, to talk about things that were present in the session as he talked about mooning, about his dream of floating above the buildings and about the lost teddy bear.'

'I follow this Steve, but I’m not yet getting why you’re seeing this distinction as so problematic, as something you want to talk about. Why does it matter?'

'Because it flies in the face of postmodern assumptions about the nature of reality. As I understand it, it’s fashionable nowadays to say that there’s no fundamental reality, nothing holding it all together, no objective pattern, that all we have is our different stories or readings of events, each of which is valid or understandable or whatever.'

'And isn’t this what your thesis is saying?’ said Giles.

'That’s what’s so puzzling at the moment,’ I said. 'It does seem to be saying that. I like the idea of there being lots of ways of viewing an event, of none of them being fundamentally right, of each perhaps holding in it an
aspect of something that’s too complicated to be taken in from the one perspective.

‘But you dislike the implication that anything goes, that one interpretation is necessarily as good as another.’

‘Exactly! Perhaps it’s the elder brother in me Giles, but I like the idea of rigour, of continuing to try to come up with an explanation of things that illuminates the multi-factorial dynamic complexity of phenomena, which resonates not just with the interpreter’s world view but with what it is that the phenomena is complexly displaying. In other words I believe that the phenomena exists distinctly from the interpreter’s interpretation. I believe that there is a sound in the forest, or something happening in the forest, even if there isn’t any living thing there to hear it.’

‘And this is important for your work with Joseph because …’

‘Because if I didn’t believe in any objective reality, if all that mattered was that I could tell a story about these events that would be convincing to me and probably convincing (because of my authority) to Joseph, then I would have stuck with the Hillmanian view of things which I find so exciting and stirring.’

‘But also limiting.’

‘I’ve found that it doesn’t bring me closer to the actual person sitting in front of me.’

‘It gives you deep and soulful thoughts to have about the therapeutic encounter …’

‘It puts the focus in a Kantian way on my perceiving and on my storytelling, on my cut-off internal process, it prevents me from attempting to engage with is actually happening in the room, with the person who is there with me and the interpersonal process that is taking place. My Hillmanian soulfulness is a barrier to my involvement. It doesn’t help me to muck in there, to get involved, to feel things, to engage with a distressing and confusing and sometimes painful process.’

‘Joseph keeps telling you that he wants you involved. He wants you shaking the rope.’
"It’s changed, hasn’t it. When he had the dream about the girl stealing his clothes, he was telling me that he didn’t want me interfering. Now he feels differently."

"He feels other things as well as threatened by you."

"Yes you’re right, it’s never simple, it’s not a matter of one feeling being replaced by another, but of things getting more complicated."

"Our job is to go for the complexity, complexify things, not to simply them."

"There’s always more to be uncovered, to be revealed, to be expressed."

"As we’ve said before, we never reach some bedrock of fundamental truth. There’s always more."

"And there’s more because there is more, not because there’s no end to the interpretations we can come up with."

"Steve, before you go can I read you a piece from Schopenhauer which perhaps you might enjoy, given what you’ve been saying today?"

"The pessimistic Schopenhauer! I said. ‘This is sure to press some buttons.’"

"No, I think you’ll like this one,’ said Giles, and then read the following:

To perceive, to allow things themselves to speak to us, to apprehend and grasp new relations between them, and then to precipitate all this into concepts, in order to possess it with certainty; this is what gives us new knowledge. ... The innermost level of every genuine and actual piece of knowledge is a perception ... For this reason, the contemplation and observation of everything actual, as soon as it presents something new to the observer, is more instructive than all reading and hearing about it. For indeed, if we go to the bottom of the matter, all truth and wisdom, in fact the ultimate secret of things, is contained in everything actual, yet certainly only in concreto and like gold hidden in the ore. The question is how to extract it."

Again, when Joseph arrived the following week, he was full of smiles and his tone was jocular. He was holding pages of scribbled notes in his hand, and began by saying, ‘Well Steve, I’ve had a really long dream that I want to tell you about.’ He then began reading from his notes.
‘The dream began with Dad and my two brothers in this car travelling through Europe and we picked up this hitchhiker who was a farmer. But suddenly I was driving the car and the others were following behind in another car.’

‘Suddenly you were alone,’ I said.

‘That’s right, though I knew the other were following. Anyway, I noticed that the car had only two foot pedals instead of three, and I thought it was missing a brake. Then just around the corner there was a traffic light on red and I didn’t think I could stop so I stepped on the ‘clutch’ hard and the car stopped. So then I realised that the car was an automatic and that what I thought was the clutch was in fact a brake.’

‘You thought you wouldn’t be able to stop at the red light, but you discovered you could,’ I said. I wanted to press the brake myself, to linger for a bit with this image, but Joseph was wanting to tell me the whole dream. He was giving off the feeling that this was one of his creations and he wanted to parade it, have it appreciated, to lodge it inside me rather than have it dissected and analysed by my clever mind.

‘Then, suddenly, the landscape changed,’ he went on quickly. ‘Everything was dry, it looked like the Australian bush. We got to the hitch-hiker’s place and suddenly the scale of things was all distorted, like lots of the houses were tiny, like toys. We drove down the driveway and right into the main bedroom of the farmer’s house. My brothers and I got out of the car. Then three girls got out who we didn’t know.’

‘You got out in the bedroom,’ I said. I had no idea why this mattered though the Freud-in-my-brain noticed which room it was. I hoped that by mentioning it Joseph might engage with the image but he was in no mood for slowing down.

‘Then we were outside walking down to where the miniature houses were, me and my brothers and the three girls, but the little houses had been demolished and removed and all that was left were the large tracks of a mini train and it was surrounded by lots and lots of flowers. The farmer was there and he told the lady who runs the place all about us and she was really nice
and showed us around and answered all our questions. She said then that the houses were going to be put back soon.'

'The kind woman was telling you missing things would soon be put back.'

'This next bit is the best!' he said, again ignoring me. I was feeling almost exhausted trying to keep up with the kaleidoscope of changing images. ‘We walked away to this bank that was covered in pansies and at first they were closed but as we looked they all opened at once and they looked absolutely beautiful.’

‘They opened up when you looked at them!’ I said, surprised and pleased with this picture of flowers that opened up when looked at. Perhaps my spontaneous response had come from a different, less thinky part of myself than some of my earlier ones, and Joseph heard this one. He looked up and nodded, and I was encouraged to offer a further thought. ‘Maybe they opened up because you looked at them.’

‘I think so,’ he said, ‘I think that’s right. It feels right…’ Anyway, then we did some swimming, first of all me with the group of boys that I hang out with at school. Then we got out and we were all sitting at this long table just like we did last week at the school formal. Then I was in the pool again, this time swimming with all of these girls. We connected ourselves up to each other and swam along one side of the pool and then we swam to the other side still connected. It was really weird.’

‘First you were with the boys, then you joined the girls,’ I said, feeling myself being banal but also wanting to engage with this dream, not just be whooshed along by it.

‘Yes, really weird,’ he said. ‘Then I noticed a spider in the pool and pointed it out, and everyone panicked and drained the pool so they could kill the spider. I thought it was a big fuss about nothing.’

‘They all seemed to think it was serious, but not you,’ I said.

‘Mmm,’ he murmured, looking fleetingly unsettled, sensing perhaps that my words were another attempt to make a link with previous explorations. But he was not going to be put off and again continued quickly. ‘Then the farmer took me to this place that I really liked but I wasn’t able to stay there.
I had to go back to the miniature place. But I really wanted to return to this place the farmer had shown me so I found a clearing in the bush and I flapped my arms and flew in what I thought must be the right direction.

‘You could fly,’ I said.

‘Yes, at first it was great, but then things kept happening to me. First of all there was a guy who was shooting ducks and started shooting at me but I called to him and he stopped, and luckily for me he was a hopeless shot. Then there were lots and lots of powerlines that kept getting in my way which I had to fly around or through.’

‘Powerlines kept getting in the way,’ I said.

‘I just couldn’t find this wonderful place so I gave up and rang Dad to come and collect me, which he did. He wasn’t angry just anxious to get me back in the car. On the drive back everything looked like it should …’

‘Looked like it should?’ I asked.

‘Well it had changed, it didn’t look one bit like the Australian bush any more. It was green and lush and everything had grown. It was wonderful. The road was really hilly and windy and then I realized why they don’t have a speed limit because you can’t go that fast anyway otherwise you would come off the road.’

‘You have to slow down,’ I said, ‘Slowing things down keeps you safe.’

‘That’s where it finished,’ said Joseph. ‘It was weird, weird and wonderful,’ he said.

I wanted him to take me back into it and tried a few more reflective comments, but all the while I was getting the message from him, ‘Don’t touch this good mood. Don’t try to get beneath the surface. I like where I am and I’m going to stay there. If you start delving around in here, this is the last dream I’m going to tell you. I’m showing you something. Just appreciate it.’

‘I have this sense,’ I said as he handed me the notes he’d been reading from, ‘that you’re not wanting me work too hard on this dream.’

‘What do you mean?’ he asked. He looked more interested than defensive.

‘You want to tell me the dream but you don’t want me to look beneath the surface, to try to see if it’s significant in this work we’re doing together.’
‘Yes, I guess that’s right,’ he said. Then he laughed again. ‘It’s as if you’re crouching there in front of the safe and you know the right combination and you’re trying to turn the knob the right way, but I keep coming past talking in my happy way and you pretend that you’re not trying to get in.’

That was exactly how I felt!

‘But I don’t know the right combination,’ I said, unfortunately focussing on my difficulties rather than on his happy talk. ‘I feel more like I’m trying to find it, trying to get us both working on cracking it together.’

‘How can we do that?’ His tone was back to that of the compliant student. He’d given me an opening to talk about his happy talk and I’d missed it, and for the moment it was clear that his recalcitrant impulse had returned underground where it would continue to disrupt and disturb.

‘Perhaps if we talk some more about the dream we might find a way in,’ I replied. This felt weak. I asked him about the landscapes, and he told me that there had always been a contrast for him between Australia (‘dry, brown, boring, flat and here’) and Europe (‘green, moist, beautiful, interesting, wonderful, and over there’). I expressed curiosity about the magical place the farmer had showed him, but he couldn’t remember anything about it. His responses were as dry as the Australian landscape he found so boring.

I tried to get back to the image of the safe, but again my attempt missed the mark. ‘It’s interesting that you used the image of the safe,’ I said. ‘Before today you’ve talked about whatever we’re trying to find as being horrible, as being something you want to get rid of. But a safe holds valuable things.’

‘Yes, I suppose they do,’ he replied dutifully.

This was getting us nowhere, and mercifully the hour was soon over. I rang Giles later that day for our supervision session, and this time my mood was more sober.

‘He couldn’t stop himself,’ said Giles after I’d explained what had happened in the session. ‘It’s like he’s masturbing in front of you and you’re trying to get him to think about it.’
Giles’s response was, for a moment, shocking. I’d had lots of thoughts about what had happened, I’d filled a page with notes before my supervisory session with ideas that I wanted to discuss with Giles, but this cut through them all!

‘Are you still there Steve?’ Giles said after a moment.

‘I’m just trying to take in what you’ve just said.’

‘I’m sorry, it’s not delicately put, but you know what I mean I think.’

‘I guess it’s taking me a minute to assimilate it because it’s not just a colourful way of describing the session, it makes this direct link with what happened in the library.’

‘It does, doesn’t it,’ said Giles. ‘Do you know that hadn’t occurred to me either until it was out. I was simply thinking about the scene in the session you’d described and I could feel Joseph’s mounting excitement as he told you the dream and your attempts to slow him down, and the image popped out.’

‘I guess what’s so shocking to me, and revelatory at the same time, is that the impulse or the compulsion to exhibit himself is so present. It was there in the room with us today.’

‘It’s a part of him, Steve. It’s what gets him into trouble.’

‘But what is it? What is it in its pure form?’

‘Goodness! What can you mean?’


‘Ramble away.’

‘Well, if I understand the implication of your intuitive response to Joseph’s last session, there’s a connection between Joseph wanking in the library and his exuberant and unstoppable telling of the dream to me. He has this impulse to exhibit himself. And I’m trying to get to the bottom of the nature of this impulse. Is it sexual? Is it to do with power? Is it sadistic?’

‘So this is what you mean when you wonder about its pure form?’

‘Not quite. I’m trying to get a grip on what the little boy in Joseph is trying to do. From what Joseph has said to me so far, the impulse is more to do with power and sadism, and revenge maybe, possibly more an adolescent urge to do something risky to wake people up … anyway more in these areas
than in the area of sex. The sex with the secretary was meaningless, it was just something to do. But what did the little boy in Joseph want?

‘You’re assuming here that what he wanted was denied to him, and that as a result the impulse has got twisted, perverted in some way, like the slug continually running into barbed wire barriers.’

‘It was when he was talking about the barriers that Joseph felt the hot lava, the anger,’ I said. ‘Yes, I’m talking about what the impulse was in its essence, before it got perverted.’

‘You resist the idea that evil is evil. For you it’s the good perverted.’

‘I’m feeling uncomfortable with this word “perverted”. It’s got too many perjorative associations. Frustrated would be better. Yes, I think that evil is goodness frustrated.’

‘Lucifer loved God more than the others, that kind of thing.’

‘Melanie Klein said something similar about criminality, that crime is an enraged frustrated love. But I don’t want to get too theoretical here. I want to try to make contact with Joseph’s primary impulse here. What was it he was trying to do when he told me the dream in the way he did? If I can get at that, maybe I’ll be closer to understanding what he was trying to do in the library that day.’

‘He was wanting to impress father-Steve with his good-object dream,’ said Giles. ‘It was like a kindergarten show-and-tell.’

‘That’s exactly what it was like!’ I said. ‘He was so keen to tell me the dream but reluctant to reflect with me on it. He was in performance mode. It was as though he was saying to me, “Look Steve, look at this wonderful creation of mine. Look how vividly my unconscious mind constructs things. Look at the fabulous complex and beautiful world that is shaped in my mind when I’m asleep. I want you to be swept along by my creation, impressed by it. I want you to be like the pansies which open themselves in appreciation because I am there.”’ He was a little boy showing me the blood on his knee, the balloon he’d just blown up, the cardboard cubby he had built and painted. It’s all so familiar! This is what I used to see day after day when I was a school teacher!’
‘And while he didn’t mind you slowing things down a bit, he didn’t want
to get thinky about it. He wanted you to respond, to be affected. His happy
talk is developmentally vital to him, he’s got to get you away from that safe
for his own good.’

Again I felt brought up short by what Giles had just said.
‘You’re saying that I have to get away from the safe?’
‘No, he’s saying that. The part of him that is still motivated by what
you’ve called the frustrated love. I’m not saying that.’

‘What are you saying then? Should I move away from the safe when he
gets into his happy talk.’

‘Not move away, no. Just lean back against it and let him chatter on.
Enjoy his dream, enjoy his performance. It is, after all, entertaining ... it’s
full of interesting stuff. Don’t be the drama critic so much as the appreciative
audience. But he doesn’t want to lure you away from the safe either. He
doesn’t want his happy talk to work too well. He’s relieved, remember, when
you keep him on the job.’

‘Or he was in the previous session. Not in this one.’

‘It comes and goes. As I’ve said before, we’re all like these twinkling
stars showing different aspects of ourselves. Our twinkles come and go.’

Our session is about to begin. I’ve been thinking more about some of the
images in Joseph’s dream: the discovery of the brake at the red light, the
miniature houses (reminiscent of previous nightmares), the car in the
bedroom, the flowering pansies, the swimming in the spider’s pool, the
farmer’s mysterious paradise, the fruitless and fraught flying, the winding
road that imposes its own limited speed. But he doesn’t want me tramping
around in his dream in my clumsy boots. It’s a poem, after all, with complex
layers of unconscious meanings and webs of interconnections within and to
the outside. It’s a poem to be appreciated, and to hold now as part of our
shared experience. We can refer to it, if the moment is right, but I mustn’t
reach in with my disembodied mind to pull it apart. He’s looking for a
different kind of engagement, one that brings his feeling life back into the
foreground of his experiencing.
Joseph is looking preoccupied, moody, as he arrives, and as soon as he sits down he fixes me with a rather cold look.

‘You’re not looking very happy,’ I say.

He shrugs his shoulders. ‘I’m fine,’ he says.

‘Your words are telling me you’re fine, your body seems to be saying that there are some other feelings there as well.’

‘I’m a bit sick of having to come here,’ he says. ‘I suppose I feel frustrated, confused. And maybe embarrassed.’

‘You’re are embarrassed as well as frustrated and confused.’

‘I suppose I feel like I’m on a stage in front of hundreds of people and I have this feeling that they’ll see something inside me that is not natural, not acceptable. I want to get rid of it so I can get on with things.’

‘You’re keen to get this done quickly,’ I say. ‘You’re impatient to get on with things.’ I’m doing my level best to follow where he is taking me, but he’s taking me back to the frustration and away from the embarrassment. I think the embarrassment is closer to the crux of the matter, but I’m quickly losing my own connection to it. It is possible that this is because at some level I’m aware that I might feel exposed or embarrassed if he shows me this embarrassing thing.

‘I feel frustrated because it’s like we’re not getting anywhere.’

‘We’re not opening the safe,’ I say.

‘The safe’s combination is in your hands, but the actual mechanism has the wrong number of pieces,’ says Joseph.

‘So the combination doesn’t fit the mechanism. The combination doesn’t work.’

‘I feel frustrated. It’s so slow. It’s like one day I went out fishing with some friends and the anchor got stuck and I was trying to row back to shore with the anchor partly down. They laughed at me, but I didn’t realize what was happening. That’s what it feels like now, that the anchor is down and we’re going too slowly.’

Again there’s a part of my mind that is telling me that this profusion of images – exposed on a stage, holding a combination that won’t work, rowing a boat with its anchor down – are coming partly from an overactive
intellectualising mind, that he’s operating in a domain that denies feeling. What’s the feeling? I think it’s something to do with shame.

‘I guess rowing with the anchor down could be embarrassing too if the others are laughing at you,’ I say, trying to get back to what I think I’m hearing is the deeper and more painful feeling.

‘I just want to get the anchor up and the boat moving,’ he says, moving me back up to the surface frustration and away from deeper waters where shame lurks.

‘Perhaps then we could talk some more about speed,’ I say. ‘I’ve been thinking about it as I thought some more about your dream. You remember the windy road didn’t need speed limits because cars had to travel slowly. Maybe that’s true of what we’re doing. We need to go slowly.’

‘I couldn’t stand it,’ he says forcefully. ‘Really, I just want to do what I have to do here and then get on with things. There’s lots I want to be doing during these holidays. I want to move quickly. I want to be finished by the end of next week.’

‘Well,’ I say, ‘I might be wrong but I don’t think that’s being realistic, not unless we were to meet twice every day.’

‘You’re joking!’ he says incredulously, looking me now full in the face.

‘I don’t think it’s wise to rush through this,’ I say. ‘If you want things resolved by the end of next week, then I think we’ve got to try to fit about ten sessions into the week.’

‘I want it to be finished,’ he says tersely.

‘I’m making no guarantees. Even if we had two sessions a day for the next week, there’s no guarantee that we’d be finished. But we could try?’

‘I don’t know … I don’t think I could manage that …’ he says, his mind apparently racing as he tries to process and adjust to what I’ve been saying. ‘It’s like taking a whole week out of my holidays … but if I have to, I suppose I have to …’

For a few minutes we negotiate times. Then Joseph resumes his stiff and hostile coldness.

‘Well?’ he asks.
In the past I've experienced this as an absence of feeling, but I'm now aware that intense feeling is present. It's concentrated, condensed, cold and controlled.

'Well, where are we?' he repeats.

'Yes, where are we?' I parry. There's an immense distance between us.

'I have no idea where we are,' he says icily. 'Do you know where we are?'

'Disengaged,' I say.

'What!' he cries incredulously. 'Disengaged from what?'

I laugh. Am I retaliating now, paying him back for his hostility? Or just struggling to stay in control myself? 'Lots of answers come to mind. Each other?'

'I don't know what you mean?' he says. It's clear, as we sit in the thickening silence, that he's becoming increasingly agitated and angry.

For a while he drums his fingers loudly on the armchair. Then he slaps his thighs with a rhythm that expresses increasing fury.

'Well?' he cries at last. 'This is getting us nowhere. Yes, I feel frustrated, and angry. We're sitting here, there's nothing in me, I'm not feeling anything in particular, there's nothing to work with, I've got better things to be doing with my time, things I could be doing if I were at home. Of course I feel angry. Nothing's happening.'

'Something's happening,' I say. 'You're feeling agitated and angry.'

'So? What's the point? Where does this get us.'

'Anger has been something that's been difficult for you.'

'So, I sit here and feel angry and some of it seeps out of me and I go home feeling less angry? Is that the point? Is that what's going to happen?'

'I don't know.'

More silence. Increasingly intense, then disengaged with yawning.

At one point I say, 'Your silence is very powerful. It destroys anything that comes near it, then you feel angry that there is nothing near.'

Joseph just grunts, his face set angrily, his eyes staring out the window.
A lot of time has now passed. We’ve been sitting in this hostile silence for over half an hour and there are just a few minutes to go before the session is supposed to end.

‘I wonder,’ I say ‘if there’s anything that can be done about these silence blues.’

My remark, echoing one of his own when we’d been speaking on the phone a few weeks back, seems to have punctured the mood, exposed a less intransigent Joseph who actually wants things to move on in some way.

‘Mmm,’ he says thoughtfully. ‘Well, you know how we’ve sometimes thought of this block of mine as a wall or a barrier, with feelings on the other side? Well, it’s as though the mortar is made of my anger, and as I sit here feeling the anger the mortar is crumbling and so the wall isn’t going to be such an obstacle any more.’

Quite out of the blue I feel a rush of fury. Even before he’s finished speaking I’ve expelled a loud breath and am shifting agitatedly around in my seat. He keeps talking till he’s finished his sentence, but I can see he’s aware of my unexpected reaction.

‘So the work is done and you can leave!’ I say sarcastically. ‘The wall is now about to crumble and everything is OK. Come on Joseph!’

He’s sitting there, looking surprised by my outburst but not shocked.

Then, as suddenly, I feel composed. I’m momentarily at a loss, confused about my reaction though I’m sure it was real. Was I angry because he felt like the devil tempting me to believe that the work was nearly done? On the spur of the moment I decide to try to look at his anger as if it were an object which belonged exclusively neither to me or to him, like one of Bion’s thoughts looking for a thinker.

‘I just felt this enormous rush of anger,’ I say. ‘It’s as though your mind has expelled it from your body and it’s rushed into me.’

‘That sounds like science fiction,’ he says.

‘It does a bit, doesn’t it,’ I say. ‘Yet I’m not sure how else to talk about what I’ve just experienced. It’s almost like there’s this anger in you that you get in touch with intensely now and then, but which is usually kept at a distance. You don’t like being angry. It leads you to lose control with the
bullies. But there are lots of things you actually feel angry about, so there’s this question for you about what to do with that anger that you don’t want, that leads to you to lose control.’

‘You’re saying I’ve got anger that I can’t do anything with.’

‘I’m saying that you’ve got to do something with it. One thing you might do is to expel it so that it enters into other people, and other people then find themselves all stirred up and out of control.’

‘That’s weird!’

‘I wonder. Isn’t that what you want to happen with the bullies for example. You like it when you make them lose control. It’s like a victory for you. When the bullies get upset, when your brother gets upset, when I get upset, it’s a victory for you.’

‘I don’t really get it, though it’s interesting,’ says Joseph. ‘Are you saying that the anger you felt was my anger that somehow I’d expelled into you … that’s weird! … or that you were just angry with me because somehow I’d annoyed you, I’d got under your skin?’

‘To be honest,’ I say, ‘I don’t know. It feels like both are partly true, though not the whole truth. I don’t know. We need more time. Maybe we’re going to find out some more about the way you use anger, the way you control it and use it. I don’t know.’

‘So we’ll just see,’ he says.

‘I guess so,’ I say. ‘But anger has certainly been present today. It’s not spent all it’s time on the other side of a wall. The gap hasn’t been so wide today!’

‘We’re getting somewhere,’ he says.

‘It seems that we’re getting somewhere. But I’m still wondering what will happen if we haven’t got far enough after our intense work, two sessions a day, next week?’

‘Continue I suppose,’ he says, again looking unhappy and agitated.

***

What is the nature of learning? It’s a question whose answer is buried under a mountain of rubble constructed out of a Cartesian and Lockean
mindset which equates learning with order, mastery, progress and a
disciplined and distanced cerebral objectivity. We can no longer see what
without the rubble would be obvious: that to want to live is to be gripped by
a compulsion to learn, that learning and loving are intertwined in ways that
might almost be called sexual, and that a blocked pathway to desired
knowledge can make us mad. There's an urgency there and a hunger, an
agitation and seeking for satisfaction.

'What?' objects the mindset. 'How long is it since you were in a
classroom? Learning is a chore, an obligation, a good idea ... more a duty
than a passion.'

But the urgency is as likely to take us violently away from the classroom
and the status quo as it is to impel us to sit receptively at our desks. It's
almost always accompanied by discomfort (otherwise why change
anything?) and also by notions (often unconscious) of an unavailable good. 5
(The soul, so both Plato and Hillman remind us, is drawn to beauty.) The
agitations which attend learning are upsetting, upsetting of balances and
equilibriums. In the disequilibrium something new can be admitted to the
system.

This urge to learn is located as much in our bodies as in our heads. I
stroke my beard, pace around the house or through the woods, smooth out
the first page of my new book and appreciate its aesthetics, chew my lip,
speak my blocked thought out loud in my solitary study. Our desire to take in
more of the world of 'not me' is felt as much in our pores as in our synapses
... or, as Spinoza would say, in both simultaneously because in reality there's
no distinction.

(Behind everything is its opposite, Giles would sometimes say to me.
Behind the urge to know is the wish to shut the world out, to stay within the
walled garden of what we know. Energy is spent on this project too.)

The upsetting agitations of learning, the pain and the pothos, are what
drives the urge to know. Research is not the result of a dispassionate standing
back from, and rational sifting through of, the objective scene that presents
itself (though this might be a part of the process once it's underway); rather
it's fuelled by a bodily-felt need to reduce the discomfort and/or pursue the
longed-for good.

To feel useless (as I did at times in my work with Joseph) was to feel the
lack of something. Pain and pothos. It was to feel empty, to feel that
something essential was missing. Either I didn’t have inside me what it took
to be a therapist, or there wasn’t a sufficient connection with Joseph (i.e the
world out there) to make my capacities useful. I’d experience it as a kind of
not living, a lack of vitality, a lacuna, experienced as a disengaging
tightening around my eyeballs and a sagging in my shoulders. At times I’d
withdraw into a soulful despair or engage in a gushy activism, each of which
made a distance between me and the emptiness.⁶

But while making a distance relieved the symptoms temporarly, it wasn’t
sustainable. The horror of the Hannibal dream, the ongoing challenge of
clients like Joseph, the willingness of Giles to engage with these questions,
all encouraged me to learn something new. I was feeling useless, often did,
and it was a constant puzzle to me that others didn’t seem to feel so useless
... people I admired, whose professional practice seemed more vital, less
hamstrung ... Giles, for example. As in the famous orgasm scene from the
film *When Harry Met Sally*, I wanted some of what they were having, and in
this case (with Giles) what he seemed to be having was an ongoing
relationship with a dynamic body of thought, informed both by the
philosophers who preceded Freud and Jung and by the analytic thinkers who
succeeded them. I wanted more of that.

This feeling of being gapped, of being incomplete, of wanting more of the
good and less of the painful, inevitably expressed itself in a series of
questions. That’s what question are, expressions of a perceived lack, attempts
to find something to fill in the gap, to relieve the tension of there not being
enough.

So the questions came crowding in. I was feeling useless. It wasn’t that I
hadn’t felt useless in other situations or with other clients. It’s just that for
whatever reason the feeling had become intolerable in its present state. Why
was I feeling this way? Was it that I was myself flawed, unable to provide
this young person with what he needed? Was it some resistance in Joseph
himself, something to do with his nature? Or was it the therapeutic project which was flawed, promising relief that it was unable to deliver?

Other questions clustered themselves around these ones, and in particular the big one: What is a person? When a Joseph arrives at my door, what is the nature of this being? Is this some intricate system boundaryed by skin, burdened with a malfunctioning part and in need of a healer? Or is it perhaps an evolving being looking for a particular kind of partner?

These questions implied others, to do with the nature of the therapeutic relationship. Do we therapists sit there having things done to us, to which we then react? Or are we more actively and creatively involved from the outset?

I like questions. They focus my thinking and seem to excite my molecules — I feel more energetic and active when I’m gripped by them. They get me searching, digging, observing, wondering, experimenting, talking and writing, and I end up seeing the original problem from different angles. The circumambulation around questions gives me more room in which to move: unambiguous answers push me into a corner from which there is only one (hemmed in) way of seeing things.⁷

To ask a question (to engage in research, to learn) is to look around for connections which might fill up a gap. No, that’s not quite the right image. It doesn’t fill up the gap so much as enliven the gapped space which before felt dead. It excites sluggish molecules. It gets things moving, animates and unbalances, and has the potential to reconnect the ailing part with an alive world.

This is familiar territory in the psychoanalytic literature. Jung wrote about it as being at the heart of both the psychic life, where opposites are continually manifesting each other and producing an intolerable and enlivening tension which must be attended to. Klein wrote about the battleground where loves vied with hates, goods with bads, and Bion then used Kleinian concepts to suggest that our thinking is characterised by the continual tension and interplay between the fierce, destabilising, energetic certainties of the paranoid-schizoid position and the more tolerant ambiguities of the complex depressive position.⁸ This line of thinking found its own expression amongst the post-Jungians with Fordham’s states of ...
deintegration where the primal self opens itself up to the outside world, incorporates some new experience and then re-integrates back to a state of perceived wholeness with the new ‘de-integrate’ a part of an expanded world.

And it was Giles, in our conversations and in his published writing, who kept reminding me that the urge to open ourselves up to the world was relational, that it was to do (fundamentally) with other people. We are animated, Giles would say, by what he called ‘the relational energy’, that vital force which leads us instinctively to make contact with others in the world. This is:

a vital force or urge which energetically permeates the psyche-soma and naturally and necessarily reaches out to mate with the human environment, in other words with other embodied vital persons. Initially this is the mother’s body, or experienced aspects of the mother’s body including the insides of mother and her mind ... It seems that this is like a primal vital spark which instinctively lives itself out between me and the world, making life between me and the world, seeming to find it.  

And while this ‘vital force’ can be thought of as being like a substance located inside us (so that some of us have more of it than others, or so that we have more of it at some times in our lives than at others), it is not actually experienced as being an individual attribute ‘coming from the inside’, but more as something that permeates the world (the anima mundi) and in a sense comes from the outside.

I am here really trying to re-emphasize Jung’s understanding of the reality of the psyche and to acknowledge its plurality and creative vitalism. It gives each of us our experience of being forcibly pushed around by a multiplicity of unconscious affective complexes, or subpersonalities, in such a way that they disillusion and relativize our sense of being in control and instead make us question our sense of unity. As Jung said, our unconscious psychic complexes (as well as contingent acts of nature) sometimes disturb our conscious intentions so utterly and shockingly that such a fateful personal experience can legitimately be called God.  

The urge to know more is another form of the urge to connect, which is always an attempt to establish relationships.  

In hindsight I can now see that
asking myself why I was feeling useless had as much to do with deepening my relationship with Giles and an intellectual tradition which could sustain me in my work as it did with finding some answer to a riddle.

There's a philosopher's question that has affected me since I was a little boy. Does an idea about something have to explain the place and nature of that idea in the thing that it is attempting to explain? Or, to put it another way, does the idea belong to the system it is purporting to explain (and therefore must the idea itself be included in the phenomenon being addressed), or does it exist outside the frame, looking in from the outside, as it were, and therefore not needing to be itself explained by itself?

It has always seemed natural to me that the idea must be included. I've always found myself uncomfortable with a particular brand of rationalism that assumes an ability to see from on high, or from the outside. I'm intuitively suspicious of any implication that the thinking or the thought has enabled the thinker to so distance himself from the phenomena that he is free of its imperatives. I think this is why I'm drawn more to Jung than to Freud, to Spinoza, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer than to Descartes, Kant or Hegel, to Hillman than to Klein. We're in it, a part of it all, and our thoughts are a part of what we're in (and must therefore be explicable by themselves).

So this little thesis-section on the urge to know applies not just to the Steve-over-there and his need to address a gappy space; it can also be read to be a comment on itself, on the project of writing the section, a project which was attended with all the lip chewings and restless pacings and other bodily agitations which are a part of all my attempts to know.
Chapter 10 Disgusting and unnatural

'So you don’t want to talk about that last session?' said Giles when I rang him afterwards. 'There’s lots in it.'

'Not right now,' I said. 'I know something happened in that session but ...'

'... it certainly did. Lots of things ...'

'... but just at the moment I don’t want to look backwards. I want to prepare myself for what’s to come.'

'You’re worried about what’s to come?'

'It’s not that I’m worried Giles. It’s something else. I get the strong impression from Joseph that this will have to be our last week together, that he won’t be able to bear any more. He’s wanting to get on with things.'

'He’s feeling very exposed. What was it he said? "I feel like I’m on a stage and the audience might see something in me that’s not natural." You can’t stand on a stage feeling like that for very long.'

'So it’s like we’ve got this final window of opportunity, this final intense week.'

'You’re having two sessions a day, is that right?'

'Yes, except for today. He can only make one today. But for the rest of the week it’s two sessions a day.'

'Intense stuff.'

'So I’m wanting to focus on this coming week, to prepare myself for it.'

'To get yourself in the right frame of mind.'
'Something like that,' I said. 'I know we're close to the end and yet it still seems we're on the edge of unfamiliar territory. I don't know what we're about to enter.'

'It's a dark place. You're wanting to bring a candle with you.'

'You're remembering my dream Giles. I had another one last night. There was this teenager in last night's dream setting off fireworks, big spectacular fireworks ... big explosions, showers of falling flames ... but spectacular rather than dangerous. Anyway, as I was watching this I heard a voice very clearly, and the voice said, *that which is created doesn't have to be destroyed but can be played with.*

'Very Winnicottian!' said Giles.

'It isn't! I've been thinking about Joseph in relation to this dream ... and about our last session ...'

'... I wondered if we might return to that last session!'

'... and I thought about the things Joseph creates .... the anger which comes and goes but is so often inaccessible and so can't be played with ... his exhibitionist impulses which he wants to destroy with the Zero. I've also been thinking about the way my clever thoughts sometimes destroy his creations ... then yesterday someone quoted Yeates to me. *God guard me from the thoughts men think in the mind alone ... do you know it Giles?*

'*He that sings a lasting song thinks in a marrow bone.* Oh yes, Steve, I know it and I believe it!'

'So I've been thinking about the coming week and about Joseph's creations and how they're so often destroyed and how I might play with them.'

'How you might still your conscientious mind,' said Giles.

'It used to be much easier for me Giles, when I was a teacher.'

'There are times when it sounds as though you miss teaching Steve.'

'There are aspects that I do miss.'

'Things like?'

'Well, like the fun of it! The bodily involvement, if you like, a kind of involvement that seems less possible when I'm sitting opposite a distressed client. The fact that as a teacher I could follow my instincts, my passions! I
could read the stories I loved, play the games that I enjoyed, sing and play
the drums and make up plays and indulge in adventurous and imaginative
large-scale projects that had me up late at night reading about medieval
towns. There was physical contact ... wrestling, children on the knee, hands
on the head ... and lots of playing! And there was a sense of community, as
we lived our school lives together, met crises, made plans and had our rituals
and celebrations. Of course I'm over-stating it, romanticising the past! But
I'm also trying to reach somewhere for something that's missing from the
present.'

'Perhaps you're implying that your Hannibal dream is a message to you
as a therapist, about a kind of music-making that was once present in your
life but is no longer available.'

'Maybe that's what last night's dream is about too,' I said. 'Maybe it's
about reclaiming something that I've allowed myself to lose over the past
decade as I've moved into being a therapist.'

'Your ability to engage playfully, more lightly, less seriously.'

'It's a paradox, isn't it, that the more difficult the territory, the lighter the
footfall.'

'We're not talking about being less involved or subtle here, or even less
intelligent.'

'We're talking about more embodied. Less earnest. More intuitively on
the ball. Thinking in a marrow bone. The therapist's chair too often
encourages in me a kind of arms-length engagement and I'm seeing more
clearly, I think, that Joseph needs my warm engagement with him.'

'The audience in front of the stage is less likely to be intimidating if he
feels you warmly engaged. Or hotly, as you were in the last session.'

'Yes that was a bit of a shock! I didn't expect that.'

'That was speaking from the marrow!'

'It's odd the way it didn't destroy anything. Or didn't seem to. He was
more engaged afterwards.'

'Probably pleased that he'd made the bully lose control!' said Giles.

'Probably! Also pleased, I think, that I then took a step back and
wondered if my anger was connected to his.'
"It's Winnicott again Steve. Joseph has attacked you and you've survived. You talked to him after the destruction. You played with it."
"Winnicott has written about this, hasn't he. What's the passage? Something about the subject saying to the object..."
I'd clearly touched on one of Giles's favourite passages as he then quoted by heart the following:

The subject says to the object: 'I destroyed you', and the object is there to receive the communication. From now on the subject says: 'Hullo object! I destroyed you. I love you. You have value for me because of your survival of my destruction of you. While I am loving you I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) fantasy.'

'I love that,' I said. 'Both things are happening at once. That's what's happening all the time with Joseph, both things, the loving and the hating...'
'... the creating and the destroying....'
'... the opening up and the shutting out. It's not one or the other. It's both at the same time, like two parallel lines running through our sessions...
'... parallel and intertwined.'

'Yes. Creating, destroying, playing... surviving... You know how I said a little while ago that in today's session I was wanting to prepare myself for what was to come?'
'You want to make sure you survive.'
'Yes, and for me that means to stay in there, not to give up, not to let things drift because they're too dizzying or because 'it's out of my hands anyway'... There's something unclear in all of this about faith.'
'About faith?'
'Mmm. About faith... It's like I've had too much of one kind of faith and not enough of another, something like that.'
'Say some more.'
'Well Giles, this isn't clear, not at the moment, so I don't know if I can tell you what I mean... I've always felt that I've had a kind of faith, and I guess my optimism has been based on it, but I've come to feel that this kind of faith is not especially grounded, it averts my gaze from what's happening in front of me, it leads me to disengage... to put things in the hands of some
'higher power’ ... to trust that it will all come out OK in the end, no matter what I do, no matter how dizzied I am.’

‘And you’ve been making moves away from this kind of faith.’

‘I have, but not away from faith itself ... I’m trying, at the same time, to have faith in something else. I think you have a deeper faith in the reality of the psyche than I do. You expect that things will be connected, that spontaneous images and dreams will be relevant. You believe in the reality of the transference.’

‘You don’t?’

‘I do, but more in a theoretical way. My faith is more ... panicky!’

‘Panicky?’

‘Yes panicky ... When a client ... when Joseph tells me a dream, my faith in the dream’s meaningfulness isn’t strong enough for me to sit there, as I imagine you would do, and say, “Well this dream is going to be connected, it’s going to be important in some way, let’s just allow the images to communicate with my marrow bone and see what comes up!” That’s faith! What happens with me is that I start to listen to the dream and my mind gets a bit panicky, it gets overactive ... it starts to say, “Shit, this will be important! On your toes Steve. Somewhere buried in the dream you might be able to see, if you’re clever and alert enough, the faint suggestion of a connection. You might, if you’re extra clever, grab hold of a possible link.”’

‘Ah,’ says Giles, ‘Now I see what you mean. Yes, a less panicky faith. This is Bion’s “faith in O.”’

‘A belief that things are ultimately meaningful, that there’s a pattern in there, that it’s not all random and unconnected. I’m talking about this now, Giles, because I don’t want to forget it during this last week. All these supervisions and reflections about Joseph have taught me, I think, to have a greater faith, to see that there are connections and patterns, that his imagery is meaningful.’

‘And that one sees the connections through one’s involvement in the process, rather than through standing back and directing the gaze elsewhere.’

‘Whether that be towards the heavens or one’s own belly button!’
'Hullo,' says Joseph breezily as he comes in. 'Here again!' The black cloud of our last session seems to have moved on.

'Hello Joseph,' I say. He moves over to his seat while I draw one of the curtains, as I do at the beginning of every session.

'Well, I've had a good weekend,' he says. 'I'm feeling pretty good.'

'You're feeling good,' I say, allowing myself to be infected by his sunniness.

'Yes, I've been spending time with my mum's friend Annie and her family. You know about Annie, don't you, I'm sure I've talked about her before.'

'You've told me dreams that she's been in,' I say. 'You've told me before how much you like her.'

'Yes, she's fun!' says Joseph. 'I like being with Annie. There's always mucking around and laughing when she's around. She's a lot of fun.'

'So the two families have been spending time together,' I say.

'No, just me actually. I've been sleeping over there at Annie's place the last few nights. Mum's boyfriend is leaving Australia soon so it seemed a good idea for me to go over to Annie's place. Which was really good. I've been helping Annie out with her telephone and computer connections, I like doing that kind of stuff, I like being useful in that kind of way. They know nothing, just nothing, about computers and telecommunications!' For some time Joseph chats about Annie's family and about his interest in computers and telecommunications. Again he is performing for me, showing me his good side. I try to keep my eye on what the chatter might be covering up without dampening his performance, though I catch myself worrying at intervals that the whole session might be taken up like this. An opening will come, I say to myself, and if not there'll be another day. Joseph himself doesn't want the week to pass without some kind of resolution.

'You enjoy being useful,' I say when at last there's a long-enough pause.

'Yes, it's fun. It makes me feel good.'

'And you like spending time with Annie. She's an important person in your life.'

'Yes, I guess so.'
'Your mum's pretty preoccupied with her friend leaving.'
'I guess so.'

There's something about Joseph and connection to his mother in all of this, and I can feel myself crouching down beside the safe, starting to wonder about what combination might open the door. Keep it light, I say to myself. Allow the Joseph who is here today to reach me.

'Perhaps you're feeling more comfortable with Annie than with your mum at the moment.'
'I suppose so,' he says airily. 'There's more to do there. It's more fun.'
'You're mum doesn't have a lot of spare time.'
'Not at the moment.'
'I wonder how that feels.'
'It's fine,' he says. 'I understand that she's needing to spend time with her friend.'
'I'm wondering if Annie is the kind of person you could talk to about what's been happening in your life,' I say.

'Oh, I wouldn't talk to Annie!' he says quickly. 'I wouldn't talk about that! By preference I wouldn't talk to anyone.'

'Not to your mother or father,' I say.

'Not to anyone. They know of course, both of them. They know what happened, but I don't want to talk about it with them because of how it might change the way they saw me.'

'Talking to them might change things,' I say.

'They both know what happened and I get the feeling from the way they are with me at the moment – I talked to Dad on the phone a while ago and he sort of referred to what had happened – that they're both working very hard to show me that it hasn't changed anything. Everyone's going about things as normal, we're all trying to be as normal as we can.'

'It sounds slightly tense,' I say.

'I suppose so. I suppose I feel tense about it in some way, about what they're thinking.'

'So it might be a relief to talk about it instead of pretending that everything's normal.'
'I don’t want to talk about it. I’d much rather be silent.'
'You want to keep things to yourself,' I say.
'What I did was unacceptable and disgusting,' says Joseph, almost shuddering. 'I wish really I had punched someone rather than have done what I did. That would have been more acceptable somehow. What I did was just disgusting ... that sort of thing should be done in privacy ... because what I did involved another person it was just ... well, unacceptable... I don’t like talking about it, not even here. Why is it important that we talk about it?'
'Because it happened,' I say. 'Because the motivations are so hidden from us. Because whatever motivated you is probably still there. A part of you was trying to express something. The way it did it has been awful for you, it has filled you with shame. But it’s still there.'
'I’ll never do anything like that again.'
'The chances are greater if we leave this part of you in the dark. If we don’t talk about it.'
Joseph is quiet for a moment, looking troubled. Perhaps there’s resistance and anger there, but today it’s much more than that. I have felt his pure resistance in the past, and this is different. Perhaps there’s a tangle of feelings, a struggle between different Josephs: the respectable Joseph who was simply revolted or full of shame about what had happened, the rational Joseph who insists that he has learnt his lesson, and the worried Joseph who wants to get to the bottom of things.
'I’m not saying it’s pointless, talking about it,' he says. 'It’s just that I can’t see where it’s going. I don’t feel us getting anywhere.'
'The feeling of getting somewhere comes and goes,' I say.
'Yes, sometimes it feels like we’re getting closer. I guess we have to keep going.'
'It feels too hard sometimes,' I say.
'It just feels that what happened was unacceptable. It was disgusting.'
'It feels disgusting because someone else was involved,' I say.
'Yes. Something like that should be private.'
'Joseph in the library didn’t want it private.'
'What do you mean?'
‘To you, sitting here, it was a disgusting act, an unnatural act, something that you can’t imagine doing every again. The Joseph sitting here doesn’t understand it, is cut off from it. But the Joseph who did it, who at the moment feels like another person, did it and wanted an audience.’

‘I guess so.’

‘Having an audience was important.’

‘Yes.’

‘Presumably the Joseph who did it wanted his act to have a particular effect on the audience.’

‘I suppose so.’ Joseph’s responses are not sullen or unalive. He’s letting me carry him somewhere.

‘I wonder what Joseph wanted to do to that audience?’ I say.

‘I don’t know.’

‘Perhaps he wanted to shock it ... or frighten it.’

No response. Joseph’s eyes are half closed, as if he’s trying to get in touch with something.

‘Maybe he was wanting to excite it,’ I say.

Still no response.

‘Maybe the Joseph who did it wanted to humiliate the boys who were there.’

Again he was quiet, then he said, ‘Humiliate sounds close. It’s not exactly it, but it’s close.’

‘Perhaps you’ll find yourself thinking about this business of humiliation before we meet tomorrow,’ I say as we wind up. ‘Feelings you have about wanting to humiliate. Times when you’ve felt humiliated yourself. Perhaps that’s where we’ll start tomorrow.’

‘OK,’ he says.

After Joseph has gone I sit for a while by myself. I’m aware of battling a deep fatigue as this final week begins. We’ve got eight more sessions to go, two each day for the rest of the week and I’m wondering how we’re going to manage the intensity of it. Perhaps Joseph is feeling a similar fatigue, his
weariness compounded by the worry that something vile and unnatural is going to be revealed.

Giles and I have agreed that we'll have some shorter supervision sessions this week, just ten minutes or so snatched at various times when both of us can talk. I won't be talking to him until tomorrow, after the first of my two sessions with Joseph, but I'm feeling the need for some kind of focussing of my energies and thoughts.

I want to do a kind of meditation. It's too easy for me to objectify Joseph, to see him as some kind of puzzle to be solved or chess game to be played. I want to try to put myself back in touch with him being much more than that, of him being a person living a complex and evolving life. Who or what is Joseph? I'm going to take a slow and meandering route into this.

This morning early, before Joseph came, I wandered around the garden with a cup of tea, just as I remember my father used to do.

What is our garden, the garden that Jo and I have been working on for the past six years? It's not the image I was looking at last night, the photo that Jo had taken of me turning the compost heap soon after we moved in. That's only a bit of it. The photo captures something true, something worth remembering, some essence of our experience of the garden. I remember turning the compost heap, seeing the steam rise, feeling the life of the heap, the countless millions of lives, the bacteria multiplying in its foetid moist wormy fresh woody centre, feeling I owed my recovery from Chronic Fatigue to these Turnings of the heap and immersions in the garden. But the compost heap isn't in the same place any more, and the whole garden is different. What is our garden? It's not the compost heap, or the rose garden which is just beginning to bloom, or the enormous cork tree which we reckon is the biggest in Canberra, or the kitchen garden with its herbs and tomato bushes so freshly, deeply green and growing bigger every day in their sheltered and sunny spot. It's not the excavations out the front where we're putting in a sunken garden and a pond where Jo's hand-built, child-sized woman will spout water through the nipples of her six breasts. It's not the deck with its pots of annuals, or the bed with the bird bath and the iron Buddha, or the lawn with the kids' swings, or the paths where Oliver rides
his bike back and forth, back and forth, for hours. It’s not even all these things put together. It’s not even what it was when I walked around it ten minutes ago. It's an incomprehensibly complex myriad of life processes dynamically evolving in a balance not confined by our boundaries, a mix of becomings and dyings, growths and decays. And its complexity doesn’t stop us from working in it! In fact what makes it our garden is our involvement, we’re a part of it, our love of it is part of what it is. Our garden wouldn’t be what it is without summer evening meals on the deck, expletives from Jo when the neighbours’ cats shit in the freshly turned soil, Oliver’s squeaky wheeled bike rides, the daily spring ambulations to see what’s happening, the sight of the first red rose which reminds me of my daughter Ruth because it first came out when she was travelling through a European summer, which in turn makes me think of my other daughter over in Seattle right now. Our garden wouldn’t be what it is if, every time I sat in it, I excluded memories of how it once was or visions of how one day it might be. Memories, plans, associations. Our garden can never be captured in an image, though our photograph album contains hundreds of meaningful images that each seem to hold some essence.

I can have an active part to play in something that is complex and dynamic beyond my ability to comprehend. It sounds so banal to say this, but it’s been an enormous issue for me as a therapist.

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Fantasy, said my favourite educational writer in the 60’s, is not an escape from reality but a reaching out towards it. It’s this question about the nature of fantasy which the conversations with Giles kept circumambulating. To what extent are the stories we tell to ourselves and to others an attempt to connect us to the world and to what extent are they an attempt to insulate us from it? Do they move us closer to or further from Bion’s O? From a therapist’s point-of-view, are there stories which help and stories which hinder, or are all stories potentially therapeutic?

Winnicott seemed to think that there were useless stories, stories best ignored or surgically removed because they got in the way of real living. He
describes a woman patient who is doing nothing in her life except fantasizing-
playing patience, imagining herself in places and times other than where
she actually was and her fantasizing, says Winnicott, was not just nothing in
terms of living, it actually interfered with it.

... fantasizing interferes with action and with life in the real or
external world, but much more so it interferes with dream and
with the personal or inner psychic reality, the living core of the
individual personality. 4

He's making this clear distinction between dreaming and living on the
one hand, and daydreaming or fantasizing on the other.

With unexpected clarity, dreaming and living have been seen
to be of the same order, daydreaming being of another order.
Dreams fit into object-relating in the real world, and living in the
real world fits into the dream-world in ways that are quite
familiar, especially to psychoanalysts. By contrast, however,
fantasizing remains an isolated phenomenon, absorbing energy
but not contributing-in either to dreaming or to living. 5

...fantasy interferes with action and with life in the real or
external world, but much more so it interferes with dream and
with the personal or inner psychic reality, the living core of the
individual personality. 6

Further exploration of the differences between fantasizing and dreaming
led Winnicott to link dreams with poems:

I said [to the patient] that fantasizing was about a certain
subject and it was a dead end. It had no poetic value. The
corresponding dream, however, had poetry in it, that is to say,
layer upon layer of meaning related to past, present, and future,
and to inner and outer, and always fundamentally about herself.
It is this poetry of the dream that is missing in her fantasizing and
in this way it is impossible for me to give meaningful
interpretations about fantasizing. I do not even try to use the
material of fantasizing that children in the latency period can
supply in any quantity. 7

I'm not sure where to start with all of this. I can see, of course, that
there's something essentially right and important about it: the woman's card
playing and fantasizing about places and times was dead-ended, dissociated
and aspects of a rigidly fixed defence organisation. And there's a whole list
of solitary retreats into fantasy that might be added to card-playing: arcade games, poker machines, the television soapy, chat show and the 24 hour sports channel and even certain kinds of reading.

But I feel uncomfortable about his distinction about poetic value being in the one (dreams, life) and not in the other (fantasying). Clients with heroin and gambling addictions tell me about their rage and their yearnings in ways which bring us in touch with frustrated grounds of their being. Joseph’s fantasies (his stories, his visions of himself as in control and ‘not bothered’) have poetic value if we define it as Winnicott has done, as having ‘layer upon layer of meaning related to past, present, and future, and to inner and outer, and always fundamentally about [him]self’. I cannot see, either, a distinction between the ‘poetic value’ of Joseph’s stories and his dreams. All present poetic layers of meaning connected to inner and outer, past and present. I can’t see how you can put one group of activities in one list (unpoetic, therapeutically dead-ended, unuseable) and another in another list.

Surely the difference is not in the poetic content of the form but in its relationship to the everyday world of action and relationship. Again it’s a question of thinking about verbs rather than nouns. The question is not, Does the fantasy have poetic content? but Does the fantasy insulate or connect? And if it is serving to insulate, to deny, to cut off, how can I as a therapist — and this surely is the real question — encourage or facilitate something different, something which connects, activates, enlivens, invigorates, animates, relates?

This all seems linked to where I started in this thesis when reflecting on Hillman’s Dream and the Underworld. When I get seduced by the material, it’s because I’m not using it, I’m not connecting the here-and-now transference to it. I’m watching, being passive, being entertained or being swallowed up by, being sucked into, and I’m offering no real resistance. I’m not working with it. Winnicott says that therapy is the overlap of two areas of playing, and when I’m in too-Hillmanish a mood, too swallowed by my own interior perhaps, I forget to play. I just watch someone else playing.

Fantasy is not an escape from the essential story of our lives as fantasy is always connected to the main plot. Yes, we can disappear into an internal
drama which insulates us from realities ‘on the outside’, realities which just won’t go away. And it’s true that coming to terms with those realities is essential. But coming to terms with reality is actually about coming to terms with the fantasy in which our reality has become imprisoned. This doesn’t mean solving it or or analysing it or letting it go; it means having a more vital relationship with it, knowing in our bodies that the issues expressed in the fantasy are a part of the fabric of our lives, part of what we will go on struggling with all our lives, part of the eternal moment to which we eternally return. Fantasy always contains useable images with the potential, if made part of the shared world of therapy, to link the client with a bigger world of relationships.

I want to explore this some more, using some of Winnicott’s other thoughts.

There is in each of us a hidden part, a secret self which is hidden away from the glare of the outside world. Sometimes this hidden-away secret self seems the home of all that is authentic and soulful; at other times it feels more like a fantasy-self, a retreat from painful external realities.

Winnicott’s extensive writings continually address the question of the nature of this self that was hidden from view, and he approaches it from a number of different directions. Talking for example about the existence of a ‘true’ and a ‘false’ self, for example, he writes:

When there is a certain degree of failure of adaptation, or a chaotic adaptation, the infant develops two types of relationship. One type is a silent secret relationship to an essentially personal and private inner world of subjective phenomena, and it is only this relationship that seems real. The other is from a false self to a dimly perceived external or planted environment. The first contains the spontaneity and the richness, and the second is a relationship of compliance kept up for gaining time till perhaps the first may some day come into its own. It is surprisingly easy, clinically, to miss the unreality of the compliance half of a schizophrenic child’s technique for living.
It is vitally important, says Winnicott, to hold this distinction in mind, and not to be fooled into bolstering up the ‘false’ and complaint system at the expense of the hidden and ‘real’.

Spontaneity and real impulse can only come from the true self, and for this to happen someone needs to take over the defensive functions of the false self.10

In another paper Winnicott examines his own reluctance to communicate which he suggests “was a protest from the core of me to the frightening fantasy of being infinitely exploited.”11

I suggest that in health there is a core that corresponds to the true self of the split personality; I suggest that this core never communicates with the world of perceived objects, and that the individual person knows that it must never be communicated with or be influenced by external reality... Although healthy persons communicate and enjoy communicating, the other fact is equally true, that each individual is an isolate, permanently non-communicating, permanently unknown, in fact unfound.12

How might this apply in the case of Joseph? Something is attempting to break through, something secret, something hidden away. Could this be the core of a ‘true’ self? Could this be where Joseph’s spontaneity and richness are located, whereas in the compliant self that presents itself to the world there is an artifice that triggers parental exasperation and school-yard bullying (though it also gains him good marks at school)?

The difficulty with this line of thinking would seem to be the degree of alarm Joseph felt whenever we took steps towards what was hidden. It was as though we both unconsciously expected to discover not creativity and real impulse, but a sour-smelling landscape in which there dwelt a bleak and lonely being whose nature was at some level evil.13

I want to come at this apparent difficulty through another piece written by Winnicott. In one of his best known papers, ‘The Use of an Object and Relating through Identifications’, Winnicott again suggests the existence of two layers in the psyche of the patient, though this time he uses very different concepts and imagery. This time, instead of ‘false’ (closer to the surface) and ‘true’ (closer to the centre), he alerts the therapist to the
existence of a psychotic core being hidden by a neurotic presentation to the world.

It is the analysis of the borderline type of case [says Winnicott] that one has the chance to observe the delicate phenomena that give pointers to an understanding of truly schizophrenic states. By the term “a borderline case” I mean the kind of case in which the core of the patient’s disturbance is psychotic, but the patient has enough psycho-neurotic organisation always to be able to present psycho-neurosis or psycho-somatic disorder when the central psychotic anxiety threatens to break through in crude form. In such cases the psycho-analyst may collude for years with the patient’s need to be psycho-neurotic (as opposed to mad) and to be treated as psycho-neurotic. The analysis goes well, and everyone is pleased. The only drawback is that the analysis never ends. It can be terminated, and the patient may even mobilise a psycho-neurotic false self for the purpose of finishing and expressing gratitude. But, in fact, the patient knows that there has been no change in the underlying (psychotic) state and that the analyst and the patient have succeeded in colluding to bring about a failure. Even this failure may have value if both analyst and patient acknowledge the failure. The patient is older and the opportunities for death by accident or disease have increased, so that actual suicide may be avoided. Moreover, it has been fun while it lasted. If psycho-analysis could be a way of life, then such treatment might be said to have done what it was supposed to do. But psycho-analysis is no way of life. We all hope that our patients will finish with us and forget us, and that they will find living itself to be the therapy that makes sense. Although we write papers about these borderline cases we are inwardly troubled when the madness that is there remains undiscovered and unmet.44

How might it feel, I wonder, if we forget for a moment that Winnicott is talking about a particular type of patient, the patient with a borderline personality, and instead imagine that what he has to say applies in different degrees to everyone? To Joseph and to me, for example? Where might we be taken if, for example, we allowed ourselves to think that we all have a neurotic and partially contrived and constructed face which we present to the world, and that behind that face there exists a self which is alive,
spontaneous, 'true' in the Winnicottian sense, and also dangerous and potentially psychotic? That we each have a psychotic core? That to deny this is to condemn us to being lived by the hidden but potent (and now distorted) psychosis, and to find a relationship with it is to allow us to experience some of the vitality and relational capacity previously denied to us?

To think like this certainly illuminates in an animating way my Hannibal dream, and it seems to explain the alarm which Joseph felt when we attempted to peek into one of his boxes of mystery. In my dream I'm visiting a psychotic landscape, a dark and menacing place dominated by a monster who eats babies and who is furious when we ask penetrating questions. The lights are suddenly switched off and we are plunged into utter darkness. I'm terrified. But my baby remains calm and the nightmare ends not in further horror but with the monster crouched over the piano, his fingers poised above the keys. It is in the prison and in the meeting with the monster, in the chamber of the psychotic core, that the potential for a spontaneous and rich expression of self is made possible.

With Joseph, too, this seems an image full of poetic relevance and resonance. The expression of much natural feeling has been unavailable to him, access to an alive psychotic core has been blocked, and yet erratic and persistent gestures from some deeper part of himself keep bursting through. There is an attempt to connect inside with outside, psychotic with compliant, what is suspected of being evil with what is assumed to be good.

There is a madness in both our lives. I use the term 'madness' not in any clinical sense, but here referring to a part of our being that is enlivened by its proximity to an undifferentiated and unmediated ground of beingness. This part of our being is also terrorised by its sense of not-existing in its own right and therefore on the brink of what Winnicott calls 'unthinkable anxiety' against which is must erect some kind of compensatory structure or sense of order 'to hold things together'. In this sense, the psychotic core has many attributes: it is enlivening, exciting, dangerous, alarming, animating, creative, terrifying, confusing, orgasmic, authentic, connected and potentially destructive or limiting. It inevitably finds its way into our daily lives either as a result of a painfully-won direct relationship that we manage to forge with
it, or by way of messy seepings through cracks in defensive walls which sometimes collapse.

What I'm suggesting here is that it's not only with the 'borderline' patients that a healthy distinction between psychotic core and neurotic organisation can be made, and that it's not only with the more severely disturbed that a therapeutic eye on an animating madness is required. To be blind to it means to see and treat only what is being presented but is essentially defensive. And to treat the defensive, to plaster up the cracks and celebrate the heroic triumphs as the persona keeps the invaders out and the prisoner in, is perhaps to simply bolster up this 'false self' structure.

Both Joseph and I have been sensing in our lives a link with an underworld which is fraught, disturbing, fascinating, alluring and destructive of our hard-fought sense of being in control. Our fascination with story, myth and fantasy is not simply compensation for an uncongenial reality but (to use Kleinian language) an umbilical connection to a good object, an ideal which is real because it's at the root of life and being, it's the soil from which we grow. It is our connection to a Platonic form, a form which is beauty itself, a form seemingly denied to us by the harsh inadequacies of our dayworld environment yet found not only in our fantasies but also in our addictions and peculiar passions. "[W]ounded wishes find a home in hallucination", says Michael Eigen. It is our attempt to maintain what Hillman calls "the soul's need for beauty."

Yet, as this thesis bares witness, the fascinations of the ethereal underworld realm of fantasy and myth can also align us to death, to the unsullied and unrelated world of the lonely brooder, to the impotence of a therapist who cannot make a real-enough connection to the fascinating dramas being played out on the stage in front of him. Fantasy nourishes, but it can also isolate. There is, as Winnicott has reminded us, people for whom environmental conditions have been so distressing that the mind has had to take on the caretaker role. Such people, both adults and children, end up relating to their own mind and thoughts rather than other people's. The mind, as Winnicott himself once put it, "takes on a life of its own" and becomes an object separate, as it were, from the self. Our fascination with the fantasy that
was once the lifeblood can become a bloodless fortress that cuts us off from life.

Giles would say that there are bloodless fortresses that are impenetrable, unbreachable. I'm suggesting here that the images in the fantasy that exists within these walls is historically linked to attempted connections, attempted matings that went wrong, and that the attempt still needs to be made to reconnect with these images, to give them some mouth-to-mouth ... which means introducing fresh air from the outside to the stale and lifeless air within.
Chapter 11 Locked in a dark room

Joseph is tense as he arrives for the first of our two sessions today. There’s no eye contact when I open the door, he responds to my greeting with a muffled grunt, and then he sits sullenly looking at his shoes. He’s expecting, I’m guessing, a return to the painful world of humiliations and cruelty.

Do I wait to see what emerges? Or do I actively take him to some place he doesn’t want to go?

As I watch him sitting silent and inward turned, I feel myself alert and at a distance from him. The image of a sheep dog crouching in front of some brooding and unpredictable sheep again comes uncomfortably to mind. It’s such a dreadful image and my immediate reaction is to flee from it by relaxing my concentration, by letting the sheep wander off where it will. Can I, in the split second that all this is taking, find some less confronting yet still focussed way of sitting with Joseph’s discomfort? I remember Marion Milner’s beautiful writing about the way she held her patient warmly in her heart during silences.¹

‘I’m wondering,’ I say after a little while, ‘if you’re wanting me to shake the rope a bit, or whether you’d rather we stayed quiet for a while longer to see what comes up?’

‘I don’t know,’ he says. ‘I’m not sure.’ The silence that follows, though quite prolonged, is not a hostile one.

‘Perhaps there are some feelings or thoughts you’ve got following yesterday’s session but it’s difficult to find words for them.’

For a few moments Joseph seems to be trying to formulate something. His mouth opens a couple of times, he sighs, he begins a sentence but then stops.
‘I thought,’ he says at last, ‘that I had been humiliated so much, now it was my turn.’

His face is blank, I have no sense of how he is feeling as he says this. ‘It was now your turn to do the humiliating,’ I say echoing his words, deciding that the only way forward is to go slowly, to see what emerges.

‘Yes.’

‘It was a kind of revenge for cruelty you’d suffered,’ I say.

‘I think that might have been it,’ he says. I notice the conditional.

‘As you were masturbating, you were enjoying the kids’ discomfort. It felt good to be the powerful one.’

Joseph doesn’t respond.

‘I wonder if that’s how it actually felt.’

‘I don’t know. It’s hard for me to remember.’

‘It’s hard for you to get in touch with the feelings,’ I say.

‘I don’t feel them any more. I can’t really tell you how I was feeling then because I don’t know. It’s like it happened to another person. But I thought that maybe it made sense to think about it in terms of it being my turn to do the humiliating.’

‘Maybe it made sense.’

‘It seemed to make sense. It’s just that I can’t feel it.’

‘As we speak now, I’m wondering if you can tell me about being humiliated, about what that feels like.’

‘No, I can’t really. I can’t feel it right now.’ Another silence. ‘I just can’t seem to connect with it or something.’

Perhaps, I think, as we sit in the growing silence, a silence which has a quality of blankness, of no meaning, it’s up to me to speak, to make sense of things, to bring a sense of a feeling life back into our exchange. I’m thinking, I suppose, of Anne Alvarez and her work with the autistic boy, where she felt that it was up to her to express the feeling that her patient could not express.2

‘You can’t connect with it,’ I say, feeling that I’m taking a risk but not sure what else to do. ‘But it’s there. At some stage in your life certain feelings have become so painful, so awful, so impossible to bear, that you’ve locked them away in a dark room somewhere.’
'In a dark room?' Joseph says, looking momentarily startled, as if being jolted out of a reverie.

'In a dark room,' I say. 'This is where the suffering you is, the Joseph who has been humiliated and hurt, who cries, the three-year-old who lost the teddy and wandered around the house at night, the boy who has been humiliated by school bullies. Maybe there are other humiliations too painful to remember.'

'Things I don't remember,' he says.

'Maybe, who knows. But we know the humiliations have been painful for you, so painful that you've had to lock the suffering part of you away. You cannot connect with this part of you, but it exists.'

'It exists? How do you know it exists?' he asks quietly. He's not throwing this stuff back at me and I'm encouraged to go on.

'Because it keeps escaping. Like in the library. Like at other times in your life when you haven't known what's come over you. This forgotten and disowned part of you keeps escaping. It cannot bear it in there, it escapes from its locked, dark place, and it does things out in the world. It has been humiliated so much, and now it wants its turn. This is the slug you told me about a little while ago,' I continue. 'This is the slug which is connected to malice.'

'You mean there's a part of me that I just don't know about?' he says, with interest but not with feeling. 'There's some part of me that controls my actions without me knowing about it?'

'Some of your actions,' I say. 'And it does more. It feels things in a way that you cannot often feel things. It feels things intensely. You have cut off your connection to it, but it hasn't cut off its connection to you.'

'Maybe,' he says. 'But it's not real for me. I think I can follow what you're saying, but it doesn't feel real.'

'And we don't really know,' I say, 'whether that's because it isn't real or you've lost your connection to it.'

'It feels,' he says, 'as if my humiliated feelings haven't gone somewhere else. They've just evaporated.'

'They don't exist,' I say. 'It feels like they don't exist any more.'
'Or maybe never did.'
'And yet a part of you wanted to humiliate those kids in the library,' I say.
'Maybe,' he says. 'I don’t know.'
For a moment he sits thoughtfully. 'I just don’t know,' he says almost sadly. 'Maybe that’s what happened.'
He’s quiet for a while. Then he says, 'You’re saying I’m not in touch with my feelings, but I used to cry at the drop of a hat. Between Years 6 and 8 I was always setting really high standards for myself, always wanting to produce perfect assignments, and I would cry at home and sometimes at school when I couldn’t meet them. I felt this terrible pressure, like the whole of my future depended on whether I did the work to the standard I had set myself, like it was sink or swim. It was awful. I didn’t like the way I was then. I didn’t like all the crying ... So I did something about that. I’ve changed all that now. I now aspire to things that I can achieve, and I’m doing much better.'
'Things seem to work much better when you don’t allow yourself to get all worked up about them,' I say.
'Well yes,' he says.
'It’s awful when you feel yourself overwhelmed by big feelings.' I’m thinking partly of his nightmares, of the huge quilt or lights which try to suffocate him.
'It’s better when I’ve got things under control,' he says.
'You feel less vulnerable when you’re most in control,' I say. I notice that our time is up. 'This is hard,' I say, looking at the furrow on his brow. 'It’s not easy to take some of this stuff in. It’s difficult to believe that it’s real.'
Joseph murmurs and nods.
'Let’s just let it sit for a while. See what happens. What comes up.'
'OK.'
'Ve meet again this afternoon.'
'See you then,' he says.
'I’ll see you this afternoon.'
‘How did you feel when you said that stuff about the locked room?’ asks Giles.
‘On the edge!’ I say. ‘But the words felt right, even though they didn’t seem real to Joseph.’
‘There are times when we have to act as though we know better than the client.’
‘It’s dangerous, isn’t it?’ I say. ‘Thinking that you know what’s going inside another person better than he does himself. It’s Freud with Dora. Potentially persecutory and very damaging.’
‘There are times when we have to make these leaps, Steve. You can’t be empathic all the time, just staying with what the client is giving you. This kind of empathy can be non-interactive. You’ve got to be different, think differently, go beyond what you’ve been fed, to have meta-thoughts. Otherwise you lie down together in a mutual wank.’
‘But it’s so difficult to know whether in being different, in implying that there’s something we can see that’s true and which the client can’t see, we’re stifling curiosity or the growth of a tentative self. I worry all the time about encouraging a non-productive compliance. Joseph kept saying that he could see what I was saying but he couldn’t feel it.’
‘We have to judge these things by their effect,’ says Giles. ‘He didn’t withdraw. He wasn’t angry.’
‘Just feeling that he couldn’t connect with what I was saying. That he couldn’t feel it.’
‘We have these moments as parents, Steve, don’t we? There are times when we feel we know best and we act on that, despite what our child says.’
‘We have to,’ I say.
‘We must have an attitude of cunning,’ says Giles, ‘a willingness to “look at the other bit”, the idea that there’s something being kept at bay that is hidden and bubbling. We must sit with what the patient brings and look for the hidden. “What am I not being shown?” Not to look for these things are the sins of omission. Over the years I’ve discovered that I’ve got to have a suspicious intuition. I think of the dangerousness of people. There’s always a criminal or perverse dangerousness lurking around the corner.’
'So I've got to keep prodding the sore bit ever so slightly, letting him know that I know that it's there ... even if he doesn't consciously know that it's there.'

'I'd be very surprised, Steve, if there's no consciousness of it. But we'll see. We see whether what we've said has the required effect. If not, we do something else.'

'The question is whether Joseph will be able to hear it, or be able to respond to it.'

'Or whether it shifts something. It doesn't have to happen at a mind level, Steve. We're not looking for greater insight necessarily, but for movement where there's been none, or life where it's been dead. This next session will be interesting.'

'Maybe he'll be different this afternoon.'

'There's a danger, of course with what you said,' says Giles, 'that you might imply that Joseph is cut off from all feeling, that he's cut off from his feelings generally.'

'He's capable of feeling shamed, obviously. And anxious.'

'Humiliated is more problematical. And its converse, the wish to humiliate others.'

'He can feel ashamed but not humiliated? These are very close aren't they?'

'They don't seem to be in Joseph. He's ashamed of what he's done. It's what others do to him that he's cut himself off from. The humiliations. And what he wants to do to others.'

'It's these he can't connect with.'

'Except perhaps in relation to you Steve, and in relation to the present.'

'In the transference. He's feeling things there, clearly.' I'm thinking about the session last week when he was so angry with me.

'The only interpretations that are truly mutative are the ones where it's brought back to you, to the intersubjective. Like when you told him in that session that his silence seemed to destroy attempts to get near and then he'd feel angry or lonely. You said something like that I think Steve.'
‘It’s so easy for me to miss these things Giles. It’s so easy for me to forget about Joseph’s present and accessible feeling life. This is what I keep missing every time I allow myself to think too much in terms of static images set in the past rather than of an evolving and dynamic story which includes what is happening right now.’

‘When you think ‘locked in a room’ rather than ‘trying to grapple with Steve’s image of being locked in a room’.’

‘Exactly that. The fixed image excludes what he’s actually feeling right at this moment. He is trying to grapple with something. He’s feeling all sorts of things in relation to this attempt as he tries to take in what I’m saying. Disbelief, frustration, fear …’

‘And he’s also probably struggling with the blanking out effect that shame has. It sounds like he’s grappling with this. His sense of shame is such that he can’t think, can’t feel, can’t respond. It deadens. Destroys. Splits up into unusable bits.’

‘It’s the struggle, isn’t it, between the part of him that wants to expose himself to me …’

‘To expose himself and to frighten you…’

‘To feel potent and alive … it’s the struggle between that impulse and the one that wants to keep it all locked away.’

‘Between life and death in a way,’ says Giles. ‘What’s so awful for Joseph is that the life impulse, the one that’s got some bite and hit and smash to it, seems to be leading him into areas which are shameful. It’s awful for him to talk about this with you.’

‘But he hasn’t given up, has he,’ I say. ‘He keeps talking about it being difficult but wanting to go on. And the connections between us keep come and go. Something’s happening.’

‘We’ll have to wait and see.’

‘You’re feeling pessimistic?’

‘Not at all. Aware though, Steve, of the unrelenting and cunning ways the disembodied bits employ to vaporise the good.’
Three hours have passed and he's back. Immediately I'm struck by a shift in mood. Joseph is bouncy, chatty. Even if this is 'happy talk' to distract me as I fumble with the safe's combination, I decide that it's best to go with it.

'After seeing you this morning I went to the Tuggeranong Mall. It's not much of a mall really, not intense enough. I like lots of people, lots of things happening. Belconnen Mall is more my kind of place, though even that's not intense enough. And every second shop is a women's clothes shop. Women's clothes are so expensive! Mum tells me about it whenever she buys a new suit. There's a mall back home in America at my grandmother's place which is more intense. Now that's what I call a real Mall! People crowded around, big shops, lots of colour and noise, lots of spending! I went into one of the shops, a CD shop, and spent thirty dollars! Thirty dollars!! I couldn't believe it! I'm rather tight with my money as a rule and when I realised how much I'd spent afterwards I was shocked, I felt remorseful. But it was fun at the time, it was certainly fun at the time! I was there with my two brothers and my grandmother and we got her into this games parlour. She nearly had a go on one of the machines! It was a real hoot!'

'It sounds like lots of fun,' I say. 'An exciting release.'

'It was, it was!' he says, beaming. 'It's often a lot of fun with my mum's family. There's always lots of laughing.'

'Your mum's side of the family is full of fun,' I say.

'Yes, not like Dad's side. God no! My father's family is full of tension, full of secrets. Kind of intrigues, you know, where people aren't speaking to each other for years ... It's like a soap opera really! I think some of them are very lonely, sort of living by themselves and all wrapped up in their nasty intrigues!'

'Cut off and unhappy,' I say.

'I guess so,' he says.

'I wonder if your parents are opposites in the same way?'

'No, not at all,' he says stiffly.

'Yet they found that they couldn't get on,' I say. 'Presumably there was some basic incompatibility.'
'I don't know,' says Joseph, the prickliness gone as suddenly as it had appeared. 'It was very sudden, from my point of view anyway. Maybe things had been building up for a while, but if they had I didn't know about it. They were both pretty upset when it happened.'

'And you?' I ask. 'How did you feel?'

'Confused mostly, I think.'

'How are you feeling about it now?' I ask.

'I get really upset with Mum, though she probably doesn't realise it. Maybe she does. She's not always straight with me and that makes me angry.'

This is very different from his reaction the first time I asked this question I long time ago. He told me then that he felt nothing. Now he's talking about being angry.

'She's not always straight?' I say.

'She tells us that we're the priority in her life but then she keeps doing things that show that this isn't true. Like she spends more time with her friends than with us.' Joseph's eyes narrow, his voice becomes tight. 'She's ruled by her feelings, by her whims. There's no logic there. Like the other day she told me that she had no money for this movie that I really wanted to see. I suggested we go together but she said no. I found out later that she then went and saw it with a friend of hers. I mean, it was pretty low not to tell the truth. And she's always got excuses, there are always reasons why she can't spend time with us or whatever, and half the time they're just things she makes up on the spot.'

'You're very angry with her,' I say.

'I guess so,' he says. 'It's a strange sort of anger I guess. I don't shout or stuff. I don't explode or slam doors.'

'It's colder,' I say.

'Yes, it's a cold anger,' he says. Then, after a pause, 'It's been there ever since the divorce ... And I get angry with my middle brother, with William. Really angry. I'd cheerfully strangle him sometimes! But I don't just lose it with him. I control my anger with him.'

'You control it with everyone,' I say.
‘I guess I do,’ he says. ‘And it works with William, it really works!’ Joseph is chuckling as he talks, enjoying the sense of power he has over William, the ways he makes his younger brother’s life a misery. ‘I can make William crazy with anger, really crazy! Especially when we’re with Mum. I’ve got Mum wrapped round my little finger, she always trusts me, always believes me, and so if I tell her that some argument we’re having is William’s fault, then she’ll tell him to stop it and William will storm off, slamming doors. There are doors in our house that won’t shut properly now because he’s slammed them so hard! Would you believe that?’

‘You get a real buzz when William loses control,’ I say.

‘Well, he’s such a sook. He cries at the drop of a hat,’ says Joseph.

‘You enjoy humiliating him,’ I say.

‘I love it!’ he beams. ‘We’ve got this game that we made up together where, if we’re ever sitting on a couch or on a bed together, then there’s an understanding that one half is for me and one half is for him, and if you catch the other intruding into your half in any way, even with just a finger, then you can punch him. We’ve played this game for years. Anyway, the other day we were having a picnic with Mum and my brothers. William and I were sitting on this blanket and he wanted to hit me every time I reached over to get the food that was on his side of the blanket. I told him not to, that I didn’t want to play, and Mum saw us arguing and told him not to, but he kept on doing it and so I hit him really hard in the stomach. Really hard! He was winded. He tried to hit me back but Mum stopped him, saying that he deserved it, that it was his fault. And it felt so good!’

‘It felt really good.’

‘Yes, the whole thing, everything about it, felt good. I keep wanting to replay it over and over in my mind! Standing up for myself! Having Mum stick up for me! Punching him really hard! It just felt really good.’

‘It sounds like something of a release,’ I say. ‘It felt good because she was sticking up for you.’

‘Yeah, and I was letting something out … how much I hate William!’ he says.

‘It felt good to let it out,’ I say.
‘It sounds awful, doesn’t it, but that’s the way I feel some times. Weird. Mad. Families are mad. The way you’re always competing for your parents’ attention, always trying to get them on your side, and how good it feels when you succeed...’

‘It feels good when your scheming works,’ I say, but he’s not really listening, he’s off on his own train of thought.

‘You feel that your family is mad sometimes. Do you feel that? Do you sometimes get the feeling that your family is mad?’

I’ve been so shoulder-to-shoulder with him for the past while that this question throws me. Something else is happening here. Instinctively I deflect the attention back onto Joseph.

‘You’re feeling that things happen in your family that are impossible to explain rationally,’ I say.

‘Mmm. Whatever,’ he says.

It’s obvious that I’ve missed the point here, or that he’s feeling suddenly self-conscious that he’s talking so freely. It’s so different from this morning. It’s gushing out, like a release of pent up feeling.

‘I didn’t get that quite right, did I?’ I say.

‘What?’ he says. ‘Oh I don’t know, it doesn’t matter. I’ve just looked at the clock. We’ve gone overtime!’

‘So we have,’ I say.

‘God, I’ve been going on like an old chook today. Sorry! I just found I had a fit of the yabbers. Like an old chook!’

He’s not looking at me as he says this, and while the words imply a self-criticism it’s clear that he’s enjoyed talking. He leaves with a big smile.

I watch him as he goes off to catch his bus. What’s going on here? What’s the meaning of all this happy talk, this being an old chook with an uncontrolled fit of the yabbers. Last time I reported something like this to Giles he said that Joseph was masturbating in front of me! He’s feeling pleasure, that’s for sure. He’s less hostile and tight and he’s speaking from his more immediate feelings about what makes him angry and what gives him sadistic satisfaction. If this is ‘happy talk’ then I don’t know if it’s a release that is taking us into somewhere new or whether is it what Giles
called today a cunning ploy to vaporise the good, a distraction while I fumble for the keys of the safe. I don’t know whether it’s a reaching-out to include me in his world (and therefore to expand his own boundaries) or an attempt to stop me invading.

Both I guess.

***

Yesterday I got a distressed phone call from my daughter Ruth who is now at university and struggling with chronic back pain. She had an essay proposal to write on the topic of Islamic beliefs and women’s rights and she was being asked to review the literature, select an issue, comment on how it’s been treated both in the media and in the arts and to summarise the different positions commentators and historians have taken – all in 250 words. She had an idea, which she outlined in the e-mail, but added:

I am finding this incredibly hard. I have lots of ideas and can’t think how to summarise them, or the most important ones, into only 250 words. The medication I’m taking is making me so sleepy. I keep losing my train of thought.

I rang her immediately but there was no-one home. ‘Ruth,’ I said to the answering machine, ‘I got your e-mail and I’ll ring you later on tonight. But I just wanted to say straight away a couple of things. First of course you’re finding this difficult. This is an enormous topic, the kind of thing an academic would spend years working on before writing a book. I know the way you want to go deeply and thoroughly into things, to really understand the issues involved, and this is a mammoth project. Of course you’re struggling, and would be even if there were no back pain and three other units that you’re working on at the same time! ... And the other thing I want to say is that you most certainly do have an idea, it’s expressed very well in your e-mail and I think you’ve got the 250 words for your proposal.’

When I talked to her later in the evening, she told me she had something more to read to me. ‘As soon as I heard your message Dad,’ she said, ‘I felt this sense of relief. It was partly that you seemed to think that I had an idea I could use, but it was also what you said about this being such a big topic. It
wasn’t just me. Anyway, as soon as I relaxed I found all these ideas coming into my head and I sat down and wrote them out. Can I read them to you?”

And so she read me her new version of the proposal. Where the first one had been sound, this was strong. It had momentum and I could hear her conviction and passion in it, I could hear her authentic voice. ‘It’s amazing to me,’ she said after we’d talked about it, ‘that I need so much reassurance and support.’

The more I grapple with the issues that this thesis has thrown up for me, the less it seems amazing. It’s to do with the location of life and meaning and order and vitality. Life is to be found in the interactive space between people. It is in that space that there is generation, birth and creation. As therapists, parents and teachers, we find life not by looking for it (me trying to find it in Ruth, for example, or in Joseph) but by participating in its co-creation. Ideas and feelings and meanings are felt and articulated by individuals, but they’re given life in the interpersonal space created by relationship. This is connected, I think, to Winnicott’s suggestion that there is no such thing as a baby, to Wittgenstein’s dictum that there are no private meanings, and even to Bion’s idea that there are thoughts in search of a thinker. Coleridge, taking issue with a Newtonian perspective, expressed it as follows:

Newton was a mere materialist. Mind, in his system, is always passive, - a lazy Looker-on on an external world. If the mind be not passive, if it be indeed made in God’s Image, and that, too, in the sublimest sense, the Image of the Creator, there is ground for suspicion that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false, as a system.  

It’s this co-creation of life through our active involvement with the world that is so well addressed in the more recent writing about babies and mothers. Babies don’t simply instinctively adapt to their mothers, and nor do mothers just respond to their babies. Reality is to be found neither in the baby nor in the mother. Both play a part in the creative and vitalizing process which is the dance being co-created between them. Stern gives the following example:

Eric is a somewhat bland infant compared with his more affectively intense mother, but both are perfectly normal. His
mother constantly likes to see him more excited, more expressive and demonstrative about feelings, and more avidly curious about the world. When Eric does show some excitement about something, his mother adroitly joins in and encourages, even intensifies, the experience a little – usually successfully, so that Eric experiences a higher level of excitement than he would alone. The cajoling, exaggerating, slightly overresponsive, eliciting behaviour that she characteristically performs are in fact usually enjoyable to Eric. Her behaviour does not create a gross mismatch, but rather a small one. His tolerance for stimulation can encompass it, but at a level of excitement that he would not reach by his own efforts. 

If there is no such thing as a baby, then nor is there any such thing as a client, a student … indeed there is no such thing as a person! We imagine that the basic unit is the individual of the species, but there is no such thing as a unit, just systems generating life through the patterns of interaction between the parts. As the Jungian Zinkin puts it, ‘The patterns which can be discerned do not need to be thought of as inside an individual. They are made by two individuals through their need to communicate with each other.’

Infant research, says Zinkin, has revealed that infant’s world is intensely and subtly intersubjective, the timing and nature of the mother’s interventions coming out of her attunement to the baby (her ability to pick up the baby’s tunes!). This regulation by the mother comes partly through the things the mother does (presenting the breast when the baby is hungry, covering the baby when cold, holding it against her when it’s distressed). But perhaps even more significantly, says Zinkin, it comes out of the way the mother acts and speaks.

... I would like to make a distinction between form and content. Regardless of what is experienced by the infant (the content), there is also the question of how it is experienced (the form). In so far as the baby’s experiences are influenced by the mother, what the baby picks up is not only what the mother provides but how she provides it, her way of doing things. Whether feeding, changing, rocking or talking with her baby, the mother has her patterns and these are conveyed to the baby as invariants...
Stern, following the work of Tomkins has made a useful distinction between what he calls ‘category affects’ such as anger, sadness, joy, fear and disgust, and ‘vitality affects’. These are by no means the only patterns underlying the infant’s experience. They are a special case which, I consider, has a special relevance to analysis because they deal with emotions which are not usually considered. The vitality affects cannot be classified in terms of these readily recognisable emotions and they do not have names, but they can be described in terms of the kinetic qualities such as ‘surging’, ‘exploding’, ‘fading away’, ‘acceleration’.... Vitality affects seem to me like the musical signs that are not of the notes to be played but indicate how they are to be played.10

It was only when I read Zinkin’s important distinction between form and content, between what and how, between category and vitality affects, that I began to have an appreciation of the real limitations of my initial intrapsychic approach. This was a two-person system that Zinkin was describing, one where it was misleading to talk about the confusion residing in one (me) and the withdrawal residing in the other (Joseph). Joseph’s icy certainties masked confusions which found their way into the intersubjective field, and his withdrawals implied failed attempts to engage. The confusion and withdrawal and subterranean shifts could be more usefully thought about as being ours. To the extent that I could tune in to Joseph’s expressive undercurrents (in his actions and body language, and in the dreams and stories he described to me), and to the extent that I could respond out of the attunement that I consequently experienced (something in which, despite my conceptual confusions, I was – by training, childhood experience and temperament – reasonably highly skilled), I could promote a change that takes place ‘through the sharing of a vitality affect or shape or pattern of interaction’.11

Such interactions are very frequent in analysis, even if interpretations are being given. The patterns then lie in the timing, the pacing, the tone and inflection of the voice. Whatever words are used the important interaction is preverbal and presymbolic. A pattern is exchanged and shared, with feelings which can be recognised but not categorised. The pattern is a combination of a perpect, an action and an affect and is very
finely graded and regulated in its quality and intensity. Again, as in the mother with her baby, it all depends on being attuned. So there was certainly an aspect of Joseph’s manifesting shadow and my moments of unconnectedness (experienced as a kind of shame) which was to do with a renewal or re-energising of our engagement with each other.

I am talking here about a vital creative act and so I keep returning to the metaphors of the story-teller and the listener, the musician and the audience, the dancer and the onlooker, the lover and the beloved, each speaking from the heart to move the Other, each taking the inspiration from the Other to move the heart. The infant’s meowlings and pukings, like the lover’s sighs and sulks, are attempts to engage the beloved. As Alvarez puts it:

By demonstrating the baby’s sensitivity to the form and quality of experience, observation and research have changed the conventional picture of the infant. He is no longer just a sensual, appetitive little animal seeking gratification and a passionately loving and destructive creature, finding and losing love and nurture. He is also, when the conditions allow, a little music student listening to the patterning of his auditory experience, a little art student studying the play and pattern of light and shade and its changes, a little dance student watching and feeling his mother’s soothing movements or playful vitalizing activities, a little conversationalist taking part in pre-speech dialogues with his mother in the early weeks of life, a little scientist working to yoke his experiences together and understand them.

I am talking here about love – felt, expressed, returned and frustrated. This is something about which art speaks more clearly than science. We see it clearly, for example, in the relationship between the young Tristan and his uncle, King Mark:

Then Tristan took the harp and sang so well that the barons softened as they heard, and King Mark marvelled at the harper from Lyonesse whither so long ago Rivalen had taken Blanchefleur away.

When the song ended, the King was silent a long space, but he said at last:

“Son, blessed be the master that taught thee, and blessed be thou of God: for God loves good singers. Their voices and the voice of the harp enter the souls of men and wake dear memories
and cause them to forget many a mourning and many a sin. For our joy did you come to this roof, stay near us a long time, friend.”

And Tristan answered:
“Very willingly will I serve you, Sire, as your harper, your huntsman and your liege.”

So did he, and for three years a mutual love grew up in their hearts. By day Tristan followed King Mark at pleas and in saddle; by night he slept in the royal room with the councillors and the peers, and if the King was sad he would harp to him to soothe his care.\[14\]

And what happens when the song is unheard, the love unreturned, the story ignored? Then the baby turns within for solace. The baby (or the storyteller, or the lover) begins to create fantastic inner worlds where a response is felt to be possible (and where it can be controlled). The creative impulse which would otherwise attempt to mate with the world, to have its way in public where it can generate something, becomes locked up and confined to an internal prison. This is the place where solipsism and narcissism are to be found. This (according, at least, to Coleridge) is where Hamlet gets stuck.\[15\] It’s where Hannibal sits hunched over the piano. All that is felt to be real is the boundaried self and its inner world.

Play, which is just another word for creativity, both articulates this and attempts to break through it. Play, as Winnicott continually reminds us, takes us to the edges of the not-me world, to that transitional space which is neither wholly inner nor wholly outer, the world of the overlap. It attempts to consolidate (bring greater order to, make more solid, reduce the chaotic feel of) the inner, and at the same time it flirts with danger, it moves to the edge, it attempts to find a crossing where some kind of push into unknown territory might be made. Play is “always on the theoretical line between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived.”\[16\] This, says Winnicott, is why it is always exciting. This is where we are when we play with an idea, embark on some project, form a new relationship or risk an unfamiliar path. To return to one of Winnicott’s poetic formulations,
In playing, the child manipulates external phenomena in the service of the dream and invests chosen external phenomena with dream meaning and feeling.  

It's through the medium of this kind of play (and which in the body of the thesis I have also called the act of telling a story) that the space between is made animate. I breathe life into the world which I find in the intersubjective space, in the transitional zone. The world I find there breathes life into me.
Chapter 12 But anyway...

‘Hi Steve,’ says Joseph as he arrives. It’s Wednesday. Two sessions today and every day till Friday, our targeted day for finishing.

He’s not looking hostile this morning, but nor does he seem particularly enlivened.

‘It feels as though there’s nothing really to talk about,’ he says once he’s settled in his chair.

‘You can’t think of anything that you want to talk about,’ I say.

‘There’s just nothing there.’

I stay silent.

‘God Steve, was I a real pain yesterday?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Was I really boring? I got carried away, I’m sorry, I just couldn’t stop yabbering.’

‘You’re feeling that yesterday you did something you shouldn’t have done.’

‘I get carried away sometimes,’ he says. ‘I just repeat myself, I end up telling you the same stuff over and over again. It must be really boring for you.’

‘When you were talking yesterday,’ I say, ‘you seemed to be enjoying it, you seemed to be having a good time. But now you’re worried. It’s almost as though you’re ashamed of something.’

‘When I thought about it afterwards I thought I must have been boring you.’

‘No, I wasn’t bored. But let’s stay with this feeling of being worried that you’d done something wrong.’
‘Not really wrong,’ says Joseph, and I can feel something slipping away. ‘It’s not like I think I committed a big sin or something. Anyway, it’s not all that important.’

‘I was wondering,’ I say quickly, before he can move too far away from what I’m sure is important, ‘if this is another instance of you distancing yourself from your feelings.’

‘How? What do you mean?’

‘Well yesterday you had a good time talking to me. You were enjoying yourself. But it seems as though there’s been a reaction to that. It’s like you suddenly felt afterwards that you’d lost control and that felt very uncomfortable.’

‘Mmm, maybe,’ he says. He’s not rejecting this but he’s not embracing it either.

‘It’s like your floating dream perhaps,’ I say. ‘That feeling of being detached from the experience, being above it.’ No, this isn’t quite right: the sense of being ashamed isn’t present in the dream. I’m stretching things here, working too hard to make a connection that isn’t quite there. But I find myself continuing, perhaps in compensation for this failed attempt. ‘You do find strong feeling very distasteful. There’s something very scary about it for you, especially the way it seems that you’re taken over by it ... by crying a few years ago ... by yabbering on yesterday.’

‘I thought you must have been bored.’

‘You think others will think badly of you when you let yourself go.’

‘I guess,’ he says, then is quiet.

I can’t leave this alone. I feel we’ve made contact here with something present and important, and I don’t want it to slip away. I go looking for ballast.

‘Do you remember telling me a long time ago about a dream you had that was set outside a doctor’s surgery?’

‘No,’ he says.

‘In this dream, your mother was dancing with bare breasts, she was having the most wonderful time dancing freely and happily.’
'Oh God, I remember! Oh God, how embarrassing!' he says, smiling and flushing at the same time.

'You felt embarrassed then, as well,' I say. 'I have the feeling that you're embarrassed in the same way about yabbering on yesterday.'

But Joseph is in no state to come back to the present. He's still squirming at the thought of the dream of his mother dancing half-naked in public. I want Joseph to think about this, not just to re-experience it. I want him to make some connection between the Joseph-in-the-dream and the Joseph-present-this-morning, who are both in the grip of a confusing mix of excitement and shame. I'm wanting to trace some connection with the other exciting and shameful incident, the one in the school library. I want to help something to shift through the insight that these connections offers us. Something is being revealed but he can't see it. He can feel it now but he can't see it. He's too caught up in the feelings themselves. He's sitting there, confused, embarrassed and excited.

A thin internal voice might be tentatively suggesting that perhaps I could say something like, 'You seem to be feeling confused, embarrassed and pleased all at once!' But, in my heady state, the prey now in view, I dismiss my pre-session resolve to travel more lightly and instead inexorably continue to gather my evidence and marshal my arguments. I'm aware that I'm feeling quite good here, in control, calling the shots. I'm speaking with a sense of authority. I'm in charge. This is what I've been wanting all along, isn't it? To feel less dizzied by a too-complex world?

'You've become estranged from your own strongest, deepest feelings,' I say. 'Our work is all about getting back in touch with feeling.'

'I'm going through life not really in touch with how I'm feeling,' he says intelligently and dutifully, his own confusion now put behind him.

'It's almost like that man you described a while ago, guarding the computer who went off to have sex with his secretary and then found it wasn't satisfying. His feelings weren't involved.' By now I'm beginning to be uncomfortably aware that my comments are coming from an over-active brain trying to rein in all possible connections.

'Well that wasn't sex, between you and me,' he says.
For the tiniest fraction of a second I feel a rush of panic. I cannot think
about what he is saying, what he might mean. I feel like I’m being
propositioned, teased, played with … but this is utterly irrational, there’s
nothing about his words or his manner which convey any of this. Yet this
feeling (so fleeting that even to articulate it is to distort it) is real and
familiar. I feel something like this whenever anyone says something
unexpectedly intimate to me, and there have been times in my life when I’ve
reacted with inexplicable hostility. I reach desperately for and find my
ordering mind.

‘Well,’ I say regaining my ground, ‘it was about exposing yourself and
then feeling that you’d bored me, or that it hadn’t been satisfying.’

‘Well, what do I do about it?’ he says in a way that is both acquiescent
and disengaged. ‘Is there a six step programme so I can get in touch with this
part of myself?’

‘There’s a side of you that feels things intensely and which won’t be
ignored. We know that now. If you ignore it, it will come into your life in
distressing ways, it will cause things to happen which are right out of your
control, in ways that feel to you to be unacceptable. It’s almost like a revenge
for being ignored. This is why the distancing that you do and which we’ve
talked about matters. It gets you into trouble, and it will continue to get you
into trouble until, somehow, you can make a relationship with this side of
yourself.’

What I’m saying, I’m sure, is true, and yet its timing isn’t right. He had
been in touch with his feelings – or been touched by them – at several
significant moments in the session. He’s full of feeling at the moment, for
goodness sake, but I’m too busy making a point to notice it.

‘Talking about mooning …’ Joseph suddenly says.

Talking about mooning? We haven’t been talking about mooning, have
we? Unless he’s making a jump from one kind of exposing yourself to
another? Is that what he’s been thinking as we’ve been talking? What’s
going on here?

‘Talking about mooning,’ says Joseph, ‘my friends and I had the most
radical fun the other night after the school formal, running around the streets.
You should have seen us Steve. There we were, out in the dark near this big road and these cars were whizzing past us and all of a sudden one of my friends drops his trousers and starts mooning at the cars ...

I can’t believe this! He’s telling me the whole story in every detail again, as if he hadn’t told it to me before! And he’s telling it with exactly the same energy and unbridled ebullience as he had the first time and as he did when he told me the dream about his mother dancing and as he did yesterday when telling me about the tormenting of his younger brother.

As soon as he finishes this anecdote he rushes breathlessly into another, this one about a film he’s recently seen. Again he recounts every scene in boring detail ... this time I am bored, though also disoriented, unable to make contact with my therapist-self.

At last he is finished and our time is up. I’ve been feeling progressively deflated listening to him, and haven’t had the energy to try to engage him again, to interrupt his monologue.

‘Sometimes,’ I say as he gets up to go, ‘you leave here feeling confused and frustrated. Today?’

‘I’m feeling full of life, full of energy!’ He’s smiling broadly as he leaves.

He’s feeling full of energy and I’m feeling deflated. I find myself scribbling notes and thinking frenzied and sometimes despairing thoughts as I wait impatiently for the time when I’m due to ring Giles.

I just can’t get it right! It doesn’t seem to matter how much I prepare myself, how much I think about what has gone before, how much I talk to Giles and am reminded of the importance of staying with what is actually present in the room, I keep clambering back up into my head. My overactive thinking process keep taking me (and us) somewhere logical, tidy, objectively right but utterly unproductive. At crucial moments it takes us away from what is actually being felt.

What is wrong with me? It’s as though I’m either too thick to really understand what the therapeutic literature and supervision is telling me, or I’m so out of touch with my own feelings (or so afraid of them) that I unconsciously recoil from anything vaguely emotional. It’s as though I’m
afraid that what is emotional will lead us in the direction of dissolution, chaos, madness and anarchy.

I keep wondering about the relationship between thinking and feeling. At moments like this, it’s as though they’re two utterly separate things, the one (thinking) being the refuge from the fearful realities of the other (feeling). Both Joseph and I retreat there when the going gets tough. There’s a temptation for me to give it up, to stop endlessly reflecting on these sessions, to simply see what presents itself this afternoon when Joseph returns and let what happens happen.

But there’s defensive thinking (the flight from thought, or the flight to thought which acts as a fortress) and there’s connected thinking (the impulse to articulate more clearly what is being felt as a confusion). It’s this latter that I’m trying to do right now.

I feel confused and depressed. Deflated.

I can think about this in a number of different ways.

One is to think of it as a necessary deflation. According to this way of thinking, this is something that Joseph is doing to me. I need to feel deflated because otherwise my inflation will continue to prevent him from making the necessary move towards his own feeling life. My interpretations are too often taking him out of his feelings and into his dutiful head. The telos of our relationship is ensuring that I reposition myself, that my court room manner is thoroughly deflated and is replaced by something more affectively permissive. When I’m deflated he can gush, and there’s no doubt that his gushiness has a connection to his feeling life that his request for a six-step-programme does not.

The other way of thinking about this is to own that it’s my stuff. This isn’t something that Joseph is doing to me, it’s something that I struggle with in all aspects of my life. It’s the Hannibal challenge, the challenge to let go of the safety inherent in being in charge of a vast unfeeling organisation of thought (it exists both inside and outside the prison walls) and to focus my attention on the dust-coated piano sitting over there in a dark corner. My need to know what’s going on, to be in charge of the direction we’re taking,
to be manipulating the resources to ensure the most favourable outcome, is
stifling the therapeutic moment.

I am repeatedly surprised by the confluence of these two strands of
thought. It is both what he is doing to me and what I am experiencing as my
own issue. I live my life as if I were a separate self, as if the wells of
motivation, inspiration, will-power, capacity and emotion were to be found
within, but keep being brought face-to-face with the unsettling but
unavoidable fact that I'm not alone, that I'm connected to others. What
Joseph is doing to me and I am going through in my apparently private life
are not two different things. The problematic relationship with intense
feeling which is a characteristic in both our lives, and which keeps getting
manifested in our therapeutic relationship, seems to be coming from the same
pool.

Is this, as I've implied earlier, an example of synchronicity? Has this
coming together of two people with remarkably similar issues been
orchestrated by some hidden hand that has plucked these two from the
millions of people who might be thrown together, simply because these two
(and especially these two) have something to offer each other?

'There's another possibility Steve,' says Giles after I've blurted all this
out at the beginning of our supervision session. There's a book I want you to
read sometime, called Sources of the Self by a Canadian academic, Charles
Taylor. Have you see it?'

'No, though it rings a bell. Didn't you mention it during the philosophy
workshop last year?'

'Quite possibly. You'll enjoy this book. He's talking about the
postmodern experience of self and what you've been saying today brings to
mind what he's arguing.'

'Tell me Giles! I want to get some kind of bearings here, before Joseph
comes this afternoon. I'm feeling all at sea again.'

'Let's start then with Taylor, because he's got things to say about being at
sea with no bearings. But let's not get too far away from Joseph in all of this.
He's made you lose your bearings Steve. That's what his yapping is all about. But we'll come back to this.'

'OK,' I say, feeling reassured and calmed (as I so often am) by Giles's willingness to engage with ideas without losing sight of what's happening in the room. 'Tell me about what Taylor says.'

'Well, you've talked today, Steve, about feeling that your thinking is taking you away from what is actually happening in the room, from your actual experience of things, and Taylor would say, I think, that this is characteristic of modern ways of thinking. Where once humans had a more animist sensibility, a notion that meaning was in the world, in things, nowadays we experience our thinking as existing outside of the material world; our thinking, then, distances us from this world. This move (which began with Descartes but which is still deeply embedded in the way we experience things) disenchants the world for us, strips it of its ontological meaning, and makes unavailable to us the sense that we are a part of some kind of matrix of realities which hold us.'

'Is he saying that if I'd lived in a different time, I'd have felt less separate from Joseph, I'd have experienced my thoughts about him as being a natural part of this matrix of realities which hold us.'

'I think that's right Steve,' says Giles. 'You would have felt more that the two of you were a part of an order of things. Since Nietzsche, though not because of him, there has been a sense of the old certainties disappearing. Nietzsche's own phrase was that the horizons were being 'sponged' away. There's been a shift in what it feels like to be a human. The time of eternal orders which had ontic significance ... God, state, societal hierarchies, nature ... with which one was once in a kind of clear relationship has been replaced by a sense of finding or even inventing meaning.'

'Where once we took it for granted that we were already in an articulated relationship with something fixed, we now feel we have to create the meaning ourselves.'

'That's it,' says Giles. 'That's what you're experiencing, in this work with Joseph and in your thesis. You're a part of a modern Western consciousness, different from earlier ways of seeing things. You are driven
by an unconscious belief that you must find or create a sense of coherence because, like all of us who live in this post-modern society, the old verities have been 'sponged' away.'

'So Giles isn't this is connected with my anxiety in this last session? Deep down, like most of us living in these times, I have this fear that there's nothing there, that lurking behind my desperate attempts to make sense of things that there is no sense at all.'

'We are forever shadowed by a sense of immanent catastrophe, as Bion said. We're all aware, at the edges of our consciousness, of the unthinkable anxiety associated with the idea that the mother ... the mother who is sometimes our thoughts, sometimes our creative life, or our relationships, our community, our addictions, our work, our God, the piece of music we're listening to, the film we're watching or the novel we can't put down ... for all of these things we can, in this context, use the shorthand 'mother', the one that holds us in her secure embrace ... we're all aware that the mother might die or lose interest or go away and never come back. This was Winnicott's way of thinking. And Steve this is what I think was happening with Joseph, this is why he suddenly started yabbering and why he needed to successfully destroy your capacity to be the therapist.'

'I don't see the connection,' I say.

'You were onto something in that session Steve. You knew it and he knew it. It was a something that had the potential to take him right back down there into all that disgusting, painful disowned stuff. He also knew that you weren't going to let it go, that you were marshalling your forces as it were, bringing in all the supporting evidence. He was squirming, Steve, feeling that you were close to revealing his terrible secret, exposing his rotten and unnatural self, and this was utterly intolerable for him. He couldn't stand it. He had to stop you. So he started yabbering and it worked.'

'Yes, that sounds exactly right,' I say. 'At the time I felt confused ...'

'This is what I mean, Steve, about your own feelings being a clue to what's going on. You felt confused, put off the scent, discouraged, out of touch with your therapist-self ...'
... and that's because Joseph was feeling like he was on the stage again, in front of a huge audience ...

... with a disgusting and unnatural side of him about to be exposed.

'So I was feeling that something was slipping away ...'

'... because something was slipping away.'

'... and I was trying to scramble with my mind to keep hold of it ...'

'... and you weren't noticing Joseph sitting there and squirming ...'

'So he yabbles or he retreats to a kind of thinking that distances him from painful feelings. And I get thinky in a session where I feel I'm losing control of things, that meanings are evaporating.'

'Taylor would say, Steve, that the distancing gives us a sense of control.'

'We're retreating to safer, more familiar territory. Our minds. I sit there thinking that my mind, my clever thoughts, my ability to marshal the evidence, is going to change something.'

'Yes,' says Giles. 'The distancing goes together with the notion that the objects of the world are subject to the influence of our rational thought, and that we ourselves are subject to the influence of our own rational thought ... that is, that self-mastery is a possibility. The Lockean position.'

'But it keeps breaking down,' I say. 'Psst.' The thoughts or interpretations or stories, the sense that I've at last got a handle on what's going on ... it keeps breaking down.'

'This I think is where Taylor's argument gets particularly interesting and pertinent Steve. Because the old verities have been sponged away, because we've lost this animist sense that there is meaning in the world, we no longer have the sense of being made or held or found or seen by something 'other' (God, group, nature, whatever). We're on our own. To find meaning in the modern world, we must go within.'

'We're continually in the process of inventing ourselves.'

'The post-modern project is not so much to find meaning as to create it.'

'So Giles, you're saying ... or you're telling me that Taylor is saying ... that there's something about our times which contributes to my inability to shake myself free of the overly intellectual. It's not just me. It's not just my
own personal neurosis or weakness. It's the air I breathe, the language I've been taught, the perspectives I've been led to look through.'

'We're all caught up in these perspectives. Joseph is right in a way. Distancing himself from feeling does give him a greater sense of control. Thinking in this Cartesian way does do something about postmodern dizziness. It does protect us from painful realities.'

'And it insulates us from their energy too. Hannibal locked in his cell, unable to play the piano.'

'It seems to me that the issue of playing the piano is connected to the issue of creating meaning. What was the message in your Winnicottian dream? That which is created doesn't have to be destroyed but can be played with? This is the same thing, isn't it? We're not trying to strip back layers to find meaning, or not only that. We're inventing it. We're creating it and then playing with it! I like that, I like your dream!'

'I still find it difficult to accept that there's no meaning.'

'I wonder, though, if it makes any practical difference, if we believe it exists or not. We'll never find it. Our equipment isn't up to it I'm afraid. Either there is no underlying meaning, or the meaning is unknowable. We're not searching for some 'thing-in-itself' which lies beneath or behind appearances. This project is not about a search for something that exists. Such a project is bound to fail. The project is about giving a shape to experience that makes a difference to how we feel about our lives. This is what you're attempting to do here with Joseph, to create together some sense of coherence that will reduce the fear, the dissociation, the terrible anxiety he feels.'

'This links in so strongly with what I seem to be fumbling towards in my thesis, which is the suggestion that the creation of a story through the therapist-patient relationship is in itself therapeutic and is what prevents us being overwhelmed by Winnicott's "unbearable anxiety". The creation of a story in the relationship is an attempt to reconnect with the missing mother.'

'That's what you're saying in the thesis and we keep coming back to in the supervision.'
'It's just that I have to keep reminding myself that the story isn't just what's said. It's what's felt.'

'And how those two go together, Steve. How the words can be found which not only describe the feelings but shift them.'

'Create something new,' I say. 'I worry that in sessions like this one I'm telling Joseph a disembodied story.'

'I wouldn't say that Steve. You're telling him a story which is relevant but not always connected with what's actually being felt at the time.'

'It would have been good if I could have found a way of commenting on the yabbering. I get a bit lost in my head ... Giles, I had another dream last night which I've just remembered! I think it may be connected.'

'Tell me your dream Steve.'

'I dreamt I was teacher telling a class of 11 year olds how to write an essay. What I was saying was very sound, potentially very valuable given the number of essays they'll have to write in their secondary school lives. It was good advice, based not just on my understanding of kids but also on what I know about writing. I liked the sound of what I was saying. But the kids weren't listening. They weren't interested. What I was saying didn't touch their felt lives in any significant way.'

'This is how you're feeling this morning in relation to Joseph.'

'That what I'm saying has little connection to his felt experience.'

'And what I'm saying is that it does have a very direct connection Steve, too direct in some ways, that he's frightened by how much you seem to know, by what you see.'

'And you're saying that it would be easier for him to take these things in if I was more in touch with how difficult he's finding this, how anxious it makes him, how it gets him yabbering.'

'Yes, you mustn't underestimate the importance of your insight, nor let go your ability to find words for it. Joseph needs these things too. I want to read you something from Taylor's book. Is that OK?'

'Of course.'

'Taylor says this,' says Giles:
We are inducted into language by being brought to see things as our tutors do. And it is through these relationships and these conversations that we come to have an identity, which is a sense of who we are and what we stand for ... which is just another way of saying that we come to have a notion of the good which orients us. There is an essential link between identity and a kind of orientation. It is through our pursuit of the good that we can find our way.²

'So pathology might be about having lost one's way,' I say, 'of having distorted or conflicted moral maps. This makes sense to me: Joseph shutting off feeling in order to 'get on' with things and, as a result, losing his way, losing some vital connection with the good. He is a traveller carrying a defective map. Part of my job has to be communicating the limitations of his map and helping him construct a better one.'

'As long as it's a joint project, shaped by his experience and his concerns, Steve, and not an imposition coming out of your own.'

'Like in the dream. That was an imposition.'

'It's in danger of becoming your project rather than a joint one every time you find yourself saying something and Joseph is either not interested, not "getting it"; or is following diligently with his head but not with his heart.'

'This points to another sense in which stories — in this case interpretations — can be disembodied. We've already talked about the sense in which a disembodied story is one that exists outside of a relationship. But a story can also be disembodied ... cut off from the body ... if there's no connection between it and the hearer's body, which in this case refers to the emotions the hearer is experiencing at that moment. If Joseph is feeling panic, impelled to a fit of the yabbers, there's no point in me telling him a story (giving him an interpretation) which explains in a rational way the reason for the yabbers. He won't be able to hear it. He'll most likely be like the kids in my dreams, simply not interested. But if I tell him a story which has at its core the mixture of confusion and fear and shame that he's currently feeling ..., even, at its simplest, if I say something like, 'You're feeling that you need to talk a lot at the moment' ..., then the story can be heard, it has a
connection with the hearer’s body (his pulse, his breathing, his racing mind, his nervous laugh), and it can shift something, move something along.’

‘And this is the essential thing, is it not,’ says Giles, ‘to help to move something along rather than to reveal some essential reality? We’re not there to strip away layers in order to reveal a true self or an authentic core. These parts of ourselves – if they in fact exist – will always remain hidden from view, will always remain a secret. In the end the self remains unknown and unknowable. You can’t uncover anything to an intrinsic meaning.’

‘Giles, this conversation has gone well over the ten to fifteen minutes we agreed to. There’s more I want to talk about though. Can I keep going?’

‘Keep going, Steve. We can have another ten minutes or so.’

‘It’s to do with a particular moment in that last session.’

‘I think I may be able to guess the one you mean!’

‘I’m sure you can! Where he said to me, “Well, that wasn’t sex, between you and me.”’

‘And you experienced a moment of panic.’

‘I’m not sure exactly how to describe what I experienced but it was something like’ that. I felt shocked, for an instant, confronted, unbalanced. What I said in response seemed like a kind of gut response to restore an even keel. I’m imagining that it was utterly unhelpful to him, that it missed some essential point which I might have seen had I been less panicked.’

‘I couldn’t disagree more Steve! Yes, your response did come from the gut, but it was connected and it came intuitively out of your experience of that moment! “When you expose yourself to me,” you were effectively saying, “you feel bad afterwards”. This was absolutely the right thing to say! You were letting him know that you’d accurately heard what he said, that there was a real relationship between the two of you where disappointments and satisfactions can take place, and that what happened in the library that day was not an isolated incident but a part of a bigger psychological picture. This is what I am talking about! That response, unlike some of your others, helped move things along. You responded out of your subjective and passionate and painful experience. You allowed his comment to have its effect on you.’
'So I did! It seemed at the time that I was just keeping the panic at bay.'

'If you'd then regained your composure, perhaps you might have explored this a bit more. But there was so much tension in the air! To relieve it he had to tell you all about the mooning again.'

'And to ask me if there was a six step programme.'

'He had to both get into his disengaged head and yabber at the same time.'

'We both panicked. I ended up scrambling up onto a debater's podium.'

'The first step must always be to acknowledge what is being done to you, and your access to that is how you are being made to feel. You can't leapfrog what Joseph is doing to you. Trying to scramble into activity to regain agency does not work. Preaching to him isn't going to help at all.'

'I'm tired at the moment, and that's one of the reasons it's difficult for me to know what he is doing to me.'

'He's getting under your skin Steve. This encounter is agitating and deflating you, it's prompting frenzied thinking, some of which feels related and fruitful.'

'And he's talking about things more. Even in the odd session we've just had he's talked about his concern that he's bored me. He doesn't want to bore me.'

'He wants to connect with you Steve. It's the relational energy. It's just that he's not very good at it yet. He needs your help.'

Joseph has just settling into his chair for the afternoon session. Only two more days to go after this one, if we're to stick to the timetable that Joseph is himself so keen on. I'd like to finish too, I'm so very tired.

'I've just had lunch with Annie,' he says. 'She told me that mum was having a lunch today for some her friends, a really big lunch, and none of us boys were invited. But anyway ...'

'I guess you're feeling a bit left out,' I say quickly, before he can take us somewhere else.

Joseph is silent for a moment.

'Steve, have you noticed how often I say, "But anyway ..."'?
‘I noticed it that time,’ I say. ‘You seemed to be wanting to take us off somewhere else, away from thoughts of your mother’s party.’

‘I don’t say it a lot outside of here, it’s more just when I’m here that I’ve noticed it. I’m always saying it. “Oh well. But anyway...”’

‘I wonder what it’s about?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Let’s think about it for a while,’ I say. ‘I wonder if it’s a way of getting things moving away from an uncomfortable area?’

‘Maybe it is.’

‘I wonder if when things are feeling uncomfortable, you are faced with two options. One is to stay with the feeling of being uncomfortable, and then other is to lead away from it by saying “But anyway”? ’

‘I think that’s it. It’s taking me away from my feelings.’

‘In this case it’s taking you away from the disappointment you feel about the lunch.’

‘You know, it used to be so good in our family,’ he says. ‘It used to be so good before mum and dad got sick of each other. Especially before either of my brother’s were born, when it was just me and we were living in this fabulous house which Dad was extending. I remember I used to walk around after him with my little hammer and nails. There’s a photo I’ve got of me as a toddler sitting on Mum’s lap, and Dad’s behind us with his hand on mum’s shoulder.’ He smiles his broad sunny smile, though much of this is said wistfully. ‘It was great then, but then Mum and Dad started having problems and started to get sick of each other, and my brothers were born ... I remember how mum used to leave us every now and then to go travelling. She used to go off to workshops or courses or something. Anyway she always used to tell us boys that she’d take us next time, but she never did. But anyway ... oh, see, there I go again! ... It’s always seemed to me that mum makes arrangements to suit herself. We find out about it afterwards, she doesn’t talk to us about it, doesn’t plan things with us, doesn’t include us in her plans.’

‘It’s pretty disappointing for you.’

‘It is, but what can you do?’
‘You feel helpless about it. Nothing will change things.’

‘I don’t think anything will ever change Mum. She’s a very strong character, she’s got a strong will you know. When we were all together, it was like she was the boss and we were all on our toes a bit. I remember how we used to relax when she went away, even Dad. There was this one time when Mum was away … She always used to make it a rule that there was no eating in the main room, she was obsessed with the carpet, about getting marks on it, so that was the rule, no eating in the main room. Well once when she was away, we got these pizzas, Dad was in this as well, it was like the kid in him was suddenly released, and we sat on the carpet and ate these messy pizzas, and then we had chocolate and we threw chocolate at each other. It was such fun, such a release! I don’t know what happened to the carpet. I didn’t care. No-one seemed to be bothered about it! I remember it so well.’

‘A good time,’ I say.

‘Yes. There were good times with Mum too, I remember some of those. But I get really pissed off at her broken promises and her selfishness. ‘She said that she was our mother Number 1, and her friends are Number 2. But she won’t drive me to these sessions twice a day because she’s too busy and she hasn’t invited us to the lunch. It’s like we’ve been dropped off the list. She lies about things and sometimes I catch her out, but she always denies it. I love her, and I guess that makes it all the more difficult to be so angry with her. My brothers are angry too.’

‘You feel let down by her.’

‘Just angry, really angry.’

‘You’re feeling it now as you speak,’ I say.

‘Yes, I guess I am.’

‘And you told me that you thought anger was somehow involved in the incident in the library.’ This is risky. I’m aware, this time, that I might be taking him away from his present feeling, but I also want to give him a chance to explore the connection, to understand something more about the library incident, if that’s what he now wants to do.

‘Yes, I think it was connected, but don’t ask me how.’
He wants me to lead him here, but I also don’t know how it’s connected. So I sit silently.

‘What do I do with this anger, now that I’m aware of it?’ he asks.

‘Do you have any thoughts about what you might do with it?’

‘I feel like gardening.’

‘You feel like gardening.’

‘Yes, I want to garden. Gardening is how I handle my rage.’

‘I wonder if you also use your anger at school, that you channel it into doing really well at school?’

‘Yes. I do that too I think. But that’s the cold anger, the more controlled one.’

‘Yes.’

‘When I’m feeling hot anger I can’t concentrate properly. Like I can’t do maths which needs me to be logical. Maybe painting, maybe I can paint when I’m angry.’

‘Something more with your body.’

‘Yes.’

‘Anger seems to give you strength,’ I say, remembering the story about Joseph hacking away at the garden. ‘Maybe that’s important to remember. Without anger, you’re not as strong.’

Joseph looks up at me, puzzled.

‘I’m thinking about what you said about Zeroing the unacceptable part of yourself and how you’ve connected this unacceptable part with anger. Maybe if you Zero it you’ll be robbing yourself an important energy.’

‘Maybe,’ says Joseph, glancing at the clock. It’s time to finish and there’s something he wants to say. ‘Well, how am I going, do you think?’

‘How are you going? What do you mean?’

‘Are we getting anywhere?’ he says. ‘Will we be able to finish on Friday?’

‘I’d be very interested to know what you think about how we’re going.’

‘I don’t know. It’s hard to tell.’

‘You’re the one who’s going to notice something,’ I say.

‘Yes, but what do you think?’
‘I think we’ve done a lot in an intense and indirect way. You’re speaking more easily from your feelings now than you have been at earlier times, and identifying this “But anyway ...” impulse seems relevant. I just don’t know though whether by Friday we’ll have done enough. I have a sense that we’ve still got some tough territory to travel through. I have a gut feeling that this is connected with sex. I’m wondering what you think.’

‘There’s nothing,’ he says. ‘Nothing I can say.’ He’s looking a little awkward. It’s different from the cold hostility from which similar words have come in the past.

‘Well, I guess we’ll see,’ I say.

I can see now, as he leaves, that these blanknesses aren’t simply defences. He needs me to help him create a meaning. Without me to help him articulate something, there’s just a blankness with panicky edges.

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It seems that there is a paradox. Life is to be found in the intersections between worlds, coming (as it were) from the outside and infusing us with energy ... and it also comes from within, from our impulses and instincts, from the relational and creative urges, out of the generative mix goods and bads, through our in-built need to play, all experienced as inner urgings to move to the edges of our known world, to the frontiers of the unknown, and to engage.

The paradox – the tension created by the co-existence of apparent opposites – is necessary. Too inward a focus leads to the solipsism and sense of isolation and powerlessness which was the starting point of this thesis. Too outward a focus leads to an unconscious activism which is motivated by an underlying fear that there is no internal meaning, no core to the self, nothing within except a painful emptiness. We are compelled, by virtue of our need to be psychologically healthy, to connect ourselves with the world, but we are also compelled (if we want to remain healthy) to maintain our connection to our unique internal fantasy, our individual way of experiencing and seeing the world.
Our fast-paced world doesn’t have a lot of time for introspection. We need, it says, to get on with things. The world passes us by, we are told, if we gaze at our navels or disappear up our rectums. As the Victorian Mrs Edmund Craster put it:

The centipede was happy quite
Until the toad in fun,
Said, “Pray, which leg goes after which?”
And worked her mind to such a pitch
She lay distracted in the ditch
Considering how to run.  

And yet so much happens in ditches! This is where we feel our most painful feelings, where we allow ourselves the time to recognize that we feel controlled, smothered, confused, betrayed, disenchanted, lost, bitter, weighed down, unconnected, lonely, angry; and where we ask ourselves how we might find some relief. This is where we feel our pothos, our yearning for the good and the beautiful; and where we ask ourselves how we might move closer to what we lack.

If we clamber out of our ditches prematurely – if we ignore our illnesses and nightmares and bodily agitations and frenzied thoughts – then we turn away from that which seems to give to our particular life its intrinsic sense of individuality and meaning. Hamlet is Hamlet not despite the labyrinthian complexities in his character but because of them. The same can be said about Joseph and all who spend periods of time stranded and distracted in ditches: Dante expelled from the city and writing the *Inferno*; Coleridge, addicted to opium, unhappily married and spurned by his beloved Asra and writing *Dejection*; the adult Dickens re-experiencing daily his childhood humiliations and sitting at his writing desk surrounded by the almost-palpable presences of his fictional creations; the Australian writer Robert DessaiX living in parallel worlds, the internal so obviously animating and giving direction to the external... to name just a few of the more striking examples. From the foul ditches and swamps of the psyche, where the mind in dreams and fantasy spurs and oozes its endless supply of animating images, come creations which animate both the creator and the world into which the creations are tipped. As Nietzsche, so obviously a dweller in
lonely, painful and intensely beautiful ditches and swamps (and so clearly a
key figure in the tradition upon which this thesis rests) has put it:

Those great poets, for example, men like Byron, Musset, Poe,
Leopardo, Kleist, Gogol – I do not dare mention far greater
names, but I mean them [Nietzsche meant, of course, himself!–]
are and must be men of the moment, sensual, absurd, fivefold,
irresponsible, and sudden in mistrust and trust; with souls in
which they must usually conceal some fracture; often taking
revenge with their works for some inner contamination, often
seeking with their high flights to escape into forgetfulness from
an all-too-faithful memory; idealists from the vicinity of
swamps...

It is Nietzsche himself who provides us with the most vivid picture of the
frenzied and alive world of the ditch, for it was in the ditch or swamp, alone
and in pain for most of his active adult life, that he developed his brilliant
and energetic insights about what it was to be human.

Nietzsche lived his life in a state of frenzy, knowing in his bones (it seems
to me) that if for a moment he stopped driving himself, if for a moment he
eased off in his compulsion to locate and then articulate his psychological
reality, his story, then physical and mental breakdown would be the
consequence.

Toward a psychology of the artist. If there is to be art, if there
is to be any aesthetic of doing and seeing, one physiological
condition is indispensable: frenzy. Frenzy must first have
enhanced the excitability of the whole machine; else there is no
art. All kinds of frenzy, however diversely conditioned, have the
strength to accomplish this: above all, the frenzy of sexual
excitement, this most ancient and original form of frenzy. Also
the frenzy that follows all great cravings, all strong affects; the
frenzy of feasts, contests, feats of daring, victory, all extreme
movement; the frenzy of cruelty; the frenzy in destruction; the
frenzy under certain meteorological influences, as for example
the frenzy of spring; or under the influence of narcotics; and
finally the frenzy of will, the frenzy of an overcharged and
swollen will. What is essential in such frenzy is the feeling of
increased strength and fullness.

'For believe me,' he wrote in another book,
the secret of the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest
enjoyment of existence is: to love dangerously! Build your cities
under Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas! Live at
war with your peers and yourselves! Be robbers and conquerors,
as long as you cannot be rulers and owners, you lovers of
knowledge! Soon the age will be past when you could be
satisfied to live like shy deer, hidden in the woods! ... 9

Nietzsche’s Dionysian frenzy had a number of faces, one of which was a
kind of ecstatic and destructive rage. The object of his fury was any idea or
perspective or ideology that kept the human race docile, passive, asleep,
servile. Scholars were a favourite target, with their penchant for taking life
and squeezing it so tight into conceptual boxes that it suffocated and died.
They were like the Egyptian embalmers, coming into their own only when
the subject was dead.

All that philosophers have handled for thousands of years
have been concept-mummies; nothing real escaped their grasp
alive. When these honourable idolators of concepts worship
something, they kill it and stuff it; they threaten the life of
everything they worship. 10

Of the scholars themselves he said,

But they sit cool in the cool shade: in everything they want to
be mere spectators, and they beware of sitting where the sun
burns on the steps. Like those who stand in the street and gape at
the people who pass by, they too wait and gape at thoughts that
others have thought. 11

Convictions were prisons he said, 12 and his task was to stir people up so
that that they became aware of the suffocating confinement of their cramped
quarters, to remind them, even those who (like the toad) thought they were
men-of-action, that they were hopelessly confined by the ideologies that
blinkered them. “To make the individual uncomfortable, that is my task.” 13

He was especially impatient with a psychological eye that thought it could
see clearly into the foundations of human motivation. Consciousness was
eternally deceitful, he said, continually making us think we know what we
are doing when in fact we have no idea.

What indeed does man know of himself! Can he even once
perceive himself completely, laid out as if in an illuminated glass
case? Does not nature keep much the most from him, even about his body, to spellbind and confine him in a proud, deceptive consciousness, far from the coils of the intestines, the quick current of the blood stream, and the involved tremors of the fibres? She threw away the key; and woe to the calamitous curiosity which might peer just once through a crack in the chamber of consciousness and look down, and sense that man rests upon the merciless, the greedy, the insatiable, the murderous, in the indifference of his ignorance – hanging in dreams, as it were, upon the back of a tiger. ...

And again, in a passage that (like many others) betrays Nietzsche's fear that his frenzy was connected to his failing physical and psychological health:

How can a human being know himself? He is a dark and shrouded thing; and if a hare has seven skins, a human being could strip off seven times seventy and would still be unable to say, “now this is really you, this is no longer a rind.” Moreover, it is a tortuous, dangerous undertaking to dig into oneself like this and to descend forcibly on the nearest way into the shaft of one’s nature. How easily one can damage oneself in the process so that no physician can offer a cure.  

Look beyond your thoughts, said Nietzsche, if you wish to know something about what it is that motivates you, that impels you forward.

Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, there stands a mighty ruler, an unknown sage – whose name is self. In your body he dwells; he is your body ...

Your self laughs at your ego and at its bold leaps. ‘What are these leaps and flights of thought to me?’ it says to itself. ‘A detour to my end. I am the leading strings of the ego and the prompter of its concepts.’

So what is the nature of this consciousness we have? And what is its connection to the body, the tiger, the self? It’s like a fantasy, he said, like a commentary infused with the images of fantasy on the actual text which is being written in some unknown place beyond our capacity to perceive.

... all of our so-called consciousness is a more or less fantastic commentary on an unknown, perhaps unknowable, but felt text...
In none of this, despite his occasional warnings about introspection doing us psychological damage, does he ever suggest that we should forget our craving to understand and articulate the truth. Our love of the truth, he implies, is a part of our joy of being alive, a lust for living and knowing which are inseparable from each other.

All joy wants the eternity of all things, wants honey, wants lees, wants drunken midnight, wants tombs, wants tomb-tears’ comfort, wants gilded evening glow.

What does joy not want? It is thirstier, more cordial, hungrier, more terrible, more secret than all woe; it wants itself, it bites into itself, the ring’s will strives in it; it wants love, it wants hatred, it is overrich, gives, throws away, begs that one might take it, thanks the taker; it would like to be hated, so rich is joy that it thirsts for woe, for hell, for hatred, for disgrace, for the cripple, for world – this world, oh, you know it!18

Nietzsche is the sensual philosopher, the one who more than any other seems enlivened not by the aesthetic beauty of his thoughts but by the frenzy in his body (a false distinction, really, though perhaps a means of contrasting his way of knowing with that of ‘the scholars’). He’s restless, agitated, filled with longing, wracked with pain. His starting point is always what he actually experiences. He’s the phenomenologist par excellence. We begin with what we know, with what through our senses we actually experience:

And what magnificent instruments of observation we possess in our senses! This nose, for example, of which no philosopher has yet spoken with reverence and gratitude, is actually the most delicate instrument so far at our disposal: it is able to detect minimal differences of motion which even a spectroscope cannot detect. Today we possess science precisely to the extent to which we have decided to accept the testimony of the senses – to the extent to which we sharpen them further, arm them, and have learned to think them through. The rest is miscarriage and not-yet-science …19

It seems that the more Nietzsche contemplates the evidence of the senses, the more he wants to make a distinction between what he feels – his emotions, his suffering, his longings – and the will which he experiences as
an irresistible undercurrent urging him forward, frenzied and lustful, to smash and possess and overcome obstacles and limitations.

Whatever in me has feeling, suffers and is in prison; but my will always comes to me as my liberator and joy-bringer. Willing liberates: that is the true teaching of will and liberty – thus Zarathustra teaches it.

But my fervent will to create impels me ever again toward man; thus is the hammer impelled towards the stone. O men, in the stone there sleeps an image, the image of my images. Alas, that it must sleep in the hardest, the ugliest stone! Now my hammer rages cruelly against its prison. Pieces of rock rain from the stone: what is that to me? I want to perfect it; for a shadow came to me – the stillest and lightest of all things once came to me. The beauty of the overman came to me as a shadow...  

This will to overcome was something Nietzsche experienced as almost fateful, necessary, unavoidable – like Joseph exposing himself in the library, an act which upsets and complicates (but also deepens and gives meaning to) the conscious life. The will to overcome is greedy, restlessly and relentlessly coming again and again like successive waves against the rocks.

Will and wave. How greedily this wave approaches, as if there were some objective to be reached! How, with awe-inspiring haste, it crawls into the inmost nooks of the rocky cliff? It seems that it wants to anticipate somebody; it seems that something is hidden there, something of value, high value.

And now it [falls] back, a little more slowly, still quite white with excitement – is it disappointed? But already another wave is approaching, still greedier and wilder than the first, and its soul too seems to be full of secrets and the lust to dig up treasures. Thus live the waves – thus live we who will – more I shall not say.  

Nietzsche's inexorable insistence on the centrality of the will to overcome was no mere manic compensation for a brilliant but thwarted mind (his books were largely unread during his active lifetime). It was more like the only possible creative response to the conditions of his actual life. To imagine otherwise it to forget Nietzsche himself, alone, in pain and going blind, crouched over his desk and trying to read and write in some freezing boarding house room, a coat on and perhaps a scarf, gripping the pen with
fingerless gloves. It’s to forget the struggle, and how desperately he felt the
temptation to give up, to crawl into bed or back home to his mother or his
sister, to become what in fact he struggled all is sane life not to become,
which was an invalid. The beautiful passage in Zaratustra called ‘At Noon’
reminds us of the pain fullness of his struggle, of the temptation to rest, to
sleep, even to die, to fall back into the arms of eternity and give up the
frenzy.23

Spurred on by fear, desperately in love with life, Nietzsche didn’t give up
but instead drove himself on and was at last broken down (was it the sight of
the horse being beaten, the upwelling of pity in him that he’d fought so long
to keep out?), spending the last eleven years of his life incoherent and bed-
ridden. His ditch was no sanctuary, no place of recuperation from which he
could eventually emerge cured and reconnected with human society. Instead
we’re left with a sense of the tragedy and fate fullness24 of his blighted and
brilliant life.

Nothing simple can be said about him. Nietzsche himself continually
insisted that nothing can be concluded with certainty. It is necessary, he said,
for mind or spirit to ‘take leave of all faith and every wish for certainty,
being practiced in maintaining itself on insubstantial ropes and possibilities
and dancing even near abysses.’25 ‘All good things approach their goal
crookedly,’26 and again:

As a learner one will have become altogether slow,
mistrustful, recalcitrant. One will let strange, new things of every
kind come up to oneself, inspecting them with hostile calm and
withdrawing one’s hand. To have all doors standing open, to lie
servilely on one’s stomach before every little fact, always to be
prepared for the leap of putting oneself into the place of, or of
plunging into, others and other things …27

This, for me, is at the heart of the post-modern consciousness. There is no
single, absolute truth, nor is there meaningfulness. There are many truths
and we’re brought closer to an intellectual grasp of reality if we consciously
adopt many perspectives. The actual world which we experience through our
senses is a many layered, dynamic and partially inaccessible reality (though,
as Giles sometimes would enigmatically say to me, we’d understand
completely if we had the faculties to do so; it's not in itself incomprehensible. We may not be able to grasp it all, or even its essence, but as Nietzsche himself so wonderfully demonstrated, this doesn’t condemn us to impotent silence. On the contrary, our willingness and ability to articulate our experience is another source of meaning and vitality.
Chapter 13 Stranded at sea

When I open the door this morning I find that Joseph is not alone. He’s accompanied by his mother’s new boyfriend Allen.

‘Good morning Steve,’ says Allen. Joseph is silent, pointedly looking away and at the garden, deliberately absenting himself from the conversation that’s about to happen. I look from one to the other, trying to read the signals. Allen is frowning.

‘Hi Steve,’ he says tentatively. ‘Look, I wonder if we can renegotiate tomorrow’s appointment time which at the moment is for 10 o’clock? I’ve got things to do in the morning and if I’m to drop Joseph off here it would suit me much better to do it at 9. I hope this isn’t inconvenient. Do you have a space earlier on?’

‘I do,’ I say. ‘9 o’clock.’

‘That’s too early,’ says Joseph petulantly. ‘I can’t get up that early! This is meant to be holiday time!’

‘Well 9.30 then?’ Allen towers over Joseph. He’s a big man. But his voice is apologetic. ‘We could compromise on 9.30 couldn’t we?’

‘I think 10 o’clock,’ says Joseph. ‘I think I could make it by 10 o’clock.’

Allen looks back towards me and shrugs his shoulders. ‘Would 10 o’clock be OK?’ he asks, perhaps forgetting that this was the original time and that there’s been no change, no compromise.

‘Yes, I can see him at 10 o’clock tomorrow,’ I say. ‘That’s fine.’

‘OK,’ says Allen. ‘I’ll see you later Joseph.’

‘See you,’ says Joseph coldly. Then, as Allen leaves, he goes into my room and asks, his voice still steely though not as cold, ‘What’s that tree you’ve got in the garden there? The one in the corner?’
‘It’s an old oak tree,’ I say.
‘It’s ugly,’ he says. ‘It needs to be chopped down or severely pruned. It doesn’t suit the rest of your garden.’
‘I think you’re right,’ I say. ‘But it belongs to our neighbours.’
‘It doesn’t look good,’ he says.

‘That was an interesting exchange,’ I say as Joseph sits down.
‘What do you mean? About the tree?’ he asks, smiling.
‘Well that was interesting too, but I was thinking about the exchange between you and Allen. You’re not powerless in relation to him.’
‘I guess not,’ he says.
‘I guess one way of getting at your mother is to make Allen’s life difficult?’
‘Sometimes I feel pretty annoyed with her,’ he says.
‘Refusing to come here earlier tomorrow is a way of punishing your mother,’ I say.
‘You could say that I suppose,’ he says. He doesn’t want to pursue this.
‘I’ve brought some things to show you.’

As we’ve been talking, I’ve been conscious that my mind’s eye is flitting between two different fields. One is the here-and-now, the interaction between Joseph and Allen and Joseph’s shifting feelings as we talk about this. The other is the spot where we left off yesterday, with my sense that we were about to enter some difficult territory which was connected with sex. I try to keep these two in mind as Joseph now produces what may be a third focus for our attention.

‘I’ve brought in some photos of when I was young,’ he says. ‘I thought you might like to see them.’ Joseph looks quickly up at me as he says this, as if wondering how I’m going to react to this move of his. I can’t make out whether it’s a defensive move towards safe territory to which he’s hoping I’ll turn a blind eye, or an attempt to find a way into something difficult and unknown for which he’s hoping he’ll find my support. Perhaps he doesn’t know either. Perhaps it’s both.
‘You’ve got some photos you’d like to show me,’ I say trying to sound neutral but not discouraging.

For the next thirty minutes or more Joseph shows me photos of his family during happier times: Joseph beaming up at the camera at his sixth birthday party, cake smeared over his face and icing dripping onto his white long sleeved shirt and tie; Joseph pouring a bucket of water over his squealing mother on a hot day; Joseph posing with his little-boy foot bearing down on an enormous snow shovel (‘my dad’s shovel’), frowning in a way that conveys that this was important man’s work that he was doing.

‘I used to follow Dad around the garden back home in the States,’ he says. ‘I used to take my toy shovel and clear the snow with him.’

‘Little Joseph being the big daddy worker,’ I say. ‘You look so involved, so serious.’

‘Yes, cute isn’t it,’ he says, putting clear space between the idolizing little boy and the 16-year-old sitting in front of me.

As we look at the photos he tells me things about his family that he’s not mentioned before. There’d been another child, he says, born before him but born dead.

‘How awful for your parents,’ I say. ‘You must have been especially welcome.’ Joseph just shrugs and quickly moves on to another photograph. He isn’t wanting to let me ‘work’ with these photos; there’s another agenda he’s running here. Maybe it is defensive, after all. Maybe it’s just filling in time, doing a ‘show and tell’ which is pleasurable in its own way but is really designed to fill the space between now and tomorrow when we’re due to finish. I find myself looking for opportunities to bring us back to where we ended yesterday.

He takes back the final photo and there’s a short silence.

‘I’m wondering if there’s something on your mind at the moment,’ I say.

‘I didn’t sleep too well last night,’ he says and rubs his temples to suggest that his mind is still foggy from tiredness. ‘I’ve got into this terrible holiday habit of staying up watching TV and going to bed really late, then it’s a real struggle to get up in the morning. It’s silly really, I don’t particularly enjoy the programmes I watch but I can’t help myself. Mum told me last night that
I had to go to bed by 11 o’clock, but I got up after Mum had gone to bed and sat up again watching TV.

‘I wonder if TV for you is like sex for the computer operator, a distraction without being satisfying,’ I say.

‘What do you mean?’ he asks. The atmosphere in the room is suddenly more alive. We’re both on our toes.

‘I don’t really know,’ I say. ‘It’s just that you’re talking about watching TV in exactly the same way as you described that man at the computer going off and having sex with his secretary. It wasn’t very satisfying, it was just a distraction.’

‘Possibly,’ he says. ‘But at least I got to sleep in the end... You know, I’ve just recently had a letter from a friend of mine in America, a girl called Mel.’

A non sequitur. I’m now more confident that Joseph is trying to steer the conversation in a particular direction, that there’s an intent here and that it’s important that I give him his head.

‘Mel is the daughter of friends of my parents and we used to go visiting them in the old days. We still write to each other a bit.’

‘You enjoy the friendship,’ I say.

‘I guess so,’ he says. ‘We used to have fun, sometimes, when the adults were busy somewhere else.’

‘You used to have fun when the adults were preoccupied, when you weren’t being observed,’ I say.

‘There was this one time,’ he says, now smiling in that familiar way which conveys both excitement and embarrassment, ‘when Mel and I were in this room together and all our parents had gone out. The babysitters were in the next room and the doors were shut so we thought we couldn’t be seen or heard, but it turned out afterwards that there was a high window above the door that was open and maybe the babysitters could hear everything we were saying. It was embarrassing when we realised that.’

‘You were saying things that you thought no-one else could hear,’ I say.

‘We thought we were saying secret things,’ he says, ‘but they could be overheard by the babysitters.’
‘Secret and exciting things,’ I say.
‘Stuff we didn’t want anyone to hear.’
‘And you don’t want to tell me either,’ I say.
‘Don’t ask,’ he says. ‘Crazy stuff.’
‘You’d squirm if you told me what you’d been talking about.’
‘I’m squirming just thinking about it,’ he says and then is silent.
I wait for a few seconds and then say, ‘So where are we now? It’s like you’ve deliberately brought us to a spot but you’re not sure where to take it from here.’
‘I’m not sure where we are,’ he says. ‘Where are we?’
‘We’re sitting outside a room trying to make sense of what’s going on inside,’ I say.

He laughs and then lapses into silence again.
‘It’s been difficult, this,’ he says.
‘Talking about Mel?’ I ask.
‘No, the whole thing. Coming to see you. Mum and Dad both said to me that this was going to be an intense time, coming twice a day, and that I’d have to be strong.’
‘And has it?’
‘It’s been hard to get up in the mornings. I’m so tired. But I guess having these sessions has given me something to get up for.’
‘I wonder if that’s what your parents meant,’ I say.
‘What do you mean?’
‘They’re talking about it being emotionally difficult. You’re talking about fitting sessions into a schedule or the effort of getting up in the mornings. It’s as though you’re leaving your feelings out.’
‘Well it has been emotional I guess, especially at the beginning.’
‘You felt more emotional at the beginning.’
‘I felt very anxious about what would happen. I thought that maybe we’d find something that I didn’t want to find, that we’d be looking behind the scenes and there’d be something there I didn’t want to face about what makes me tick.’
‘You don’t feel that any more?’
'No, that anxiety has gone away now.'
'You don't feel that you need to Zero a bad part.'
'No, not any more.'
'You were worried that we'd be looking behind the scenes.'
'Well we have I guess. I have felt more aware of things like anxiety and anger, my feelings I suppose. I'm more aware of them now I guess and I'm more conscious that I have to do something about them.'
'You feel you have to do something about them.'
'Don't I? Isn't that what you've been saying?'
'Maybe being aware of them is the important thing. Being aware that behind the scenes there are some pretty intense feelings shaping your experiences.'

Joseph is not looking convinced. It's as though there's something puzzling him, something about our conversation that hasn't touched the essential thing. We sit a little awkwardly without speaking, me watching Joseph's face and him frowning and looking into his lap.

'I'm not sure why I'm telling you this,' he says at last, 'but there was a moment in one of our earlier sessions, right at the end, when we were talking about something and the time had ticked past the hour and I'd already heard the car pull up outside and I wanted to leave, and I said, "Well we've finished," and you said, "No, we haven't, not yet." I felt really trapped, like you wouldn't let me go.'

'You were feeling trapped in that earlier session,' I say. 'You wanted to go but you felt I wouldn't let you.'

'That's right.'
'I wonder if it was what we were talking about or ....'
'Yes!' he says urgently, 'it was what we were talking about! I didn't want to talk about it, we'd gone in quite deep, and I wanted to leave. But you wouldn't let me. I'm glad really that you wouldn't let me.'

'You were both wanting to escape and wanting to be trapped by me. You were wanting me to force you to continue.'

'Yes.'
'And the reason you’ve brought this up now is that you’re feeling the same, you’re both wanting to escape and wanting me to stop you from escaping.'

'Yes.'

'And it’s to do with sex,' I say. 'You’ve been trying to find a way of talking about it, but it hasn’t quite happened, we haven’t found a way.'

'Yes.'

'You were trying to find a way when you were talking about Mel. And you’re worried that we’re not to going to have the time to talk about some really important stuff before we finish tomorrow.'

At that moment I glance at the clock and am surprised to see that we’ve gone overtime. 'Goodness is that the time?' I say.

'Does it matter?' asks Joseph impatiently. 'Can’t we go on?'

'We can’t, I’m afraid. I’ve got some other commitments I have to keep. But this is where we must start this afternoon.'

Abruptly he’s gone and I soon find myself caught up in other matters. But in the back of my mind I know that we’re coming to a crucial moment in our work.

A couple of hours later I’m busy getting the room ready for our second session. I set out the glasses and the water jug, and clear away the toys strewn around the carpet by another client. All the while I’m thinking about Joseph.

There has been a shift. I can feel it now during our sessions.

He seems, for instance, to be more genuinely aware of his feelings. He’s not just asking for a Six Step Programme or for a way of thinking about things, he’s now wanting the work to stay at a deeper level. He’s taking us into the area which holds the most fears for him. He’s pleading with me to help him resist the impulse to flee. He’s disappointed, almost dismayed, when the session ends.

This seems to be connected to a shift in the power dynamics in the room. For a long time it was important for Joseph to stay in control, to be calling the shots, to be keeping things at the surface. The question of how and what
we would talk about was less important than the question of who was in charge here. When I took the lead, he would acquiesce but withdraw emotionally so that his commitment was purely intellectual. The letter but not the spirit.

The shifts in the power dynamics at the beginning of our session this morning reveals something different. He began by beating Allen into submission and telling me that the tree in my garden was ugly. He put me on the defensive and during the photo ‘show and tell’ he resisted any attempts by me to regain the initiative. But then, about half way through the session, something moved. It was like a development of the ‘But anyway’ conversation where he asked us both to look at something difficult and puzzling. He steered the conversation towards Mel and what happens in secret places when you don’t think the adults are listening. It’s as if he was saying, ‘Steve, you’ve been suggesting that there’s something sexual and difficult that needs to be talked about, and you’ve made it clear that it’s up to me to take us into that territory. I haven’t wanted to do it, I find it awkward and exposing, but I can now see that you won’t be put off, that you’ll bring me back to this difficulty whenever you can. So no more “but anyways”! I trust that this is what needs to be done.’

In hindsight it’s not difficult to see the seeds of this shift in earlier sessions; the putting of the imaginary ball into my hands, the requests that I shake the rope, the questions about how to proceed.

Seen through a Winnicottian lens, this is an omnipotence looking for a way of being contained. Actual omnipotence is frightening: there are no felt boundaries. To feel omnipotent is (paradoxically) to feel out of control; the would-be dictator always feels isolated, unheld, alone, unconnected, always feels caught up in a futile attempt to impose his will in a world that’s too big and too chaotic and, ultimately, too hostile. There is a part of Joseph that yearns for a strong father figure, for someone who is involved but firm, who will say, ‘I’ll take you to Steve’s tomorrow, but my own priorities are important and I’ll take you at 9 am.’ Without a containing father, Joseph feels too powerful, too much left alone with his omnipotent fantasies.
So, one aspect of the shift is Joseph’s finding a way of being contained. It’s like setting off into the unknown and finding a safe-enough companion. I find myself remembering his interest in Dante’s guide into the Inferno. In some important way we have moved beyond an old paranoid-schizoid pattern. We seem to have established an alliance where we notice and resist distractions, where we can talk together about the ‘but anyways’.

But there remains (as always) something else, something elusive and hidden … something to do with sex and intimacy, a confused part of Joseph’s life where anger and desire are muddied. There is a thwarted seeking for intimacy, an attempt to feel and find love which gets cut-off and then re-routed into a kind of suppressed but felt rage. I feel that we’re at the edge of this territory and that Joseph now wants us to enter it.

As soon as Joseph arrives for our afternoon session, it’s clear that he knows what he wants to talk about, that he’s been thinking about it since this morning.

‘I want to tell you about what happened in the room with Mel,’ he says. ‘It’s no big deal really, but for some reason I want to tell you about it … ’

‘Good,’ I say. ‘I’m ready.’

‘We were sitting in the room with the door shut and in front of the computer searching the Internet. After a while we started to type in words like “sex” and “dick” and “fuck”. It was hilarious and we were getting some pretty weird sites, I can tell you. We were laughing really loudly, it was really fun, and it was only afterwards that we noticed that the high window was open and thought that maybe we’d been overheard. No-one said anything.’

‘It was pretty exciting,’ I say.

‘It was, because it was forbidden territory, kind of risky’.

‘Because it was about sex and Mel was a girl.’

‘It was exciting but it wasn’t really sexual. It was the forbidden territory thing that made it exciting. It was exciting but safe.’

‘It felt risky, you said, but also safe.’
‘Well it felt risky just because we’d never done anything like this before, but we knew it wasn’t going anywhere, it had no consequences, we weren’t going to do anything. We both knew that I was leaving soon to go to Australia and that we wouldn’t see each other for a long time. But it felt kind of like being on the edge, trying something a bit dangerous or something.’

‘Like making a move but feeling that it wouldn’t go too far,’ I say.

‘I’ve had very little sexual experience actually,’ says Joseph. ‘Sometimes I feel a bit strange about this, I mean I’m sixteen after all and I guess most kids my age have done some fooling around or something.’

‘But not you,’ I say.

‘No.’

‘It just hasn’t happened.’

‘I’ve never really felt the need,’ he says. ‘I don’t feel frustrated, I don’t feel that I miss it … maybe I don’t miss it because I’ve never had it, I don’t know what it’s like. It’s funny actually, but there’s some plan being made by my mother at the moment to set me up with a girl to do some dancing lessons. It should be quite fun.’

‘There’s a bit of a mystery here,’ I say. ‘Here is Joseph telling me about his lack of sexual experience … and you say that you don’t miss it, you’re not frustrated … and had I known nothing else I might have concluded that here was someone without much of a sex drive. And yet the reason he is sitting here is that he’s been involved in a couple of sexual acts in public.’

‘There was a feeling of panic just then when you said that,’ Joseph says. ‘Like when you were talking I wanted you to stop, but there’s also a feeling that I want to go further. It wasn’t a big feeling, and maybe it’s not important, but I just wanted to let you know that I’d had it.’

‘The way you notice and express these feelings has changed the whole dynamic of our conversations,’ I say. ‘We’re working together now.’

‘Yes,’ says Joseph.

‘And so we have this puzzle,’ I say.

‘Well,’ says Joseph, closing his eyes and putting his hand on his forehead, as he often does when thinking deeply. ‘For a long time as I was growing up, I’ve felt very confused about my sexuality. I’ve felt at times that I was a girl,
and at times that I was a boy. That’s been very confusing for me. I didn’t
know what I was. Recently I’ve realised that I’m male, that I’ve got a male
sexuality, and now that I’ve made that decision it’s going to be important for
me to use and express my sexuality more than I have in the past.’

‘You’ve made that decision,’ I say.

‘It’s like for a long time I’ve been stranded in the sea between two
islands, and now I’ve given up looking for an island where I can be both, and
instead I’ve now decided to clamber up onto the man’s island. In a way I’ve
made that decision, and in a way I’ve been pushed by society.’

‘You’ve been pushed by society,’ I say. ‘Do you mean the bullies, the
ones who have called you gay?’

‘No it’s not the bullies. It’s more what’s expected generally. It’s like there
are only these two islands, one where I think of myself as a boy and the other
where I think of myself as a girl, and everyone expects as a matter of course
that I’ll move towards the first. Going to the other island is like swimming
against the tide.’

‘Against society’s tide rather than your own,’ I say.

But Joseph ignores the implication behind my comment. ‘It’s a great
relief to have made the decision to swim for the boy island,’ he says. ‘That’s
been a great relief. It’s like there’s a list of conditions or a script that I can
now follow, about what you have to do if you’re on this island.’

‘The list tells you what to do. It’s less confusing that listening to your
confused feelings about your own sexuality.’

‘I guess that’s right. I’ve made a decision to follow the script that says
I’m a boy.’

‘So I wonder what’s happened to the female part.’

‘It’s like she’s in hibernation, my voice is telling me, and she’ll come out
again when I’ve had children,’ Joseph says, then looks quickly up into my
face. ‘I didn’t expect to say that! I thought I’d eliminated her, that I’d made
the decision to turn my back on her!’

‘She mustn’t be Zero-ed,’ I say. ‘She’s a part of you, and perhaps she’s
feeling pretty emotional now that she knows that you’ve made this decision
to climb onto the male island.’
‘She’s crying,’ says Joseph.
‘She’s crying,’ I say.
‘She’s upset. I can feel that she’s upset.’
We sit quietly for a moment and it’s only when I fear that something might important might evaporate that I break the silence.
‘Perhaps it was her that was masturbating in the library,’ I say. ‘Perhaps she’s feeling angry and wants somehow to express her rage.’
‘My immediate reaction is “no”,’ says Joseph, ‘but that voice is saying “yes”. My male voice, the conscious one, says “no”. But unconsciously there’s another answer.’
‘The female voice says “no”.’
‘The unconscious one. It doesn’t seem to have a gender or a role … You know, for some reason I find myself thinking about those super-fast, pencil-shaped planes that get from London to New York in no time.’
‘The Concords,’ I say.
‘Yes, that’s them. I have this aerodynamic impulse myself, to get quickly from one spot to another a long distance away.’
‘The impulse to escape, the “but anyway” impulse. To get away from uncomfortable feelings,’ I say.
‘Yes, exactly,’ he says.
‘And you run the risk of leaving a part of you behind, ignored, unhappy, revengeful.’
‘Crying,’ he says.
‘A frustrated female part which needs to exact its revenge.’
‘It’s like making enemies of former friends’, says Joseph.
‘Perhaps it’s important to renew the friendship,’ I say.
Again we sit in silence for a while. Our time is almost up and there’s a feeling in the room that what has had to be said has been said. I say something about the possibility that one day the issue of his sexuality may resurface, that he might find himself attracting, or attracted to, a male, and that perhaps he’s felt some of this already. I also say that there are people who feel partly male and partly female who have found islands where their
bisexuality has found a home. He acknowledges these remarks with a nod but makes no comment.

`How are you feeling?' I ask just before he gets up to go.

`Oh I'm all right.'

`She's a bit of a mess though,' I say.

I have five minutes on the phone with Giles soon afterwards and try to describe what has happened and the mixture of relief and concern that I'm feeling.

`But Giles,' I say, `I wonder a bit about taking this female part too literally, about speaking about "her" as if she were a person who actually existed. I know that Jung talks about the complexes being gods, each having their say in what goes on, and there are times when I can't think of a better way of dealing with the complexity of things other than by talking about different parts. But is this being too literal?'

`It depends, I suppose,' says Giles, `on whether the personification of the female part broadens the picture, gives you more room to move ... gives you access to places that were previously shut off.'

`Whether it's a healing fiction,' I say, remembering the title of one of Hillman's books.

`It seems to be a way of looking at things, a construction, which illuminates dark places,' says Giles.

Like the candles in my dream, I think to myself. Perhaps the candles in my cathedral dream are ideas, perspectives, theories, ways of thinking?

`I worry, of course,' I say, `that I put this idea into Joseph's mind, that he's just feeding back to me what I've put into him.'

`How so Steve?'

`Well do you remember a week or so ago I told Joseph that he had locked up a part of himself in a dark room, the suffering part, the little-boy part that feels things.'

`You're worried that this "revelation" today is simply a regurgitation of your own interpretation?'
‘Not really,’ I say. ‘The thought does cross my mind, but no ... it seems more likely that together we’re finding a way of describing something Joseph actually experiences. It’s probably not the only way of describing it ... other words, other perspectives ... other stories ... could be used ...’

‘This story makes sense,’ says Giles.

‘Yes, it makes sense!’ I say, seeing for the first time a new meaning in the expression. ‘This story makes something, it creates something ... a kind of order out of chaos ... it brings things together in a meaningful way. Where there wasn’t sense before, now it has been made.’

‘This is Taylor’s thesis, isn’t it Steve. That the postmodern quest is not to do with finding meaning, with stripping things back to their essences to reveal something that existed all along ... God, a natural order, whatever. The postmodern quest is the invention of meaning, the articulation of a story that makes sense. It’s about giving a shape to experience that makes a difference to how we feel about our lives.’ From what you’ve said, this is what Joseph and you are doing together. You’re making something ... a story if you like. The articulation of this story makes a difference.’

‘And I guess what I’m hoping,’ I say, ‘is that this is an embodied story, that it’s been put together out of the raw material of his actual experiences, his present bodily feelings and that it somehow embraces what it is that he’s wanting to become.’

‘Unlike his more conscious story ...’

‘The supersonic Concord who left behind an disowned passenger,’ I say. ‘There are stories that connect us to life and stories that whoosh us away from it.’

‘The story that you’re creating together here,’ says Giles, ‘has the potential to bring previously-unrelated parts of himself back into relationship.’

‘The good side at one end of the sea, and the concealed and sour-smelling evil at the other,’ remembering his first story and being struck yet again at how often something said at a first session expressed in a nutshell something that then needed to be amplified, circumambulated, lost, rediscovered and then articulated in a more embodied and relational form.
I've been writing and thinking about Joseph, about what it is that he's attempting to do as he tells me his stories. But what is it that I'm doing when I tell a story?

Take last week, for example, when I lectured to a group of undergraduates. What was it that I was attempting to do when I told them the Grimm story, "The Prince Afraid of Nothing"?

Once upon a time there lived a prince who had got tired of living at home in his father's house and as he was afraid of nothing he thought: I'll go out into the wide world, I won't be bored there, and I'll see plenty of strange sights. So he took leave of his parents and set out on his journey.¹

Actually the story I told was not simply the Grimm fairytale. I kept interrupting the narrative each time the prince found himself in a new situation: leaving the castle, encountering a giant, fetching a magical apple, being blinded by the enraged giant, finding a cure for his blindness, enduring torments for a beloved and celebrating a wedding. At each of these points in the story I reflected on the prince's perspective at that moment, and suggested to the students that in our lives we experience many of these perspectives at the same time, and that our feelings and actions are perhaps more the result of a partly successful attempt to reconcile different perspectives than a clear consequence of any single one. It was, at one level, an attempt to encourage a Nietzschian multi-perspectivism.² So perhaps the answer to my question is that in telling a story I'm attempting to teach something.

But if I was using this fairytale-plus-reflections as a didactic tool, it was something of a fizzler. It didn't work very well. 'I felt confused during your presentation Steve,' one of the students said at the end of the session. 'I enjoyed the story, I found myself engaged with the narrative and held by the way you weaved extracts from various sources into your presentation, but I kept wondering what it was exactly that I was being asked to think about.' The atmosphere in the room suggested to me that this student's experience was not unique.
So, had I just done it badly? Or were there other reasons why there was some confusion in the room? Was my aim really didactic, or was I trying to do other things as well? And is it possible that there were assumptions in the room about the nature of story-telling that confused the communication, assumptions not unrelated to those which confused and limited me in some of my sessions with Joseph?

This, of course, is the argument of this thesis, that there are in fact widespread misunderstandings in our culture about the act of telling a story and that this has quite profound consequences not only for teaching but also for therapy. I have been suggesting in these pages that a story is not primarily a cultural object, an encapsulated truth made intelligible so that it can be passed from client to therapist or from teacher to pupil (Joseph telling me about good and evil, Steve preaching the virtues of a Nietzschean multiperspectivism); it is instead the currency of exchange between teller and listener, a way of sharing maps and inviting joint-exploration ventures, a means by which relationships are formed and fostered. We tell stories not in order to persuade but to connect, not to teach wisdom but to find and develop links, not to reveal a truth about anything but to expand (by creating possible meanings which are useful) the intersubjective space which is formed by the interlocking boundaries of our personal worlds. If it is true that vitality is generated within the intersubjective or relational field, then the act of telling a story is an attempt to animate the world by agitating and enlivening the intersubjective space. Or, to put it more simply, we tell stories in order to love and be loved.

Not, of course, that we’re usually aware of this. The need to tell a story is felt more as a bodily impulse. It’s a form of nature naturing, as inevitable an aspect of being human as breathing (we don’t breathe out as a result of the thought that it’s time to expel the used air) or the centipede’s walking (mindbogglingly complex only when analysed!). I simply must speak. I need to find a way of articulating something elusive or complex, something as-yet-unformed.

In its conception this impulse seems to have very little to do with other people. It seems to be selfish, a response to an entirely internal need. I need
to make sense of something for myself. There is an unknown something, a chaotic or confusing something, and in its present undifferentiated form I cannot use it, talk about it, feel the power of it, feel myself energised by the aesthetics of it. I have an intuitive sense that it would be good to be able to do some of this, that if I could find the right words then some pressure or heaviness or muddiness or impotence or loneliness that I’m feeling might be alleviated. So I must speak, and unconsciously I begin to play with the chaotic elements, to muck around with them in exactly the same way a toddler does with a new combination of toys or blocks. (Play is not a preparation for living, but a continuing component of the creative life.) I’ve got to muck around, I’ve got to play, until I’ve formed some kind of relationship with the elements, or with the unknown world into which the elements have taken me. I’ve got to play until the chaos has been patterned in some way, until I’ve made the unknown more familiar. The alternative is to be frightened by the world and to be pushed back into myself, a particularly postmodern temptation in a world where God is dead and Gaia ailing. Thus I begin the early drafts of this thesis by playing with the elements; creating a Joseph and investing the invention with the characteristics of many of my most challenging or unsettling clients, writing scenes which seemed to convey something of the atmosphere of actual interactions, and then superimposing a partly fictitious account of a supervision with Giles. I muck around with scenes and dreams and thoughts and feelings until what initially felt dizzying, distanced and disempowering begins to take on some coherence and starts to lead to connections of many kinds: with my past, between my bodily agitations and certain thoughts, between apparently unconnected ideas, with philosophic and psychoanalytic traditions, and with current challenges. Even in these earliest stages a story is a verb, attempting to do something, not a noun attempting to be something. This playing with disparate elements is an attempt to temporarily reconcile uneasy internal coalitions and rivalries as well as being an attempt to make more room for imprisoned and previously unrecognized internal beings like Hannibal. It is therefore an attempt to be inclusive and pluralistic rather than single-minded and didactic.
So, in its inception, the impulse to tell a story seems to be about sorting out something for myself, clarifying an internal confusion. But even early on the audience is implied, is felt to exist. We seek out a response and adjust the story according to what we find or fail to find. As I'm writing my first draft I have my supervisors and unknown examiners in mind, I think about how various colleagues might react to the material; even as I'm sorting out my jumbled thoughts for the session with the undergraduates I'm imagining their faces and wondering where they're coming from, how they will respond to this material. The process involves continual adjustments; the business of storytelling is always dynamic, a tense and never-entirely-successful attempt to reconcile the need to make sense of internal realities with the need to be understood.

So the story never stands still, never arrives at a final form. It remains dynamic. And each attempt to tell a story has a destabilising effect on previous stories. A good-enough story sufficiently supported by a facilitating environment attempts a dismantling of some of the 'old story', allowing structural links to loosen or break so that more of the world can come in. This is Fordham's deintegration-integration and Bion's Ps+D. It's always a balancing act and the threat of an abyss is always present. Our fear of meaninglessness is one of the spurs to the story telling that arises out of our need to see connections, to feel ourselves connected. If I stop telling stories, I cease to be sane.

If the environment is insufficiently supportive or responsive, the storyteller is turned inwards. A story is fashioned to take the place of the holding environment, and this story necessarily must cut itself off from the unsympathetic external world. The story becomes tight, controlled, self-sufficient and solipsistic. It becomes disembodied. So much energy goes into such a holding operation that none is then available for an advance into the unknown but vitalising territory which, for others blessed with a more facilitating environment, is the real world of real interactions.

A young man (I'll call him John) came to see me some years ago living out exactly this kind of disembodied story. John had never had a girlfriend or a satisfying job, and he'd developed an alternative world which he inhabited,
a crystal world full of beautiful lights and labyrinthian corridors, which he
described to me one day as follows:

It's kind of like ... it's hard to describe ... it's like this ornate
crystal globe or cube that has all these pathways running in it ... and it's quite twisted and has various turns and stuff like that, and they go in all directions and in three dimensions, and ... and it seems to be stuck in time, it doesn't actually move forward at all! ... and there are all these crystal pathways that I follow and they tend to change or shift or get confused in the lighting effects of the globe ... like there are so many distractions or different paths to take ... So it's like this huge maze which is enclosed in a globe, and in fact there is no way out of the globe ...

And what I need to do to get out of it, I think, is to just do it. And yet I feel blocked from doing it, I just feel trapped in this thing, it feels too hard to just do it and get out ... In fact the longer I stay in here, the longer ... the more complicated the paths actually are, because I find new paths to take and stuff like that, and by going along them I'm making them more concrete and more real, more intricate, more twisted around itself, and I'm not making any real progress ...

There's a part of me that thinks that yes [the crystal globe] is an illusion, but it's actually better than being outside ... and surely it's not necessary to compromise the beauty of the thing to be free of it ... But it's so much like a cage. It's a very beautiful cage but it's still a cage. And I know it very well.15

In telling me this story, John was attempting to articulate a new one. This is how it has been, Steve, and in telling you about it I'm hoping that some new story will emerge. A story is an aspect of love-making. It is an attempt to articulate a desire and to elicit or provoke a response. Whenever John felt that my response was inadequate he would try another tack, a new story, sometimes insisting that he was stuck and the therapy was futile, wanting to punish me for my unresponsiveness and demanding that I change my ways and offer more. His stories were not just descriptions of psychological states, they were weapons (both offensive and defensive) wielded in a desperate campaign being fought over the issue of his involvement with the world.

John's crystal world was a disembodied story, cut off from lived experience and relationship with the world, self-nourishing, a self-sufficient
system living in a bubble, recycling stale and increasingly poisonous (but familiar) air, unable to flush away its shit. It existed (until he told me about it) as a noun rather than a verb, a lifeless construction rather than a living plant. An embodied story is our lifeline to psychological health. When we successfully take part in a story-telling, we're joined up to the world. We breathe in other people's stories, we breathe out our own. The air in my lungs is never simply mine.

We tell stories because our hearts are heavy with desire. Thus when we tell a story, we're less interested in having the listener think something than feel and do something. While it may be true that feeling and thinking are not two separate things (two separate actions), it's also true that to respond to a story with a disengaged and disembodied thought (a thought without its roots in the soil of the body) is to miss the point. We tell stories in order to affect the listener. We want the listener to shudder or panic, laugh or smirk, be quickened or saddened, feel gapped or connected. We, the storytellers, want to excite something in the listener, which when successful always affects a relationship. We want to excite love (even when, in our disappointed fury, our immediate impulse is to hurt, to cause pain or to kill). One aspect of introversion, that tendency to keep our best stories to ourselves, may well be a timidity that comes from too many failed attempts to excite a listener, too many attempted seductions that have gone wrong.

I'm suggesting, then, that when I told the story of "The Prince Afraid of Nothing" (and added my reflections on its seven locations), there was an implied agenda that had less to do with teaching than with relating, less to do with imparting truth than with enlivening an interactive field, less to do flashing than mating.

So, if it's true that when I'm telling a story I'm engaging with the world (real and imagined, flawed and ideal) and am attempting to affect or change my relationship to that world in some significant way, how then does this differ from what we assume a story to be? What are our assumptions?

Not far beneath the surface there are, I'd suggest, three main ones: that stories are carriers of truths, faithful descriptions of some reality (existential,
unconscious or fantastic); that stories are *entertainments*, diversions designed
to pass the time pleasantly and to take our minds off less-palatable realities;
that stories are *objects* which can be observed without involving our
participation. It’s possible to speculate that the student who didn’t know what
to think as I told my story was operating out of all three assumptions: that
Steve was trying to teach her something, that Steve was trying to entertain
her for some reason, and that Steve was putting before her some object of
value for her to appreciate and reflect on. Any suggestion that I might have
been trying to affect our relationship might have seemed faintly shocking or
peculiar to her. Yet that was what I was attempting to do, albeit largely
unconsciously, and I’m suggesting that one of the reasons why my attempt
was confusing to her was the existence of these dis-engaging assumptions.

Our culture is shot-through and hamstrung by these three assumptions
about the nature of a story.

‘This bird has been trapped in the classroom all night,’ says
the kindergarten teacher as she and the early arrivals watch the
bird cowering in a corner, cheerupping pathetically. One of the
children starts to cry, the others look worried. ‘I think we should
open the window wider and let it go.’

‘The bird is lonely,’ says Andy, the tearful one, always first to
school in the mornings. ‘It wants a cuddle.’

‘We can’t keep it here, Andy, it’s just going to feel more
frightened. It’s crying because it wants to get out. Letting it go is
the sensible thing, isn’t it.’

‘The poem was unfinished, wasn’t it,’ says 16 year-old
Alison, hoping that her extra reading about Coleridge and the
circumstances of the writing of ‘Kubla Khan’ will impress the
teacher she admires so much. ‘I was wondering if instead of
writing an analysis I could write an ending to it. Or could I do a
painting? I’ve got this painting in mind, based on the last lines
which describe the man besotted with the Abyssinian maid:

Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.’
‘You’d have to get stoned first!’ interjects her friend.
‘Coleridge was high, wasn’t he?’
‘We’re preparing you for university Alison,’ says the teacher
soberly but not unkindly, ‘and it’s important that you get practice
here expressing your ideas clearly, presenting them so that one
follows on from another in a logical order. That’s where your
essays have been weak this semester, and that’s what we’ve got
to address. We’ve got to get your marks up.’

‘Great concert, eh! Doesn’t it make you feel great! Doesn’t it
make you feel like running in the dark or something.’
‘So you liked it?’
‘I loved it!’
‘So what did you like about it? What made it so good do you
reckon.’
‘I can’t answer questions like that! I hate questions like that!
I knew you’d ask something like that, and it spoils things for me,
it distracts me!’
‘Have I said something wrong? Look, I was just trying to
make some conversation. You’re so bloody touchy these days.’

‘I had this dream last night – it was really weird, I’m not sure
what to make of it – about my lover storming out after an
argument and then being brought back dead, killed in an
accident,’ he says to his therapist, his pulse quickening as he
relives both the murderous fury of the confrontation and then the
desperate sense of loss when he saw the face in the coffin.
‘What does it mean?’
‘You’ve entered the depressive position at last! You’re
making progress! ... You’re frowning... Let me try to explain
...’

In all these cases the gap between the worlds of the story teller and the
listener remains unbridged as the listener regards the story from a Cartesian
distance, unaware that the story has been told not in order to reveal
something, not to place an object on the table for dissection and analysis, but
in order to engage the other and further a relationship. The unconscious
assumptions about the nature of a story prevent the story from achieving its
objective.

Of course the psychoanalytic literature is full of warnings about this, and
the trend in theory has been away from Freud’s disengagement and towards
an empathic involvement in the intersubjective space. Nonetheless we remain, as a culture, dominated by a disengaged rationalism. When we hear stories (women’s stories, indigenous stories, our children’s stories, our psyche’s stories) our gut reaction is not to ask *What is this story trying to do and how am I affected?* but *From what emotionally disengaged distance can I place myself in order to evaluate the truth or significance of this story?*

Of course distance and rationalism have a place; civilised life would not be possible without them. They are, for example, our defence against the tyranny of the crowd; they are gateways to all kinds of insights and advances, scientific and otherwise. It is partly because we need in our work a more distanced clarity that we attempt to look again at our experiences through the eyes of our supervisors.

At the same time, the writing of this thesis has revealed to me the extent to which I have been unconsciously caught up in a kind of rationalism that has led me, at times, to miss the point of my clients’ communications, to receive a story as if it were a noun rather than a verb. At one level the writing of the thesis (the telling of this story) is an attempt to mate with a less constricting and more vital world.
Chapter 14 Making room

‘I’m tired,’ says Joseph as he slumps into his chair at the beginning of the first of two sessions on what I’m assuming is our last day.

‘TV?’ I ask.

‘No, not this time. I went to bed a bit earlier than usual last night. I’m tired because I’ve been working so hard. I’m building this room under our house you see, down in amongst the foundations, and yesterday I spent hours moving earth, trying to make the space big enough for me to sit comfortably down there. I’m going to put carpet down and bring in a sofa and chair.’

‘You’re building a space for yourself underneath the house,’ I say.

‘Yes, it’s going to be really good I think,’ he says, though he’s looking more exhausted by the work than animated by the prospect.

‘You’re really throwing yourself into this,’ I say.

‘It’s hard work.’

‘You talked to me earlier in the week about how when you felt a certain kind of anger, you’d experience this impulse to throw yourself into some gardening. I’m wondering if this is similar.’

‘Maybe,’ he says. ‘I’m not sure.’

‘But it feels good to be burrowing away down there, creating a space for yourself underneath the house.’

‘I’m just really tired,’ he says and yawns. I’m feeling his reluctance to go where I’m nudging him, a renewed defensiveness after the catharsis of yesterday’s revelations.

‘You’re not wanting to go down that track,’ I say.

‘I’m just making a room for myself down there and I’m not sure that there’s any particular significance in that, is there?’
'Maybe, maybe not,' I say. 'It doesn't sound unimportant.'

'Well I'm certainly thinking about the room a lot,' he says, relaxing somewhat. 'I find myself planning it and thinking about what it's going to be like.'

'It sounds to me as if you might be making some space in your life for the girl you found yourself talking about yesterday.'

'Making some space?' he says. 'I'm not sure. Maybe. That's not what I was thinking about just then.'

'You were thinking about something different.'

'Well nothing specific. It's just that you interrupted my train of thought, though I don't think I can tell you what the train of thought was. I suppose I was thinking about whether we are going to be ready to finish this afternoon.'

'What do you think?'

Joseph is quiet for a minute, then says, 'Nothing. I've got no reaction.'

'There's nothing,' I say.

'It's not so much that there absolutely nothing,' he says, again shutting his eyes to more clearly see some internal image. 'I have this sense of dropping something down a hole, into a cave, and it hits some water down there and there are ripples, but it's muffled, it's not clear what the reaction is.'

'You're dropping something down into a hole inside you,' I say.

'The question, I suppose,' he says. 'The question about whether we're ready to finish or not.'

'And although there are ripples down there, although there's some reaction, it's too far away from your conscious mind to know what it is.'

'Something like that, I guess, though I do want to finish. I hope we've finished.'

'You're wanting to get on with things,' I say. 'To put all of this behind you.'

'Yes,' he says. 'And I'm tired.'

'They are your conscious feelings, though maybe the ripples signify something different.'
'Maybe,' Joseph says. 'But I do want to finish today.'
'Perhaps it's wise for us just to note this, to be aware that there's activity beneath the surface, that there are things going on down there that aren't easy for us to see clearly or to understand.'
'I guess,' he says, and sits silently, a little restlessly, occasionally yawning.
'And the girl you were talking about yesterday, the one you thought you'd turned your back on but who turned out to be crying. Is she still around?'
'I've been thinking more about her,' he says. 'And I've been aware, in a way, of how she's feeling. She's not crying any more.'
'She's not crying.'
'No, she's calmed down or something. She's meditating.'
'Just sitting in a quiet space on her own,' I say. 'Perhaps you're building the room to give her a safe place to exist.'
I don't like the way I've said this. 'You're doing x because of y.' This kind of reductive causal thinking always leaves too much out; no doubt there are lots of reasons why Joseph is building this underground room. It would have been better to have left causality out of it and to have said instead, 'Perhaps she'll feel quite safe down there.'
'Maybe it's connected,' he says and then continues without the prompts that I've been feeling called upon to provide so far this morning. 'I feel I know her quite well really ... She's younger than me, about 14, and she's solid with big eyes and red lips, like a Disney character I guess. She's quite temperamental, and gets annoyed when people bug her. She doesn't want to be bothered, talked to, helped, or at least that's what she says, though I rather doubt this.'
'She too wants the sessions to end, or at least she says she does!' I say with a smile, and Joseph smiles too.
'I can picture what she's wearing,' he says. 'It's a blue and green kimono and on the back there are these red fire-breathing dragons!'
'Look out!' I say.
‘Yes, she’s got a fiery temper, though not as much now as she used to. Now that I’m recognising her existence, she’s much less fiery, she doesn’t need to be so worked up.’

‘Allowing her some space in your life takes the heat out of her fire,’ I say.

‘She’s impatient still,’ he says. ‘She’s not all sweetness and light, not by any means. She still gets impatient with questions.’

‘She wouldn’t like it much if she was sitting in your chair,’ I say, and again Joseph smiles.

‘She loves making things, doing things with her hands, she loves good food and wine, she loves sleeping … and the thing she loves the most are beach parties.’

‘Beach parties?’

‘Yes, when everyone gets together down at the beach after the sun has gone down, and there are people around a fire on the sand and there’s singing and flirting and lots of laughing and mucking around. She loves that, with all her friends around and the sound of the waves but you can’t see them except when the moon comes out and you see these silver streaks on the surf. That’s her favourite, that’s what she loves the most.’

‘She wouldn’t want to be confined to an underground room for the rest of her life,’ I say.

‘She loves beach parties,’ says Joseph, gently reclaiming her story.

We talk quietly about other things for a while before he leaves. There’s a feeling of winding down in the air. We’re both very tired.

And now he’s back again for our last session. We haven’t made the decision consciously, we haven’t openly acknowledged to each other that this is to be our last, we haven’t even discussed it properly. It’s just assumed. I feel a tinge of guilt, of weakness, about this.

Since leaving me this morning Joseph has been digging out more of his room and he begins by telling me about it.

‘I can almost stand up now!’ he says. ‘Just another hour or so of digging and I’ll be able to stand up.’

‘Then the digging will be finished,’ I say.
‘Well for the time being,’ he says. ‘I’m hoping that I haven’t finished growing, that I’m going to end up a lot taller than this, so maybe some time in the future I’ll have to dig some more out. Or maybe we’ll go back to America before that’s necessary. I don’t know. But for now, I’ve nearly finished the digging.’

‘The hard work is nearly over,’ I say.

‘Well, I’ve been talking to her again,’ he says suddenly.

‘Since our last session?’

‘Yes, while I was in the shower. I got all dirty doing the digging, and I didn’t want to come here in that state, and while I was in the shower I found myself actually talking to her. She was telling me that she’s feeling much happier now that I’m taking notice of her, and that she thinks there’s no need to come any more, that the work has been done.’

‘So even if you’re not sure whether it’s been done or not, she’s sure.’

‘I’m sure now too. Listening to what she had to say was like finding out what I think deep down.’

‘Being in touch with her is like being in touch with a deeper part of yourself,’ I say.

‘Maybe it’s something like that,’ says Joseph. ‘Anyway, she’s not backward with her opinions! She told me that she doesn’t like my singing in the shower. I was singing, you see. I’m feeling relieved and ... something else ... relieved and happy, I think, that I’ve re-established contact. She’s let me know that she needs to be taken account of, that she needs to have attention paid to her needs. Anyway, I’m feeling relieved and feel that we’ve done our work and that everything will be OK now. I feel that as long as I keep in touch with her, then I’ll know my feelings about things.’

‘In some crucial sense she is the key to your feelings,’ I say.

‘I feel happy and relieved at the moment, I feel like singing, and it’s something to do with her, with her being in my life again.’

There is a nagging feeling inside me that this is too neat a conclusion to our work, that there’s an element of contrivance here, if not in the revelation and general sense of relief then in the way Joseph is tidying up the loose ends so completely. But then that’s what we do, isn’t it, when something big is
coming to an end? We tidy up the loose ends even when deep down we know
that nothing is final.

‘It’s a relief,’ I say, ‘and you find yourself singing in the shower.’

‘That’s right,’ says Joseph. ‘I feel relieved.’

‘And you’re feeling that we’ve done enough together, that we’re ready to
finish this afternoon.’

‘I think so,’ he says. ‘What do you think?’

‘I think the Joseph sitting in front of me now is changed in some very
significant ways from the Joseph I first met, and even the Joseph who
returned after what happened in the library. You’re less anxious ... less
frightened of something inside yourself perhaps. We work together better
now than we used to.’

‘So we’ve fixed the problem?’ he asks.

‘It’s not as if you’ll never be anxious or angry or frightened again,’ I say.

‘Life’s not like that. I’d say that you’re less likely now to have something
like the library incident happen, but it’s not impossible and there will
continue to be difficulties with complicated and confused feelings.’

‘So you don’t think we are ready to finish?’

‘No, I think we’re ready to finish. We’ve done enough, I reckon. But I
feel pretty sure that there will be big challenges in front of you, and some of
them may be distressing. I’m wondering if you’d ask for help if things got
very confusing again, or very tense? I’m wondering if you’d get in touch
with me again if you needed to?’

‘I think I would,’ he says. ‘I’ll be aware of whether I need help again or
not. As long as I keep in touch with her.’

‘I feel better about finishing today knowing that you’d ask for help in the
future if you needed it.’

‘So,’ says Joseph looking at the clock. There are still about twenty
minutes to go till the end of the session. ‘Is that it? Can I go?’

‘I guess I want to say a couple of other things,’ I say. ‘You told me that
you didn’t know why you did what you did in the library, that “a demon
came over you”. Now we know there was anger involved, and a quite strong
impulse on your part, over a long period of time, to deny certain feelings. We
also know that this girl part is connected to these feelings and that she’s been feeling ignored and upset and very angry.’

Joseph is sitting quietly, just listening. I don’t know what he’s making of this but feel sure that he wants me to continue.

‘We also know, now, that we’ve got somewhere together. Just recently you’ve started to speak more from your feelings, from your intuitions even when you didn’t know what they meant or where they might lead.’

‘Like when I mentioned I kept saying “but anyway”,’ he says.

‘Yes, exactly,’ I say. ‘I’ve felt a shift in you over the last week or so.’

‘I’ve felt different, though I don’t exactly know what I mean by that.’

‘There’s another thing I want to mention, though perhaps it’s not important,’ I say. ‘Maybe it would make sense if we were to imagine that the baby who died was a girl. Maybe your parents were unconsciously expecting or hoping that you would be a girl, and perhaps this has contributed to some of the confused feelings you’ve talked about.’

Joseph looks suddenly startled. ‘A girl?’

‘The baby that died,’ I say, suddenly doubting that he’d mentioned a dead baby yesterday.

‘The baby was a girl,’ he says.

‘You knew it was a girl?’

‘Yes, didn’t I say that?’

‘Maybe you did. I don’t think so. I think you told me that you didn’t know the sex.’

‘No, it was a girl, definitely a girl... You know, what you’ve just said reminds me of something that happened a long time ago. Dad and I were looking at the cover of a fashion magazine, at some model, and he said to me that if I had been a girl then that’s what I would have looked like. Maybe he sometimes looked at me and wondered what the girl who died would have looked like.’

‘Maybe he or your mother look at you sometimes and see a daughter,’ I say.

‘Maybe,’ he says. ‘I must ask Mum what the girl would have been called. Perhaps it was Julie or Melissa?’
‘It would be interesting to find out,’ I say.
‘You know,’ says Joseph, ‘I think the girl part got shaken up a bit when I first saw you. I mean before the library thing.’
‘You think that what we did then shook her up.’
‘And she didn’t like it. She became aware of her existence and she didn’t like it.’
‘Or perhaps she thought that we might discover her existence and she didn’t like that. She’d got used to her dark room.’
‘Maybe,’ he says. ‘It’s just that I have this feeling that she felt stirred up then, agitated somehow.’
‘Through something we did.’
‘I guess so, but I don’t know what it was.’
‘There was often a feeling in me that there was something missing in our sessions, that there was something hiding or out of view. The existence of Melissa or Julie makes more sense of this feeling.’
‘I felt her out of the picture,’ he says.
‘You thought you’d put her behind you, that she no longer existed,’ I say.
Joseph sits silently again.
‘I wonder if you remember the story you told me in our first session, over a year ago,’ I say.
‘The one you read out in some meeting?’ he says. ‘Not really. It was something about the good and the bad wasn’t it.’
‘It was,’ I say. ‘Could I read it aloud to you?’
‘If you like,’ says Joseph.
‘Yes, I think I’d like to do that to finish off,’ I say. I go to my filing cabinet and get out the sheet on which it’s printed, then read out loud:

There’s the evil and the good, and between them is the sea, and at each end of sea there are two boxes of mystery.

At one side of the sea there are the good things, the sweet smelling, the comfortable and the good ruler.

On the other side, there is the evil and it’s all enclosed in bushes, a sense of not letting the rest of the world know what’s going on inside.

There’s the sour smelling things, the funny and evil kind of things, and an evil kind of a ruler. And also on the evil side there is a part that the
good side has conquered, and its armour is being taken off and it is being exposed and converted to the good.

And in the middle of the sea, and between the two sides, there is a sun which is a meeting point, not very high where neither will fight, like a conference area where they talk.

I’ve felt moved again by the story as I’ve read it out loud, by its aptness as a poetic description of the story Joseph has found himself in over the past year. This is what has happened. We’ve confronted what at first seemed like something bad or unacceptable, the exposed part has been subjected to some kind of conversion by the talking we’ve done in this meeting area, and something has been revealed. Its armour is being taken off. Was it Jung who said that everything is laid out in the first session?

But when I clamber out of my reverie and look up at Joseph’s face, I can see that he’s squirming. ‘God that’s embarrassing,’ he says.

‘You feel embarrassed as you hear this,’ I say, inwardly off balance because this is opening things up again at a time when I’m trying to engineer some kind of good-enough closure.

‘It’s so immature,’ he says.

‘It sounds immature to you,’ I reply.

‘Well, parts of it. Some of it sounds mature, other bits immature. It makes me squirm a bit.’

‘You wouldn’t tell the same story now,’ I say.

‘I guess that’s so,’ he says, then with supersonic speed he takes me to another world by telling me in five rushed minutes all about a film he saw on TV last night. Finally he finishes, I point to the clock, and he unexpectedly reaches over and offers his hand.

‘Well I guess that’s it,’ he says shaking my hand. ‘Good luck for the rest of your life!’

I’m gobsmacked by this unexpected gesture, by this out-of-place adultism, and perhaps it shows for a moment on my face. Then I smile, stand up and put my hand on his shoulder as we move towards the door.

‘Good luck to you too Joseph! And don’t forget what you said about keeping in touch with her and your feelings.’
344  CHAPTER 14 MAKING ROOM

As he leaves for the last time I realise that suddenly I am sapped of energy, full of doubts again, struggling to know in any certain way whether what we’ve achieved together was in any senses real. It’s like someone has just switched off a TV set.

‘So Giles, what do you make of that?’ I ask. I’ve already faxed my notes to him from these final sessions.

‘What do I make of it? Goodness, that’s much too broad a question! I don’t know where to start. I need some guidance from you, some indication of the territory you want us to be in here. What do you make of it?’

‘That’s just it Giles, I can’t make up my mind what I make of it. I know that something real has happened. But there’s also something unsettling about that ending, something too ... neat ... like it’s bordering on the contrived.’

‘Contrived by you or by Joseph?’

‘I’m not sure. Him I suppose, with me as the helpless observer ... again! It just seemed to neat, too much like loose ends were being tidied up.’

‘There’s always more, isn’t there Steve,’ says Giles. ‘You’ve had the revelation about the feminine and this has a climactic feeling about it, but there will always be more to come, hugely more. No matter how neat the conclusion there’s always the question, “And what’s the next thing?” All endings are artificial, unreal in the sense you’re using the word. Whenever anything is uncovered, you then reveal that this too doesn’t exist ... it’s a permanent deconstruction.’

‘I saw Joseph a couple of days ago in a public space,’ I say to Giles. ‘It was after that last session and he was walking along with a friend, absorbed in some kind of animated conversation and he didn’t see me. As I watched him I had a strong reaction, more like a bodily sensation than a thought. It was something like, “I do not know that boy! The boy who is walking along there with his friend is someone I hardly recognise.”’

‘It was a shock,’ says Giles. ‘You were out of the frame, looking on.’

‘I was watching a part of his life to which I had no access, you’re right. I remember thinking that here was someone I’d been sitting with for all these
intense sessions, talking about his dreams and his fears, struggling with his shame and anger, and the boy there in front of me, talking to his friend, is utterly unknown to me! It was a most peculiar feeling Giles ... most uncomfortable. He looked quite unlike any of the Josephs I thought I’d got to know quite well.¹²

‘You mustn’t forget that he’s shown you parts of himself that he keeps well-hidden in public. That’s been one of the main things, has it not?’

‘I suppose that’s true,’ I say. ‘But the sensation was not quite like that. It wasn’t, “I know more about this boy than other people do,” but “I don’t know the secret, deep-down Joseph at all.”’

‘But you see I doubt that there is such a thing as the deep-down Joseph. There’s no bedrock, no true Joseph for which all the other Josephs operate as elaborations or masks. We keep displaying different selves, we keep remaking our identity. Perhaps the only constant is the maker and the unmaker who has no particular goal.’

‘Perhaps,’ I say, half wanting to open up a discussion about Spinoza and his concept of conatus¹³ but at the same time knowing that right now I wasn’t up to it. ‘It’s sometimes so exhausting! I felt so drained during that last session, as if I’d been trying so hard for so long to allow as much complexity in as I could manage without being dizzied into impotence. I remember consciously thinking during that last session that the end was in sight, that it would all be finished in half an hour and that now that a resolution of sorts had been found I didn’t want anything new to surface! I just wanted it to be over.’

‘It comes across in your notes,’ says Giles. ‘You wanted to finish things off, you wanted to engineer an ending rather than let more come up and out.’

‘I felt there was more but I was too tired. I didn’t want to look any more. I’d had enough.’

‘Mmm.’

‘I’m worried, I guess, that the revelation of this disowned feminine part so clearly demonstrates my thesis, or elements of my thesis ... that I was deliberately resisting the intrusion of other stuff that might further complicate matters. It just doesn’t seem real to me that Joseph walked out the door after
that final session "reconnected to his female part". I know from my own problematic relationship to Hannibal that reality isn’t as ordered or neat as that."

'You’re worried that might have contrived things to fit your thesis.'

I don’t say anything for a bit.

'Not when I think about it Giles. No doubt my thesis has shaped my thinking and writing and so it's shaped my experience, but it works the other way too ... I didn’t know what my thesis was until I'd written three drafts of it! No, this wasn’t a contrived ending ... and there was lots about it which was clearly authentic, connected, evidence of genuine shifting I think. The way Joseph had been digging that day in his underground room, getting dirty and then singing in the shower, the feeling of enormous relief, finding himself feeling happy. These things were authentic, clearly authentic ...'

'So it’s ...'

'And there’s more that’s authentic,’ I say before I lose what feels to be an important thing. ‘You know I’ve said before that my experience with writing is that it takes me closer to a real experience, that I find something and not just create it. This kind of writing is not contrived, not in the sense we’re talking about it ... quite the opposite. This writing has brought me closer to a feeling of falseness that I was experiencing at the time. That disquiet, that sense of rounding things off in a too-neat way, was something that I was actually feeling at the time."

'The writing has revealed how this was for you,’ says Giles. ‘The image that comes to mind is of love-making. This particular moment in your love-making didn’t quite work.'

'It was as though I had the thought, in the middle of it all, that he was faking his orgasm,’ I say.

'And that thought, that he was faking his orgasm, came between you and a more whole-hearted enjoyment of the climax,’ says Giles.

'That, and the fact that I was exhausted ... we were both exhausted!’

'Yes, you’d done all this hard work together, there’d been this prolonged and sometimes difficult courtship and foreplay, and now suddenly, when it
was all meant to be reaching its climax, this thought that he was faking it
occurred to you and spoiled the ending.’
‘Yes,’ I say. ‘That’s exactly what it felt like.’
‘And that’s not good-enough?’
‘What do you mean?’
‘That tired and not-quite-coming-together ending isn’t good-enough?’
‘No, you’re right Giles. It is good enough … It’s just that it’s not like
Freud’s case studies, is it? It’s not complete like Dora or the Wolf Man …’
‘… with the essential thing revealed and confronted and resolved,’ says
Giles.
‘This ending,’ I say, ‘is closer to the way I actually experience things.’
Appendix

Robert Dessaix’s Description of his fantasy world, Pureland

Let me describe to you a city I know well, but you could not be expected to. The old town, where some of the zigzagging streets are still cobbled and the castle keep called Mokkó still stands intact and grey-black on the highest point, is on a promontory at the mouth of a small but swiftly flowing river. If we walk north from the keep, away from the sea (a choppy strait, with the mountains on the offshore island clearly visible to the south in good weather), we come to a more ordered, European part of the city – almost like Helsinki, really, with gracious Palladian buildings (mostly ochre and cream, but some duck-egg blue) enclosing thinly planted squares and lining well-planned streets. There are a few cafés and restaurants dotted about the streets here but if it were lunchtime and we wanted a more crowded, bohemian atmosphere we might head more east towards the escarpment above the river. This is the part of the city that was ‘outside the walls’ in an earlier century, so the streets are narrower and more crooked and the buildings quaintier and pokier. There’s the odd glimpse across the river below to pines and sand-dunes on the other bank. If you wanted something more up-to-date – shopping malls, glass and chrome delis, that sort of thing – you’d have to go northwest from the centre, out just a few kilometres inland. Down on the sea on the other side of the promontory from the river is a pleasant little bay – in fact, that’s what it’s called in the local language, The Little Bay – with a promenade and some expensive private houses with lush gardens on the hill
behind. It's quite a high hill — well, it curves round to form the promontory — so if you're down on the promenade at the water's edge you can't see the mountains hemming in the city from the north or the magnificent monastery, almost a Potala, soaring up brown and white and sheer above the foothills. Idyllic, really, although the winters can be severe.

This city does exist, but not quite in the same way as, say, Vancouver or Wellington. I don't wish to sound mystical, but it's existed for me since I was a small boy of about six, pottering around in the backyard where the bush cam up through the chook-yard to the edge of the back lawn. It was there in that backyard I started to imagine my own Pure Land. It wasn't just a fantasy or a game I played there with myself; it was and still is a parallel world....

... Already at six I could have drawn you a street map of the main city (severely rectilinear) and pinpointed it for you in my school atlas ... I hesitate to tell you what I call it — it's not that it's sacred or a secret, it's just that I want to keep it pure. And I fear your scorn.

Perhaps it's a case for psychiatric intervention, but over the four decades since I first drew a map for myself of the Righteous City — all right, call it K. — with its righteous rectangles, its parks and squares and public ponds, my Pure Land has not clouded over and disappeared from view as it ought to have done, but has grown denser and more economically and politically complex, and my map of the city has spread into a map of the island. And across the island snake railway lines (I used to know the timetables) and roads both paved and unpaved, there are airports, hospitals, castles, bridges, mines, hotels, even benches in particularly sunny spots on certain promenades. I can tell you the rates at the health farm in the mountains near the Blue Lake or take you on a tour of the Buddhist monastery on a clifftop in the south. I can recommend various cafes in a cafe in a town called V. (oddly enough, a mainly Russian Orthodox town and an important site of Orthodox pilgrimage) and run through the family history of the eighteenth century rulers of the district of B. I live there, after all. Even as I write this, I realise I'm being careful not to tell you a single untruth....
One effect, apart from a complete lack of interest in cricket or indeed in playing any kinds of games with little boys, even cards, was the immediate need I felt to create a Pure Language for my Pure Land. I would set up my own loom and weave my own language. Now, many children make up private languages, I know – sisters talk with brothers in secret codes, only children compile private vocabularies, prepubescent fraternities have their ritualistic gobbledygook and so on. But starting from the age of about eleven I began to do something much more ambitious and, I suppose, eccentric: I began to construct an Indo-European language of enormous grammatical and morphological complexity, with a history going back to pre-Roman times in Asia Minor, sound shifts, three scripts (one syllabic, thanks to the Cypriots), two main dialects and several regional variations on those dialects. If I’m alone and in a compulsively Pure-Landish mood, I’ll chat to myself in this language (the dialect depends on the persona I’m entering) and certainly all my dogs have heard a lot of it....

This is madness sprouting madness, you must be thinking. I suppose it is in a way, but my rational self seems powerless to stop it. It just proliferates in my head like a vine. Part of me lives there and has done for over forty years. Although I do remember making resolutions on significant dates (my twenty-first birthday, for example, my thirtieth birthday, a New Year’s Eve or two) to give it all up like masturbation, to put it away like some childish thing, it’s not something I can just swear off.
Endnotes

INTRODUCTION

2 Kohut and the self-psychologists. See for example Kohut (1984)
3 Jung and the post-Jungians. See especially Jung (1946)
4 This has been a preoccupation with all the post-Freudian schools of analytical thought.
6 Stern (1985) and Zinkin (1991)
7 James Hillman, ex-Jungian analyst and author (see bibliography)
8 Giles Clark is a senior training Jungian analyst, formerly from the UK and now based in Sydney.
9 See Taylor (1989) and Ellenberger (1970)
10 The idea that therapy is two people telling stories to each other is one that permeates the writing of Adam Phillips (1993, 1995)
11 Derek Jarman has his character Wittgenstein say

  'We learn to use words because we belong to a culture, a form of life, a practical way of doing things. In the end, we speak as we do because of what we do. And all this is a properly public affair. Philosophers in the tradition of Descartes start from the lonely self brooding over its private sensations. I want to overturn this centuries-old model. I want to start from our culture, our shared practical life together, and look at what we think and feel and say in these public terms.' (Jarman 1994)

12 'Behind your thoughts and feeling, my brother,' said Nietzsche 'there stands a mighty ruler, an unknown sage - whose name is self. In your body he dwells; he is your body.' [Zarathustra quoted pp 67 – 68 Kaufmann (1992)]
13 Spinoza suggested (see for example the Postulates following Prop 13 in Part 2 of Ethics) that our body is made up partly of impressions made as a result of collisions with other bodies and that these impressions have their necessary correlations in the mind as thoughts (and for Spinoza an emotion is a type of thought). I'm claiming, therefore, that to have an appreciation of the nature of particular ideas (such as those expressed in this thesis) one must know something about the bodily impressions out of which the ideas came.

14 These sections come after the asterix towards the end of each chapter. The fact that there is a shift in character in these passages as the thesis progresses (from internally-
preoccupied to finding-a-voice-in-the-world) is both deliberate and a part of what felt like a natural process, suggesting (I'm hoping) that my experience with Joseph and with Giles led to some shift not only in my thinking but in the more grounded state of my body-mind system.

As Timothy Sprigge writes: 'Spinoza has been more variously interpreted than most philosophers. Perhaps this only shows his system's resemblance to the universe it mirrors.' P 845 Honderich ed. (1995)

For, as Jung (p 78 (1954)) reminds us

The moment one forms an idea of a thing and successfully catches one of its aspects, one invariably succumbs to the illusion of having caught the whole. One never considers that a total apprehension is right out of the question ... This self-deception certainly promotes peace of mind: the unknown is named, the far has been brought near, so that one can lay one's finger on it. One has taken possession of it, and it has become an inalienable piece of property, like a slain creature of the wild that can no longer run away. It is a magical procedure such as the primitive practices upon objects and the psychologist upon the psyche. He is no longer at its mercy, but he never suspects that the very fact of grasping the object conceptually gives it a golden opportunity to display all those qualities which would never have made their appearance had it not been imprisoned in a concept...

In some of his later writings (Bion 1967), Bion doubted the possibility of written case studies (for example, this thesis?) ever being able to capture the reality of psychic phenomena.

The more experience a psycho-analyst has of psychotic phenomenon, the less room he has for doubt of their reality. They "evolve"; they are there and are replaced by a further "evolution". Fortunately for psycho-analysis, these events can be demonstrated between psycho-analyst and analysand, but unfortunately for the science they cannot be demonstrated in the absence of the phenomena. (p 160 Bion 1967)

I went to a conservative school and Sir Robert Menzies was the conservative Prime Minister at the time, seemed to have been Prime Minister for ever, a kind of timeless fact of life.

See pp 57-73 Taylor (1989)

As Taylor (1989) points out, 'human life is irreducibly multilevelled ... The recognition that we live on many levels has to be won against the presumptions of the unified self, controlling or expressive.' Taylor devotes many chapters to showing the ways in which over the centuries and in many different ways we have been attempting to free ourselves of the myth of the unified self.

Coleridge (quoted p 48 in Ackroyd 1990)
... from my early reading of fairy tales and genii etc etc my mind had been habituated to the Vast and I never regarded my senses in any way as the criteria of my belief. I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions, not by my sight, even at that age. Should children be permitted to read romances, and relations of giants and magicians and genii? I know all that has been said against it; but I have formed my faith in the affirmative. I know no other way of giving the mind a love of the Great, and the Whole.

38 Chandra, V. (1995) dust jacket
39 p xi Chatwin (1989)
36 In particular I have taken the liberty of making the Giles in these pages give extended spiels about this-or-that, something the real Giles almost never does during our supervision sessions.

CHAPTER 1 THE EVIL AND THE GOOD
1 Because Giles lives in Sydney and I live in Canberra, all of our supervision sessions are done over the phone.
3 Hillman (1979)
3 I knew from a reference in Andrew Samuels book on the post-Jungians (p20 Samuels, A. 1985) that Giles was considered to be from the Developmental school of the Jungian tradition. Hillman said the following about the developmentalists (p 234 Hillman 1990):

   We have been initiated into the myth of developmental psychology: that all life moves in one direction starting in infancy (but not before, not beyond). Moreover, the simplistics of our myth say that this one-way direction in time is causal: a person is caused by history, and the earlier the history the more powerful the cause. So, childhood has been declared the source of all our disaffected behaviour. This tale told by dynamic and developmental psychology says childhood is basically miserable. Every therapy session searches memory for traces of unhappiness. We do not turn there for beauty and joy, but to uncover the curses of abuse, shame, and fixation on that abuse and shame. Bad mothers, absent fathers and envious siblings are the demons and ogres in psychology’s fairy tale. The script curses the family with a psychology of blame instead of honor. It also curses the pleasurable world and the origins of the libido in sensuous joy.

4 p 5 Hillman (1979)
5 p 56 Hillman (1979)
6 p 33 Hillman (1979)
7 p 59 Hillman (1979). Hillman also says
Here a difference with Freudian and Jungian praxes becomes most obvious. I mean the relation between the dream and a person’s remembrances, or anamnesis, is different in our way of working. Although Freudsins have always paid especial attention to dreams, and Jungians have categories called “initial dreams” and “big dreams” that they use as decisive, predictive images, neither take the radical bridge-burning step that our attitude forces on us. While they put the dream in the patient and his life context, we place the patient and his life in the dream. Our first psychotherapeutic move is to imagine him in a dream. His dayworld stories are regarded as further places where his dream is dreamt, his problems further analogies of his images. These images are his psychic context and his psychic reality, which we, as therapists of the psyche, consider to be our first and last concern. Our image theory means that we have nowhere to place the patient except in his images, in the midst of his ‘material’, and both of us must stay in the underworld, forgoing whatever metapsychological aims the dream might be serving: ego development, integration, social interest, individuation.

This means forsaking anamnesis in the sense of case history, the usual gathering of a context of social realities and personal experiences in which to put the dreams. To our perspective, none of this is more important that the dream or even helps to understand it. The phenomenon to be saved is the dream, saved from its dayworld links, which distort the images in personal recollections. Our anamnesis is the dream itself, and we get to know the patient through his dreams, from below, turning to his psyche before his dayworld life. This move constellates the underworld from the beginning and initiates the whole analytical procedure as a descent into unknown space.

pp195 - 196 Hillman (1979)

see for example Jung ‘Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious’ CW Vol 9 §3 reproduced in *Four Archetypes* Ark Paperback London 1989 pp 3-4, where Jung writes:

A more or less superficial layer of the unconscious is undoubtedly personal. I call it the *personal unconscious*. But this personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, which does not derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn. This deeper layer I call the *collective unconscious*. I have chosen the term “collective” because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal: in contrast to the personal psyche, the collective psyche has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical
in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us.

* See particularly Hillman (1996)

** It was Fordham who thought if Jung “got on the track of an archetype he tended to lose sight of the person in whom it was active” p 33 Astor (1995).

CHAPTER 2 FEELING USELESS

1 p 38 Hillman (1983)
2 pp 193 - 4 Hillman (1979)
3 p 194 Hillman (1979)
4 p 296 Malouf (1990)
5 p 117 Hillman (1990) The mind never stops oozing and spurting the sap and juice of fantasy, and then congealing this play into paranoid monuments of eternal truth.
6 See p 365 Clark (1996)
7 ‘I once risked the remark ‘There’s no such thing as a baby’ - meaning that if you set out to describe a baby, you will find you are describing a baby and someone. A baby cannot exist alone, but is essentially part of a relationship.’ p 88 Winnicott (1964)
8 see pp350-351 Clark G. (1995)
10 p 111 Clark (1987)
11 p 108 Clark (1987)
12 p 364 Clark (1996)
13 p 364 Clark (1996)

14 This talk was subsequently published. See bibliography Sharr (1998)

"To quote Bion himself:

It requires a training which enables a physician, surgeon, psychiatrist, to denude himself of his preconceptions and be vulnerable to the facts. Knowing a great deal of medicine may be quite useful – one assumes that it is – but what is much more important is that it should not be at the expense of one’s senses. When we see or hear a patient we should at once be sensitive to what we see and hear, and from that point of ‘observation’ go on to the ‘meaning’. p 31 Bion (1978)

As psychoanalyst I was committed to keeping an open mind, while feeling constant pressure, not least from myself, to take refuge in certainty. The patients showed themselves anxious to agree with an interpretation so as to build up a sense of security. Since I deprecate allowing rein to memory and desire, it is right to point out that exclusion of both exposes the psychoanalyst to the anxiety of being in a minority of one
(possibly two when the patient throws in his lot with the analyst) by engaging on the psychoanalysis of such a patient. p 158 Bion (1967)

"Jung urged analysts to find a new theory for each patient, Fordham for each interview. His ideal analyst forgot his previous knowledge of the patient each time he met him and began afresh each day. For while it is true that an analyst has a repertoire of conscious techniques which include his knowledge of his patient, the unconscious interactions also give rise to information about the patient and the analyst." P 132 Astor (1995)

CHAPTER 3 TROUBLE AT SCHOOL

1 Winnicott (1971) p 117

Psychotherapy is not making clever and apt interpretations; by and large it is a long-term giving the patient back what the patient brings. It is a complex derivative of the face that reflects what is there to be seen. I like to think of my work this way, and to think that if I do this well enough the patient will find his or her own self, and will be able to exist and to feel real. Feeling real is more than existing; it is finding a way to exist as oneself, and to relate to objects as oneself, and to have a self into which to retreat for relaxation.

2 See for example Winnicott (1986b)

3 Jung (1934) quoted in Clark (1987)

4 Winnicott (1971) This is discussed more fully below in Chapter 11.

CHAPTER 4 MOTHER'S BREASTS

1 Pp 27-28 Jones, (1956)

2 p 51 Hillman (1983)

When I'm dreaming at night, I'm in the image, I'm imagining - or imagining is going on and I am sunk deep into the inherently intelligible, the sense-making, clear, amazingly purposeful life of the dream. And almost the moment I wake up, even if very slowly wake up, my understanding begins. I'm understanding, turning the dream into understanding it, even if I don't want to, and at that moment the dream fades. It gets obscure, too, and loses its intelligibility. Why is that, why? The dream is hiding from my understanding. It's almost like an inner poet who hides from the inner critic, because he doesn't want to be understood and find out what he means.

3 Ellenberger (1970)

4 Schopenhauer (1819)

5 Jarman (1994)
ENDNOTES 365

* Monk (1991)

7 Jarman’s Wittgenstein says it like this:

Philosophy is a sickness of the mind …
For many years at the centre of philosophy was a picture of the lonely human soul brooding over its private experiences. This soul is a prisoner of his own body, and he’s locked out from contact with others by the walls of their bodies. I want to get rid of that picture. There is no private meaning. We are what we are only because we share a common language and common forms of life.

7 p 481 in Kauffman (1982). See more on this in Chapter 12 below.

8 For more extensive account of Zinkin’s ideas, see Chapter 11 below

10 p 75 Phillips (1995)

The dream becomes the product of an always contentious collaboration of different parts of the self. Condensation, displacement, considerations of representation – what Freud describes as the dream-work – are all ways of incorporating what might be called an excess of points of view (the dream-work, as Freud said in another footnote, is the meaning of the dream). The dream itself, in so far as it has not become a nightmare, has apparently, and temporarily, conciliated rival internal claims.


Perspectivism is a concept which holds that knowledge is always perspectival, that there are no immaculate perceptions, and that knowledge from no point of view is as incoherent a notion as seeing from no particular vantage point. Perspectivism also denies the possibility of an all-inclusive perspective, which could contain all others and, hence, make reality available as it is in itself. The concept of such an all-inclusive perspective is as incoherent as the concept of seeing an object from every possible vantage point simultaneously.

CHAPTER 5 KEEPING SHADOWS OUT


2 See below Chapter 11.

7 p 45 Ogden (1989)

9 pp 446-7 Hesse (1943)

3 see Chapter 4 in Winnicott (1962)

4 Nietzsche wrote about this moment as follows. [pp 101-102 in Kauffman (1976)]

* The greatest stress. How, if some day or night a demon were to sneak after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you,
“This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything immeasurably small or great in your life must return to you – all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over and over, and you with it, a dust grain of dust.” Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or did you once experience a tremendous moment when you would have answered him, “You are a god, and never have I heard anything more godly.” If this thought were to gain possession of you, it would change you, as you are, or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, “Do you want this once more and innumerable times more?” would weigh upon your actions as the greatest stress. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?

1 I’d just been reading Sidoli. (1989) See especially chapter 5.
2 Quoted p 12 by Hollingdale (1961)
3 p 93 Nietzsche in Kauffman [ed] (1971)

CHAPTER 6 THE END

1 p 82 Rhode (1994)
2 This quarrel is taken up below in Chapter 11.
3 P 1 ‘By MODE (modus) I understand the Modifications (affectiones) of a substance or that which is in something else through which is may be conceived.’ Definition V, Spinoza (1910 edition)
4 p 1 Spinoza (1910) Definition IV,
5 p 38 Spinoza (1910) Second Part Axiom IV
6 Spinoza says [ p 89 Spinoza (1910) in the Second Part of his Ethics “Concerning the nature and origin of the mind”:

... the decision of the mind and the desire and determination of the body are simultaneous in nature, or rather one and the same thing, which when considered under the attribute of thought and explained through the same we call decision (determinatum), and when considered under the attribute of extension and deduced from the laws of motion and rest we call determination (determinatio) ...
CHAPTER 7 A DEMON CAME OVER ME

1 Writing about the criminal, Melanie Klein had the following to say (p 260 Klein (1934):

One of the great problems about criminals, which has always made them incomprehensible to the rest of the world, is their lack of natural human good feelings; but this lack is only apparent. When in analysis one reaches the deepest conflicts from which hate and anxiety spring, one also finds there the love as well. Love is not absent in the criminal, but it is hidden and buried in such a way that nothing but analysis can bring it to light.

2 I work with a progressive spellchecker, and it has accepted Ritalin! As an experiment I’ve tried Eros and Aphrodite. It recognizes neither.

3 It was both. p 57 Hillman (1995) “If there is a God in the disease, as Jung says, ... is it not wiser to pay obeisance to the God than be obsessed by the disease.

4 See Bion (1959) reprinted in Bion (1967)

5 see for example p 213 Eigen (1993)

6 See p 2 Rhode (1994)

... thought exists in its own right and is true to itself and carries within itself a dynamic for transformation ...

The discovery of the depressive position, and of the mysterious threshold to it, which is the area of Bion’s catastrophic change, transformed the nature of the transference. It was no longer a way of elucidating some unresolved burden concerning the past (the facsimile theory, or the theory of transference as a form of mental digestion); it had become a means of elucidating structures that are specific to the human mind – structures that disclose how mind originates in a rationality of ideas.

... the discovery of the threshold endowed the irrefutable power of transference to be associated to a boundless optimism. Implicitly, Melanie Klein showed the transference to be a function of reason as love. It is one of the postulates of its progress that the inseparable pattern of liminal phenomena (images whose structures find their origin in such emblems as the mask or the labyrinth) will resolve itself into a meaningful communication.

7 p 15 Abram (1996)
8 p 46 Abram (1996)
9 p 49 Abram (1996)
10 p 53 Abram (1996)
11 Abram, [p 57 Abram (1996)] following Merleau-Ponty, suggests that perception is 'inherently participatory', so that
perception always involves, at its most intimate level, the experience of an active interplay, or coupling, between the perceiving body and that which it perceives. Prior to all our verbal reflections, at the level of our spontaneous, sensorial engagement with the world around us, we are all animists.

11 p 80 Abram (1996)
... to affirm that linguistic meaning is primarily expressive, gestural, and poetic, and that conventional and denotative meanings are inherently secondary and derivative, is to renounce the claim that “language” is an exclusively human property.

13 p 68 Abram (1996)

CHAPTER 8 AN EVIL SLUG

1 For example [p44 Hillman (1995)] he writes:

Priapic enormity [Priapos, son of Aphrodite, had an enormous phallus] has many gods in it – lots of Gods. It can’t be read simply ... Each Priapic excitation has in it the powers of Aphrodite, Dionysus, Hades, Zeus, maybe Hermes, and so on ... This is what polytheistic psychology teaches about any event. There is a complex imagination released rather than a simple explanation that identifies and closes the question. We get a story rather than a reduction or a moralism, and each mythical story involves another. As the German Romantics said, ‘Never, never does one God appear alone.’

2 pp 283-284 Malouf (1990)
3 pp 20-21 Hillman (1990)
4 pp 48 Hillman (1990)
5 p 66 Hillman (1990)
6 p 186 Hillman (1976)
7 p 246 Hillman (1990)
8 p 15 Hillman (1990)
9 see for example pp 149-150 Hillman (1990)

The wound and the eye are one and the same. From the psyche’s viewpoint, pathology and insight are not opposites – as if we hurt because we have no insight and when we gain insight we shall no longer hurt. No. Pathologizing is itself a way of seeing; the eye of the complex gives the peculiar twist called psychological insight. We become psychologists because we see from the psychological viewpoint, which means by benefit of our complexes and their pathologizings.

10 see for example p 234 Hillman (1990)
ENDNOTES 369

11 pp 19-29 Hillman (1990)
12 pp 30-31 Hillman (1990)
13 p 160 Book Nine Lines 94-96 of Homer’s Odyssey
14 see particularly Hillman (1996)
15 see for example pp 195-196 Hillman (1979)
16 Hillman draws on the Romantic tradition when he talks about [p 97 Hillman (1996)]

the quickening soul in which our lives are bedded. For Wordsworth and for mythic sensibility in general, the acorn is not embedded in me, like a pacemaker in my heart, but rather I am embedded in a mythical reality of which the acorn is but my particular and very small portion. What the Romantics called ‘the quickening soul’ is today named psychic reality. It is all over the place, although we insist it is invisible.

CHAPTER 9 ANGRY RUMBLINGS

1 Eigen [pp 219-220 (1985)] says:

Bion (1970) associates the struggle to know (K) with possessiveness (Keat’s “irritable reaching after facts and reasons”), sensuousness, and the container-contained relationship. Strictly speaking, the date of psychoanalysis are non-sensuous and ineffable. Faith is the medium of access to psychoanalysis data. It undercuts and transcends our controlling needs and enables us to experience the impact of emotional reality in a way that allows the latter genuinely to evolve.

Bion uses the sign, O, to stand for the emotional reality of moment, or, in general, ultimate reality as such. In itself it is unknowable but the analyst opens himself in the faith that he will meet it. He aims at the emotional truth of a session. The impact the patient has is translated into guesses or convictions about what is truly happening. The situation is both Kantian and mystical. The analyst aims at ultimate reality but must work with hypotheses. The subject becomes more-at-one with himself and his capacity to experience. A paradoxical result is that faith enhances rather than mutes precision. One’s contact with subtle nuances of experience deepens as one develops an appreciative sensibility for what remains out of reach. The very taste of experience gains new meaning. The subject learns the gesture of repeatedly starting from scratch, of living in a wall-less moment and sensing his walls in ways that make a difference.

F in O approaches an attitude of pure receptiveness. It is an alert readiness, an alive waiting. Bion describes how uncomfortable one may be in this open state. One must tolerate fragmentation, whirls of bits and pieces of meaning and
meaninglessness, chaotic blankness, dry periods, and psychic dust storms.

Or as Bion himself puts it (p 145 Bion (1967)):

The psychoanalyst accepts the reality of reverence and awe, the possibility of a disturbance in the individual which makes atonement and, therefore, an expression of reverence and awe impossible. The central postulate is that atonement with ultimate reality, or O, as I have called it to avoid involvement with an existing association, is essential to harmonious mental growth. It follows that interpretation involves elucidation of evidence touching atonement, and not evidence only of the continuing operation of immature relationship with a father. The introduction of “sense” or “direction” involves extensions of existing psychoanalytic theory.

2 Jarman’s Wittgenstein expressed this as follows [Jarman (1994)]

For many years at the centre of philosophy was a picture of the lonely human soul brooding over its private experiences. This soul is a prisoner of its own body, and he’s locked out from contact with others by the walls of their bodies. I want to get rid of that picture. There is no private meaning. We are what we are only because we share a common language and common forms of life.

3 Quoted pp 475-6 Magee (1998) from Schopenhauer’s The World as Will and Idea

4 See Chapter 7 above, endnote 1.

5 Adam Phillips and Iris Murdoch suggest that to understand a thought we must know what the thinker is frightened of and what the thinker loves (p xi Phillips (1995)). Eric Rhode argues that ideas derive from two sources: mental pain and a notion of the ideal (p 3 Rhode (1994)). Charles Taylor talks about thinking as being our stepped reaction to an inadequate framework (pp 57-73 Taylor (1989)) and our behaviour as being animated and shaped by our notion of the good (pp 42ff Taylor 1989).

6 Rumi says [quoted Hollis (1998)]:

Unconscious and insane, I spill sad energy everywhere.

7 Hillman [p 7 Hillman (1971)] expresses this sentiment as follows:

We shall today be entertaining a theme, rather than answering a problem, hoping our method to move us through a series of reflections on the same subject, like a string of water colours, evoking insights, perspectives, emphasizing metaphorical speech, aiming to suggest and open, and where the aim is not a conclusion, not to close the subject, but to open it further.

8 For Bion, says Eigen, (p 213 Eigen 1993),
the double function, P ↔ D, is at the centre of a theory of
the mind. It represents the elemental and ubiquitous presence of
the mind’s ability to divide-and-unite. For Bion the breaking-up
of D has as much primal value as its creation.

9 p 366 Clark (1996)
10 p 347 Clark (1995)
11 This is also another way of talking about Spinoza’s idea about conatus, Hegel’s geist,
Schopenhauer’s will, Nietzsche’s will to power, Freud’s life and death instincts, Jung’s
individuation and Hillman’s acorn theory. While these are of course not identical, each
of these is an attempt to describe the sense we have of being driven by forces beyond
our rational control.

CHAPTER 10 DISGUSTING AND UNNATURAL

1 p 90 Winnicott (1971)
2 see Endnote 1 for Chapter 9 above.
3 Holt (1967)
4 p 31 Winnicott (1971)
5 p 26 Winnicott (1971)
6 p 31 Winnicott (1971)
7 p 35 Winnicott (1971)
8 p 35 Winnicott (1971)

Psychotherapy takes place in the overlap of two areas of
playing, that of the patient and that of the therapist.
Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together. The
corollary of this is that where playing is not possible then the
work done by the therapist is directed towards bringing the
patient from a state of not being able to play into a state of
being able to play.

9 p 109 Winnicott (1988) - footnote
10 p 43 Winnicott (1988)
11 p 25 Winnicott (1962)
12 p 33 Winnicott (1962) These are Winnicott’s italics.
13 Winnicott himself [p 33 Winnicott (1962)] would have not been at all surprised by the
alarm, the panic sense of violation.

I would say that the traumatic experiences that lead to the
organization of primitive defences belong to the threat to the
isolated core, the threat of its being found, altered,
communicated with. The defence consists in a further hiding of
the secret self, even in the extreme to its projection and to its
endless dissemination. Rape, and being eaten by cannibals,
These are mere bagatelles as compared with the violation of the self’s core, the alteration of the self’s central elements by communication seeping through the defences. For me this would be the sin against the self.


15 This is the argument put forward by Rhode (1994a) who suggests that the mind is connected to powers which come from ‘somewhere else’ (p 6), and that our experience of this metaphysical connection is sufficiently common, from one person to another, to suggest that there is a psychotic metaphysics, laws which govern the operation of the mind, and which can be coherently described. The mind, he says, has its being grounded in pain and the ideal (p 3). An experience of suffering and an inviolable connection to beauty and ‘the good’ are inseparable from the existence of mind.

As a result, the following story is played out in our lives as part of this psychotic metaphysics. We experience a separation from a twin who, together with the mother, dies and like the placenta is banished to the underworld; we then (in ways that seems both temporal and timeless, spatial and eternal, experiential and metaphysical) crown ourselves omnipotent king and experience a kind of exhilarating paranoid-schizoid existence which is also lonely, frightening and limited (and incapable of symbolisation); a necessary but mutually-uncomprehending communication is set up between the paranoid-schizoid perspective and the depressive (p 25); the banished twin maintains links with the good object (p 83); the banished twin in the end (and through the painful passing through of the threshold to the depressive position) rises from the dead (p 84), destroys the ego’s sense of omnipotence and allows for the first time an experience of the reality of others.

All of this works itself out naturally within the transference, says Rhode (p 2).

16 p 47 Eigen (1986)
17 p 104 Hillman (1990)
18 Clark (1982)

CHAPTER 11 LOCKED IN A DARK ROOM

1 Milner (1969)
2 Alvarez (1992)
3 See Endnote 6 Chapter 2 above.
4 see for example p 165 Bion (1967)
5 Coleridge S.T. letter to Thomas Poole, 1801, reproduced on p 273 of Richards ed. (1978)
6 As Alvarez (p 63 Alvarez (1992)) puts it:

...there is more to mothering than the passive and mechanistic concepts of adaptation and fit, or receptiveness, would allow. Surely novelty, surprise, enjoyment and delight, in manageable quantities, play as vital a part in the infant’s
development as their more peaceful counterparts – structure, routine, familiarity, lullaby.

7 P 193 Stern (1985)
8 p 60 Zinkin (1991)
9 p 51 Zinkin (1991)
10 p 52 Zinkin (1991)
11 p 58 Zinkin (1991)
12 p 54 Zinkin (1991)
13 p 76 Alvarez (1992)
14 pp 9-10 The Romance of Tristan and Iseult as retold by Joseph Bédier, translated by Hilaire Belloc and completed by Paul Rosenfeld, Vintage Classic, Random House 1973
16 from Coleridge’s notes, reprinted p 426 in Richards ed. (1978)

Hamlet’s character is the prevalence of the abstracting and generalizing habit over the practical. He does not want courage, skill, will, or opportunity; but every incident sets him thinking; and it is curious, and at the same time, strictly natural, that Hamlet, who all the play seems reason itself, should be impelled, at last, by mere accident to effect his object. I have a smack of Hamlet myself, if I may say so.

Or, writing about himself to his friend Godwin [and quoted p 314 in Holmes (1989)]:

You appear not to have understood the nature of my body & mind. Partly from ill-health, & partly from an unhealthy & reverie-like vividness of Thoughts, & (pardon the pedantry of the phrase) a diminished Impressibility from Things, my ideas, wishes, & feelings are to a diseased degree disconnected from motion & action. In plain and natural English, I am a dreaming & therefore an indolent man. I am a Stirling self-engaged, & always in the Moul, & my whole Note is, Tomorrow, & tomorrow, & tomorrow.

16 p 50 Winnicott (1971)
17 p 51 Winnicott (1971)

CHAPTER 12 BUT ANYWAY

1 See p 124 above.

3 P 38 Taylor (1989) Taylor’s Chapter 2. “The Self in Moral Space” discusses this at illuminating length, making the link (which is relevant to this thesis) between an orientation to the good, identity and the construction of a life narrative.

3 Attributed by the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations to Mrs. Edmund Craster d.1874

4 There’s a painting called Dickens’s Dream by Robert William Buss, and I have a copy of it in front of me as I write. It shows the mature Dickens in his study, sitting in his
desk chair, eyes closed, arms comfortably extended so that the hands rest on his knees, his pen in his right hand. Perhaps he is dozing, perhaps he’s stilling himself before the next frenzied scribbling to meet a deadline or to keep up with the outpourings of his teeming and vivid internal world. There are clouds or mist in the room, some dark, others various shades of grey, and in the clouds the characters of Dickens’s novels play out their various dramas. Dickens used to say that he could hear their voices as he wrote, he could see their mannerisms.

5 Dessai’s account of his imaginary world Pure Land is so extraordinary that I’ve reprinted it in Appendix 1 below; extraordinary because his account is infused with the tension that exists between outer and inner, reality and fantasy, sanity and madness, and extraordinary because in the fantastic world of Pure Land we can see the spirit or daemon (in the Hillmanian sense) which so clearly has animated Dessai’s own ‘outer’ life as a linguist, traveller, broadcaster and novelist. Dessai’s description of his fantasy world brings to mind one of Nietzsche’s most beautiful sentences:

... all of our so-called consciousness is a more or less fantastic commentary on an unknown, perhaps unknowable, but felt text...


Dessai’s description, like the most vivid of our dreams, offers us a glimpse of what this text—or his text—might look like.

6 ‘The mind never stops oozing and spurtiong the sap and juice of fantasy.’ p 170 Hillman (1990)


12 From Genealogy (1886) and quoted p 126 in Kaufman (1992):

Men of conviction are not worthy of the least consideration in fundamental questions of value and disvalue. Convictions are prisons ... Freedom from all kinds of convictions, to be able to see freely, is part of strength ... Conversely, the need for faith, for some kind of unconditional Yes and No, this Carlylistism, if you will pardon the expression, is a need born of weakness ...


15 Schopenhauer as Educator (1874) quoted pp 7-8 in Kaufman (1992)


Zarathustra (1883) quoted p 435 in Kauffman (1992)


Zarathustra (1883) quoted pp 199-200 in Kauffman ed. (1982)

I prefer this term to the usual ‘will to power’, which although descriptive of the idea that Nietzsche was increasingly drawn to nevertheless has overtones which the Fascists drew on so effectively, with the assistance of Nietzsche’s sister.


This Zarathustra did; and as soon as he lay on the ground in the stillness and secrecy of the many-hued grass, he forgot his slight thirst and fell asleep. For, as Zarathustra’s proverb says, one thing is more necessary than another. Only his eyes remained open: for they did not tire of seeing and praising the tree and the love of the grapevine. Falling asleep, however, Zarathustra spoke thus to his heart:

Still! Still! Did not the world become perfect just now? What is happening to me? As a delicate wind dances unseen on an inlaid sea, light, feather-light, thus sleep dances on me. My eyes he does not close, my soul he leaves awake. Light he is, verily, feather-light. He persuades me, I know not how. He touches me inwardly with caressing hands, he conquers me. Yes, he conquers me and makes my soul stretch out: how she is becoming long and tired, my strange soul! Did the eve of a seventh day come to her at noon? Has she already roamed happily among good and ripe things too long? She stretches out long, long — longer. She lies still, my strange soul. Too much that is good has she tasted; this golden sadness opposes her, she makes a wry mouth.

Like a ship that has sailed into its stillest cove — now it leans against the earth, tired of the long voyages and the uncertain seas. Is not the earth more faithful? The way such a ship lies close to, and nestles to, the land — it is enough if a spider spins its thread to it from the land: no stronger ropes are needed now. Like such a tired ship in the stillest cove, I too rest now near the earth, faithful, trusting, waiting, tied to it with the softest threads...

What happened to me? Listen! Did time perhaps fly away? Do I not fall? Did I not fall — listen! — into the well of eternity? What is happening to me? Still! I have been stung, alas — in the heart? In the heart? Oh break, break, heart, after such happiness, after such a sting. How? Did not the world become
perfect just now? Round and ripe? Oh, the golden round ring — where may it fly? Shall I run after it? Quick! Still! (And here Zarathustra stretched and felt he was asleep.)

"Up!" he said to himself; "you sleeper! You noon napper! Well, get up, old legs! It is time and overtime; many a good stretch of road still lies ahead of you. Now you have slept out — how long? Half an eternity! Well! Up with you now, my old heart! After such a sleep, how long will it take you to — wake it off?" (But then he fell asleep again, and his soul spoke against him and resisted and lay down again.) "Leave me alone! Still! Did not the world become perfect just now? Oh, the golden round ball!"

"Get up!" said Zarathustra, "you little thief, you lazy little thief of time! What? Still stretching, yawning, sighing, falling into deep wells? Who are you? O my soul!" (At this point he was startled, for a sunbeam fell from the sky onto his face.) "O heaven over me!" he said, sighing, and sat up. "You are looking on? You are listening to my strange soul? When will you drink this drop of dew which has fallen upon all earthly things? When will you drink this strange soul? When, well of eternity? Cheerful, dreadful abyss of noon! When will you drink my soul back into yourself?"

Thus spoke Zarathustra and he got up from his resting place at the tree as from a strange drunkenness; and behold, the sun still stood straight over his head. But from this one might justly conclude that Zarathustra had not slept long.


What alone can be our doctrine? That no one gives man his qualities — neither God, nor society, nor his parents and ancestors, nor he himself. (The nonsense of the last idea was taught as "intelligible freedom" by Kant — perhaps by Plato already.) No one is responsible for man's being there at all, for his being such-and-such, or for his being in these circumstances or in this environment. The fatality of his essence is not to be disentangled from the fatality of all that has been and will be. Man is not the effect of some special purpose, of a will, and end; nor is he the object of an attempt to attain an "ideal of humanity" or an "ideal of happiness" or an "ideal of morality". It is absurd to wish to devolve one's essence on some end or other. We have invented the concept of "end": in reality there is no end.

One is necessary, one is a piece of fatefulness, one belongs to a whole, one is in the whole; there is nothing which could judge, measure, compare, or sentence our being, for that would mean judging, measuring, comparing, or sentencing the whole. But there is nothing besides the whole. That nobody is held responsible any longer, that the mode of being may not be
traced back to a causa prima, that the world does not form a unity either as a sensorium or as "spirit"—that alone is the great liberation; with this alone is the innocence of becoming restored. The concept of "God" was until now the greatest objection to existence. We deny God, we deny responsibility in God; only thereby do we redeem the world.

32 Section 347 of The Gay Science and quoted on p100 in Kauffman (1980)
33 Zarathustra (1883) quoted p 406 in Kauffman ed. (1982)
35 Perhaps this was Giles talking about the Kantian categories of reason, or a reference to the Spinuzzian idea that from the point of view of God (sub specie aeternitatis) everything follows nature's laws, everything is comprehensible.

CHAPTER 13 STRANDED AT SEA

Winnicott has written about the personification of a split-off part in an paper called "The split off male and female elements to be found in men and women" (pp 169 ff in Winnicott (1989)). Giles mentioned the paper during this conversation and I read it that night, finding it absorbing and alive given what had happened during my session with Joseph.

Winnicott begins with the concept 'familiar to psychoanalysis' that all humans have a predisposition towards bisexuality and in characteristically fruitful ways he plays with this idea, juxtaposing his thoughts with clinical material of a patient who had been in analysis for more than twenty years. Among the central questions which the paper addresses are: In what ways is it useful to think in terms of male and female internal characters? What kinds of factors might contribute to a strong and perhaps upsetting cross-sexual identification? Are there helpful theoretical ways of thinking about the male and female elements in a person's personality and development? And how might these thoughts be used in the therapy?

One of the most refreshing things about this paper is Winnicott's willingness to take risks, to play with ideas, to exploit intuitions. Listening to his patient one day he finds himself thinking that he is listening to a girl ... and he says so! Then it occurs to him that it is only his own madness (Winnicott's) that makes this true ... and again says this to the patient. This in turn leads to an exploration of the relationship between the patient and his mother, and to the realisation that she treated him as a girl rather than as a boy. In all of this Winnicott refuses to be restrained by an over-literal regard for what might be called 'objective truth' and instead allows his artistic license considerable latitude. He talks to the patient as if the female element were a real person and as if he (Winnicott) knew how the girl felt.

The girl that I was talking to [says Winnicott to his patient] does not want the man released, and indeed she is not interested in him. What she wants is full acknowledgment of herself and of her own rights over your body. Her penis envy includes envy of you as a male... The feeling ill is a protest
from the female self, this girl, because she has always hoped
that the analysis would in fact find out that this man, yourself,
is and always has been a girl. [p 172 Winnicott (1989)
Winnicott’s own italics.]

What I found so exciting about this paper was not so much what Winnicott says as
the way he is talking to his patient and to this split off part. He is speaking as if the girl
exists and as if he knows what she wants and feels. This is precisely the way I had
found myself speaking to Joseph in our session as together we empathised with this
rejected internal female element and saw some of Joseph’s behaviour in terms of this
girl’s fury.

Again I’m brought back to discussions with Giles about meaning. Do we invent a
meaning; or do we find one? Does the invention of this girl (in Winnicott’s patient, in
Joseph) simply provide us with an ordering framework which enables us to proceed, to
act, to move away from the debilitating sense that all is fundamentally chaotic,
disordered and mad; or does it move us closer to a state of affairs that really exists? Are
our stories about stories arbitrary (though clever and relational) inventions; or are they
approximations which bring us closer to Bion’s O? Do we trust the spurtings of our
deeper intuitions and our dreams because they’re simply aesthetically wondrous; or do
we trust them because they contain within them intimations of what is perpetually
hidden from our view, the things-in-themselves?

What Winnicott is implying in this paper is that it’s less important to find certain
answers to these haunting questions than to increasingly operate, as Winnicott clearly
does, from an informed and playful intuition.

It’s not simply Winnicott’s therapeutic style, his way of playing with his own
spontaneous thoughts, which is instructive: he has things to say about the nature of the
female and male elements which give me pause for thought. He equates the female
element with being and identity and the male element with doing and creativity. ‘The
male element does while the female element (in males and females) is.’

After being – doing and being done to. But first, being...

At the extreme I discovered myself looking at an essential
conflict of human beings, one which must be operative at a
very early date; that between being the object which also has
the property of being, and by contrast a confrontation with the
object which involves activity and object-relating that is backed
up by instinct and drive.

This idea of an ‘essential conflict of human beings’ existing between being and
doing, between identity and object-relating, a conflict which can be dramatised by
thinking of it in terms of a dynamic relationship between the female and male elements,
casts its light into several corners, not the least of them being the way Joseph hides and
engages, is without boundaries in his intimacies and is unapproachable, is sentimental
and emotionless. In his dreams and in his life the female element is attempting to find
an elusive sense of being and identity through becoming the breast (dancing bare-
breasted outside the doctor’s surgery, snuggling up to his parents, exposing himself in
the library), while the male element is busily making a way in the world, getting good grades and focussing on a career ahead. It wants to get on with things, and is both furious and anxious when events conspire to slow things down.

Later on in the paper, Winnicott offers another interesting idea:

Stealing belongs to the male element in boys and girls. The question arises: what corresponds to this in terms of the female element in boys and girls? The answer can be that in respect of this element the individual usurps the mother’s position and her seat or garments, in this way deriving desirability and seductiveness stolen from the mother.

I’m reminded immediately of Joseph’s dream of the red clothes being stolen from his mother’s flat by the girls (the female element usurping the mother’s garments) and then flaunted on a line in public view, an act which made the dreaming Joseph (the male element) murderously livid. The male element wants to eliminate the female, to zero her, to shoot her with a gun ... or at least it used to.

And there’s another fruitful idea in the article, that an overdeveloped female element might be the consequence of parents wanting the boy to be a girl. Winnicott’s patient was, like Joseph, born after the death of an infant sister and Winnicott speculates that his patient was seen as a girl by the mother.

\(^7\) p 18 Taylor (1989)

But the invocation of meaning also comes from our awareness of how much the search involves articulation. We find the sense of life through articulating it. And moderns have become acutely aware of how much sense being there for us depends on our own powers of expression. Discovering here depends on, is interwoven with, inventing. Finding a sense to life depends on framing meaningful expressions which are adequate.

\(^7\) pp 343 ff Grimm (1982)

\(^4\) As the author of the article on Nietzsche in The Oxford Companion to Philosophy has put it:

Both in principle and in practice Nietzsche’s thinking was avowedly interpretative, multiply perspectival, experimental, and tentative and made free use of language that is highly metaphorical and figurative. He preferred to offer suggestions, hazard guesses, and propose hypotheses rather than attempt to construct rigorous lines of reasoning. He further acknowledged that the upshot of what he (or anyone else) has to say on any substantive issue neither is nor can ever be beyond all dispute. Yet he repeatedly insisted upon the distinction between plausibility and soundness of various ideas on the one hand,
and their 'value for life' on the other (between their 'truth-value' and their 'life-value', as it were.)


1 There is, of course, a whole other dimension to 'story telling': we also tell stories in
order to maintain power, suppress minorities, create bigger distances between people,
protect privilege, set things in concrete, deny life or change. We tell stories not only to
bring the world into closer relationship but also to keep it at a distance. But hate and
fear and the maintenance of power are not unrelated to love and desire. The amoral
libido (or so at least Schopenhauer and Nietzsche would suggest – Spinoza too )
ignores distinctions between good and bad, selfless and selfish.

* Charles Taylor writes:

... we come here to one of the most basic aspirations of
human beings, the need to be connected to, or in contact with,
what they see as good, or of crucial importance, or of
fundamental value. And how could it be otherwise, once we see
that this orientation in relation to the good is essential to being
a functional human agent. ...

...[T]he goods which define our spiritual orientation are the
ones by which we will measure the worth of our lives. (p 42)

...[B]ecause we cannot but orient ourselves to the good, and
thus determine our place relative to it; and hence determine the
direction of our lives, we must inescapably understand our lives
in narrative form, as a 'quest'. (pp 51-52)

'Bion's talks about the inescapable need to turn chaotic elements infused with a sense of
catastrophe (he calls them 'beta elements') into an alive thinking process (his term for
this is 'alpha function'). I think we're talking about the same process, using different
language. Drawing on the Kleinian lexicon, Bion (and other post-Kleivians like Eigen)
describe a process where beta elements are produced but cannot be made sense of by
the infant, and so the psyche 'has to evacuate these elements into the mother, relying on
her to do whatever has to be done to convert them into a form suitable for employment
as alpha-elements by the infant.' [p 116 Bion (1967)]. In my less sophisticated
language, this is the infant and the mother (or the client and the therapist) telling each
other stories, enlivening the intersubjective space. As Eigen [p 218 Eigen(1993)] puts it:

Bion tracks a free floating sense of catastrophe which is a
fundamental term of our existence. It functions as an invariant
which can be filled in with a range of more specific contents
(dread of birth, death, change, boundlessness, sameness, the
predator, castration, disease, burning, drowning, suffocating,
failing, etc). One strain to see its face clearly in what can be
seen but it grips one blindly from behind the scenes...

... However, the self is not simply one with its sense of
catastrophe... As the self goes under it broadcasts signals of
dissolution into progress. It can do so only from some remaining
quality of difference which it cannot shake off. In the end a
difference remains between oneself and zero and however
miniscule, it is infinite.

This, in varying degrees, is a description of Joseph telling the story of good and
evil, me dreaming about Hannibal, and the student in my class complaining that she
doesn’t know what to think about. Bion’s Faith in O [see Eigen (1985) in Eigen (1993)]
can be seen as his faith in the meaningfulness of the animating substrata of the
intersubjective field.

Winnicott [p 48 Winnicott (1971)] says that in all stages of play the mother’s presence is
felt and necessary, whether or not she is actually in the room.

‘... a face which inspires fear or delight (the object of fear or delight) is not on that
account its cause, but – one might say – its target.’ Wittgenstein, quoted p 9 in Phillips
(1953).

It initially puzzled and bothered me that every time I told a particular fairytale or myth
to a different group or individual, I would change it in some way. Wasn’t I tampering
with something archetypal here, with some artefact of the collective unconscious? Then
I realized that the variations in each case were influenced by the audience, and that by
noting what I was changing I was being given some insight into what I was
unconsciously perceiving about that group or that individual. We adjust our stories all
the time according to what we find or fail to find.

This led to further thoughts. For many years I’d taught in a progressive school and
had come to realize that the Rousseau/A.S. Neill assumption that, given the right
physical environment, the child would flourish, had its dangers. Our school was set in
beautiful surroundings and we teachers put a lot of work into making the classrooms
stimulating places, with tools, art supplies, toys, puzzles, dress-ups, and so on always
available. What happened when kids were let loose in this stimulating and beautiful
environment? It seemed to depend (I came to realize) on the willingness of the teacher
to engage. Those teachers who, as it were, stood back and observed the children ‘set
free’ soon found that some of the children became quickly bored and aggressive. What
was missing, for these children, was a response, an interaction: they were made anxious
and felt adrift because there was no ‘mother’ face in which to find or fail to find a
reflection. Those teachers who on the other hand got their hands dirty, mucked in there
with the kids and revelled in the play themselves (without forgetting their adultness,
without losing sight of the kids’ need for them to be teachers as well) found themselves
a part of an enlivened overlap between two areas of play. (See Shann (1987))

Thomas Ogden [p 1 Ogden (1989)] begins one of his books with the following
paragraph:

This book, having been written, has become part of the given
and must now be overcome in the minds of its readers and its
author. Having been written, it is static and no longer becoming
anything other than itself. The potential value of this book lies
in the degree to which it creates a possibility for the given (of
which it is now a part) to be overcome through interpretation
by the reader in a new and more generative way.

13 Fordham (quoted pp 51 – 52 Astor (1995)) described it as follows:
In essence, deintegration and reintegration describe a
fluctuating state of learning in which the infant opens itself to
new experiences and then withdraws in order to re integrate and
consolidate those experiences. During a deintegrative activity,
the infant maintains continuity with the main body of the self
(or its centre), while venturing into the external world to
accumulate experience in motor action and sensory stimulation
... Such a concept of the self brings a new dimension to both
depth psychology and developmental psychology, for it is now
conceived to be a dynamic structure through whose activity the
infant’s emotional and ego growth takes place.

13 Someone – was it Laing or Winnicott or Adam Phillips? – has defined madness as being
that state where you cannot find anyone who understands your stories.

14 John had described in an earlier session a lifelong attachment to ‘a magic crystal’ which
froze time for its possessor.

17 This session was tape-recorded (of course with the client’s permission), and so the
words quoted are verbatim.

16 At an English teachers’ conference in the late 80s, a man approached me and asked me
if I was Steve Shinn who had written School Portrait. When I said I was, he told me
rather belligerently to sit down as he had a thing or two he wanted to say to me. ‘I’m a
deputy head in a government school,’ he said rather belligerently, ‘and I took your
book with me on a camping holiday last Christmas. One wet day I lay in the tent and
picked up your book, read about 20 pages and flung it over the other side of the tent,
shouting to my wife, “This bloke wouldn’t know if his arse was on fire, teaching at his
progressive school with all the rich kids.” But later in the day I picked up the book
again and found myself reading it at one sitting, and at one stage my wife came in and
found me crying. I was so moved by it,’ he said, his face suddenly softening (he was
enjoying telling me this story, and enjoying the slightly alarmed look on my face). ‘I’m
tired and sometimes cynical old teacher, but I felt refreshed by your book.’

This remains my favourite reaction, I think because it indicated that my book had
got into his body. It had successfully mated!

17 These are all false distinctions, of course, in order to emphasize the relational aspect.
For example there’s clearly a showing, a display, involved in story-telling. I’m strutting
my stuff, and hoping that ‘the other’ will be impressed and will respond.

18 This was the theme of Jung’s The Psychology of the Transference, and it’s echoed by
post-Freudian analysts like Stephen Mitchell [p 21 Mitchell (1993)] who writes:

What is inspiring about psychoanalysis today is not the
renunciation of illusion in the hope of joining a common,
progressively realistic knowledge and control, but rather the
hope of fashioning a personal reality that feels authentic and
enriching ... The bridge supporting connections with others is not built out of a rationality superceding fantasy and the imagination, but out of feeling experienced as real, authentic, generated from the inside, rather than imposed externally, in close relationship with fantasy and the imagination.

"Many schools and universities still tell their students in English and other humanist subjects never to use the first person pronoun in essays, still encourage the objectification implied by the passive voice, and still assume that the correct model for an argument is a scientific experiment with hypothesis (definitions made explicit), accumulation of objectively observed data (preferably in controlled and repeatable situations) and an unambiguous conclusion. Such a discourse actually excludes from consideration what is at the heart of the human experience.

CHAPTER 14 MAKING ROOM

1 'To have a daughter like that,' said the Queen in the story of the Wild Swans which Joseph had read to me, 'I would give my twelve fine sons.'

2 Winnicott [Winnicott (1962a)] and Mears (1992 — see chapter 1 'The Secret' argue that the existence of a private part which is not shared is an essential step in the development of a sense of self.

3 Spinoza argued that while there was only one Substance (God or nature) of which everything else was a Mode, each mode (a person, for example) endeavoured to persist in its own being (Ethics Part 3 Prop VII) and that this endeavour or striving (conatus) was nothing other than the essence of that thing (Prop VIII). If I hadn’t been so tired, I would have wanted to ask Giles what Spinoza meant by this, whether it was the same as Freud’s libido [see Hampshire (1951) pp 110 ff] and to what extent the concept of something like conatus immediately presupposes some kind of a goal, even if it’s simply self-preservation or a more active and joyful life lived in relative harmony with the natural world of which each of us is a determined part. All the way through, even towards the end when both Joseph and I were exhausted, I had this sense of some kind of relentless striving being present in Joseph’s life, manifesting in his underground building and weeding and public masturbating and in his dreams, his stories and his spontaneous imagery ... a striving of some essential part of himself determined to continue to exist. 'The mind,' says Spinoza ‘as much as it can, endeavours to imagine those things which increase or help its power of acting (Prop XII in Part 3) ... When the mind imagines things which diminish or hinder the power of acting of the body, it endeavours as much as it can to remember things which will cut off their existence.' (Prop XIII in Part 3)

APPENDIX

4 pp 25 ff Dessaix (1994)
Mating with the world:
_on the nature of story-telling in psychotherapy_

Steve Shann
BA (Hons), Cert Ed, M Sci (Hons), Dip. Psychotherapy

PhD Social Ecology
2000

University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury
This is to certify that this work is original and has not been submitted for a higher degree at another institution.

Signed: ..................................................

Date ..................................................
PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
Summary

What is going on in a therapeutic setting when one person tells a story to another? Is it really as it appears to be, with the story being told in order to communicate some information, either affective or factual? Or is this way of thinking about the business of therapy limiting, both for the people concerned (therapist and patient) and for those who theorise about the therapeutic process?

These are the questions around which this work is organised. The thesis itself takes the form of a story being told, the story of a therapist (Steve), of his client (Joseph) and his clinical supervisor (Giles).

The author uses the story of these relationships (Joseph and Steve, Steve and Giles) to argue that stories are told more to create something (a relationship) and forge something (a more vital connection to an animating world) than to communicate something. The author suggests that an aspect of the Freudian legacy is a largely unconscious but powerful assumption in the minds of therapists that they are in the business of ‘unlocking riddles’, of intellectually grasping the underlying meaning of their patients’ communications. He gives an account of his own struggle with this underlying assumption and how it limited his effectiveness.

The author draws on both a philosophical tradition (represented in particular by Spinoza and Nietzsche) and a psychoanalytic tradition (Freud, Jung, Klein, Winnicott, Bion, Milner, Alvarez, Zinkin, Stern, Clark, Hillman and Eigen) to show what he suggests are more vital ways of thinking about human behaviour in general and the therapeutic encounter in particular.
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Nature! We are surrounded and embraced by her — unable to step out of her and unable to penetrate her more deeply. Unasked and unwarned, she accepts us into the circulation of her dance and propels herself with us until, tired out, we fall out of her arm. She creates eternally new forms; what is there has never been; what has been does not recur — everything is new and yet always the [same] old [thing].

We live in her midst and are strangers to her. She speaks with us unceasingly without betraying her secret to us. We affect her continually but have no power over her.

She seems to have designed everything for the sake of individuality, but does not care for individuals. She always builds and always destroys, and her studio is inaccessible.

...She is the only artist: from the simplest material to the greatest contrasts; without any appearance of exertion to the greatest perfection — to the most exact determination, always covered by something soft. Every one of her works has its own character, every one of her manifestations the most isolated concept, and yet everything constitutes a unity...

Eternal living, becoming, and motion are in her, and yet she does not move on. She transforms herself eternally, and there is not a moment’s standing still in her. For staying she has no concept, and she has placed her curse on standing still. She is firm, her step is measured, her exceptions rare, her law immutable...

She is everything. She rewards herself and punishes herself, rejoices and torments herself. She is rough and gentle, lovely and terrible, without strength and all-powerful. ... She is wise and silent. One cannot tear any explanation from her body, nor force any present from her that she does not give of her own free will. She is cunning, but for a good end, and it is best not to notice her cunning.

She is whole, yet always unfinished. The way she carries on she can always carry on.

To each she appears in distinctive form. She conceals herself in a thousand names and terms, and is always the same. She has placed me inside, she will also lead me out. I entrust myself to her. She may dispose of me. She will not hate her work. I did not speak about her. No, what is true and what is false, everything she has spoken. Everything is her fault, everything to her credit.

Goethe (quoted pp32-34 in Kauffmann (1980))

Most who have written on the emotions, the manner of human life, seem to have dealt not with natural things which follow the general laws of nature, but with things which are outside the sphere of nature: they seem to have conceived man in nature as a kingdom within a kingdom. But they believe that man disturbs rather than follows the course of nature, and that he has absolute power in his actions, and is not determined in them by anything else than himself. They attribute the cause of human weakness and inconstancy not to the ordinary power of nature, but to some defect or other in human nature ...[But] nothing happens in nature which can be attributed to a defect in it; for nature is always the same and one everywhere ...

Spinoza Ethics Third Part (pp 83 – 84)
Introduction

Clearly there’s been a paradigm shift since Freud articulated the psychoanalytic project, from an intrapsychic drive theory to one which focuses on the intersubjective, whether that be expressed in terms of projection and projective identification,¹ the four basic transference types,² the infection of the analyst’s unconscious,³ the nature of the countertransference⁴ or the existence of a creative potential space.⁵ When a therapist sits with a client these days, she is more aware of her participation in a living process and less hung up in elusive attempts to identify a drive, reveal a repression or solve a riddle. This is a new paradigm, a new way of understanding the therapeutic drama, a new theoretical perspective which has come partly as a result of experienced limitations with the old paradigm, partly through the revelations of infant research⁶ and partly out of sympathy with a postmodern consciousness which casts doubt on the possibility of objective certainty.

It’s a new paradigm that I am eager to embrace. It makes more sense of what I experience, it sits more easily with many of my other consciously-held assumptions about human relationship and psychological pain and pleasure.

But I’ve discovered that it’s not as easy to free myself of the old paradigm as I thought it would be. The old paradigm, I have found to my consternation, is inside me, is in my body, shaping (along with more postmodern sensibilities) the way I experience the world, the way I conduct my psychotherapy practice. Sometimes this old paradigm presents itself in its traditional shape (encouraging me to try to behave like a Freud) and
INTRODUCTION

sometimes it crops up disguised in more postmodern dress (encouraging me to act more like a Hillman\(^3\)). In whatever form, it lulls me into the position of observer of, rather than participant in, events. In the end (rather like Freud in his more pessimistic moments) I end up feeling useless.

In a sense, then, this thesis is about the difficult experience of attempting to free oneself of the old in order to embrace the new. It suggests that the first step in this is to recognize the sometimes unconscious grip of the old and implies that the grip of the old is more tenacious than the current professional literature admits. The old paradigm lives, even if only partly consciously and in an uneasy relationship with the new, and it effects the way we go about our work. Or at least it has with me.

This thesis also suggests that the point about recognizing the old is not simply to eradicate it. There's what I hope is a more subtle suggestion being made, that the process of identifying what is actually present (rather than operating as if it didn't exist) is in itself valuable. There is blocked energy in what is felt but denied space in consciousness, blocked energy which is unavailable because confined. I felt useless but tried for a while to ignore this. It was only when I allowed myself to really feel the uselessness, the frustration, the anger and the humiliation that I found I had energy for something more. In this sense recognizing the old, turning my attention to it, allowing myself to feel its existence in my body, helped me to move towards something less constricting.

It helped, but it wasn't the whole story. Allowing myself to feel what I was feeling released energy, but I needed to find some way of channelling it. The energy needed some constructive (and constructed) channel down which to flow. In other words, I needed to think. This thesis, then, is also an account of the ways my mind attempted to construct a useful theoretical perspective.

One aspect of this thinking was to learn how others had thought about these matters. Jung, Klein, Bion, Kohut and Winnicott had all found aspects of Freudian thinking limiting and had thought their way to new paradigms. Others had followed in their footsteps. Conversations with my clinical supervisor Giles Clark\(^3\) (who, from now on, I'll call simply Giles) deepened
my appreciation of these thinkers, helped me to see ways in which adopting their perspectives threw light on my own experience and pointed the way towards a more active and effective engagement.

The conversations did more than that. They revealed some of the foundations on which the philosophical thinking of Jung and Freud stood, the ideas of Spinoza, Kant, Herder, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, the Romantics, and the Enlightenment thinkers. These sources, as both Taylor and Ellenberger point out, not only informed Freud’s thinking but exist in an uneasy alliance of mismatched assumptions behind our own postmodern consciousness. Knowing more about the philosophers meant that I knew more about unconscious aspects of my own thinking patterns.

So, could I transcend the limits of the old paradigm by adopting the conceptual framework of one of the many who had? If I could think more like Jung, or Hillman or Winnicott … or if I could go back further and think more like Spinoza or Goethe or Nietzsche … would I free myself? Or if I could simply adopt Giles’s theoretical perspective, would the problem be fixed? I tried all of this, as this thesis reveals, and not without some success and obvious practical benefit.

But neither was that enough. I somehow had to make the thinking mine. It had to be, to a certain extent, a creative and individual process, something that grew out of my own experience and preferred ways of processing the world. Klein and Bion had moved the Freudian project on by imagining evacuations and injections of affects, Winnicott by writing about play and the use of the transitional object, Jung by seeing therapy as an alchemical process, Kohut by distinguishing between different developmental needs as reflected in the transference, and Giles by highlighting the consequences of a ‘relational urge’. What could be my own take on this shift?

I discovered that what made most sense to me was to think about the therapeutical interaction in terms of story-telling. To make this shift, to think of therapy as two people telling stories to each other, suddenly allowed room for the drama, the complexity, the dynamic nature of what I actually experienced.
INTRODUCTION

My fifteen-year-old client Joseph tells me a story. It’s an exciting story and I rush off and include it in a talk I’m giving to the local Jung Society. But then my next session with Joseph is unexpectedly flat, I have a disquieting dream and I find myself wondering if I somehow missed the point of Joseph’s story. So I talk to my supervisor Giles and I tell him the story (and the story of my confusion) and Giles tells me a story or two of his own. At our next session Joseph tells me some more stories (by now I’m using the word ‘story’ to describe many different kinds of things, but more of that in the body of the thesis) and the stories I tell him back have incorporated in them some Joseph-bits and Giles-bits. This three-way story-telling (with cross-fertilisations) continues for over a year and I then write a thesis (another story!) about it.

As soon as I began to think about my work in this way using the language of story-telling, the question around which my thesis must revolve became obvious. What’s all this story telling about? What is going on here?

I knew that at one level the answer was obvious, hardly worth bothering about. A story teller is trying to tell a story. There’s something that the story teller is trying to convey. There’s a story that the story teller knows and he or she wants to tell it to someone else. It’s simple.

But the more I reflected on my experience, the more I found that it wasn’t quite so simple, that this apparently transparent and natural act was (like the act of breathing for example) made up of a myriad of subtle and complex sub-processes. And the more I discovered about these less obvious aspects of story-telling and the more I thought about what these less obvious aspects were telling me about the nature of story-telling, the more I found myself receptive to what it was that Joseph was trying to do when he talked to me ... the more, in the other words, I found myself released from some of the limitations of the Freudian paradigm.

I discovered, for example, that the idea that a story teller is trying to convey something is an inadequate idea, that it contains an assumption that can be quite limiting to the therapist who is listening to the story being told. I can best explain this by describing the difference between thinking of a story as a noun and thinking of story-telling as a verb.
When as a therapist I think ‘story-as-noun’, my focus is on the story as an object, on some kind of package in which a chunk of meaning is wrapped. When my thinking is being organised in this way (when it’s being shaped by this assumption) what I experience is a client presenting me with a carefully wrapped object and saying something like, ‘Here, make sense of this, what does it mean?’ And I take the object and my intelligent mind attempts to engage with it, to unlock its hidden aspects and to reveal its meaning. My mind seeks to perceive the story’s essence. I turn it over, I look at it from different angles, I remember all the other stories this client has told me, I make some tentative comments and a conversation gets going. The story, after all, is something that the client knows (even unconsciously), it is a chunk of meaning, and the client is trying to pass this thing over to me for my analysis, for my insight. When I think ‘story-as-noun’, I’m unconsciously a part of a Freudian and Cartesian perspective.

But I began to feel constricted by this kind of thinking. Something was missing. I noticed, for example, that with clients like Joseph I was feeling oddly powerless and that my most intelligent observations didn’t seem to be moving things on much at all.

Things change when I think of ‘story-as-verb’. Straight away I’m aware that there is something happening here. There is a process going on, or perhaps many. The client, for one thing, is trying to make sense of something, is trying to bring order to something that he or she is experiencing as chaotic or disordered or frighteningly meaningless: there’s an attempt to change something going on through this attempt to communicate. And when I think ‘story-as-verb’ I remember that the verb has an object, me, that the client is trying to do something which will involve me in some way, that there’s an interpersonal process going on at the same time as there is an internal process happening. When I think this way, when I’m aware of processes taking place in the room as we talk, I experience myself quite differently, no longer the observer but a participant. The telling of a story is drawing me into the teller’s world. I no longer feel powerless because I now feel involved. When I think ‘story-as-verb’ I feel myself being connected to Spinozan and Darwinian perspectives.
At one level, then, this thesis is about the breakdown of one paradigm and the construction of another using the language of the dynamic act of story telling. It's about my attempt to find a different and more empowering way of thinking about these acts of story-telling that go on in therapy, one based on the idea that the telling of a story is an attempt by the teller to mate with a wider world.

The above account of the way my thinking moved is, of course, utterly misleading. It gives the impression of Steve, sitting alone in his study after difficult sessions with Joseph, progressively trying to think his way out of a feeling of limitation. Steve the lonely brooding thinker, finding his own way to his own paradigm through the hard slog of solitary and disciplined thinking. Though I did my fair share of brooding and thinking, this was by no means how the shift actually occurred.

Bion once suggested that there were thoughts in search of a thinker, a fanciful idea perhaps but one which conveys our sense that the thoughts we think are not generated in the lonely chambers of our disembodied minds. Instead (to adopt an ugly modern phrase which is surprisingly apt here) our thoughts are out-sourced. We think in particular ways, Wittgenstein insisted, because we belong to particular worlds, and in my case there were three particular worlds of which I was part which account for the genesis of the ideas explored in this thesis.

First of all I belong to the world which is made up of my body–mind. I think particular thoughts because my body feels particular things. My body has both a history and a network of current relationships, both of which leave impressions on my body, and my thoughts are shaped by (Spinoza would say that they are aspects of) these bodily impressions. I feel useless and excluded partly because current experiences in my therapeutic interactions with fifteen-year-old Joseph are touching sensitive areas of my body. My thesis, if it is to be an attempt to account for the nature of the ideas it expresses, must be in part an account of these sensitive areas of my body. For this reason each of the chapters (except the final one) has attached to it a
glimpse of an aspect of my particular history and current relationships, this world made up of my body-mind system.14

Secondly I belong to a world made up of my client and myself. I’ve written about a boy called Joseph and certain ideas came to me either because he put them into me (to use a bit of Kleinian shorthand) or because they came out of the particular dynamics of that interaction. We related in a particular way, we created in our meetings a relationship with a particular mix of hope and fear, expectation and yearning, love and hate, and out of that ideas were generated and entered the minds of the two thinkers involved. His thoughts and feelings turned out to have an odd similarity to my own. It is partly for this reason that my account of a developing thesis is told in terms of a case study.

Finally I belong to a wider professional world, made up of colleagues and supervisors, professional organisations and bodies of literature, mentors alive and dead. Thoughts enter me through that medium too, out of the dynamics of that world and that relationship. After I’d written a draft of the thesis (in the form of a more traditional case study and without much reference to what I’ve experienced as a seminal relationship with my supervisor), I realized that my account left out what was in many ways the most important aspect of what it was purporting to show, that we develop particular ideas not just to make more sense of what we experience but also to connect us to others. Particular ideas became attractive to me because they were attractive to Giles. If that sounds immature, then so be it. What I’m suggesting in the thesis is that this attempt to connect with ‘the good’ is at the heart of much of our story-telling, an aspect of which is the way we are inducted into various ways of thinking by those (alive and dead) whom we admire or wish to emulate in some way. For this reason it was necessary for me to find some way of building into my thesis my own ‘relational urge’, and so I’ve made the weekly supervision sessions with Giles central to the structure of each chapter.

Either our thoughts are aspects of our nature (and are therefore embodied aspects of our relationship to the worlds we inhabit) or they are disembodied,
solipsistic and unrelated to our everyday experiences. Spinoza argued the first, Descartes the second. We suffer catastrophically from our tendency to believe Descartes rather than Spinoza, and one way of reading this thesis is to see it as an attempt to move from the unrelational and disengaged world of the Cartesian paradigm to the more connected and empowering world of the Spinozan.

But to say this takes me into a new maze with its own difficulties, in particular a typically postmodern lather about the nature of the stories we tell, be they Cartesian, Spinozan or whatever. If the telling of stories is in part about constructing an empowering narrative, and if theories are no less stories than are fairytales and dreams, then what is the status of the theoretical framework I'm attempting to construct in this thesis? Is it a conceptual framework that brings me closer to the way the world actually is? Or is it simply an energetic fiction told to make life possible in the face of the deeper reality of meaninglessness, chaos and deconstructible complexity?

The same question may also be asked about the stories my clients tell me. Is the story-telling we do in the consulting room now more effective because these are truer stories we are telling each other, more in tune with the actual undercurrents in our disturbed and difficult lives? Or is this story-telling more effective simply because we're better at investing faith in these supporting fictions, especially now that I'm helping us to see them as verbs being enacted in the present rather than nouns fashioned by the past?

For some this is a non-issue. What does it matter? If the story works, if it makes a life more active or less fractured, why worry? They're all fictions anyway, all susceptible to endless deconstruction, all undergoing constant change as circumstances shift.

It matters to me. The stories we tell and believe organise our thinking and organise our behaviour. One theoretical framework suggests that the client is giving me nouns and consequently I'm one kind of therapist: another framework suggests to me that I'm involved in a verby process and I become a different kind of therapist. The framework that involves me more in life by moving things along more juicily is a better story because it's closer to how things actually are. Life itself is something that moves things along juicily:
life itself is more about process than content, more about verbs than nouns. Spinoza’s system is closer to the way the world actually is than Descartes’: it’s a better story not just because it’s easier for me to have faith in it but because it reflects better the world I experience. There are, in other words, stories which deepen our understanding of the world as it actually exists and there are stories which limit our experience. Both kinds of stories can be comforting and perhaps even necessary, but that doesn’t mean that they are of equal value. Some stories are better than others, some have a better connection to the world: they make more sense of things and they expand our capacity for involvement. Such, anyway, is a part of the argument of this thesis.

So this is a thesis about stories and the thesis is itself a story. It is, in other words, a thesis that seeks to say something about its own nature; it attempts what the therapist attempts, to have a double vision which looks outwards and inwards at one and the same time. There are times in the writing of it when it’s become dangerously close to disappearing up its own bum. It has helped when I’ve remembered that story-telling is a dynamic natural process and that stories attempt to describe dynamic natural processes. Things don’t get stuck in nature, or not for ever. Crafting my thesis as a story has helped me to move on through (and perhaps even enter into) the bogs and roundabouts.

But this wasn’t the only reason why I felt I needed to write the thesis in the form of a story. It seemed to me that the theoretical underpinnings of my thesis, its metaphysical and its epistemological assumptions, made it inevitable that my research would come out of an actual experience of working with clients like the fifteen-year-old Joseph and that the meaning of the research could only be expressed in the form of some kind of narrative. I want to try to explain this.

The thesis assumes (an assumption that I’ve tried to make explicit and have attempted to examine) that reality is too complex and dynamic to be imprisoned in a static conceptual framework and indeed that all understandings, however painfully won, in the end break down under the
pressure of complex and chaotic reality ... or at least that they must continually be adapted, supplemented and pruned, and that in their evolution they must always allow for concurrent diverse perspectives and apparent contradictions. This is a statement I'm making about stories, it's a statement I'm making about reality, and it's a statement that I can only demonstrate by presenting my research as a dynamic, unfolding, multi-perspectival and non-linear story.

I have always felt oppressed by the stifling notion I took away from my own schooling that truth existed as a pre-packaged item delivered to some and denied to others. Deliveries went to Plato, Jesus, Galileo, Newton, Descartes, Kant, Dickens, Tolstoy, Mozart, Churchill and probably Sir Robert Menzies, but to very few others and certainly to no-one I knew. These lucky ones were either given the gift at birth, or at some moment in their lives there was a revelation: one moment they didn't have it, the next the postman had thrust enlightenment into their hands. Eurekas in the bath, apples on the head, voices from the clouds. As a result there's a part of me that spends inordinate amounts of time waiting to hear the postman's whistle.

But I now know (as surely I must have known as a schoolboy) that truth is not like that, not for the famous nor for the rest of us. It comes (and goes) in bits. It comes to us all as a result of our experiences, it comes over time, and the package is never complete. Charles Taylor talks about 'reasoning in transition', by which he is referring to the Hegelian notion that our thinking moves through a series of transitions each of which is constructed and invested with energy in order to eliminate an error or resolve a contradiction or confusion. This is the way my thinking has moved during the years of this research and I've wanted to keep these transitions visible, to show the way they spiral and coil back on themselves as I keep revisiting and re-experiencing errors and insights. Writing the thesis as a story helps me to do this. The truth is not delivered as a package, nor would we have the perceptual equipment to take it all in if it were. All we can do is wander into it, or into bits of it, and as we do so we can reflect and act in order to establish more solidly our relationship to this package, this world (or these worlds) in which we find ourselves.
Other considerations also pointed me in the direction of narrative. If I'm writing about the nature of story telling, I'm inevitably brought face-to-face with questions about the tellers themselves, about what it is to be human. Who is this Joseph telling me stories? What is his nature, his essence (did he have one?), his connection to others? Where are his boundaries? Who am I and where are my boundaries? These questions (as I've already suggested) inevitably took me into the realms of philosophy and in particular into reflections on the nature of the cosmos to which we seem to have a peculiar relationship, both a part of it and (through the existence of our Cartesian minds) split off from it, apart, at a distance. These were reflections which could easily become ungrounded, could easily waft away into the ether, and so I wanted to keep them tethered to an actual experience. Writing my research as a story offered me, I hoped, this kind of ballast.

There was also the hope that in a thesis-as-story I might capture some of the many different perspectives, often unconsciously held and in conflict with each other, that formed an uneasy committee in charge of my perceptual apparatus. I'm forever detecting these in myself, occasionally being overwhelmed and incapacitated by their clashing and uncomfortable coexistence. Writing the thesis as a story might, I thought, make it possible for me both to bring out some of these often unconscious perspectives more clearly, see the ways they interacted in practice, and possibly also make the complexity less daunting.

There were other factors too. There's a body of research in the human sciences which deals in diagnostic descriptors and psychological categories, a way of thinking that implies there are generalisable ways of behaving, that there are categories into which human beings fit. I've found it more useful to focus on my clients' complexity and uniqueness. For example, I like to think about the Josephs who come to see me as having not one true self which is telling stories but many selves, not one persona with many hidden faces but many more or less equal sub-personalities each with its own needs and way of looking at things. This in turn implies a temporal dimension where sub-personalities are vying with each other in shifting internal and external collaborations; things are constantly changing. Furthermore there are
internal dramas in clients like Joseph, battles going on inside, and there are winners and losers, with the losers seldom killed off but instead finding some cave or dark forest in which to lick their wounds and continue to exert an unseen influence on our lives. Denied parts of oneself continue to live on and act out, and continued efforts by the ‘victors’ to deny the existence of these banished victims seem to leads to a kind of enervating narrowing of life possibilities. Conversely, letting these denied parts into a more conscious lived experience leads to more spark or oomph or (in Winnicott’s sense) authenticity. This is an idea about energy, zing, vitality, and also therefore about lethargy, purposelessness, sickness and psychic death. So if each personality is made up of a unique combination of different sub-personalities, internally squabbling and collaborating in unique and shifting ways, then when Joseph arrives at my doorstep, it’s not a dissociated personality that I treat (though there are aspects of his self that are split off), it’s not a case of arrested emotional development or narcissistic wounding or of a failure to negotiate the Oedipal complex or of an incomplete and unsuccessful attempt to repress both rage and fear that is at the core of the Joseph’s being (though each of these can be seen to be present at different moments). It is Joseph himself who is wanting in some way to be seen and experienced (which is more than, or different from, understood) by me, in something approaching his unique and multi-personalitied individuality.

If in fact there are sub-personalities (or if this is a helpful fiction, or a good-enough conceptual approximation to how I experience the world), if in fact the coalitions are shifting and the boundaries permeable and unstable, then the only possible way of writing about this that could possibly do justice to the dynamic complexities is through a narrative, by telling a story. Stories, with all their ambiguities and inevitable connections with what Jung called ‘the collective unconscious’ and Coleridge called ‘the Vast’, are able to carry within them more complexity than other forms of writing. Or at least that is my experience. To adapt an idea of Wittgenstein’s, stories can show what cannot be explained. I have found myself imagining fancifully at times that the fundamental building block of the universe is not an atom or a quark or whatever it is that the scientists are positing, but a story ... or that when
the atom or quark is looked at in a particular way the dynamic shapes of its myriad sub-processes and the internal and external attractions and repulsions have the characteristics of a story. 'I will tell you a story,' says the novelist Vikram Chandra, 'that will grow like a lotus vine, that will twist in on itself and expand ceaselessly, till all of you are a part of it, and the gods come to listen, till we are all talking in a musical hubbub that contains the pasts, every moment of the present, and all the future.'

So it was important to me that the thesis take the form of a narrative of my work with an adolescent client, that I tell a story. But this created a major problem. How could I write a narrative when the therapeutic process must necessarily remain confidential?

The solution has been to create a fictional client, Joseph, who is in fact a composite of a number of clients (with a dash of invention thrown in). No such person as Joseph exists, though all the conversations, stories and dreams which I’ve used in this thesis are based on real conversations, stories and dreams with real clients.

There will of course be those who will object that this means that the thesis is built upon a fiction. I disagree. The character of Joseph is believable, I think, and the interactions which I describe between Joseph and the world and Joseph and myself are believable because they are constructed out of the sometimes painful experiences of real clients and my reactions to them. So while therapeutic sessions with a person called Joseph never took place, the essences and flavours of the interactions I’ve described in this thesis are as close as I can make them to those that I actually experienced with a number of clients.

The same fictionalising process has been at work in this account of my conversations with Giles Clark. The conversations here, like the sessions with Joseph, are my inventions, however much they are each based on conversations and sessions that actually took place. As Bruce Chatwin once put it, I want to ‘alert the reader to the fact that, however closely the narrative may fit the facts, the fictional process has been at work.’ Some of the words I here attribute to Giles are ones he actually said to me; some are what
I imagine he would have said given the drift of the conversation; some are words others have said but which (for narrative purposes, to tell a more coherent story) it seemed best to attribute to Giles; some are words which it simply suited me to put into his mouth in order to move the conversation on in a particular way. So the Giles that exists in these pages is, like the Joseph, a construction of mine. My debt to him (and of course to the clients who gave me the material and experiences that enabled me to create Joseph) is real.

There were others who helped me during this difficult period, two Jungian analysts (Glenda Cloughley and Craig san Roque), and David Russell who was the main supervisor of my academic work. Conversations with each of them have informed this thesis, and in some cases words that I’ve put into Giles’s mouth actually came from Glenda, Craig or David. My debt to Giles is made clear in the text: I want to acknowledge the others as well.