



A Journey

Anne Coghill

I was forty before I felt any desire to sort myself out. First of all I decided that I would like to train as an analyst; it was only later that I realised I wanted to be analysed myself. I was not aware of any specific problems. I had accepted in my twenties that sexual activity was not for me. My relations with men tended to be slightly aloof but I accepted this and managed to work with them satisfactorily. I sought advice from Sylvia Payne, an elderly Freudian analyst (she had herself been analysed by Ernest Jones, Freud's biographer); we met at Cedric Morris' school of painting at Hadleigh in Suffolk. She gave me the name of a male analyst who was unable to take me on and then of a woman who was a follower of Melanie Klein. I did not know much about Kleinian theory at

that time, but in my first interview with this analyst I did get a warning of her attitude, which I ignored, to my cost. I told her that I had an inferiority complex and that I felt I needed a boost to my ego. She turned her head away, and I thought: 'She's not interested in what I have to say.' Why did I not act on that thought and try somebody else? I can see some of the reasons now.

- My early conditioning of love received only in return for complete obedience had emphasised the importance of authority and the advantages of non-assertion.
- Reading Freud's theories had given me an unshakeable faith in the analytic process. All through my eight years with her I was convinced that if only I stuck with her, I would eventually change.

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- I may have been in a more desperate state unconsciously than I realised; certainly a few months later I began to find it difficult to see cars on the road and narrowly missed being run over on several occasions.

But what did we talk about five times a week for eight years? The only occasion I remember which helped me dramatically was the interpretation of a dream I had early on. I was standing in a road running down hill. Every few yards there were objects like bodies covered with a curious yellow substance. She said that these were the bodies of people I felt I had killed. The next night I woke in bed with a violent pain in my head. Suddenly I remembered her interpretation and the pain gradually subsided. I felt she had saved my life and I was very grateful. She must have said other helpful things. I began to study in my spare time for a degree in psychology which I finally achieved with an upper second. I began, quite suddenly it seems now, to feel that I was coming alive. My painting was improving — I painted some of my most imaginative pictures at this time. I decided to study for a PhD. I wanted to look at children of primary school age. Working for twelve years in an experimental job as organiser of social and educational activities in a large mental hospital made me keen to look at children to see if one could detect signs of future breakdown. I cannot remember what the analyst's reaction was, but I suppose I must have felt some lack of support because I had a vivid dream at this time: I was in a wheelbarrow being wheeled round in circles in a narrow street by a number of nuns. When I told the analyst this dream she became angry and said I was mocking her. I was surprised — had

Freud not said that dreams were the pathway to the unconscious? But I said nothing. Some weeks later I told her that I would like to go to Portugal with a friend for Christmas, but that this would entail missing some sessions with her. She said it was dangerous for me to do this — after eight years of five visits a week! Finally, some weeks into the new year (I did not go away because my friend became ill) I began to suffer for the first time in my life from high blood pressure and was sent to hospital for tests. My blood pressure was down, as I guessed it would be; I was beginning to realise that it went up after the sessions, because there was so much anger in the situation which was not being expressed by either of us.

I realised at last that my survival depended on my freeing myself from this analyst; I hadn't reached the stage where I could have it out with her, so I wrote. She wrote six letters in reply, but in none of them did she suggest that we discuss my difficulties, she merely repeated that it would be very dangerous for me to give up the analysis. A few years later I heard from friends that she had had a stroke in her bath. Was this the danger she feared? Six years later she wrote at Christmas saying that she would like to see me to see how I was getting on. Her body when she opened the door appeared very rigid; she sat at the far end of the couch, drinking a cup of tea. I was not offered one. Interpretations poured out of her. By this time I had given up two later attempts at analysis and was into encounter groups, so I said, 'I don't want more interpretations', but she did not seem to be open to what I said. Two years later she wrote again. I went because I was curious to see if she had changed at all, but her behaviour was similar. She told me

that she was leaving to live in Oxford, and so we lost touch. Why was she so angry when I was changing and coming alive? Why wasn't she getting herself sorted out? Was my freedom to take new initiatives so dangerous for her?

My immediate reaction was to realise that I needed further help. Although very excited by my research plans and able to organise the practical side for example tests in schools, I began to find my concentration when reading was not so good as it had been. A friend at Birkbeck was in a Jungian analysis. She was able to vary the number of times she went — more when she needed support, less when she was in a more relaxed phase. This seemed an excellent idea to me, so I arranged to visit a Jungian analyst. He was a very warm, gentle man and I basked in the warmth — the missing father! But that was more or less where we stayed for four years, four days a week. I never got around to suggesting that the rate of visits might be varied. But I did begin to be troubled by certain sexual obsessions which seemed to be growing more intense. At the same time I had a fantasy of a small animal being held on a toasting fork over a fire. Did I share this with him? And if I had, could he have dealt with it? One day I walked out suddenly in the middle of a session. He put an arm up as if to defend himself. What were *his* fantasies?

In the next few years I was to find a few clues. A few months later we found ourselves both in a creative writing group. We were all asked to have a fantasy that we were climbing a mountain, and then get into small groups to describe what happened. He was in my group. He said his fantasy was blocked. Could it have been due to anger with me? We had not dis-

cussed my sudden departure. How could one be an analyst if one's fantasy was blocked, I asked myself.

He came to live in my neighbourhood and some years later I met him in a shop. I noticed that his face was more lively; he told me that he had worked out a new approach to his patients. I met him once or twice after that and each time he seemed more alive. At our last meeting three years ago he said that he was now seventy and that he felt wonderful, so full of life. If only he had been like that, I thought, when I was his patient.

After I left him, I began to develop a theory that in their training, analysts work through the problems they are ready to work through at that time, but that in their thirties and forties they proceed to deal with earlier problems, related possibly to their mothers, and that this creates difficulties for them when they are dealing with middle-aged women patients. I decided to try a young man, an eclectic analyst. Some months after I had started, I went to one of the first encounter group one-day meetings. It was run by a powerful woman from California. I felt myself on the verge of getting in touch at last with disturbed feelings connected with my mother. When I told the new analyst this, he said that if I was disturbed I had better not go to the group again. This after twelve years of therapy! Was I deluded in thinking that the object of therapy was to get into touch with and work through such feelings, with the support of a therapist? He was surprised when I left him and suggested we meet to discuss my reasons. I went to see him, but we did not seem able to communicate. What do analysts learn in their training?

For sixteen years after this I gave up

painting. I still liked my pictures but they no longer seemed to have any connection with me. I continued with the research; when I had finished testing the children in a five-year follow-up study and sorted out the results, I began to concentrate my reading on biographies, looking for evidence of change and development in later life — or lack of it! Although I was able to study, I could not publish my results; my fear of the power of the intellect was still an inhibiting factor. I continued to try various techniques for personal development. Co-counselling attracted me because of the lack of transference; however necessary for working through, its absence was at that period a great relief to me. After various training sessions to learn the technique, I organised a group for people over 40. I found it a useful method for the release of anger. What I did not realise until later was that after the anger, there is still the original pain and despair of childhood to be worked through, as well as the grief of un-lived life.

Chance plays an important part in life. At the same time as I broke away from the first analyst, my PhD supervisor at Birkbeck College died very suddenly, just as we were establishing a more open relationship. Because I had been conditioned as a child to believe that my spontaneous behaviour was destructive, these two events appeared to confirm this early conditioning. My crusading energies were attracted to farm animal welfare. I helped to found two new societies: the Farm and Food Society and FREGG, the Free Range Egg Association. Perhaps because I was back

in my own cage, I felt the hens' predicament sharply!

I enjoyed this crusade but often had the feeling that I was really waiting in the wings of my life. And then one day I met a friend who said she was going into a Jungian analysis. I thought: 'Dare I try again?' That was five years ago. The analyst is male and fairly young. He encouraged me to paint and to talk. I began to get into touch with the anguish, the hurt, the despair which destroys hope. The experience has made me wonder to what extent so-called depression, far from being an illness, is in many cases really just part of the process of growth and development. If one wants to grow, there is simply no other way. I have sadly watched friends who could not accept this become ill through the stress of blocked emotions, and only begin to become aware of the possibilities of change and development when it was already too late.

A Cheerful Postscript

So where am I now? This year I have had three exhibitions of my paintings, one solo and two with friends. I was encouraged when I started to paint again by Five Women Artists Plus, a group who provided the company and the stimulation of other painters which I welcomed, and which I found quite by chance. I hope before long to start using the results of my research with children and my study of development in middle and old age to highlight the need for the facts of the emotional life to be recognised as a vital part of education.