

Petruska Clarkson

31st October 1947 - 21st May 2006



*Memories by Hilde Rapp, Alexandra Chalfont, David Boadella,
Glynes X. Jacques, Yuko Nippoda and Richard House.*

Petruska was by all accounts a remarkable woman. She had a rare gift for touching people's heart and for creating a therapeutic environment in which people felt safe enough to release and work through deep pain. Petruska had a way of holding people, both emotionally and physically which gave them the courage to come through a transformative experience to a place of metanoia, a change of mind. I have personally witnessed people turn themselves around from facing a painful past in ways that held them captive in a state of victimhood, to finally face forward towards a future full of challenge, but one in which they could feel and be alive, no longer numbed by pain.

Petruska sought to bring about a world in which love, truth, beauty, justice and peace could be lived fully, and she sometimes wore the mantle of the prophet, admonishing us to stop dithering, to stop bystanding, and to embrace this commission to live our full potential as human being with courage and sincerity.

Petruska set out with great urgency on the path to that frontier of the human project where the brave have always fought against injustice and bureaucracy, convention and mediocrity, small mindedness and all the other fetters which imprison the human spirit. She struggled greatly with her own, sometimes intemperate, frustrations with the inevitable brakes that hold back the chariot that she so hoped would carry psychotherapists to join her there. She could often not muster the compassion for her colleagues that she so readily extended to her clients, when it came to recognizing that the vicissitudes of every day life slow down our progress. Not all of us see our role as that of being embarked on a quest for the philosopher's stone traveling together as a new fellowship of spiritual warriors.

Petruska was loved, and feared, admired and denigrated, much appreciated for her depth, poetry and wisdom, and much misunderstood in her stringent critique and harsh criticism of the profession.

I fear that she may have been, in the end, too much alone with the task she had set herself, too hesitant to entrust herself to others in the way that she had encouraged others to entrust themselves to her, and perhaps as harsh with herself as she was loving with those who opened their heart to her. Be this as it may, we should respect that Petruska, like all of us, ended her life enveloped in the same mysteries that shroud the twin miracle of those two radical transformations that mark our human span on this earth, our birth and our death.

Like all of us, Petruska will take her secrets into the grave with her, and so it should be.

In the end, psychotherapy, even when practiced by a great artist like Petruska, is but a small candle in the wind as we stumble through the darkness of our individual and collective ignorance. We need to learn to be content with such light as it does give and neither diminish its importance, nor exaggerate it. We should be able to see enough by it to set our feet on that path that Petruska invited us to follow, to journey where love, truth, beauty and justice come alive as we walk out into that bright field where we finally understand why we are here.

Petruska has taken some of that light with her and I hope it helps to light her way to that great unknown we call peace.

Hilde Rapp

How You Can Help AHP(B)

In order to help sustain AHP(b) as a healthy organisation with a sustainable future, our focus often needs to be placed on increasing our membership base and attending to the essential task of receiving sufficient income to cover the costs of running AHP(b).

One of the ways in which the costs of producing S&S can be offset is by having paid adverts and leaflet inserts from sources compatible with our humanistic approach. In the past S&S used to have more people wanting to advertise with us than now, so we are looking for a volunteer to help co-ordinate the ads in S&S.

We would also welcome volunteers who would be willing to network with their contacts about advertising with S&S as a way of reaching out to humanistically minded people. And - for those of you who need to advertise your own professional offerings - please do consider S&S when planning where to publicise your events.

If any of these spark an interest for you, please contact Tony Morris on chair@ahpb.org.uk

A Modulation Transfer Function for the Famed One

For Petruska

Hilde Rapp

London

19 March 1992

I am a poet
I receive the multiple transmissions
of other's small gestures of relating
as they reach out towards the vastness of creation
imploring the creator
shamed by the significance of the created
afraid of the power of fellow creatures
such as yourself
shining like a jewel
in the crown of the profession
with a vibrant dark red light
which illumines that which is invisible
to the untrained eye
and which eclipses the light
of other beams
falteringly searching
for their own truths
ever worried
that if they see too much
they will
as all great books of wisdom warn
be blinded by the power
of the revelation

I am a goldsmith
forever fashioning suitable settings
for those that shine
but you like the Gravidia
forever stride as you shine
and shine as you stride
breaking out of every setting
with a burning passion
to commune with that rock
that red earth
from which you came
and which withstands
the onslaught of those
who mine the rich veins of our creativity
that place of wilderness and wildness
in which human passions
are mere wrinkles on the face of time

Tempeternity is your setting
from which you
sing to us from the future

and your voice breaks all glass
that glitters
and is yet not
precious stone
and only
other jewels withstand
your song
without breaking
as they delight
in hearing
you sing their truths
to them from the future

But those
other vessels of the sacred fire
fashioned from coloured glass
will break
and spill
their precious spark
unless they are shielded from the force
of your impact

Sooner or later
they will cry
oh pluck out that jewel from the crown of creation
it hurts our sensibilities
put out its dark fire
and stop its vibrations
so that we may be safe from this crystalline voice
which admonishes us
to be true
to our promise
and which shames us
by exposing our insufficiency
to contain a bigger spark
and to shine more brightly
in our own place
in the crown of creation

They will cry
bring down that star
and let the sky darken
so that our gentler
subtler fire
fairy fire
which does not hurt
the eyes of the little ones
and which does not burn the dimming eyes of the aging
and which does not scorch the moist eyes
of those yet young in experience
even though no longer innocent
may play on our walls
as we turn the magic lantern

of our imagoes
to cast its lights and shadows
to entertain us
so we do not become
too fearful
in the dark nights of the soul

Can you not shield your fire
as all the old books of wisdom prescribe
can you not clothe your brilliance
in the customary veils of modesty
so that you do not shame
those who dare not desire so much beauty?

Perhaps you cannot bridle your passion
perhaps you cannot adumbrate
your truths
perhaps you must sing
and shine
like a star
and permit
others to interpose such filters and devices
as will mask your light
and soften your voice
in those places
where it is not yet decided
what is fearful aspiration
and what is spiteful denigration
of that which is too much alive
and ever generative and abundant
neither chalice nor blade
but fiery liquid stone
iridescent with its own mercurial potential
ever forming and unforming itself
in perpetual responsiveness to its source
where creator, creature and created
are still one multiplex manifold chaos
of all our yesterdays
and all our tomorrows

Let me be a modulation transfer function
let me bend your light
so that it may reach those
who wish for illumination
yet are afraid of too much brightness
let me be a handkerchief
over your mouth
so that you do not blast
the delicate violet
with your breath
let me be a baffle
so that your clarion call

does not bring down the newly mortared walls
of the professional enclave
where those as yet undecided
shelter from the winds of change

Let me be the screen which knows both sides
of the puppet play
which sees the performance
of the great puppetmaster
in all its glorious colours
and who hears the gongs
in all their clarity
and yet modestly translates
all that was too brilliant into shadows
and all that was too piercing into gentler tones.

Then there will be an audience
for your stories even among those
who dare not sit on the side of the royal couple
but need stories for all that.

I too know how to shine
and I still know how to be afraid
and so I can shine light onto the fear of shining
and I can be afraid of those who fear the light
and I can lighten the fear
and fear the lightening of responsibility
I am not a bystander
but I stand by those who are afraid and yet act.

In time I will send you a new handkerchief
through which to speak
with the soaring clarity of the eagle of farsight
and the pearly gentleness of the dove of remembrance
to those who shelter from the winds of change
behind the arras of accreditation

You must trust me to know
how much energy I can transform and by what means
I do dare disturb the universe
albeit in ways dissimilar to yours
I will try again to decode your messages
about building a tower
in the midst of our professional field
from which winged messengers
of complex weathersystems may fly out
carrying letters which bear the stamp of the Royal Mail
even if they never travel
in any mailbag to reach their destination.
You have, after all
taught me well
and you were not the first to do so!

Partial recall of Petruska

Alexandra Chalfont

In the early nineties I trained in hypno-psychotherapy, and was familiar with other modalities vicariously through literature, other fields of work and some self-experience. A few years later, on the quest to choose a psychotherapeutic way of working and a training that more fully met my personal criteria, I published *dialogue*, a magazine for psychotherapy trainees. This afforded a perfect opportunity to interview and talk with some senior practitioners in the field, discovering their values, personalities and way of working. I thought this might be a way to find my teacher of choice for this time in my life. Petruska was on my short list and, after a couple of phone conversations, opened her door immediately; we sat there, two women of about the same age, with very different life-experience, and had the sort of discussion which shifts personal worlds, the kind of discussion that Petruska was an artist in holding with so many people; with those who had lost all meaning, as well as those who generated new life meanings and discovered hitherto unrecognised connections in old and new knowledge. Here was a woman of blazing intellect, as widely and deeply informed as I could wish, and untrammelled by the myopia of the single viewpoint. She spread herself across the couch in vivid colours, and laughed the raunchy laugh which let slip her vast appetite for life.

She supported *dialogue* generously with editorial contribution, and when I invited her to draft a code of ethics for this kind of publication, she responded quickly and enthusiastically. Little wonder - I had accidentally addressed a central area of interest for her: ethics.

Shortly after this I found myself popping in regularly to work with her as an editorial assistant, particularly on parts of the Ethics book. I also decided that I had found a perfect fit for my own values and way of learning in her *Dieratao* psychotherapy course. *Dieratao, learning by enquiry*, the practitioner as researcher, self-motivated, self-directed, in rich and invigorating exchange and co-learning with colleagues from a wide spectrum of environments in psychotherapy and psychology, inspired by knowledge and research from many fields of human endeavour and artistry; this was, for a while, to become my learning as well as my working environment.

Walking into her school, *Physis* at Ealing Common, was to encounter *physis* both literally and metaphorically; early in the morning you tripped over an odd assortment of dogs that ran to crowd the entrance, pint sized to counter-high, clamouring for greeting; often Petruska would be squatting at the PC in her dressing gown, in the day's first flush of creativity, drumming out drafts of

the latest manuscript, or plucking sumptuous blooms from the front garden. After I arrived she would disappear to dress for the day's demands, delights and battles. And battles there were, as I witnessed. During these years she became uncompromising in her position toward those colleagues in whom she thought to detect ethical imperfection, to such an extent that eventually some in the profession gently (or perhaps not so gently) shook their heads and turned away. As well as her ethics book, her book 'The Bystander' illustrates her beliefs here vividly, and can serve as valuable discussion material in any psychotherapy course.

Of course, I have almost all her books on my shelf, and I'm thinking, thank goodness. At least that. For around the turn of the century family and other concerns took me in other directions, and I saw her only a couple of times after her move from Ealing to Harley Street, the years passing

with the haste of months or weeks. Last winter I was in Croatia doing a spot of training, and learned with surprise (I don't know why with surprise) that she had also been there not so long before. I resolved to get in touch, soon. By late Spring I had googled her name to find Physis had all but disappeared from the web, no active address available. Then the news that she had chosen her own time to die. No stopping you doing exactly what you want, Petruska. How dare you, you cow! That's it, though, isn't it, you *do dare*. Or despair. What's left, for me, is the imprint of a friend and inspiring colleague and teacher with pivotal influence. Well, like so many others, Petruska, I'll help perpetuate the spirit of your work in this way or that through my own: through teaching your five-relationship model, through quoting Rumi, through a tag-line on the training course I'm currently designing: 'in the spirit of Dieratao - learning by enquiry.' Thanks.

Alexandra Chalfont works, inter alia, as a psychotherapist, trainer and translator. She is the founder of *ifocus connections*, a training consultancy which resources counsellors, psychotherapists, coaches and health professionals in their personal and professional development.

Petruska Clarkson

Petruska was a boundary-crosser, always looking for the next edge to cross. She was a defender and protagonist of double roles and a great de-mythologizer of our superstitions. She understood the depth and complexity of the therapeutic relationship better than many. With her death we say goodbye to a great meta-psychologist.

David Boadella

Quest for a teacher.
Glynes X Jacques
London. June 2006

Did you prepare yourself, in robes of golden glory, or
let deep Bacchanalian strings carry you on your way?
Did you choose a good day,
Or have a diva sing, that Sunday in May
as Amsterdam opened her arms to Spring.

I remember your feet, fit for Michaelangelo marble
and keen eye, eager to inspect
and hone the power of a word. Someone said
your trousers were ripped. "Only Alah is perfect!"
you quipped, while putting on your lipstick.

Did you decide there was nothing
more
to learn or give? Were you tired of
being
yourself, in this little isolation?
Did the Cosmos see you coming with
Tristan's potion
Did you toast the Soul's Eternal
Nation?

I wonder how a curious mind turns
out its own light
Long before that Sunday. Yet in that
flicker
my darkness made ignition,
that marvelous transmission
And bore up its sails to new transition.

But sleep. Whatever the reasons or
non reasons,
Respects or transgressions, secrets or
Confessions, set off your boat
and may the shores of other destinations
bring peace and new devotions.



My last letter to Petruska

Yuko Nippoda

Dear Truska (as you wrote in your last email to me)

I think this is a very good way to say goodbye to you.

Since I heard about the sad news, it has been extremely difficult for me to come to terms with it. Lots of emotions have come up to me. However, one thing I clearly want to say is - I am feeling very proud and privileged to have known you, shared lots of time with you and learned a lot from you.

I enjoyed the experience of working with and for you since 1993, not only in psychotherapy and organisational consultancy, but also research and writing, at metanoia and PHYSIS. Various workshops and particularly Dierotao 'Learning by Enquiries' were amazing. Your training was the most exciting I have had. Taking in individual resources and exchanging energy of the participants, I had a transformational experience. I learned how human beings can grow and change through relationships. Coming as I do from a society which emphasises conformity, an individuation process needed to have taken place. Your sensitive and supportive approach enriched my individual strength, and I felt my worth was acknowledged and transformed. The individual tutorials and daily life discussions I had with you were very useful. They helped me enormously to grow and change as a psychotherapist through the relationship with you. I really feel that I was in a privileged position to assist you with your research and also to have co-written a chapter. It was a live learning from experience and it rooted my writing interest. I remember your saying 'You have writer's eyes' when you saw my tired eyes after doing lots of writing. I'm also pleased that I translated your book 'Gestalt counselling in action' into Japanese. It is the biggest treasure that I worked with you when you were on top form. I certainly convey that to younger generations.

I also thank you for giving me a warm family atmosphere. Both of us are from another country and I felt understood on what it is like to live in another culture. You had amazing parties and dinner parties with your colleagues and friends, which I enjoyed so much. Do you remember that our first dinner party was a Japanese meal? Not only that, you and I and Vincent had meals together sometimes. I remember the three of us went to pick up flowers for your birthday making lots of jokes and laughing. You loved flowers very much. We sometimes went for a walk and played with your dogs. Do you remember that you and me were dancing in the library of your house with 60's music? I never knew that you were such a good dancer until then. Something I remember is that we exchanged gifts for our birthdays and Christmas. I always had creative ideas for my gifts and you liked them so much. I still have many of your gifts. Some years ago, I was so upset that the parcels from my family in Japan got lost one day. Then you organised people in the training group to contribute small things and put them in the big box and gave it to me as a birthday present. It was truly touching. I was so looking forward to seeing what comes out of the box one after another. You were very caring and generous. I spent an extensive amount of time with you and I have lots of good memories. That's a shame that I cannot put everything here. They were happy days.

Of course, we didn't always have happy times. We sometimes had disagreements. You showed some anger to me and I did, too. However, we worked it through and dealt with it. Something I valued was that when you were challenged, you thought about it and came back with your answers.

I came to know many people through you. I am regularly in touch and see them; some of them are long-term friends. I do feel close to them.

You moved to Harley Street. I also thought the time came for me to leave the nest. Since then, I didn't see you as much as before. However, we were still in touch. I had a life-threatening illness and I suffered a lot. You kindly rang me and listened to my agony. Your empathy and very useful information helped me tremendously to go through the difficulties. Then last year, we met again and made very good contact. I always thought I wanted to meet you again and work with you when the opportunity arose. Now I feel utterly sad that I cannot do that any more.

When Sue Fish passed away, I felt tremendously sad and a real sense of loss. I remember seeing you at her memorial service. How sad that I am now writing this eulogy to you. I enjoyed working with both of you so much. I think that I am very lucky to have been trained by both of you, who I respect and admire greatly as psychotherapy trainers.

I still feel that you just live far away and that's why I am not seeing you. Then suddenly the reality hits me. You no longer belong to this world. It makes me so sad. What is difficult is that you took your own life. It has affected me so much since then. I have been thinking about life and death on many occasions due to my life-threatening illness. That's why I still wanted you to live.

Bye bye Petruska,
I will sign off in the same way as ever.
Lots of love as always,

Yuko Nippoda

Yuko Nippoda is a UKCP Registered Psychotherapist. She was trained by Petruska Clarkson and worked alongside her for many years, participating in training courses and workshops in psychotherapy, supervision and organisational consultancy, including some joint projects. She also assisted Petruska on the administrative side in the office for many years.

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Memories of Petruska Clarkson Richard House

I can't say I knew Petruska well - certainly nothing like as much as would be needed to write an authoritative obituary - but our lives did touch from time to time over the past fifteen years of her life, and I would like to share these vignettes of experience as my modest testimony to her professional life.

I first met Petruska at a party held by Sage Publications in the early 1990s (I was one of their freelance editors at the time), to mark the opening of their new offices in Bonhill Street. I travelled to London, quite shy and uncertain of myself in those days - and I remember walking into the room and immediately noticing a tall and strikingly attractive woman whose presence seemed to dominate the room (I guess there were maybe 100-150 people there). I noticed her before I knew that this was indeed Petruska. I somehow briefly introduced myself to her, and she recognised me as someone who had worked on one of her book manuscripts and who had recently had a piece published in *Self and Society*.

I also remember composing the index for her *Handbook of Psychotherapy* (which she edited with Michael Pokorny), and it was a pleasure to receive a specially written letter from her through the post ('those were the pre-email days'!), thanking me for the quality of the index. In my experience, freelancers rarely received such fulsome acknowledgement, and the kindness and graciousness of this gesture really struck me at the time.

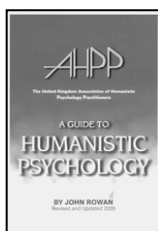
My next and most extensive contact with Petruska was when there was an editorial difficulty over a controversial article I had submitted to *Self and Society* in the mid-1990s. As a result of this, I went to a weekend workshop she was running on 'Eros in the Consulting Room', which made a significant impact on me. Petruska was a brilliant woman with an extraordinary breadth of reading and knowledge. I thought I had a lot of books - until I spent the weekend in her consulting room, shelved wall-to-ceiling on all four sides with the most impressive collection of books imaginable. Petruska went out of her way to comment on and support the article I had submitted to the journal. The article was ultimately published (see *S&S*, 23 (2), 1995, pp. 34-9), and Petruska's strong support of it was very affirming at what was a challenging time for me.

Several years ago, Petruska was also very kind to write a major review of my book *Therapy Beyond Modernity*. And while her review has not yet found its way

into print, it was massively encouraging to me that someone of her stature had clearly read the book deeply and, notwithstanding its inevitable shortcomings, had really understood and concurred with the counter-cultural arguments what I was trying to develop in it. It was only after the book came out (in 2003) that I discovered that Petruska had been arguing similar things in some of her own writings, and I now really regret not having quoted her work more extensively in the book - which in retrospect makes her review of the book all the more generous. Yvonne Bates and I were also delighted that Petruska agreed to include a chapter from her book on 'the transpersonal' in our *Ethically Challenged Professions* anthology.

I know nothing of the circumstances of Petruska's death, other than that she took her own life (which, as my friend Grace Lindsey Cook reminded me recently, can be very different indeed from 'suicide' as conventionally understood). I also didn't know her on a personal level, though I am aware of the professional difficulties in which she became embroiled, and the challenges she launched at the allegedly double standards of many of those involved in the therapy institutions. But what is surely incontrovertible is that Petruska made a major and lasting contribution to the development of therapy in Britain and beyond - and I sincerely hope that any enemies that she may have made in the course of her sometimes controversial career will be able to recognise and value the magnitude of her contribution to understanding and extending this difficult work that we strive to do.

Richard House is Senior Lecturer in the Research Centre for Therapeutic Education at Roehampton University and also works with the early years in Norwich Steiner School as a Kindergarten and Parent & Child Group leader.



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