

## Alchemy and the erotic transference: A Jungian approach

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# Alchemy and the erotic transference

## A Jungian approach

JOY SCHAVERIEN

**ABSTRACT** In *The Psychology of the Transference* Jung showed a series of pictures which he discovered in an ancient alchemical text, the *Rosarium philosophorum*. He connected these to the effects of the transference in psychotherapy. This may seem an unnecessarily obscure way of looking at the transference, yet it makes remarkable sense. Although alchemy is often considered the sole province of Jungian analysis, it can also be seen as illuminating a psychodynamic approach to counselling. Written from a post-feminist viewpoint, a critical approach is taken to certain key Jungian terms. The paper is illustrated with two clinical examples.

**KEYWORDS** Jung, alchemy, feminism, erotic transference, countertransference, gender



Figure 1 The *Coniunctio*

For some readers, this picture will be instantly recognizable as denoting a Jungian approach to the transference in psychotherapy. For others, the image may seem arcane and so unlikely to have anything serious to contribute to psychodynamic counselling. However, I hope to show that this image, and the series from which it is taken, offers a powerful metaphor for the psychotherapeutic relationship and, furthermore, that it is relevant within a feminist approach to clinical practice.

The picture is one of a series discovered by Jung in an ancient alchemical text, the *Rosarium philosophorum* (Jung 1946). Although it may at first seem esoteric, unworldly, even irrelevant to our present-day concerns, it is an image which Jungians understand as a metaphor for the unconscious meeting in the analytic relationship (Samuels 1989). So what does this ancient image hold for present-day therapists? And how can the mating of a heterosexual couple help in thinking about the transference/countertransference dynamic with regard to feminism? In this paper I shall address this question and show how this series of images informs my analytic work.

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE TRANSFERENCE

In *The Psychology of the Transference*, illustrations from the *Rosarium* are equated by Jung with stages in the transference and countertransference in depth psychology. In these woodcuts, the alchemical

(or analytic) journey is pictured through the transformations in the (psychological) relationship of the two people. These are the alchemist and his assistant, his *soror mystica*, symbolized by the 'imaginary figures of the king and queen' (Samuels 1985: 181). In psychotherapy the couple is intended by Jung to be seen both as the patient and analyst in the transference and as aspects of the individual psyche. Jung describes how, in alchemy, there is a well-sealed vessel in which a chemical reaction takes place. There is an affinity (an attraction) which draws opposing elements together, causing an intense chemical mix. There is a fusion of these elements out of which is produced something new, gold or the philosopher's stone.

The first illustration in the series is the Mercurial Fountain (Figure 2). This is the vessel containing the *prima materia* or the divine water, in which the elements are understood to combine. In Figure 3 the opposing elements are shown as the sun and the moon, on which stand the king and queen. They are also a brother-sister pair, and, although they are clothed, Jung writes that the incestuous

## ROSARIUM

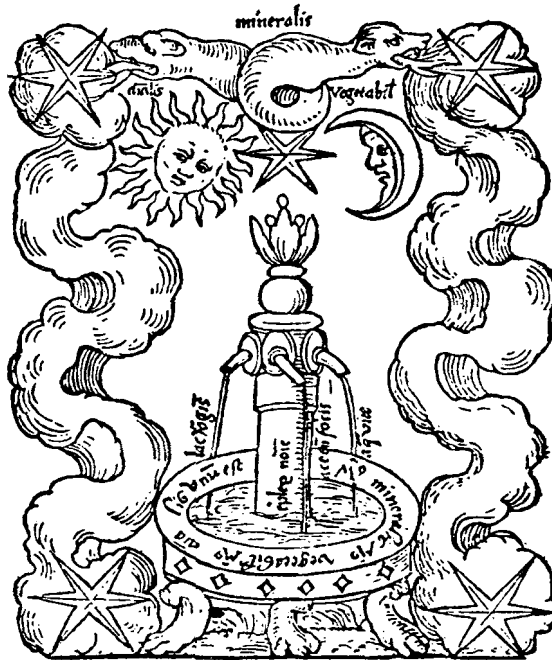


Figure 2 The Mercurial Fountain

connection is revealed in the contact of their left hands. In the next illustration they are naked (Figure 4). Then, as the process deepens, they are shown immersed in the bath which is the Mercurial Fountain (Figure 5). The transformation is continued in several pictures where they are depicted in copulation; the picture shown as Figure 1 is the first of these. In a picture not shown here the soul, in the form of a child, departs, leaving a state of stasis, the *mortificatio*, a near-death state. It returns, symbolizing rebirth, and eventually the disparate parts of the self are united. They come together anew, as is shown by the androgynous figure (Figure 6). (In this paper I have selected six from the original series. Jung (1946) showed ten pictures and Schwartz-Salant (1989) has shown additional pictures from the original series, which number twenty in all.)

This series of pictures can be seen as an illustration of the unconscious relationship in psychotherapy. The alchemical vessel is the analytic relationship, sealed by the boundaries and limits of the setting. The confidentiality and the undivided attention of the analyst all contribute to making it possible for the unconscious of patient and therapist to meet. As with the chemical elements of alchemy, there may be an affinity which draws the two people together. The analyst lowers his consciousness sufficiently to be open to the influence of the patient and, in the countertransference, he may temporarily become infected with the patient's neurosis. (I am paraphrasing Jung and therefore using the pronoun 'he' in this context.) There is an intensity, even an attraction, when the unconscious of the patient meets the unconscious of the analyst, and an incestuous atmosphere may draw the analyst, in spite of himself, into a repetition of the dynamic of the patient's family. An intense and often erotic form of relating may temporarily dominate in the transference and countertransference. The point is that Jung's *Psychology of the Transference* (1946) indicates that, within a therapeutic relationship, all is not as it at first appears. This central Jungian text has been discussed by a number of Jungian writers including Jacoby (1984), Schwartz-Salant (1989) and Samuels (1989).

Contrary to first impressions there is a complex gender mixing in this text, in which nothing is as it first appears. Although the story is told through a series of pictures of a heterosexual coupling, to understand it merely in gender-specific terms would be to miss the complex subtlety of Jung's meaning. Many of Jung's texts have a rather fixed approach to gender difference, but not this one. The couple represents unconscious elements in the transference and so

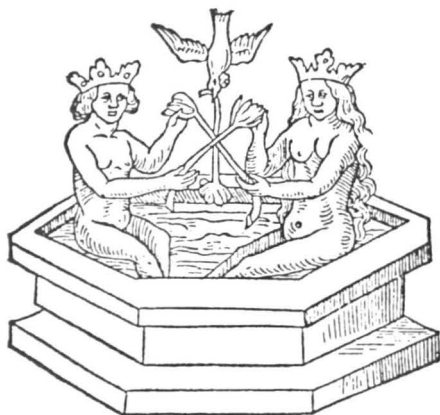
PHILOSOPHORVM.



Figure 3



Figure 4



Speculum

Figure 5



Figure 6

there is a crossing of gender boundaries: the unconscious of the woman may sometimes manifest itself in male guise and the unconscious of the man in female guise. However, this is by no means fixed. If the pictures are viewed as symbolic of different forms of

psychological intercourse they can be understood to be applicable regardless of the reality of the gender or the sexual orientation of the analytic couple. To be open to this we need to relinquish fixed ideas of gender; it may be that a form of gender uncertainty liberates us to apply this understanding to working in the transference.

### The context of practice

Theories from many schools of psychoanalysis are applied in the clinical practice of present-day analytical psychologists. In Britain, the influence of Fordham is significant (1971, 1973, 1974). Following Jung, he evolved a particular understanding of developmental theory through infant observation and linked his findings to Jung's view of the 'self'. Thus he linked Kleinian, object relations and Jungian theory. In the space I have here I cannot do justice to the international literature in this field; instead I give an extended reference section at the end of this paper and I refer the interested reader to Samuels (1985) who gives a helpful overview of the different schools of thought in analytical psychology. There are also a number of international journals on different facets of analytical psychology.

In applying alchemy as a metaphor for clinical practice it is necessary to be clear about the way that I actually work. The woodcuts and the sense Jung makes of them are like a template, a pattern of understanding of unconscious processes, which informs my practice alongside other theoretical models and, most importantly, in response to the patient's material. In *The Revealing Image* (Schaverien 1991) I analysed a series of pictures, made by a patient, showing how the therapeutic process related to *The Psychology of the Transference*. Although I am informed by understandings gained from many other psychoanalytic schools, and particularly from Winnicott, Freud and Lacan (Schaverien 1991, 1995), I will leave these aside for the purpose of this paper.

In the analytic encounter the construction of the frame is carefully planned. In the first session the boundaries of the setting and the limits of what is on offer are established, and the fee is negotiated. In the first session it is usual to answer questions regarding qualifications but not personal questions. Thus the vessel is constructed. However, I have no illusion that the therapist is a blank screen; we communicate about ourselves in many subtle ways which are not always conscious. The layout of the room, clothes and body language all contribute to giving an impression of who we are as people. Analysis is centred in



the transference and countertransference, but before we can engage with the transference it is essential to establish a therapeutic alliance (Greenson 1967). Only then is it possible to interpret the unconscious elements as they unfold within the therapeutic relationship.

To work with the inner world we also need to take account of the reality of the outer world. In certain ways women and men experience the world differently. This may be attributed to cultural factors rather than an essential biological difference (Brennan 1989; Wright 1992). Many men, as well as women, are oppressed by the cultural expectations of their social role. In therapy this cannot be ignored, and in my practice I aim to take account of social and cultural effects of gender role as well as personal history. In *Desire and the Female Therapist* (1995) I give a more detailed elaboration of this.

The countertransference informs my understanding of the transference. This means that if I feel an arousal, or alternatively none, in relation to a client, I will consider it as a possible unconscious communication. If, for example, I realize that I am feeling bored, I might wonder if something in the material is evoking this in me. First, I will check myself and question if I am resisting something in the countertransference. However, if the same thing is repeated in the following session, I begin to suspect that my boredom may be a response to the patient's attempt to remain unconscious of some split-off aspect of the psyche. (This sort of situation has been discussed by Samuels (1989).) Interpretations informed by this understanding may reveal some powerful feeling, such as anger, love or a fear, such as of abandonment or possibly of psychosis, which has been split off. It is this unconscious situation – that which is unstated, unsayable or unconscious – which is depicted in the woodcuts.

## JUNG AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL FEMININE

It is common for the dominant schools of psychoanalysis to disregard Jung. Insights which Jung wrote about in the early years of psychoanalysis are often 'discovered' by psychoanalysts without due reference or the acknowledgement which any other analyst would receive. This is probably a legacy of the split which developed between Freud and Jung. It was their disagreement over the aetiology and purpose of eros in the analytical encounter which was central in the break in their relationship. While Freud considered the erotic transference to be based solely in infantile and bodily experiences, Jung understood it rather differently. For Jung, eros was seen

as a purposive aspect of the life force. In *Symbols of Transformation* (1911–12) he elucidated this, and, later, in *The Psychology of the Transference* (1946), he developed it further through understandings gained from his studies of alchemy (1944, 1968). Therefore eros, in its widest sense, or the lack of it, is considered to be a central indicator of the life within the analytic encounter.

While Jung's erudite knowledge of and interest in other cultures are part of the richness of his writings, some of the views he expressed are problematic and pose a challenge to those who find his work helpful. It is important to read Jung in order to distinguish the wealth of valuable insights from attitudes which are clearly unacceptable today. Only then is it possible to re-vision some of his work. One area where this is called for is in his writing on gender and particularly the psychological feminine. Here I am intending to make a distinction between what may be regarded as the 'feminine' in the psyche of both men and women and 'female psychology' in the sense of the psychology of women. A number of analysts have written critiques of Jung's views of the feminine and of homosexuality in attempts to distinguish the positive aspects of his thought from his cultural bias, but, before discussing them, it is necessary to outline some of the concepts on which Jung's theories are constructed.

### **The collective unconscious and archetypes**

Central in Jungian terminology is the collective unconscious. This is considered to be a layer in the psyche which underlies the personal unconscious. It is sometimes likened to geological strata where, as one layer is revealed, it is discovered to be founded on another and yet another (Jacobi 1942). The collective unconscious is the deepest and least accessible of these layers; it is the foundation of all the others. Jung writes that it can never be fully known or depotentiated and he suggests that all we can hope for is to gain a conscious attitude in relation to it (Jung 1959: 3). The assumption is that all human beings are, at some fundamental level, linked to each other; not separate but related.

The collective unconscious is expressed through archetypes. These are instinctual patterns which have no form in their own right; they are not tangible, or visible, but rather sense perceptions. They are the underlying pattern from which images take form in dreams, myth and art. Archetypes are often attributed with human form and characterized by figures such as the 'hero' and the 'great mother'.

They may manifest themselves in psychological types which centre on generational aspects of the personality, such as 'senex', where someone who is very young may have an elderly outlook on life, or 'puer', the 'Peter Pan' character who does not grow up. An archetypal constellation in the transference taps into the collective unconscious and as a result may be experienced as transfixing. When this is activated in the analytic encounter the therapist may find herself under its influence and have difficulty separating from the atmosphere which is evoked. Schwartz-Salant (1989) has drawn parallels with projective identification.

The problem with theory based on archetypal states is that it can be used to argue an essentialist position so that certain characteristics may be attributed as innate in women or in certain ethnic groups. This theory appealed to the Nazis and so its dangers are evident (Samuels 1993); it is for this reason that we must maintain a critical stance in relation to such theories.

### **Anima and animus**

In Jung's view the psyche is made up of opposites; that is to say, any conscious attitude is compensated by an unconscious one. (This is similar to other psychoanalytic schools of thought, for example Racker (1968) who writes of the talion law in this regard.) In the context of feminism this merits attention because the concept of anima and animus, which is central in Jungian theory, attributes gendered status to the opposites. This is evident in the woodcuts from the Rosarium. Taken too literally this may foster a fixed attitude to gender and sexuality. However, many present-day analysts see the 'inner masculine and the inner feminine' as elements of the psyche which may emerge in both sexes. In Jung's view opposites manifest themselves in culture as well as in the psychological development of the individual. They may be characterized by extremes such as hot and cold, light and dark, day and night. With regard to issues of race this can be problematic as very often black and dark are attributed to the unconscious state while white and light are seen as conscious (Dalal 1988). Similarly, and this is my interest in this paper, the feminine element in the psyche is attributed to the dark unconscious state while the masculine is associated with light and consciousness. The problem is that, in the language of opposites, there is always an 'other' who may become the convenient and unthinking repository for unwanted projections.

In Jung's writings the masculine is equated with Logos and the feminine with Eros (1951: 14). There are aspects of both in men and women which, if they are unconscious, will be projected and attached to a figure of the opposite sex. Thus the unconscious in a man may be characterized by the appearance in his 'dreams, visions or fantasies' of an idealized female or 'anima' figure who carries the archetypal feminine. Jung writes: 'I have suggested the term anima as indicating something specific for which the term soul is too general and too vague' (Jung 1951: 13-14). The anima in men is very often attached to the mother imago. 'Every mother and every beloved is forced to become the carrier and embodiment of this omnipresent and ageless image which corresponds to the deepest reality in a man' (Jung 1951: 12-13). The anima is often, but not exclusively, the idealized feminine which leads man towards individuation and to a resolution of a projected part of his personality; it is ultimately an aspect of the 'Self' (Fordham 1971: Redfearn 1985). This accounts, in part at least, for the incestuous dynamic which may be experienced in the transference and which the woodcuts could be understood to illustrate. The projection of the anima may lead to idealization or else an intense hatred propelled by fear of intimacy which may be particularly intense for a man working with a female therapist (Schaverien 1995).

In order to find the richness in this theory it is necessary first to confront some of the excesses of androcentrism in Jung's writings with regard to the feminine. In woman the unconscious element is associated with the animus and, although Jung speculates that this is similar to the anima in man, he is less eloquent, even perhaps a little reluctant, when discussing it. This is shown when he writes: 'if the anima is an archetype that is found in men, it is reasonable to suppose that an equivalent archetype must be present in woman. For just as the man is compensated by woman so the woman is compensated by man' (Jung 1951: 14). We have seen that the anima in man is often the romantic temptress while the form taken by the animus in women is less clear.

Furthermore, while unconscious possession by either anima or animus results in behaviours which are undesirable, both seem to be attributed to negative aspects of the feminine. For example, animus possession in women produces the aggressive, unco-operative mate of the man. Of women who are unconsciously identified with the masculine element in the psyche, Jung writes: 'no matter how friendly and obliging a woman's Eros may be, no logic on earth can shake

her if she is ridden by the animus. Often the man has the feeling . . . that only seduction or a beating or rape would have the necessary power of persuasion' (Jung 1951: 15). In cultural terms we have here the traditional justification for violence by men towards woman: the woman is blamed. However, it is also the feminine which is denigrated in men when he writes: 'men can argue in a very womanish way too, when they are anima-possessed and have thus been transformed into the animus of their own anima' (Jung 1951: 15). I present these quotes because they are among the worst of his excesses and characteristic of the problem which we have to confront when applying Jungian concepts within a feminist frame. However, within the same chapter in *Aion* (1951) Jung makes it clear that the purpose of understanding the opposite elements within the individual psyche is to develop a conscious attitude and so recognize and integrate the projections within the personality: 'The autonomy of the collective unconscious expresses itself in the figures of anima and animus. They personify those of its contents which, when withdrawn from projection, can be integrated into consciousness' (Jung 1951: 20). I find this a really helpful way of understanding the psyche. This is the problem: there are so many significant insights in Jung's writing that, if we dismiss him for his misogyny, there is the danger of ejecting the alchemist's gold with the murky waters in which it is disguised.

Rigsby (1994) has pointed out that Jungians often reject feminist arguments and feminists very often ignore Jung; there is frequently avoidance from both of addressing these problematic areas. However, if Jung's work is to continue to be useful clinically it is necessary to open these issues for debate in an attempt to re-vision some of the theory. Among those who have engaged with this are Wehr (1987) who is both a Jungian and a feminist. She has shown that one of the problems is that Jung often confused men's anima projections with female psychology. She writes: 'Had he located both discussions within the context of patriarchy's influence on men and women's sense of self, both would be improved' (Wehr 1987: 104). Here it seems to me that she makes a significant differentiation between the inner world (particularly of men) and the outer world. She attributes this to the probability that 'Jung derived his concept of anima from his own experience' and she proposes that 'Even though in some ways he was unable to see through his own projections he did come up with a remarkable model for understanding men's feelings about women' (Wehr 1987: 117). It seems to me that this is the crux of the problem, and I concur with Wehr who concludes that

there is a real difficulty in resolving a critical attitude to Jung's sexism while maintaining a regard for his 'very real contribution to human self-understanding' (Wehr 1987: 124).

Young-Eisendrath (1984), and Young-Eisendrath and Weidemann (1987) have given accounts of the ways in which these theories can be understood and applied within a feminist frame of reference. Young-Eisendrath (1984) clearly distances herself from Jung's polarization of masculine and feminine and argues that both emerge in the psyche of women and of men. In her work with heterosexual couples, she directly confronts the negative image of the Hag and the apparently more positive image of the Hero, to offer an understanding of the woman who is denigrated in relationship by her male partner. Through case example she shows how it is the inability of the couple to communicate with each other and integrate anima/animus projections which causes both to feel resentful, misunderstood and unable to relate to each other. Transformation of the psychological state of both may occur when the projections become conscious and so are withdrawn. In working with individuals, in counselling and psychotherapy, we can see similar patterns played out in the transference/countertransference dynamic.

In a collection of papers edited by Schwartz-Salant and Stein (1992) anima and animus are addressed from a number of different perspectives. Young-Eisendrath writes that she finds the concept most useful clinically when applied to Jung's theory of contra-sexuality which 'invites a psychological analysis of the other arising in one's own subjectivity. This is extremely useful in clarifying gender differences . . . providing . . . we revise our theory of gender so that it is relative and contextualised' (Schwartz-Salant and Stein 1992: 175-6). She argues that there is no self-evident or neutral truth about gender: 'gender has no ahistorical, universal meanings' (ibid.: 159). This is a point made in a different way by Hopcke (1991) who has analysed the contradictory attitudes to homosexuality in the writings of Jung and his followers. He argues for a less fixed attitude to sexual orientation which could be understood to be the result of a 'personal and archetypal confluence of the masculine, feminine, and androgyne' (1991: 187). Significantly he proposes that sexual orientation may be fluid and changing in different phases of life. This may be a helpful way of viewing the woodcuts from *The Psychology of the Transference* (1946). It could be that they too reveal aspects of the psyche which are fluid in relation to gender and, further, offer a pattern of relating which is both interpersonal and intra-personal.

I will give two brief examples of psychotherapy in an attempt to establish the difference between the inner-world, psychological feminine, particularly in the psyche of the man, and female psychology, as lived by a woman. I am informed by countertransference responses which I have discussed in detail in *Desire and the Female Therapist* (1995). In that book I drew on feminist and psychoanalytic theory to discuss particular issues faced by the female therapist. In the case examples which follow I take a similar position with regard to the material presented.

In the first example, a vignette from therapy with a male patient will show the way in which anima projections may be unconsciously acted out and lived. When they become activated within the transference the analytic vessel offers a container where they may be held and eventually integrated, leading to a more conscious state. The challenge here is that the female therapist may have to overcome a certain resistance to the attitude to women expressed by the client.

### **Clinical vignette: Robert**

Robert was married to a woman whom he described as cold. On his honeymoon he had met another woman, who was on holiday with her husband, and they had had sex while their partners were asleep. The two couples had become friends and the affair between Robert and this woman had continued for fifteen years. When he came to me it had recently concluded. This had been a significant relationship for him of which his wife had remained ignorant. Over the years there had also been a number of other brief sexual encounters which had had a less permanent place in his life. We might understand that his anima projections had been embodied, and so lived, in his relationships with these different women. They could all be understood to hold different facets of him and their unconscious purpose had been to enable him to avoid becoming conscious of his 'Self'. They had served the purpose of maintaining a split which had been necessary for him in keeping at bay fears, grief and insecurity which had now broken through and driven him to seek therapy.

As I learned his story I came to understand that Robert's particular form of loneliness drives him to search for his ideal feminine partner in many women. No one woman can satisfy his yearning and each seems temporarily to offer a solution to his feelings of abandonment. Thus his anima projection takes form in 'other women' as well as his wife. As time progressed I came to understand how

this had come about and how it related to his need to keep sexual passion and daily living arrangements separate. To love and make love in the same place would have meant an integration for which, until now he had not been ready. He became frightened of his lover, who was passionate, and he realized that he had unconsciously married a woman who was unresponsive to him. This reproduced his early experience of a cold boarding school and an absent but longed for mother.

With the therapeutic relationship there were again two women in his life; this time his wife and myself. A similar split to that of the wife/woman friend and the boarding school/mother emerged within the transference. For a while I was idealized as the lover had been. However, he began to be able to understand this split as he observed it being played out within the therapeutic relationship. As this became more conscious, it became possible for him to begin to bring these projected parts of himself together. Negative as well as positive elements emerged in the transference and the idealization of women gave way to his admission of his disgust and fear of them. Thus we began to understand that the 'other women' served a purpose for him by keeping at bay consciousness of both his homosexuality and his fear of women.

Such material can be regarded from many different points of view. The man is the client and it is almost inevitable that the therapist, engaged with his inner world, will identify with his position. However, especially if the therapist is a woman she may also be drawn to consider the outer world and the position of the women in the story. I felt an understanding and empathy for Robert and yet, as a woman, I was also aware of the sense of betrayal of the women in his life. It is important to be alert to these different identifications in such a case. It may be helpful to view the analytic setting as the stage on which the patient plays out his drama, assembling all the characters in his story. This helps to see them as elements of his own psyche. Thus it is possible to take both an outer-world, social view, which includes the reality of the effects of this drama in his life, and an inner-world, psychological view.

This example of therapy in a heterosexual pairing can be seen to fit with the alchemical process as illustrated by the woodcuts discussed by Jung. Robert's pattern of relating to women had become manifest in the transference. Much of the time we had been engaged in negotiating a process of intimacy and distance which might be understood to be the psychological parallel of the meetings



in the woodcuts. Sometimes he might desire me as a mother or a woman; but, at other times, associated with memories of being in the parental bed, he had been repulsed and disgusted at the thought of closeness. In the transference these could be viewed as similar to the meeting in the 'Mercurial Fountain' where transformation becomes possible through the immersion. The incestuous intensity increased for a while, and then decreased and turned bad, eventually leading to a more conscious resolution. At the conclusion of our work together Robert summarized the way he had experienced the process and said that he had seen me for a while as his 'mystical' mistress. This choice of imagery from someone who was not familiar with Jungian theory seemed graphically to encapsulate the temporary intensity of the engagement in analysis. Perhaps this is particularly so when the patient is a man and the therapist a woman (Schaverien 1995).

Over time the client takes different positions in relation to the therapist, and when we maintain an element of gender confusion in relation to the process the patient may experience the paternal function in the female therapist. This is similar to the way in which the male therapist is often understood to carry the maternal transference. The therapist has to be fluid and prepared to be seen in all these roles for the client to be able fully to work through all the elements of the psyche which are evoked by the process. The therapeutic alliance in this case could be understood to parallel the image of the brother/sister pair. I turn now to consider the sister/sister pair.

### **Clinical vignette: Flora**

The relevance of the alchemical imagery for the transference is less immediately clear for the female therapist when working with women patients. The heterosexual metaphor does not immediately seem to represent intercourse in the same gender pair, and yet similar processes occur. In the second case I present it is not the anima or animus which was the most significant point, although similar idealized images of men sometimes emerge in the transference with women. However, here it is the erotic engagement within the transference on which I will focus; there are times when this may challenge the female therapist to consider her own sexual orientation.

Flora, a married woman with three children, had recently increased her therapy sessions from once to three times a week. She was

describing feeling excited today. It was her eldest child's birthday and she was pleased that, contrary to her mother's prediction, she had found that she was able to make a cake and do the other domestic chores necessary to provide for the party. Then she went on to talk about the sexual relationship with her husband, a common theme in recent sessions. She was experiencing herself as passionate and wishing to initiate sex and this had been altering the relationship between them; she felt that he preferred her to be more passive. After a while she turned to me and said, 'I feel this is not what I was wanting to talk about today. It feels as if there is something between us which I wish to talk about but I don't know what that is – I think it relates to the couch.'

In the past the couch had terrified her and, although she had tried it once, she had refused to use it since. She felt that if she were to lie on it she would fall into a black hole. Today the atmosphere was different. Mentally reviewing the material in the session so far, I noted that she had talked about her mother's lack of affirmation of her as a mother, and her husband's lack of affirmation of her initiating sexual contact. It seemed she was feeling creative but restrained and, as this was followed by her reference to the couch, I wondered if she might be experiencing me as restraining her.

After a pause, I told her that I found myself wondering if it might have something to do with sex between us. She said 'maybe', and then went on to talk at length about a transference she had had to a previous female counsellor. She had found herself having fantasies about the counsellor's breasts and this had confused her and she had become concerned about her sexual orientation. She then described how, on a recent weekend visit to her mother, she had slept in her mother's bed. There were only three beds and her children were sleeping in the other two. She had asked her mother if she had ever had lesbian relationships and her mother replied that she had not. It seems that, in Flora's mind, her desire for closeness with her mother and her fear of it had become sexualized. The mother did not affirm her as a viable adult woman, but rather encouraged her dependency, as did the husband who seemed anxious about the power of her sexuality. This seemed to encapsulate the undifferentiated feelings which now began to emerge in the transference.

In the theoretical context of *The Psychology of the Transference*, it seems that there was an immediate engagement which was in the process of deepening. Flora had recently committed herself to three

sessions a week and was now considering using the couch. We could say that we were both increasing our investment in the process and so were in the vessel together. In the transference the couch seemed to represent getting into bed with me. The excitement, associated with her desire for bodily closeness, and the identification with the therapist/mother's body was experienced as sexual. In terms of the alchemical metaphor this could again be understood as the immersion in the process. Furthermore, the erotic bond, which is necessary for the individuation process, was beginning. The couch seemed to indicate the intercourse which she desired but also feared with me – an unconscious mix. In psychoanalytic terms the fantasies of breasts clearly evokes a maternal transference which could be understood from a Kleinian frame of reference and the terror, associated with the couch, was probably linked to fear of regression to an abandoned baby within. However, there was also the sexual passion which she discussed earlier in the session and so it would have been a mistake to understand the transference solely in terms of infantile desires. Equally it was important to acknowledge the infantile aspect of the transference. My understanding is that the sexual issues which seemed to be emerging between us came from trust of the unconscious mix. The memory of being in bed with her mother paralleled the deepening of the therapy and the discussion of the intercourse with her partner paralleled the intercourse she both desired and feared with me. Would she be too much for me – too able a cook or too passionate? Thus, I understand this as the beginning of the affinity, the attraction of opposites, which draws therapist and client into an intense form of relating.

In terms of the countertransference, too fixed a view of gender and sexual orientation might have caused me to avoid this aspect of the transference, as O'Connor and Ryan (1993) have suggested. When considering the female therapist working with a female client, the similarity in the gender experience of the couple makes for identification. This can be a positive benefit but it may also lead to repetition of possible problems with regard to separation (Chodorow 1978). Intersubjectivity (Benjamin 1988) is a helpful way of understanding the mutual need for separate identities which emerges between the mother and her child. However, in any therapeutic pairing the desire for closeness first needs to take its particular shape. This may sometimes challenge the therapist to question her own sexual orientation: is it fixed or can we freely experience within ourselves the variety of possibilities?

## CONCLUSION

In this paper I have developed my interest in issues of gender in therapy from the perspective of the female therapist (Schaverien 1995, 1997). I have attempted to apply Wehr's (1987) idea that, in Jungian theory, a distinction must be made between the psychological feminine and the psychology of women. It seems to me that this makes it possible to apply Jungian theory in the light of feminism. *The Psychology of the Transference* shows us how Eros in all its many manifestations is a guide to the life in the therapeutic relationship. This is the main point of the somewhat arcane, alchemical imagery. It lends itself to an imaginative approach to the varied material which emerges in the therapeutic encounter. I do not consider that the story ends here but rather hope that this paper will encourage others to explore and find their own relation to the original Jungian texts.

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## NOTE

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