Thuja – The Tree of Life, the Tree of Death

By Misha Norland

In recent homeopathic materia medicas a well developed portrait of Thuja has emerged which is as excellent as it is one sided. This one sidedness may be inherent in the picture of Thuja (divided, with one half hidden), therefore this paper is an attempt to paint in some of the neglected areas.

Thuja, although familiar to all prescribers of homeopathic medicines, is often missed because we have a preconception of how a Thuja patient ought to present. (Likewise we may have a preconception of how Carcinosin ought to present, as say, a sympathetic, suppressed and dullish person; or that Causticum ought to present as sympathetic, yet tough, a fighter for causes.) Naturally these stereotypical pictures are useful hooks upon which to hang prescribing information. However when it comes to practice it is often best that we throw these pictures away! For there are almost as many variations on the theme of the basic pictures as there are people. Maybe it is better, safer, to think in terms of processes and themes. What are Thuja’s themes, what process is occurring in the soul and the body of the Thuja patient?

The remedy is prepared from a tincture of the fresh green twigs of Arbor Vitae, the Tree of Life. Referring to Biblical allegory we are reminded of the tree of eternal life, the fruits of which the banished Adam and Eve did not eat, for had they done this, then they would have become immortal – neither disease nor death would have assailed them!

The theme of life, the tree of death. The process of excessive vegetative life and the theme of guilt.

Where is the seat of life in the physical body? The Japanese and Chinese would indicate the Hara – the umbilical region. In Japan, death by Hara Kiri was the honourable way out of a shameful situation.Thuja is the only remedy in the Materia Medica to have the symptom, ‘delusion that animals are in the abdomen’ and, furthermore, it is italicised, which means that several provers experienced it. There is also the delusion, ‘voices are in his abdomen’ and ‘thought herself pregnant.’ This is an hysterical pregnancy (but without the rapidly alternating states of Coccus), rather a fixed notion that it is so, complete with movements as of foetal limbs and swelling of abdomen. These are symptoms of a super-abundance of vegetative/animal life, as are the fleshy warts for Thuja which is famed. The symptom, ‘hairiness in unusual places’, also expresses the over-abundant life principle. Healing writes of Thuja, ‘there is a surplus of producing life; nearly unlimited proliferation of pathological vegetations, condylomata, warty syctic excrescences, spongy tumours, and spongy pock exudates (which) organise hastily; all morbid manifestations are excessive, but appear quietly, so that the beginning of the diseased state is scarcely known.’

In the opposite modality, we have the delusions ‘that the body is brittle; that the body is delicate; diminished and too thin; that the body is made of glass; and in insantity, will not be touched’. These symptoms give the impression of fragility, as if there were a deficiency of life. From a psychological perspective we might question why it is that these erroneous fixations about the state of the body arise. What does it mean that the brittle and glass-like body has an animal in the Hara? One possibility would be to suggest that Thuja’s process is on a continuum between a super-abundance of lower chakra, animal energy on the one hand, while on the other, there is extreme weakness and transparency of life, and a body hardly able to house and sustain the inner being. This finds its psychical analogue in states such as ‘desires death’ and ‘feasting of life’.

By way of extending the range of this spirit/life/death dynamic, we may cite the delusion that he/she is under super-human control – the super-human controlling the lower human, or the higher aspects of the self controlling the animal being. We are reminded of Sigmund Freud’s model of consciousness wherein the truer aspects of the psyche are spoken of as Superego, Ego and Id. As we all know, Thuja patients are prone to massive guilt complexes, as rubrics alluding to doing wrong, being a criminal and self reproach attest. The superhuman aspect of the divided self sits in judgment of the Id, the animal aspect.

The windows of the soul are the eyes, it is said. Thuja is bold type alongside Opium in the rubric, contracted pupils, which given the themes of shame and deceit, is enlightening. This interpretation sits well with the Vishoutlian description of the guarded, hidden personality, who, walked off behind a lifetime’s habit of secretiveness, is viewed by others as manipulative and sneaky. Clarke, quoting Millspaugh, writes, ‘The Arbor Vitae assumes a conical form with such true lines as to appear ‘clipped’, thus forming one of our most valued high-hedge trees.’ Hedges are grown to provide a screen. Douglas Borland suggests that Thuja patients are well mannered, sensitive, polite, truthful and scrupulous in all their undertakings. My experience tends to favour this latter description, perhaps it is the one modelled upon a more traditional British temperament. Yet both stereotypes are built upon a pathological need for correctness. The need to behave pathologically well is consistent with the theme of guilt.

The theme of division. ‘Religious fanaticism’ – fixed ideas, fixed religious ideas, are another Thuja stronghold, born of an excessively rigid sense of correctness. Thuja is listed bold type in the rubric, ‘conscientious about trifles’, and is added to ‘fanaticism’. On one side of the divide is correct, orderly, right, on the other is wrong. The more you pull, as it were, right and wrong to the extreme positions, the more division you have and the greater is the sense of not belonging, even isolation. This state is a little different from the Anacardium split of good Angel versus bad Devil, although many rubrics overlap, including the sense of separateness, however this is far more pronounced in the Anacardium patient who may be unfeeling, and can lack all moral scruples. Anacardium is a species of
Cashew nut, the sweetest of nuts, the kernel of which is protected by the corrosive skin from which the remedy is prepared. Likewise Anacardium patients can be sweet (the stereotypical image of the cruel, curving magpie may be absent), and we may find a striving spiritual follower of the doctrine of love and peace. Both Thuja and Anacardium may be deeply meshed in religious movements. Hell-raising Anacardium, and proaching and converting Thuja are both to be seen in the spiritual market place!

But to stay with Thuja, where the division is of Victorian virtue versus 'animal' instincts; here the Superego may appear as a fascist moralist who doesn't trust instincts and would put his Safer Lock and Iron. If Thuja patients feel like that, then they certainly don't want other people to see through them. They may feel dirty, like shit, unlovable, unworthy. A patient to whom I prescribed Thuja 10M described a dream the following night (a new and probably a proving symptom) in which she visited the home of friends and was invited to eat her own shit recycled into sausages. Indeed, if we couple this state of mind with the delusion of being made of glass, which is transparent as well as brittle, then it is easy to comprehend the fear of strangers, and the reluctance to open up in a spontaneous manner.

Thuja is divided in respect of left and right hand sides of the body, with a marked aggravation on the left side. It is customary to vaccinate on the left hand side. Symbolically the left side represents the unconscious and all processes tending towards death, towards lack of structure and formed elements, towards dissolution and anarchic (vegetative functioning), while the right side represents form and organised structure (which manifests the function of reason). It is interesting to note the relationship between Thuja and Silica. Both remedies are divided, fixed and fastidious, both feel that they have done wrong and are pursued (by the projections of their guilty conscience), both are major remedies for the ill effects of vaccination, yet Silica has the delusion that the left side does not belong, i.e. the right side is all that there is. Just as Silica dominates in the field of the right side, so Thuja dominates in the field of the left. As Silica is to dominance of form, so Thuja is to dissolution of form (and anarchic growth and proliferation). Yet both remedies keep up appearances, Silica because shape and definition is all-important, and Thuja because shape and definition are threatened by the process of undefined proliferation.

The process of death.
A single symptom of Thuja is 'divided in two parts and could not tell of which part he had possession on waking'. And why not? Perhaps because he could not successfully or completely return to his delicate, brittle body after sleep. We may picture sleep as involving more or less detachment of physical and psychical parts of the being, and awaking, their reunion: 'Delusions mind and body separate'; 'Fancies body was too small for soul, or that it was separated from soul'; 'Body is lighter than air'; 'Being divided into two parts; being double.' Another way of picturing this is as a division between light and heavy elements. When we die the separation is between the light, ascending elements and the heavy, earth-bound elements of the decaying corpse.

Thuja individuals are suffering from an excess of vegetative life, as the delusion of an animal in the abdomen, and a tendency to neoplasms indicates. The typical condylomata are pedunculated, reminiscent of a Broccoli flower bud or of an umbilical cord and foetus. These manifestations represent one pole along the continuum of life (the Arbor Vitan), while the other pole is represented by death. There are many symptoms around death: 'Conviction of death, desires death, thought he was about to die, the time had come to die, sees dead persons'; 'Dreams of the dead, of dead bodies, of dying.' Also there are dreams about falling, falling from a high place. As well as expressing an anxiety about physical death, falling dreams may be expressive of the soul's experience of re-entry into the body after a period of deep sleep. Also falling dreams may be expressive of residual memories of the actual incarnational experience. It is not accidental that the rubric, 'Abortion in the third month' contains Thuja. It is during the third month of pregnancy that the foetus's sex is manifest and it is then that human features develop. Before this time it is not possible to distinguish between animal and human. Abortion at this critical moment would indicate a major hitch in the transition from animal into human form. The delusion 'fancies body was too small for soul' expresses this idea beautifully, it seems to me. These and the following symptoms give us some idea of the major dynamic at work in Thuja, 'Body lighter than air, floating in air', 'that he is ethereal', and 'incorporeal' and 'light'. If the body were lighter than air, then it would rise. And were it to rise, lighter than air, then it would not be a body, it would be a spirit or soul – unanchored, as would belit the state in the period before conception and during the initial phases of gestation and, of course, after death. As well as representing an ungrounded state these symptoms represent a state of physical fragility, of thinness. Notice that Boericke, Clarke and Kent all write about 'emaciated, thin patients'. The process is thus expressed in the body.

When my friend, Jeremy Sherr talked about Thuja, he suggested that such patients were stuck between life and death, between the end of one cycle and the beginning of the next. One might say they are 'in a place' just before the third month of pregnancy or just after life. This, as I recall it, was Jeremy's cardinal idea. It sheds light upon the meaning of the delusion of the body and soul being separate, although they are not yet completely separated, and it bears upon the delusion of not knowing which part of themselves they inhabit upon awakening.

Vaccinosis.
Compton Burnett has written eloquently and convincingly of vaccinosis and its protein manifestations. Also, in his booklets, Dilemma, Backward, Pine and Stunted children, he continues to make a clinically well documented case for the use of Thuja in vaccine-damaged patients. Me patients, emaciated patients with extreme weakness, and in stunted children of parents who are Sycotic, and parents with a vaccination history, as well as those who have been vaccinated in childhood may benefit hugely from Thuja. Loosely, it could be said that vaccines are foreign disease proteins, yes, animal proteins introduced into the blood. Certainly, the immune reaction to a foreign protein in the foetus, with fever, with fever and then remembering the protein's structure (its key signature) for future and faster, more effective, defensive responses. This necessarily ties up the defensive system's memory into a fixed state of readiness, perhaps a monomaniac about being pursued, to use reportory language: It is wonderful and terrifying to speculate upon the development of this state, as seeded by vaccination into a sycotic soil – to meditate upon this wide-spread genesis of Thuja states in the Western world. Inculcations inflame latent sycosis, while the widespread use of dental amalgam does the same for the esphitic misrock. Within this soil the little seeds of cancer are apt to grow.
The theme of confusion.

'Confusion of mind as to his identity and a sense of duality'. Now, these states are expressed in a number of ways (other than ontologically). For instance, patients may tell that they lose their way in well known streets. They may become confused while talking, as well as walking. And they lose words, phrases and even complete sentences. The same phenomenon may occur when they are writing. It is listed in bold type in the rubric, 'Mistakes in writing.' Using wrong words, or not knowing what it was that they wanted to say at the point of saying it or writing it. Words, phrases and sentences may slip into a memory hole, a little memory death. This is reminiscent of Medorrhinum, which is a very close analogue. As Medorrhinum is to the state that arises when the Syctotic taint has been passed through generations and has developed into a more passive way of being, has become more 'civilised' and introverted.

Miasm and constitution.

In common with most other syctic remedies Thuja is applicable to hydrophobia and conditions worse for water. The Syctotic tendency to overproduce fluids, catarrh, and such patients are very much worse for wet conditions; especially aggravated are rheumatism and asthma. There is a great affinity for joints and capsules. Because they have too much water within them and are more amenable to climates and troubled by wet conditions. Thuja as well as Medorrhinum are big asthma remedies and often clear up the chronic state that is behind frequent Arsenicum acutes. (Thuja and Arsenicum 'enjoy' presentiments of death, both have fixed ideas, both feel that they are being observed, and both feel contami- nated, by disease in Arsenicum's case and by animal poisons in the case of Thuja.) The late Phyl Eyre suggested to me that Thuja should also be considered in cases of the ill effects of HRT, where animal oestrogen is introduced into the blood. Pseudacris, the best known prepa- ration, is refined from the urine of pregnant males. The underlying fear which motivates many women to take HRT is brittle bone syndrome!

**Thuja and the energetics of Mappa Mundi.**

Clarke's dictionary informs us that Thuja 'abounds in the upper zones of North America, from Pennsylvania northwards, where it often forms what are commonly known as cedar-swamps. It grows upon the rocky banks of rivers, and in low, swampy spots.' Thuja provings brought out a general aggravation from cold and wet conditions. These features would have us examine the lower right quadrant of the circle, the phlegmatic pole of the diagonal static/dynamic axis. Now, if we look in the Generality section to find Thuja's times of aggravation, we see that it is worse in the evening, worse at night, and worse at 3AM and 3PM, which indicates the vertical as well as the diagonal axis of phlegmatic/choleric temperaments. This latter placing is consistent with a picture of sensitive patients who are afraid of revealing themselves, and like to take a passive position. 3 - 4 am is the time when most deaths and births occur. It is known as the hour of the wolf, and those required to watch at night, call this time, 'the dog-watch hour'. This is the time of the coming-in and the going-out of the soul, the time of the lowest metabolic rate, the time of nightmares, ghosts and the first breath of the newborn. Having established this phlegmatic aspect we wish to find evidence of polar opposite characteristics, of choleric characteristics. Thuja patients, who, after all, tend to be over-cautious, over-civilised and over-consciousness are not noted for outbursts of rage or violence; however, Thuja appears in a very interesting sub-rubric of anger: 'violent anger when things don't go after his will.' Here we have evidence of a typically fixed idea, things should go 'after his will.' This is a pronounced choleric symptom. We also find 'anger from contradiction,' 'easy anger' and 'anger at trifles,' also 'besides oneself,' and 'being beside oneself from trifles.' Why trifles? Because this conforms to the choleric ideal of conformity and order, i.e. everything belongs in its precise place. Such individuals build the structures of civilisation, laws and social mores in order to hold at bay the advancing tide of the phlegmatic's fears and chaos, and in Thuja's case, to control the tide of the instinctual and animal.

However, the major axis upon which Thuja orients itself is that of fire and air. The following case illustrates this.

**Bewildered?; A Case:**

Mrs Bewildered is of medium height and build, brown hair and brown eyes. She has a forceful and lively personality. She says of herself, 'I seem to have the ability to cut through other people's barriers.' Her conversational manner is lively and engaging; she laughs a lot, yet with equal ease she can enter into the

tragedy of a situation, indeed, when she first came to me bringing her youngest son, she burst into tears when telling me about his situation (I prescribed Stramonium for him).

'I have come to see you, because I have just had two operations under my nose on my salivary glands for a benign tumour, which seeds itself. I am not healing as fast as I should, and last summer I strained my elbow, and it is still not better. I am concerned about not getting over things as fast as I feel I should, and about things growing in my head. It scares me. (She starts crying.) I have lost my sense of taste since I had this last operation, but maybe that is temporary. I don't know. I still hate strong sweet smells. I have a physical reaction to bowls of sugar on the table. Sugar makes me feel ill.'

I asked her to tell me about her childhood.

'I was always considered quite delicate but I have no idea why because I don't remember being delicate. I had my adenoids out at 4, and I did have one growth, a benign tumour, on my knee when I was about 7. I was named after the doctor, Janet, because she saved me when I was nearly miscarrying, except that she didn't realise, as far as I know, what was going on. I had a horrible birth because I was induced due to my mother's blood pressure. Then I had bad reactions to drugs, I was given loads of aspirin, and I had my appendix out. I think being born was a disappointment. There was a lot of fuss about me, a lot of worry about me. I have a feeling I was born with a headache. I still do often wake up feeling hung over – I think that may stem from being born very dopey from being induced.'

Tell me more about your childhood?

'I went to a very strict girls school, and I hated it all the time. Behaviour was expected of me which didn't make sense, and I never really figured out the hidden curriculum. I was off school a lot because I used to run mysterious tempera-

I've got a brother and a sister and I am in the middle. I was very boisterous and I skimped everywhere for years. I was happy. I liked my life. I hated school. I loved my family. I was always consid-

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Did anything scare you when you were a child, apart from school?

'Scare me... yes, I had lots of night-
mores when I was little and I was always scared of the dark. I always thought that people were coming to get me. I was very disappointed when I stopped being able to fly. I don't know if we project ourselves out of our bodies. Up until I was about four, I could definitely fly and then that stopped. (She laughs.) That was a big blow in my life.

Tell me more about the nightmare?

"My school used to issue bed-times and my parents, being very conformist, always sent me to bed at very strict times but I could never sleep. I used to hide under the blankets because I was frightened. I would dream that someone was coming to get me and I was trying to skip away but I went into slow motion. Then I would wake myself up and I would be in a tremendous sweat under the blankets."

Any other dreams?

"Well, I still have falling dreams. I wake up having fallen. I think it is from running away. It doesn't particularly bother me, but I do wake up a lot at night. If there is a pattern, it is that I wake up early, usually around 5 in the morning."

Do you have a favourite sleep position?

"Yes. On my right side, with my right leg up and my left leg and right arm extended. I am left-handed. So maybe I am leaving my left hand free."

Were you allowed to be left-handed?

"Yes. After a brief wobble at the beginning I was allowed to be. But I was criticised for my handwriting. My whole school life. We had to write with fountain pens and if you are left-handed you tend to smudge it when you are learning to do it. But they allowed it, and they criticised me. I still get bewildered by criticism. I don't see why anybody needs to be criticised. We're struggling along as best we can, aren't we (laughs). Totally bewildered. Most of us go lurching through life in a state of bewilderment. People would be amazed if they heard me say this because women say to me, "you are so confident." But I think we are still bewildered inside. I think it is part of the human condition."

Tell me other inner feelings you have.

"Oh right. Oh well, I think we all feel so sad we want to die. I do, sometimes. Another thing, I poisoned myself quite systematically when I was 4. I was told that Privet and I think, Hypericum, are poisonous, and they were on my way to

this horrord school, so I used to eat them quite regularly in the hope that I would die.

"I could read and write, I learnt to read and write, I think my sister must have taught me, when I was really quite little, and so when I went to school I could already do it. So I told them I wasn't going to bother to come any more, because I was beyond it, and they absolutely, you know, crushed me. That was my first experience of bewilderment, I couldn't understand why I was being told off for expressing that opinion."

You said "I feel so sad I want to die."

"Yes; yes, sometimes."

Tell me something of the feelings around that?

"Oh, I will probably cry (laughs). Okay. (Laughs). Well, it's like watching news of a war, you know, it's so tragic what happens to people, when none of us want it to happen. And my little boy is blind in one eye and (tears in voice) I don't understand why, you know, things like that just (weeping)... and when I was tiny, I had this memory from before I was born — my mother nearly miscarried me and I remember thinking it wasn't a big deal if I stayed alive or died, but I decided to stay, and it does come back sometimes. My son was in hospital last week, and I watched what other parents were dealing with in terms of their children's lives, (sighs) ... (laughs) ... it seems to me to be perfectly normal not to always want to be alive (laughs). I think we have to keep choosing it, and it sometimes feels difficult. I don't feel that I am a morbid person, but I feel part of the balance of the joy of being alive has to be that sometimes you don't really feel that it is worth it."

Do you feel you have ever done anything that is bad?

"I always think everything is my fault and that I should somehow be better. If only I was this perfect person that I would like to be, the world would be sorted out. I took personal responsibility for the Gulf War, because if only I'd lived my life better I would have made everything right for everybody. I don't know if that is deep arrogance; it doesn't feel like it. I think if you have sensitivity you do feel frustrated when you see people constantly making the wrong decisions who are in positions of influence. I've been active in the peace movement for years and years, but you get attacked from within the peace movement; you get attacked from outside the peace movement, and, um — I can't remember what I was saying — it's just that then you withdraw yourself from the leadership because you feel so much pain from the attack. I am a parent every time I lead in the peace movement. But I have to leave my children in care and then I have to deal with the fact they don't like that. The situation always seems impossible. So I end up feeling a failure (laughs). I was ill, as you know, for a few years, and I gradually withdrew. I was a leader of the Nuclear Freeze for 5 years — before that, I was active in the Women for Peace in Devon, and I ran that for years — I teach counselling, which I think is being a peace activist."

Tell me about your family?

"My father and mother met when he was 13 and she was 12, they were a very loving couple. I really loved my parents and still do. I've got an older sister and a younger brother. I think my sister botoxes things up. She was the first born and then my mother had a daughter who died when she was a week old — just a horrible accident — she choked on a bottle which had been propped up by some barbed wire, and choked to death. And so when I was born, I was another girl and my mother was probably very scared that something was going to happen to me and I got lots of attention and I don't think my sister got much. She was born right at the end of the war, as well. So I think she just learned to bottle things up. I was always considered the emotional one, you know, and allowed to express my feelings a bit more, and she learned to cope by being quieter. Her husband says she is cold. I don't think she is cold, but I don't notice peoples' coldness, I kind of — there is something about me that pushes through that. And my brother is in very good health, and he is lovely."

What makes your blood boil?

"I can't stand bigots. The one thing I can't stand is bigots (laughs)."

Case Analysis of Bewildered

I have presented the case of Bewildered, because the curiously acting remedy was Thuya 200C. This leads to initial intensification of post operative pains in her nose and the subsequent cure of this and her elbow pains, also a general sense of relaxation and well-being. She said, "I feel that I don't have to do anything to be acceptable". Thuya was repeated half a year later, and again after
a further year due to the occurrence of winter-time rheumatics. (Since writing this paper I have had occasion to rephrase Thuja with subsequent curative action. No other remedies have been needed.)

Thuja was prescribed on the basis of the dominant 'image' of death and other themes, discussed below. Coupled with the physical pathology of growths and rheumatics, before Bewildered was conceived, her mother had lost her baby. Any of us who have experienced the death of a loved one will know that the image of the corpse is emblazoned upon the memory. Thus it is not fanciful to assume that this was the case for Bewildered's mother. Perhaps there was also guilt, we cannot tell.

Where it not for the image of death it would be extraordinary that Bewildered recalls having made an in utero decision to live at the point when abortion threatened. It also would be extraordinary that Bewildered made systematic suicide attempts aged four were it not for the image of death. The image underpins her statement, "I think we all feel so sad we want to die," and motivates her life work in the peace movement. It was upon the altar of 'save the world from eco and nuclear death' that she sacrificed the well-being of her children, and risked the exposing accountability of being an organiser for the campaign for nuclear disarmament.

Bewildered's early childhood was happy; she skipped, was bright, outspoken, boisterous and in her dreams, she could fly. Yet her mother, because of the image of death, imagined that Bewildered was delicate. At the age of four her adenoids were removed, she was crushed at school (as one who is purportedly delicate might be) and bewildered by her teacher's constant criticism of her left-handedness. It was under the pressure of these external circumstances that Bewildered's nightmares and suicide attempts began. Why was this such a big deal? Because she was told that she was doing it wrong, there was a hidden curriculum that she could not understand. Bewildered felt the criticism acutely as the dreams of being pursued clearly indicate. The one who is pursued is the one who has done something wrong, and from this guilty feeling they attempt to escape. The one who falls cannot get away – this is the plight of the cornered criminal. At this time also her adenoids were removed, a violation which drove home the pain of the bewilderment and the punishment of the criticism.

We may translate Bewildered's feelings and actions into the following rubrics:

Delusion; wrong she has done.
Delusion; pursued.
Dreams; of falling.
Suicidal thoughts.

Repertorising the above rubrics gives us Thuja as the only remedy in all rubrics. The rest of her case 'falls into' the mould of Thuja: neoplasms, fragility, left handedness, monomania about peace (a current incarnation of religious fanaticism), reproaches self.

Bewildered's acute sense of responsibility is highlighted in her statement: "I took personal responsibility for the Gulf war because, if only I'd lived my life better, I would have made everything right for everybody". So strong is her feeling of personal responsibility, blaming herself for the wrongs in the world that she has dedicated her life to the peace movement. As a final coup de grace we note her extreme sensitivity to the smell of and aggravation from sugar. We may interpret this symptom as a denial of 'sweet life' both literally and metaphorically.

An edited transcript of a lecture and case analysis presented by Misha Norland to some of his students at the School of Homeopathy in Devon, UK. Recorded in Autumn 1991.