

Welcome to the online journal of the [International Forum for Psychoanalytic Education](http://www.ifpe.org). Other/Wise is an innovative, fluid and avant-garde journal that dares to go where other publications do not venture. We welcome contributions of scholarly papers as well as personal experiences of clinical work via stories, drawings, photos and music.

Check out the web version of the journal at <http://ifpe.wordpress.com> to leave comments.

### What's in a name?

Encountering ideas in ways other than expected allows us to see things we might otherwise overlook. The word otherwise suggests that experiencing that which is different can make us wise.

With this in mind we created OTHER/WISE, an unconventional online journal that makes room for the familiar and the unfamiliar in understanding psychoanalysis.

Through observation, art, reading, thinking, day dreaming and ideas not yet thought our journal pursues psychoanalysis with a language of passion and desire.

### This Issue's Contributors:

- Claudia Bader
- Vanessa Bezbroz
- Johanna Cuevas
- Oren Gozlan
- Elisabeth Hanscombe
- Rachel Jennings
- S. Montana Katz
- Michael Larivière
- Stephen Michaels
- Arthur Pomponio
- Elizabeth Singer
- John T. Sloma

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Other/Wise Volume 5 Spring 2011 .....  | 1   |
| Editors' Introduction.....   | 3   |
| Entering the Consulting Room .....   | 4   |
| When Resistance is Recognized as Resilience (Definitely Not the Same Old Song and Dance) ..... | 4   |
| Autobiographical Discoveries.....  | 11  |
| Straddling Two Worlds: The Writer and the Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist.....                  | 11  |
| Rhythms of Psychoanalysis and Counterpoints of Therapeutic Spontaneity.....                    | 21  |
| Heterosexuality – The Love that Dare Not Speak Its Name .....                                  | 38  |
| Articles.....  | 46  |
| Pictogram .....  | 46  |
| Love Letters .....   | 63  |
| Play Script .....  | 68  |
| Clytemnestra's Last Day.....   | 68  |
| Poems .....  | 94  |
| Little Mary Sunshine .....   | 94  |
| Therapy.....   | 96  |
| Mortified.....   | 97  |
| Bedroom Door .....   | 98  |
| Short Stories .....  | 99  |
| The Lines.....   | 99  |
| Flying Blind .....   | 107 |

---

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Welcome from the Editors:

“The secret of the psychoanalytic method is the very engagement of a discourse wherein the fixity and certainty of any proffered epistemic configuration are dislodged... what psychoanalysis offers, the subject is thus its discourse as Otherwise.”

Barratt, B. (1993) *Psychoanalysis and the Postmodern Impulse: Knowing and Being Since Freud's Psychology*. Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore (p. 42).

The co-editors and the editorial board welcome you to the fifth issue of *Other/Wise*. Our editorial board members are Susan Flynn, Larry Green, Montana Katz, Steve Kuchuck, Rachel Newcombe, Josie Oppenheim, Stuart Perlman, Katherine Schwarzenbach, Judy Vida, and Tom Wagner.

*Other/Wise* will continue to offer our two innovative sections, “Entering the Consulting Room”, featuring articles that focus on clinical material, and “Autobiographical Discoveries: Our Psyches, Our Selves”, featuring articles that focus on the personal journey.

*Other/Wise* continues to feature creative work such as short stories, poetry, art work, and music that illuminate internal unconscious process or any aspect of the human condition that engages us from a depth perspective. We are delighted to include in this issue for the first time a play script.

We believe that learning is a reciprocal pleasure, and invite our readers to participate in our ongoing dialogue by using the feature that allows you to respond to everything published in each issue. Learn, enjoy, join in the conversation!

Articles, art work, poetry, short stories, play scripts, music with lyrics should be submitted electronically to Richard Raubolt, [r.raubolt@gmail.com](mailto:r.raubolt@gmail.com), and Merle Molofsky, [mmpsya@mindspring.com](mailto:mmpsya@mindspring.com).

Richard Raubolt, Founding Editor  
Merle Molofsky, Co-Editor

When Resistance is Recognized as Resilience  
By Johanna Cuevas, Ph.D.

ENTERING THE CONSULTING ROOM

WHEN RESISTANCE IS RECOGNIZED AS RESILIENCE  
(DEFINITELY NOT THE SAME OLD SONG AND DANCE)

By Johanna Cuevas, Ph.D.

Presented at IFPE Conference  
October 30, 2010  
Nashville, Tennessee

In the midst of winter,  
I finally learned  
there was in me

an invincible summer.  
Albert Camus

He who has a WHY to live for, can endure almost any HOW.  
Victor Frankl

All during my teaching career, my hope was to bring out the best parts of my students. It wasn't enough for me to make sure they had the basics; my goal was for each child to leave my class knowing what talents and strength they possessed. The majority of my students came from homes with limited resources and deficiencies in the English language, but these same youngsters had the potential and the capacity to do well if they had someone to guide and encourage them.

When I began my clinical work, I continued this belief and practice. As I worked with youngsters and their families I pointed out areas of strength and those healthy and positive qualities they possessed. Once these were recognized it became easier to work on the troubled areas.

For some time, I have wondered if resilient behaviors could be used within an analytical framework to augment the process. While an analysis is an often painful experience for both the analysand and analyst, it may be possible to imagine that both persons involved have something solid that allows them to deal with memories, traumas, and feelings of loss, hatred, confusion, depression etc. Each of us who has walked this line has been able to do so because of this solid part --- this resilience --- that part which in spite of all the shortcomings in our lives has somehow equipped us with the stamina to survive horrible experiences.

As the work typically begins to unfold and deepen, the memories and the feelings that accompany them may become so threatening that old survival behaviors arise. These may be manifested in periods of silences, forgetfulness, subject changing, misunderstandings or angry responses. How both the client

## When Resistance is Recognized as Resilience

By Johanna Cuevas, Ph.D.

and therapist respond to this resistance --- the transferences and countertransferences --- may strengthen the work or impede it.

During my own therapeutic journey, my therapist, a very kind and wise person, acknowledged those parts in me which were competent and strong and able to function well in the world. This acknowledgment came at a time when I felt my life was coming apart, and I was in the throes of depression and anxiety. She frequently reminded me of my love of working with the children I taught, and allowed for spaces of writing those things that I felt unable to put into words during the session time. She encouraged my curiosity about reading and the process we were undergoing. (I'm sure I drove her crazy.) My resistance to what she said and did was high. I had been taught well as a child to be silent and not give up any information; if I did, some catastrophe would occur. But I was touched by the fact that she recognized this other part of me --- the competent part --- and allowed it into the consultation space. It was this part of the therapy that allowed me to deal with the parts of my life that I feared, that had been silenced and very much split off.

Three years ago, I attended the memorial service for a psychoanalytic colleague. Her writings were passed out, and I was fortunate to get a copy. I had met her a few years before at an IFPE conference in Pasadena and at some local seminars. She was such a lovely person --- so funny and so vibrant. I was stunned to learn what an awful and traumatic childhood she had had and wondered how it was that she became this amazing creative person. What struck me was the fact that as a child she had become involved with a church group that in many respects took her in and saved her life. This relationship allowed her to have a support group, a family structure and mentors, even if they were not blood kin.

Psychological resilience is generally defined as the positive capacity of people to cope with stress and catastrophe, the ability to bounce back to homeostasis after a disruption. It can be used to provide resistance to future negative events. (Masten, 2009) In the literature on resilience certain characteristics seem to be agreed upon. (Newman & Blackburn, 2002, p. 9)

These include:

- strong social support networks
- the presence of at least one unconditionally supportive parent or parent substitute
- a committed mentor or other person from outside the family
- a positive school experience
- a sense of mastery and belief that one's own efforts can make a difference
- participation in a range of extracurricular activities that promote self-esteem
- the capacity to reframe adversities so that the beneficial as well as the damaging effects are recognized the ability --- or opportunity --- to "make a difference" by helping others
- not to be excessively sheltered from challenging situations that provide opportunities to develop coping skills

Our colleague appeared to have several of these characteristics that probably helped her not to become totally lost and reactive to her world of abuse and trauma.

*My childhood friend Renne calls to tell me she has cancer. I ask her how she is. She tells me she's OK, taking it one day at a time. She goes on to say, "Well, when I was in recovery after the biopsy, the doctor came over to me and said I had cancer and walked away".*

## When Resistance is Recognized as Resilience

By Johanna Cuevas, Ph.D.

*"That was thoughtful of him", I say sarcastically.*

*"Yea, the fuck!" she says, but quickly adds, "I didn't cry... I really haven't cried, well, maybe just a couple of tears, but that's all... I can't cry, you know, it's a sign of weakness...I'm not weak!"*

*These last statements bring up my childhood memories of a scrawny girl who could outrun, out-jump, and fight any boy or girl three times her size. I don't ever remember her crying. I don't press her on this issue of being strong because I know how important it was --- and is --- for her to feel strong and invincible. When we were eight years old, Renne's father passed away. I remember standing on the stoop of our building and watching as the men from the mortuary took her father away on a stretcher. Renne and her mother followed, the mom in tears and Renne with a stoic expression.*

*I have been reading The Elegance of the Hedgehog by Muriel Barbery, and come across an observation by one of the main characters, a 13 year old girl, Paloma, about the building's concierge, Madame Michele. Madame tries to present herself as a stupid concierge, but Paloma believes her to have the elegance of a hedgehog: on the outside, covered in quills, a real fortress; yet on the inside is the hedgehog's simple refinement: a deceptively insolent little creature, fiercely solitary --- and terribly elegant. (p. 143)*

*When I read this, it strikes me that my friend Renne is very much like Madame Michele ---prickly on the outside, but inside surprisingly intuitive, intelligent, well read, and quite funny. This is the adult Renne I know now, the one I discovered about ten years ago. I believe Renne learned early that the only way to survive and deal with her life circumstances (her father's death, an alcoholic mother who worked nights and left her alone, meager finances, and the death of her mother when she was 17) solidified the presentation of the stoic, prickly veneer.*

*Presently, the cancer has spread to her liver and she is on double doses of medication --- which she calls Kryptonite --- and tells me her oncologist "Dr. Kevorkian" is working on her. She speaks little of this experience and is terribly anxious and appears depressed. I wish she could have someone clinical to speak with. But this someone would have to woo her --- accept the presentation of strength and invincibility she so tenaciously holds on to. This resistance would need to be seen as a resilient behavior, one which previously served her well, but that currently needs modification to help her get through this physical and emotional ordeal, while preserving this persona of great strength.*

*In the novel Before Green Gables, the Prequel to Anne of Green Gables, by Budge Wilson, we meet Anne Shirley as an infant whose parents die and who is taken in by their housekeeper, an overwhelmed, cranky, poor woman with an alcoholic husband and three children. From the onset Anne is seen as an added burden to the already chaotic circumstances of this family. Fortunately, the oldest daughter, Eliza, takes a sincere liking to the child and begins to treat her as she were her own. She reads to Anne, spends whatever time she can spare with her, shares school experiences and her dreams, and creates the possibility of another world outside of their present reality.*

*Anne blossoms from this care. It soon becomes apparent that she is very bright, speaking at an early age, verbalizing ideas, making intuitive statements, which of course are not perceived as an asset by the family, but as possibly housing a small red haired witch. By the time Anne is four, she is already involved in the tasks of cleaning, cooking and washing diapers for her foster mother.*

## When Resistance is Recognized as Resilience

By Johanna Cuevas, Ph.D.

Outside of Eliza, Anne experiences no comfort or warmth from the other members of the family. When Anne is five, Eliza leaves to marry a young man, and although she had promised to take Anne with her, she leaves her to assume Eliza's role in the family. Anne is devastated, feeling totally abandoned and inconsolable. But being the ingenious, precocious child that she is, she invents a friend, a reflection she sees of herself in a glass pane in a cupboard door that is tucked away in a back hall. She knows this reflection to be her own but uses it as a form of comfort, as a child might use a doll or stuffed toy. She calls this reflection Katy Marie, who becomes her solace, best friend, kindred spirit and to whom Anne is able to disclose all her hurts and dreams. It is this image and the ability to go to school that enables Anne to survive and grow intellectually, while being forced to take on all the household responsibilities and abuse.

Anne is once again moved when the foster father dies. She is given away to a young woman who is about to have a child and who already has four other children. She is moved to an isolated location in the woods and although her living conditions are a bit better, her responsibilities increase with the birth of twins and the depressive state of this foster mother. Anne continues to speak to her imaginary friend even though the cupboard was left behind. She is able to return to school and gains the friendship of her teacher and a neighbor while continuing the grueling responsibilities of taking care of the children while cooking and cleaning for this family. Once again Anne is moved when this foster father dies, this time to an orphanage where she encounters other difficulties. The early attachment to Eliza and the rich fantasy life, which centered around characters and places in literature and poetry, appears to have formed the basis for her ability to cope with the cruelties she encountered.

Then there is Maggie. Maggie was a 14 year old girl I worked with at a clinic for about 5 months. She was referred because her parents felt she was depressed and possibly suicidal. She was sullen and withdrawn and resistant to any form of communication, eye contact or empathic responses on my part. I tried various things, but nothing seemed to work. She just sat there slumped in a seat and waited for time to pass and the session to end. An opportunity presented itself when the usual room we met in was unavailable and I had to use another therapist's room. As we walked in and sat down, Maggie spotted a magazine on a table and took it and began looking through it. She read the article totally ignoring me. I asked her about what she was reading and she responded that it was about Kurt Cobain. I was familiar with this musician and I shared my sadness about his death, the loss of such a talented young man.

"Why would you care, you know nothing about him --- you know nothing about his music".

It was the first time Maggie showed any emotion, or spoke directly to me. I asked her to tell me about him. Maggie said, "He was great" and she started to cry.

I commented to her that I thought he must have felt hopeless and with no one to turn to. Maggie shrugged. Before she left she asked if she could have the magazine. I told her it didn't belong to me but that I would copy the article and photo and let her take this home with her. I also said I would make a copy for myself so I could read it and that we could talk about it at our next session.

The next couple of sessions were spent talking about Kurt's life, his marriage, drug problems, and music. Somewhere in these conversations I asked Maggie if she ever wrote her own songs or poetry. I was surprised when she said she did. I asked her if she would bring some of her work in to share with me.

## When Resistance is Recognized as Resilience

By Johanna Cuevas, Ph.D.

Maggie ignored this question and I didn't press her. I hoped the opportunity would come up again at a later time when I could ask her about sharing her songs.

About two weeks later, Maggie came into the session with an old, beat-up looseleaf binder. She sort of threw the binder down on a table and sat down in a chair away from it. Then she surprised me by saying, "Take a look." At first glance I thought the binder contained schoolwork. But a closer look revealed at least a hundred or more sheets of paper that were actually poems, songs, and a diary. I expressed admiration for her work and the thoughtfulness and care she placed on these pages. I told her she was quite talented and creative. She sloughed this off with her usual shrug.

It was difficult for Maggie to take in this recognition of her talent and the positive qualities she had. Anonymity was very important to her. She didn't belong to any clubs at school, shared little with her parents, and even less with me. She would allow me to see into some of her inner world but would not elaborate on it or answer any questions. I knew she read a great deal but would not talk about the readings or the authors. I asked if she had read *The Diary of Anne Frank* and she responded that she had, when she was eleven years old, and this discussion went no further.

As I look back, I think I could have used some of Anne Frank's diary entries to make a better connection with Maggie. When I reread the diary, long after my work with Maggie, I was so taken by Anne's self awareness, her openness in what she wrote, and real concerns about her interactions with her family and others sharing the confinement of the annex.

Throughout her diary entries, Anne is very concerned about how she is perceived by the adults who share her confinement in the annex.

*Sunday, July 12, 1942.* Anne tells us, "I don't fit in with them...(mother, father and Margot)." (p 29)

*Monday, September 28, 1942.* "They (the van Daans) criticize everything... about me: my behavior, my personality, my manners..." "Harsh words and shouts are constantly flung at my head..." "According to the powers that be, I'm supposed to grin and bear it. But I can't!" (p.44)

At another point Anne says (*Saturday, January 30, 1943*), "Everyone thinks I'm showing off when I talk, ridiculous when I'm silent, insolent when I answer, cunning when I have a good idea, lazy when I'm tired, selfish when I eat one bite more than I should, stupid, cowardly, calculating etc. etc. All day long I hear nothing but what an exasperating child I am, and although I laugh it off and pretend not to mind, I do mind." (p.81)

She suffers greatly from these rebukes and the only solace is the diary she calls Kitty. She writes (*Saturday, October 30, 1943*), "That's why I always wind up coming back to my diary --- I start there and end there because Kitty's always patient... I promise her that despite everything, I'll keep going... I only wish I could see some results or, just once, receive encouragement from someone who loves me." (p.142)

Anne reads in a magazine (*Tuesday, January 6, 1944*): "...girls my age feel very insecure about themselves and are just beginning to discover that they're individuals with their own ideas, thoughts and habits." (p. 161) Anne is desperately trying to find her place in life, in the annex, and understand



## When Resistance is Recognized as Resilience

By Johanna Cuevas, Ph.D.

what is happening to her --- why she is the way she is, why it is that she cannot change her character even though she tries.

I believe Maggie was also trying to find her place in life; like Anne she felt she had no voice, and like Anne she wrote to have one. At one point Maggie asked me if I read, what I read. I could have responded by reframing her question but I decided to tell her that I did read, though not as much as I would like to, and had just finished the last of the series of novels, *Anne of Green Gables*. She just looked at me and said to tell her about it. I related some of my favorite parts but also realized I was feeling somewhat on the spot. I told her so. I also said I wondered if she felt this way when I asked her questions. Her response was, "What do you think?" I got it, and apologized. I explained that I wasn't trying to pry, but was trying to get a sense of who she was. "And who are you?" she says to me. "Ahh," I said. "Touché!" What and how to explain myself. My own resistant feelings were very much present. Should I disclose anything about my personal life? I did want to answer her truthfully but in a way that might be helpful. The best I could think to say at that moment was that I was a person who was constantly evolving, like Anne Shirley, growing in ideas and thoughts. This came as the result of people I met, with interactions and connections with them. I told her I was basically me: a funky short lady who very much appreciated young people's ideas and thoughts. And who would also appreciate *her* thoughts, feelings and ideas. I told her a bit more about Anne Shirley and Maggie sat quietly. As usual she did not respond to what I said.

The issue of suicide came up not long after this conversation. Maggie was curious to know if I had ever felt suicidal. Once again I felt on the spot. I thought, young people have this uncanny ability to notice the holes in one's socks. I told Maggie that there was a time in my life when I was depressed and hopeless. This feeling led me to believe I might die, yet it was more a fear of the anxiety and despair I experienced rather than a conscious wish on my part. I had never considered suicide but the depression felt as if it might kill me. I went on to tell her that at the time there was a comedian that I really liked, Freddie Prinze, who had committed suicide, and his death really impacted me, a sort of push that turned the cart over. He wasn't the cause, but his death added to my feelings of depression. I wondered out loud if she had similar feelings when she found out about the death of Kurt Cobain? She was able to speak of some of the anger she had felt. I also shared with her how I felt about Freddie Prinze's suicide: the disappointment and betrayal, the loss of such a young and vibrant person, who made me laugh. Maggie didn't say anything about what I had told her, she never referred to it at all. I had to trust that her silence was a way to protect herself, to feel safe.

Abruptly Maggie's father announced to the family that he was taking a job in another state and they would be moving in three weeks. I felt saddened to hear this. A connection had just begun to strengthen between us and I wondered if I had been able to do enough to puncture a hole in her malaise. I didn't feel she was suicidal, only toying with the idea as a way of perhaps keeping a tie with Kurt Cobain. I told Maggie she was very talented; perhaps the move would give her a new start. I encouraged her to continue writing, to join a writing club at her new school if there was one, or try the school newspaper. I also shared with her that when I was very depressed this little old woman doctor had told me to go run every morning before I went to work. I told her the running really helped me, along with my teaching, and friends who hung in there with me.

I don't know what happened to Maggie. I told her she could call or write to me at the clinic if she wanted. I said I would respond to her. I never did hear from her. I've often thought of her and wondered how she was. I hope that when she left she felt listened to; I hope that she believed she had

## When Resistance is Recognized as Resilience

By Johanna Cuevas, Ph.D.

a voice like the real Anne Frank and the fictional Anne Shirley; and I hope she knew that definitely she had been heard.

### REFERENCES

- Barbery, M. (2006). *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*. Paris: Editions Gallimard.
- Frank, O. & Pressler, M. (1991). *Anne Frank: The Diary of A Young Girl*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Masten, A. S. (2009). Ordinary magic: Lessons from research on resilience in human development. *Education Canada*, 49 (3): 28-32.
- Newman, T. & Blackburn, S. (2002). *Interchange 78: Transitions in the Lives of Young People: Resilience Factors* <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2002/10/15591/11950>. (p. 9)
- Wilson, B. (2008). *Before Green Gables*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons

*Johanna Cuevas, Ph.D.* is a bilingual psychologist who has worked with children, adolescents and families. She is a retired elementary school teacher who has trained and mentored student teachers and worked with children with special needs. She has a long time interest in psychoanalysis.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DISCOVERIES

STRADDLING TWO WORLDS: THE WRITER AND THE PSYCHOANALYTIC PSYCHOTHERAPIST

By Elisabeth Hanscombe

In December 2008 I presented a paper to my colleagues on the topic, 'Narcissism, Autobiography and What Happens when the Therapist Writes a Memoir'. My audience consisted mainly of psychoanalytic psychotherapists, and a few non-therapist partners, invited in honour of the fact that this event was the last such professional development meeting for the year. Most audience members belonged to my professional association but the meeting was also opened to other psychotherapy groups. On that evening I talked about narcissism in the context of autobiography, and the degree to which autobiography's popularity can be considered both as a function of narcissism and also as an attempt to deal with it. Narcissism, I argued, looks inward and avoids acknowledging the gaze of the other. Autobiography, on the other hand, is relational. It requires an interactive audience, an empathic response and non-judgmentalism, if readers are to avoid their own defensive counter-transferential responses. Similarly, I argued that the issue of self-disclosure can evoke powerful responses from both patients and colleagues when the therapist writes autobiographically. I used an example from my own autobiographical work, a section that included details of a history of sexual abuse across two generations within my family of origin. I then considered the work of the memoirist and practising psychoanalyst, Sophia Richman, who writes about her childhood experience as a Holocaust survivor to explore what happens 'when the therapist writes a memoir'.

When I was a child I sat one day with my brothers and sisters watching television. In those days my greatest pleasure was to sit and watch the television for hours. On holidays this might be possible but never for long. When our parents were both out of the house, away at work, there was another parent in the form of my older sister who would issue edicts about the amount of television we might watch. Although she liked to limit television to a minimum during the holidays she would at least let us watch the midday movie.

It was on one such day while we were watching the midday movie when the announcer came on during an advertisement break to tell us that there would be a special screening of a family favourite, two hours of Walt Disney cartoons on Saturday night from 6 till 8 pm.

'We won't be able to watch,' I said. It seemed a straightforward statement and one I imagined everyone else in the room could understand. We would not be able to watch television because our father would be at home as he was at home every Saturday night, drinking heavily from a bottle of St Agnes brandy hidden inside a brown paper bag, which he kept beside his chair.

'What are you talking about?' one of my brothers asked.

'You know,' I said. 'You know.'

He did not know it seemed, or if he did he wanted me to spell it out. They all did. All my sisters and brothers, with the exception of the two oldest who had left home by then, stared at me, as if daring me to explain myself and at the same time urging me in some unspoken way to remain silent. I had spoken

## Straddling Two Worlds: The Writer and the Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist

By Elizabeth Hanscombe

the unspeakable. We had been told without words that we must not speak about these things and I had broken the rules.

I did not understand at the time, why I should not speak the obvious. Why I should not say something that we all knew to be true. Why the conspiracy of silence? Now I recognise it had something to do with the anxiety that comes from putting certain experiences into words. The fear that if we put words to the experience, the feelings and fantasies associated with that experience will rise to the surface and choke us. Something similar it seems happened at the December meeting when I presented my paper and spoke openly about such unspoken matters.

As children my siblings and I were well versed in the fourth commandment, to honour thy father and thy mother. To speak of our father's drinking would have been to dishonor him. Besides he was already visiting my older sister in her bed at night by then, and to speak of his drinking might also have hinted at other such transgressions. I learned then to remain silent. Only in adulthood have I dared to speak out. As Freud argues, history repeats itself.

I had already published a short version of my paper in the *Australasian Journal of Psychotherapy* and when the Chair of the Professional Development Committee suggested I present it at the end of the year meeting, I spent a long time thinking about how I might actually do that.<sup>1</sup> I did not want simply to read the published paper - to my audience. I have been to enough meetings where the presenter reads the pages out loud, head buried, and all the energy slides away from the room down onto the page. I wanted to bring my paper to life and to this end I decided to include two additional sections. I decided to cut some of the theoretical sections on the nature of narcissism. The audience members were in the main psychotherapists and I presumed they would know enough about narcissism already. I added an autobiographical section, as well as a discussion around my vignette that might illustrate and help make sense of the events I had described, with an emphasis on the need for empathy when reading autobiographical material.

The people in the back of the room were shuffling chairs to make room for latecomers. I was more anxious than usual before presenting and I qualified the paper by telling my audience about my nervousness and likening it to how I imagined I would feel were I presenting to my siblings. There was a polite titter. Things seemed to be going well and I continued the paper till the end without feeling that it had been too difficult for my audience to absorb. Occasionally I noticed the furrowed brow of one of my colleagues who seemed to be struggling over my words but otherwise all seemed to be going well enough. Even during question time, the questions were innocuous, mostly impossible to answer questions about how my siblings might feel or my patients were they to read my autobiographical material. I talked about my recognition of the difficulties. I did not feel satisfied with my responses but these questions needed more time for discussion, I said. There could be no definitive answer to any of them.

These things come back to me now as I scan my memory for signs of what was to follow. Even one of my detractors from long ago, asked questions in what I heard as a benign tone of voice. She asked two

---

<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Hanscombe. 'Narcissism, Autobiography and What Happens When the Therapist Writes a Memoir' in *Australasian Journal of Psychotherapy*, Vol. 27 1&2, 2009.

## Straddling Two Worlds: The Writer and the Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist

By Elizabeth Hanscombe

questions that left me believing she was genuinely interested in what I had had to say. Apart from the woman of the furrowed brow, I could not detect any other specific response. Afterwards some people came up to me. They were neither congratulatory nor full of praise but they seemed to appreciate what I had presented and I went home after supper happy enough. I did not know then that during suppertime after my talk there was a small group of colleagues who had gathered together in the kitchen to share their concerns.

The next evening the first of the criticisms arrived in the form of an email. One colleague complained that I had re-enacted something of my experience as a child with the audience. I had in essence, he argued, abused my audience by my self-disclosure and that my audience was powerless to avoid it, just as I had been powerless as a child to avoid my father. In my presenting in this manner, my colleague believed that I had behaved not as a therapist but as a patient, looking for empathy.

One difficulty is that I straddle two worlds, that of the writer and that of the psychotherapist. The writer seeks to open up experience and events for consideration. The psychotherapist aims to do likewise, and she does so in the privacy of the therapy room, where traditionally the focus has been on opening up the patient's world, not the therapist's.

It is assumed that the therapist within her own personal therapy has opened up her own world with another therapist/analyst and therefore her own subjectivity need not impinge too much on her patient. It is beyond the scope of this paper to outline the history of the many schools of thought that have developed from and elaborated on Freud's structural theory. But I will say that Freud's initial emphasis on the objective nature of the work and his attempts to eradicate the subjective still influence therapists' efforts to practise in a way that fits in with traditional models of scientific investigation, so that therapeutic encounters can be duplicated and verified.<sup>2</sup> Today however, more emphasis tends to be placed on the relational nature of psychoanalysis, the patient and therapist in a mutually engaged process of self-discovery. This applies especially in relation to the widespread recognition of countertransference as an inevitable component of psychoanalytic practice.

The day after my presentation I had wanted to dismiss this first email as the ranting of particular colleague, who has a reputation for anger. I heard nothing more until the next day when the woman who chaired my paper told me that she had decided to send the matter on to the Ethics Committee.

I suppose my ears should have been burning. They were not. At the time I imagined the flurry of emails between committees that followed had emerged over the poorly expressed email from the enraged colleague and I believed it would all die down soon – a storm in a teacup. It was not until the weekend, six days after the event that I realised the full extent of some people's reaction to my talk. They were indignant and full of rage. I had breached the rules of non self-disclosure, abstinence and the need for anonymity. Although the ethics committee met and discussed my presentation at length and in the end decided there had been no breach in the code of ethics, the president and chair of the ethics committee later advised me to take a leave of absence indefinitely from my official positions within the association – I act as treasurer – to allow time for the dust to settle.

---

<sup>2</sup> Lewis Aron. *A Meeting of Minds: Mutuality in Psychoanalysis*. Relational Perspectives bok series, Volume 4, Psychology Press, Routledge, New York, 1996. P. 23.

As a group, psychotherapists have savage superegos. The term superego derives from Freud's topographical model of the human mind as consisting of an id, an ego and a superego. The id, the impulses and desires of the primitive and uncontrolled infant mind must be harnessed through the developing superego and modulated by the ego to get some sense of control over our lives. The term superego applies to the area of functioning broadly under the category of conscience. Although the concrete imagery of Freud's model has long since been developed into a more metaphysical set of ideas, we still tend to think in these terms. They are useful as a way of describing states of mind that develop in all of us in our attempts to deal with the world. When I write that psychoanalytic psychotherapists have particularly savage superegos therefore I refer to the extent to which they have a strict set of rules of conduct encoded throughout their training regarding their clinical behavior. Any deviations from these rules, overt deviations call forth extreme responses of censure, while it is still recognised that in day-to-day practice, technique requires flexibility in practice.

Historically self-disclosure has not been considered psychoanalytic. In the past to self disclose was to work as a maverick in non-psychoanalytic ways. Self-disclosure was once tantamount to heresy. Freud 'while personally quite open and spontaneous with patients...forcefully and decisively established the rules of psychoanalytic anonymity and abstinence.'<sup>3</sup> According to Freud, 'the doctor should be opaque to his patients and like a mirror, show them nothing but what is shown to him.'<sup>4</sup> Freud initially developed these rules in response to his analysand, Sandor Ferenczi's insistence on greater mutuality in treatment. However, over time others have explored the possibility of technical self-disclosure, but little had been written that 'systematically explored technical considerations of the principles of self-disclosure.'<sup>5</sup> Therefore it is difficult for analysts today to suspend their adherence to Freud's strict rules about the analyst as mirror and to consider other perspectives.

Most of the literature about self-disclosure focuses on self-disclosure within the consulting room, and whether or not it can be considered therapeutic. Apart from the analyst, Sophia Richman's work on what happens when the analyst writes a memoir, which I discuss in the third section of my paper, there has been little written on the topic of self-disclosure outside of the consulting room. At the same time there have been several psychoanalysts who have written autobiographically while still in practice about their own traumatic experiences. As yet I have not found such memoir writing to include details of childhood incest, which has proved a significant dimension in the debate over my so-called therapist self-disclosure. Not only had I self-disclosed but the nature of my self-disclosure, namely the fact of a history of sexual abuse across generations within my family, aroused such intense feelings. Either I was considered very brave to raise the subject much in need of discussion or I showed a serious defect in character. I must have been insufficiently analysed and still in need of therapy. As one colleague wrote in her letter of 'concern', my paper could be seen as 'a cry for help'.

There have been significant shifts over the last century in relation to 'Telling Incest' particularly from the late 1970s when feminists proclaimed that 'incest is not a taboo, speaking about it is'. In the present, there are concerns about the activities of television presenters like Oprah Winfrey and celebrity

---

<sup>3</sup> Aron, 1996, p. 221.

<sup>4</sup> Aron, 1996, p. 222.

<sup>5</sup> Aron, 1996, p. 223.

literature that suggest 'maybe incest is talked about too much'.<sup>6</sup> In talking about incest too much, there is the danger that its significance is downplayed. Janice Doane and Devon Hodges argue that incest narratives are formed under conditions of uncertainty not only about 'what happened' but also in the light of 'who will listen'. Thereby incest narratives 'inspire particular forms of resistance or acknowledgement'.<sup>7</sup>

Doane and Hodges suggest that it may well derive from 'the persistence of the belief that incest is something that happens to other people – them'. Traditionally the pervasive belief has been that only the poor, racial minorities, the disenfranchised suffer under the weight of incest. Not 'us'. It seems that a similar unspoken view might exist within the professional psychoanalytic psychotherapy community as well. The ones who suffer incest are our patients, not the therapists. As Doane and Hodges observe, 'Fantasized moral havens provide a sense of order and safety for their inhabitants, that is, for most of us'.<sup>8</sup> Therapists who hide behind a façade of normalcy may be particularly prone to such wishful thinking.

In relation to incest stories, Doane and Hodges reflect on the difficulties of 'finding a workable framework for telling', in order that those who report their experience of incest might 'gain the attention of a sympathetic audience'. Also that they might 'avoid retaliation', and as well might find a way around the 'debasement persona associated with the tellers: the liar, the seducer, the hysteric, the victim'.<sup>9</sup> In my case as witness to sexual abuse I add the descriptor, 'whistle blower'.

As Eviatar Zerubavel who writes about the nature of conspiracies of silence, argues, whistle blowers 'disturb our cognitive tranquillity' by bringing to light matters we would prefer remain hidden.<sup>10</sup> There is a significant gap between what Doane and Hodges describe as 'thoughtful and carefully crafted memoirs and their representation by certain critics as self pitying and naïve victim stories'.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, my colleague who wrote the first critical email about my presentation spoke about my writing as merely asking for empathy.

The history of psychoanalysis is riddled with incestuous events. To talk about incest in my own family seems to have stirred up anxiety about the taboo. The same anxieties as David Marr considers in relation to the recent furore in Australia over the Henson photographs of children. Do they constitute pornography or art?

When panic arrives, facts don't count. Complexity disappears. All slopes are slippery. The only scenario is the worst-case scenario. And everyone has a high old time except the victims.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Janice Doane and Devon Hodges. *Telling Incest: Narratives of dangerous remembering from Stein to Sapphire*. University of Michigan Press, 2001, p. 1

<sup>7</sup> Doane and Hodges, 2001, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Doane and Hodges, 2001, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Doane and Hodges, 2001, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel. New York: Oxford, 2006, p. 69.

<sup>11</sup> Doane and Hodges, 2001, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> David Marr. 'Panic and Censor' in *The Monthly*, December 2008-January 2009, p.13-15.

## Straddling Two Worlds: The Writer and the Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist

By Elizabeth Hanscombe

My American colleague Sophia Richman suggests that I examine my conscience as regards my responsibility in this affair. In a recent email she writes:

*What may be more relevant than the autobiographical material and the act of self-disclosure is the subtle interaction between you and the audience at the presentation. In the spirit of relationality is it possible that knowing your audience, you anticipated a potentially critical response and communicated it? Your plea for empathy may have actually stirred up the opposite in some of those members of the audience who had been detractors of yours. I'm reminded of a mother at her daughter's birthday party who warned "please don't make trouble today of all days" and of course the daughter took her cue and became what the mother expected of her. Given the fact that this group and its ethos is something that you must be familiar with after so many years of affiliation, it's hard to imagine that you were so surprised by the response of at least some of the more rigid in the group. What some perceived as courage others probably interpreted as defiance of convention. Then group-think took over and the witch-hunt began.*<sup>13</sup>

The sociologist, Avery Gordon, is interested in 'the things behind the things...the things that haunt us'.<sup>14</sup> I cannot ponder too long on the belief that my simple exercise of writing autobiographically, my self-exposure, or my exposure of the incestuous nature of my family of origin are the only elements at work here. Given that the history of psychoanalysis is studded with countless examples of boundary violations – at the extreme end, violations that constitute incest, the therapist in loco parentis – then likewise my professional association, metaphorically-speaking my 'professional family', might harbour such conspiracies of silence as a protective manoeuvre. I bear witness to both personal and professional abuse and as such I have spoken the unspeakable and must be punished. Richman's thoughts bear consideration. At one level I brought it on myself.

When I suggest that the incest that occurred in my family of origin is akin to the incest that occurred within my professional family and explore with some degree of uncertainty what these things might mean, I unsettle my audience. The haunting here has much to do with my personal history, the history of incest within my family, of secrets and of unresolved trauma.

According to Gordon 'The layers of institutional memory and amnesia run deep in psychoanalysis.'<sup>15</sup> Here she alludes to Freud's difficulties for instance in dealing with ??? ???Gustav Jung's affair with his patient who later became a psychoanalyst, Sabina Spielrein.<sup>16</sup> Gordon argues that Freud was afraid of what he saw, hence his change of heart about the degree to which incest had occurred, rather than as a function of internal fantasy and desires.<sup>17</sup>

'Psychoanalysis needs a way of grappling with what it represses'.<sup>18</sup> My presentation has stirred up one such haunting. And as Gordon argues we 'need to reckon with haunting as a prerequisite for sensuous

---

<sup>13</sup> Sophia Richman, personal correspondence, January 2009

<sup>14</sup> Avery F Gordon. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008 (1997), p. 38.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon, p. 55.

<sup>16</sup> Gordon, 2008, p. 56.

<sup>17</sup> Gordon, 2008, p. 56.

<sup>18</sup> Gordon, 2008, p. 56.



knowledge and to ponder the paradox of providing a hospitable memory for ghosts out of a concern for justice.’<sup>19</sup>

The colleague who wrote the first email complaining of my presentation used the word, ‘stealth’. He believed that I had snuck up on my audience. ‘It is one thing,’ he wrote, ‘to go out and buy an autobiographical book, looking at the cover and bb [sic] before buying , ... and quite another to go a professional seminar with no forewarning to hear a therapist describe [sic] in detail her own highly dysfunctional [sic] incestuous family of origin and wanting our empathy. It is supposed to be a PD event not a therapy session for the presenter.’

Academic presentations are performative. Performances can upset people. People feel tricked.<sup>20</sup> I had written in my abstract that I would use autobiographical material to make certain points about narcissism and autobiography and the difficulties for a therapist who writes autobiographically, but I did not clarify the nature of the autobiographical vignette. And although I had foreshadowed a discussion of incest within the text, it is only in retrospect that an average reader might notice this. In this sense I defied the usual academic conventions, the convention of saying up front what I will speak about and then saying it. It seems that some people want to know in advance, so that they can nod off, perhaps. There should be no surprises. The unwary listener can then listen only half attentively without disturbance. Whereas my paper may have kept my audience awake, kept them on edge. It made the audience pay attention and some have resented this; especially as my presentation took place at the last ‘celebratory’ meeting for the year.

‘It was untimely,’ one colleague said later. ‘You should have forewarned people, the way they do on the radio when bad language is used. It was meant to be light hearted and people were overwhelmed. They felt attacked.’

It occurred to me immediately before my presentation, as I watched people fill their glasses with champagne that they seemed a jolly lot, convivial and cheerful, ready for fun, and I had worried then that the seriousness of my paper might dampen their spirits. As my first detractor wrote, my presentation at the end of the year was meant to be a ‘family friendly’ event. Members were invited to bring along their spouses. People may also have felt twice deceived in so far as within my short autobiographical vignette I spoke first about my grandfather’s imprisonment on charges of sexual abuse. Then I theorised about the nature of conspiracies of silence and finally introduced the topic of the incest that occurred within my own family of origin. Thereby I brought the experience into the room.

In the second reference to familial incest in my paper I had quoted from a letter I once wrote to an aunt in Switzerland in which I had asked her to tell me something of her story as my father’s sister. My aunt wrote in her reply that she did not want to speak about her experience and instead urged me to forget about the past. She asked in German why I insisted on poking around in the past, using the word *wuhlen*.

German speakers would most likely be aware that the word *wuhlen* holds connotations not only of seeking, searching, or digging up, it also suggests some sort of mess making in the process. It is akin to

---

<sup>19</sup> Gordon, 2008, p. 60.

<sup>20</sup> I owe these reflections to lengthy discussions with Klaus Neumann, historian, Institute for social development, Swinburne University.

## Straddling Two Worlds: The Writer and the Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist

By Elizabeth Hanscombe

rifling through a suitcase in search of something, pulling everything out and leaving nothing in its original order. The *wuhl* mouse is one that digs multiple tunnels below the surface, for other animals to use. Unlike the English mole, its actions although clearly purposeful to itself, are not so clear to others. To others, to people, the *wuhl* mouse is simply a pest.

Hence my paper may have aroused the type of indignation some people feel when their world has been upset and unsettled. As Don Watson writes in his book *On Indignation*, indignation derives from God. 'God being first in everything is fundamental...how dare you...One is to obey his commands, the whole ten of them, seven of which begin with thou shalt not'<sup>21</sup>.

I have broken rules. Paul John Eakin cites three of them in relation to the autobiographical act, the rules for self-narration as 'Telling the truth, respecting privacy, and displaying normalcy'.<sup>22</sup> Eakin approaches autobiography 'not as a literary genre but instead as an integral part of a lifelong process of identity formation'.<sup>23</sup> To his list of rules I therefore add a fourth, that of respect for context and audience. Richman wrote to me that the criticisms that had been levelled against her following the publication of her memoir were never so harsh; (except those from one psychoanalytic group in Britain) perhaps, she writes, because her memoir deals with about her experience of the holocaust. It is not politically correct to criticise holocaust survivors, she wrote. Incest is a different matter. It is too close to home, too 'raw and unprocessed'.

When I was still a child, some thirteen years of age, I sat at the kitchen table in the dining section of our living room in Cheltenham. My back was to the body of the kitchen. When I turned my head I could see into the lounge room, and the bend of my father's leg as he sat smoking and drinking in front of the television. Smoke curled around the room from his cigarettes. My father's voice was a drone against the voices on the television as if everyone were talking at once. Although I could not see her, I imagined my mother sitting in the chair opposite my father doing her best to screen him out.

My mother's voice sounded as though she were trying to ignore his impossible questions and rhetorical demands, namely that she was a good woman and would go to heaven along with her glorious children. Instead she asked whether my father might like a cup of tea.

'A cup of tea, a cup of slops,' my father said. It is understandable that my mother's comments to my father fell far from the mark. It was best to skirt around my father, to avoid all direct statements and behave as though nothing were wrong.

I hid my pink note pad between the pages of textbook, and took it out only to write down my father's words verbatim. I wrote fast like a Hansard reporter. I was recording this moment for posterity. One day I would show my father's words to others and they would see that he was mad. His thoughts were mad. The words he used popped up from nowhere, from the depths of his deranged mind, sodden with alcohol and grief. They had no beginning or middle or end but we were forced to listen to them night after night. My mother did not intervene. She was even more terrified than we, her children. And so

---

<sup>21</sup> Don Watson. *On Indignation*. Melbourne University Press, 2008, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Paul John Eakin. 'Breaking Rules: the Consequences of Self-Narration' in *Biography* 24.1 (Winter 2001) p. 114.

<sup>23</sup> Eakin, 2001, p. 114.

## Straddling Two Worlds: The Writer and the Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist

By Elizabeth Hanscombe

like her, we tried to go on with our lives as if my father were not there, despite knowing that the more we ignored him the more enraged he became.

These days when I write I do so with the same intensity as if I am taking notes on my father's madness and I must record it all for posterity. I do not need to transcribe the meaning. I hope readers will discern this for themselves. The ravings of a mad man are the words of someone whose words are not to be trusted. The difficulty then as I write emerges in the degree to which I identify myself not only as the one who transcribes the madman's words, but at the same time as the one who identifies with this madman whose words I transcribe. My father/myself.

I am the mad scribe, the one who insists on taking down the words verbatim and then passing them on to my audience. Is this true? Is this what happened when I presented my work to my colleagues in December 2008, as some complained later, that I had abused them with my presentation, that I had dropped this 'shocking' information on my audience unbidden. They had not asked to hear these things. They had not chosen to read my words as if they were the words from a book they had selected in a bookstore. I had foisted my words upon them like so many missiles and they could not help but feel helpless at the strength of my words.

An experience such as this forces the writer and presenter to question her motives. I did not see it coming. I had anticipated a strong response, but I did not expect the tidal wave that has since threatened to engulf us.

In a discussion at the New York Philoctetes Center entitled, *Opening Pandora's Box: From Ancient Sacrifice to Family Secrets*, the writer Kathryn Harrison talked about the repercussions of her revelation of a family secret: her incestuous involvement with her father when she was in her early twenties. Harrison's memoir, *The Kiss* was first published in 1997, and elicited a polarized and extreme response. There were those who admired its beauty, clarity and honesty, while there were other reviewers, like James Wolcott, who were vitriolic in their reception of the book. Wolcott's review 'Dating your Dad' ends with the words, 'shut up'.

Harrison's memoir details among other things a heartbreaking story of parental disaffection; an absent mother and a father who only came onto the scene when Harrison was in her late teens and promptly fell in love with her. Harrison could not resist his affections then and the two had an affair. Wolcott is unsympathetic to her plight but more than this he is appalled that Harrison has elected years later to write about the experience, in full view of the public,

Harrison is a respected and well known novelist in America; her beautifully written memoir reflects her ability as a writer. . Wolcott's review is acerbic and in some ways says more about Wolcott than Harrison. But he is not alone. For many it is safer to keep things at a distance. Harrison also was surprised by the amount of anger called down on her and now agrees with the feminists of the 1970s that 'the taboo against incest is really much more of speaking about incest.'<sup>24</sup>

I am not alone in finding Wolcott bigoted and cruel, though there are clearly many who enjoy his writing, his irony bordering on cynicism, full of American idiom and slang. It is almost another language,

---

<sup>24</sup> 'Opening Pandora's Box: From ancient sacrifice to family secrets'.  
The Philoctetes Center, New York.

## Straddling Two Worlds: The Writer and the Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist

By Elizabeth Hanscombe

thin, one dimensional and negative. The bad publicity may well have promoted Harrison's book, but the attacks on her integrity as a mother who it was argued should have protected her children from the knowledge of her 'affair' with her father is reminiscent of the way my integrity as a therapist has been questioned within my own association.

Why did I not anticipate the strength of my audience's response? In the paper, I talk about the possibility of judgmental countertransference responses to the reading of autobiography in my paper. I talk about the pressure from people who might wish that certain things remained unspoken. I talk about the public's and certain critic's responses to Harrison's memoir – that she was told 'to shut up' about the incest that had occurred between her adult self and her father. I talk about the need for empathy while reading autobiography, the need to consider our countertransference responses and not to become judgmental. I talk about the dangers of conspiracies of silence. None of this deterred certain members of my audience from doing the very thing I had warned against. But as the literary critic, Kay Torney Souter, writes, we all are 'helpless bit players in a toxic cultural emotional mix'.<sup>25</sup>

In retrospect, as a writer and presenter of autobiography, as a psychotherapist and one who bears witness to incest, this polarisation of response from my professional association may well have been (anticipated?) inevitable. (I'm not sure inevitable is what you're wanting to say . . . ????) It can serve as a reflection of a broader societal response to those events in the world that alarm us. When our writing breaches that which is taboo, we bring together the sacred and the forbidden, the 'fascinating and the repellent', an emotional conflation that is often met with indignation and disgust.<sup>26</sup> The impulse then is to shoot the messenger, while everyone else ducks for cover.

*Elizabeth Hanscombe is a writer and psychoanalytic psychologist who is currently undertaking a PhD in the Unit for Biography and Autobiography at La Trobe University, Melbourne in Australia on the topic 'Theories of Autobiography: Life writing and the desire for revenge'. She is interested in the ways in which Psychoanalytic Object Relations theory intersects with that of narrative and the auto/biographical. She has published a number of short stories and essays in the areas of autobiography, psychoanalysis, testimony, trauma and creative non-fiction in Meanjin, Island, Tirra Lirra and Quadrant, as well as in the journal, Life Writing and in psychotherapy journals and magazines throughout Australia and in the US. She was short listed for the Australian Book Review's 2009 Calibre essay prize.*

---

<sup>25</sup> Kay Torney Souter. 'The Products of the Imagination: Psychoanalytical theory and Postmodern Literary criticism' *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*: Dec 2000: 60, 4. 341- 357. P. 356.

<sup>26</sup> Kay Torney Souter speaking on 'Taboos in Literature' on *The Bookshow*, ABC, Radio National, 5 December, 2008, Australia.

Rhythms of Psychoanalysis and Counterpoints of Therapeutic Spontaneity  
By John T. Sloma

---

RHYTHMS OF PSYCHOANALYSIS AND COUNTERPOINTS OF THERAPEUTIC SPONTANEITY

By John T. Sloma

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the  
International Forum for Psychoanalytic Education  
Nashville, Tennessee, October 29, 2010

*Conference Title: Psychoanalysis: Not the Same Old Song and Dance*

**Rhythms of Psychoanalysis and Counterpoints of Therapeutic Spontaneity**

**INTRODUCTION**

There are many ways of discussing the ebb and flow between patient and analyst for understanding the creations of the rhythms of psychoanalysis and counterpoints of spontaneity so the work of the treatment process can unfold and proceed.

My research has uncovered some old gems of psychoanalytic writing from Freud, Theodor Reik, J.L. Moreno, who developed psychodramatic theory and technique, as well as current thinking in the field, (Renik, Hoffman, and Farber).

Sigmund Freud (1933) said, "Where id was, there ego shall be." (*New Introductory Lectures*, p.80). In many treatment sessions however, unconscious processes and conscious "ego states" are usually a mix or actual cacophony of differing perceptions, perspectives, anxiety states, resistances, defenses, et.al. The analyst's consistently empathically attentive, yet spontaneous energy, a quiet yet firmly committed stance of neutrality and hopefulness in the transference-countertransference matrix, can represent a powerful and calming effect in the treatment process. As Theodor Reik (1948) says in *Listening with the Third Ear*:

(It is a).... quiet attention...that in itself gives...proof of sympathy...driving him(the patient) into deeper layers than he intended. ( p.124)

Speaking further of therapeutic silence, Reik maintains:

...patients become more aware of what is and is not important to discuss. Silence is profound and powerful; in its purest form it endows patients with enormous respect for the formidable task that faces them. (p. 125)

But what is the place of silence in today's psychotherapeutic climate of relational immediacy, emotional presence or nearness of both analyst and patient. As Farber (2006) points out in his study on *Self-Disclosure in Psychotherapy*:

## Rhythms of Psychoanalysis and Counterpoints of Therapeutic Spontaneity

By John T. Sloma

...empathy has largely replaced silence in humanistic/existential psychotherapies, disclosure has largely replaced silence in contemporary psychodynamic therapies, and confrontation has largely replaced silence in short-term dynamic therapy. (p.159).

One of my first mentors, Martin Sulkow, Ph.D., advised me to read Colby (1951) which validated my own long held belief that being “real in the moment” as a human being, let alone as a therapist in the treatment room, is a most useful and essential baseline aspect of any treatment process.

If the way you act as a therapist is greatly different than the way you are as a person, then the façade will drain energy needed for other aspects of therapy and your patients will soon learn of this artificiality. In this connection, the therapist should not attempt to “manipulate the transference. For example, acting like a father for one patient and like a brother for another. The patient must be left freely as possible to develop *spontaneously* those reactions determined by his childhood experiences. (p. 24)

Sulkow also told me to always start the session by taking stock of myself, how I was feeling in the moment and then being real enough to report that to the patient before the session proceeded. It is advice I would like to say I never forgot, but as time and other training interceded, I lost touch with this basic tool of existential therapy: Be Real in the Moment.

I believe that it is the “ebb and flow” of the empathically attuned analyst, with flexibility and attuned self-awareness which ultimately orchestrates the “vibes” of sessions, acknowledging the patient’s cacophonies of psychodynamic conflicts, while gently, patiently and spontaneously bringing forth the analyst’s own “counterpoint” rhythms of countertransferential energies and feelings. This co-creates in the moment with the patient the desired goals of clarity, insight, self-understanding and self-acceptance, which are the aims of any therapeutic endeavor.

As Reik (1937) so eloquently states, in Chapter IX of his book, *The Surprised Psycho-Analyst*, in an article called, “Concerning Tact, Time and Rhythm,”

It is my view that the utterances of our patients, in which we recognize the unconscious, instinctive element, also obey the secret power of rhythm in all their variety. Anyone who has conducted analysis for a series of years will have noticed that what is unconscious and instinctive in his patients’ communications follows a definitive rhythm, though one which we are unable to define, and he will be able to divine when the hidden aggressive and sexual tendencies will appear in these communications, and when they will reach their height, die away, and repeat themselves. He will often perceive this rhythmical rise and fall of the hidden instinctive process behind the patient’s communications, without being able to tell by what signs he can detect the rules governing the movements of these nameless forces...the most favorable moment to give an interpretation... is conditioned by the unconsciously felt rhythm of the patient’s instinctive processes. (p. 123)

So, are we to remain analytically neutral, empathically supportive, or authentically spontaneous at any given moment in the therapeutic process of the unfolding energies of a treatment session? What therapeutic stance or technique works best and when, how and why? This paper will discuss some answers to these questions that I have learned over my 40+ year career in the pursuit of psychotherapeutic effectiveness via my days with Moreaneans (1967-1980), psychoanalytic training (1981-2006) and recent explorations with direct self-disclosure, including spontaneous feedback in the analytic dyad and the successful or disastrous consequences.

## DEFINITIONS

Let's begin with some definitions essential to this paper:

### 1. **Spontaneous:** (from the Latin "sponte", meaning, "of free will, voluntarily.")

J.L. Moreno (1959): Spontaneity is either a new response to an old situation, or an adequate response to a new situation. For J.L. Moreno, spontaneity seems to have been a kind of self-generating inner responsiveness to life's presentations, not necessarily triggered or stimulated in any predictable manner, so much as born of the individual's unique moment of being in time and place. As such, it is a "slice of time" which can never again be experienced or reproduced in its unique existentiality.

Webster defines *spontaneous* as proceeding from natural feeling, temperament or disposition...acting by internal impulse, energy or natural law, without external force, self-acting.

### 2. **Psychoanalytic Frame:**

"The analytic frame, of course, provides the general boundaries for the relationship, a multi-faceted scaffolding of protection for both patient and the analyst. It sets up the special "potential space" in which the "play" of psychoanalysis can go on (Winnicott, 1971; Modell, 1990). As Modell says, "Despite the spontaneity and unpredictability of the affective relationship between the analyst and the analysand, there are also certain affective constants that are institutionalized as part of technique and contribute to the frame or the rules of the game." Hoffman (1998) ( p. 30)

### 3. **Transference:**

The patient sees in his analyst the return – the reincarnation – of some important figure out of his childhood or past, and consequently transfers on to him feelings and reactions that undoubtedly applied to this model. It soon becomes evident that this fact of transference is a factor of undreamed-of importance – on the one hand an instrument of irreplaceable value and on the other a source of serious dangers. This transference is ambivalent: it comprises positive and affectionate as well as negative and hostile attitudes toward the analyst, who, as a rule, is put in the place of one or other of the patient's parents, his father or his mother. ...Therapeutic

## Rhythms of Psychoanalysis and Counterpoints of Therapeutic Spontaneity

By John T. Sloma

successes that take place under the sway of the positive transference are under the suspicion of being of a *suggestive* nature. If the negative transference gains the upper hand they are blown away like spray before the wind. Freud (1933) ( p.190)

#### **4. Rhythm:**

...from the Latin "rhythmus", meaning "measured motion, measure, proportion, akin to Gr. "rhein" meaning "to flow". The flow of cadences in written or spoken language.



### **SOME PERSONAL HISTORY**

Long before I was to become aware of the true depths of psychoanalytic self-exploration, I wrote poems of self-expression in high school. My poetry was of loss and suffering and joy and celebration. In college, I majored in Literature, where I was a published poet in the college literary magazine.

As Theodor Reik discussed in *Listening with the Third Ear*:

The person who approaches psychoanalysis is not psychologically unprepared for it. Long before he enters the consulting room with the analyst, he has become aware of strange experiences, has felt anxieties or inhibitions, and has observed symptoms and behavior traits that have made life difficult and sometimes unbearable for him... He has himself tried to find the way out of the labyrinth of his emotions. It was a kind of abortive self-analysis, attempted with insufficient insight and knowledge, performed with inappropriate tools... Long before he saw a psychoanalyst the patient became interested in psychological problems by inner necessity, because they were his own problems. (p. 9)

Unsatisfied in the understanding of myself, I switched my major to Philosophy after taking a course called, "The Philosophy of Mind". I became involved in my own orthodox psychiatry and psychoanalytic psychotherapy and became immersed in the unorthodox world of J.L. Moreno, where I learned role theory, psychodrama, group psychotherapy, sensitivity and encounter training. It was at a group psychotherapy conference that I met my first analyst and began my first psychoanalysis. My varied academic and experiential training/education over the next 30 years has evolved into a spontaneous and hopefully rhythmic treatment style, which has produced a psychodramatically-oriented psychoanalyst. This is best described as my own "rhythmic amalgamation" of techniques integrating psychoanalytic silence and neutrality with psychodramatic notions of spontaneity and self-disclosure.

As Reik (1937) says in his discussion in "Concerning Tact, Time and Rhythm,"

I propose a provisional definition of Tact. I hold that Tact is the expression of a certain adaptation of our own vital rhythm to that of our surroundings for the time being... Rhythm is a universal vital function, belonging to every living creature... It regulates the flow of vital processes, governs waking and sleeping, hunger and satiety, work and fatigue, ebb and flow, warmth and cold, and the changes of day and night and the seasons.... Without intending or knowing it, the analyst becomes aware of the rhythm of his patients instinctive impulses, and this unconscious knowledge will tell him when to make his communications. Unconsciously he follows this rhythm of instinct, vibrates with it. Perhaps it is better to say that he is a fraction ahead of the patient, a bar let us say, so that he divines in what direction the unconscious will move.... It is still our own mental reaction to the communications of the patient which illuminates our path, the response, as I should prefer to call it. (p. 122)

So, is there a rhythm to the beat of the unconscious, or shall we say instead it is the task of the mutual energy of the working alliance to explore the depths of the co-unconscious for whatever beats or rhythms which may be discovered?

### PERSONALITY OF THE ANALYST

The personality of the analyst needs to become sufficiently sensitized to the profoundly traumatic potential for harm when psychoanalyzing another person. Again Reik (1937) states in his article, "Concerning Tact, Time and Rhythm,"

Was not the American lady patient right when she complained at the beginning of her treatment: "Analysis is so intrusive"?...It would be tactless to fling at a patient's head the statement that he had been sexually in love with his mother and had wanted to kill his father. A certain mental introduction and preparation is needed, an understanding of the contrast between conscious and repressed ideas and so forth. (p. 113)

No consideration for others will help anyone who does not pay attention to the guiding voice within himself,...(p. 118)

Let us then not forget that tact is the outcome, not only of consideration for others, but also of attention to our own impulses, and especially our own reactions. (p. 119)

(and these sometimes offer wisdom, but more often "screw-ups", Tom Wagner (personal communication)

Reik's admonition that we listen to and obey our own inner voice is the start of his discussion of the essential and inescapable truth that we are all of the natural rhythms of nature, and of our own human nature as well. The ebb and flow of our aggressive and libidinal energies creates the inner rhythms of our own unique and particular capacity for our patterns of response to other fellow human beings. And while our unique ebb and flow energies may be quite determined by our individual histories, yet and still our unique ways of synthesizing our experiences into our own 'cranial computers' creates that special set of character traits and attributes known as personality, similar perhaps to many others in many ways, yet ultimately unique and responsive in our own patterns, known best and perhaps only to ourselves as individuals.

It is this unique sense of ourselves, which Reik maintains is the single most important tool for the successful practice of psychoanalysis. In an article called, "The Surprised Psychoanalyst," reprinted in Wolman's (1988) review of seminal papers on Countertransference, Reik (1948) states:

I am of the opinion, not shared by many New York analysts, that the personality of the psychoanalyst is the most important tool he has to work with. My stand here is in sharp

## Rhythms of Psychoanalysis and Counterpoints of Therapeutic Spontaneity

By John T. Sloma

contrast to that of those teachers who train their students to forget themselves when they try to understand unconscious phenomena. I admonish my pupils to be acutely alert to their own responses. The most important advice on the technique of psychoanalysis is nowhere to be found in the textbooks. The teacher who has discussed technique and technicalities should at the end remind his student: "*This above all: to thine own self be true.*" (p.63)

The analyst, as he is often trained in psychoanalytic institutes, is an interpreting automation, a robot of understanding, an independent analytic intellect who has become a person without ever becoming a personality. He confuses the calmness and control of the observer with lack of sensitivity, objectivity in judgment with absence of sensation and feeling. When he sits behind the patient, he tries to be everything else but himself. But only he who is entirely himself, only he who has the sharpest ear for what his own thoughts whisper to him, will be a good psychoanalyst. (p. 63).

My early training, then with the Moreneans convinced me, rightly or wrongly, that my feelings count too, and are not just reactive, but *original* and therefore proactive, in some sense.

I was a difficult analysand to be sure! Just ask my two analysts: my first, a wonderful man named Murray, found me to be "too much myself!" My second analyst, still living so nameless here, found me to be "too articulate and quick-witted" to allow myself to internalize her well-meaning introjects without question or suspicion.

So here I am, now licensed in the field myself after 30 years of training, including two training analyses, still questioning what goes on in the session and what are the meanings of the patient's productions and responses to me, and what are the meanings or true needs which I may be experiencing as countertransference as I listen empathically and respond spontaneously to my patients' productions and self-representations.

I think this places me squarely in the present-day camp of analysts known as "Relational." These analysts theorize on that endlessly eternal focal point in the analytic process known as The Moment. What happens in The Moment of A.H. Modell's (1990) 'analytic relatedness'? The patient and the therapist are in that inevitable dyad of conscious and unconscious needs, forces, feelings, observations, reflections, self-control, self-censorship, risk, fear.

It is this excitement about the unpredictable nature of any such moments which underlies the ritual rhythms of defense, analysis, trust, openness, anxiety, relaxation, love, fear of intimacy, fear of abandonment ( I can freely associate here in an almost 'stream-of-consciousness' fashion *ad infinitum*, or would it be *ad nauseum*?) But I think we can agree as analysts and as human beings, we all know this dance, this rhythm of ebb and flow between the patients' productions and our own thoughts, feelings and formulations of interpretations floated in our own heads while our patients wonder what we feel and think about them.

Rhythms of Psychoanalysis and Counterpoints of Therapeutic Spontaneity

By John T. Sloma

As Reik (1948) says in his book, *Listening With the Third Ear*,

I only now, after thirty seven years of analytic practice and theory, venture to speak on the subject of technique.... The first is an inability to learn from other people's mistakes. All the wisdom of proverbs and all exhortations and warnings are useless to me. If I am to learn from the mistakes of others, I must make them on my own, and so perhaps cast them off. *I am almost incapable of learning from my own mistakes unless I have repeated them several times.* (p. 12)

So, as my trusted friend and colleague is always reminding me,

Personality is both an asset and a liability in this work. Possibilities for connection and rupture always abound, and good cases are always messy. Even those of the masters. Especially of the masters!" (T. Wagner, personal communication)

### COUNTERTRANSFERENCE, SELF-DISCLOSURE & CAUTIONS

I would like to say a few words about self-disclosure as counter-transference. It is my contention that although my natural sense of my own spontaneous flow of free-associations to the productions of my patients may at times be useful, humorous, confrontive, even challenging or insulting, nonetheless the “shock value” of the self-awareness often induced in the patient is frequently, *though not always*, worth the risk. In other words, regardless of the psychoanalytic frame, tactfully timed interpretations, and/or other cautions notwithstanding, a well-placed joke, humorous reflection or even self-disclosing, self-deprecating self-reflection will often catapult or “finesse” a dull, boring, repetitive routine session into a major new set of avenues for further inquiry.

As Renik (2006) says in his book, *Practical Psychoanalysis for Therapists and Patients*,

The truth is that every interaction between analyst and patient expresses the unconscious motivations of, realizes some unconscious fantasy or other of, both participants. For an analyst to think otherwise is naïve and will lead the analyst to underestimate his or her personal participation in clinical work. (p.91)

For example, if I were to suddenly share personal reflections of my own history of the dynamic with my mother, (admittedly probably triggered by some unconscious counter-transferential response to the patient’s ruminations about *his* mother), nonetheless, such spontaneous sharing on my part eases the patient’s anxieties about the same dynamic he may be recounting without yet the benefit of the analyzed perspective of the analyst.

Again, Renik (1995) boldly states, “We need to begin by not just discarding the principle of analytic anonymity, but by *contradicting* it.” (p.482).

And as Barry Farber (2006) notes in his book on self-disclosure,

Renik is quite clear about his use of self-disclosure, avowing that he is consistently willing to make his own views “explicitly available to the patient” (1999, p. 522). He argues that all analytic interventions require some degree of self-disclosure and that the ultimate effect of judicious self-revelation is that patients will follow suit. Although he recommends that the analyst create guidelines about the types of disclosures that promote positive outcome, he is not concerned that the act of self-revelation will lead to exploitation, believing that the analyst’s superego will keep his or her impulses in check (Wasserman, 1999) (p. 130)

So here it is that we come to the cautions, the sense of tact, timing, propriety. Reik (1937) seems of two minds in his article on “Tact, Time and Rhythm”. While he questions and observes,

What happens when we do not communicate the interpretation to the patient at the right moment, that is to say, when we are not guided by tact but by other considerations, when we

## Rhythms of Psychoanalysis and Counterpoints of Therapeutic Spontaneity

By John T. Sloma

allow ourselves to be ruled by the strong feelings or rational arguments! The results are not uniform; they vary, from the absence of success to the rousing of violent resistance. (p. 120),

he also admits elsewhere that in more than a few sessions,

I did not give a damn about logic and what I had learned in the books. I did not think of any psychoanalytic theory. I just said what had spoken in me despite and against all logic, *and I was correct.* (Italics added for emphasis) (p. 57)

He discusses brilliantly just why and how he had come to be correct in his wonderful masterpiece, *Listening with the Third Ear*, specifically, Chapter 23: "The Surprised Analyst." In that inspired narrative of self-disclosure that was essentially Reik's autobiography, he elaborates the importance of learning of one's own inner voice and the rhythms of one's own nature by becoming self-aware through one's own analysis. Only then will the tendency to give in to one's impulse to share the insight of the Moment become perhaps somewhat tempered by the long-accumulated awareness of the unconscious patterns and functional ego-strengths or deficits of the patient.

But what about those painful awkward moments in the psychoanalytic processes which inevitably evolve over time during the course of any lengthy treatment? I know the patient's rhythms of defense, his or her patterns of avoidance, displacement, transference paradigms or dyads of well-worn role-conserved stalemates in the "ritual affective constants" that are part of the rules of the game, as in Modell's (1990) definition of the psychoanalytic frame.

At such times, I believe the frame can feel like a psychological or emotional straitjacket for patient and analyst alike. The sense of struggle, stalemate, lack of progress, discouragement, and eventual premature termination (usually by the patient, but sometimes by the analyst, also burnt-out by the impasse) results in a profound sense of failure for one or both parties to the enmeshment. As my colleague, Tom Wagner says,

An enmeshment involves pathological elements in the analyst that are played out in enactments with the patient. Any discussion of spontaneity of self-disclosure should include destructive potential unconscious elements in the analyst. If they are not scrupulously examined they cannot be put to good use. I think you have to indicate that you are open to examining negative countertransference, that you are struggling with your blind spots. This is the benchmark of good analysis. (personal communication)

But in such scenarios, the iconoclastic spontaneity of the analyst can be most helpful, if somewhat shocking, discordant, and seemingly violating all the rules.

I believe at such junctures, it is the analyst's unconscious awareness of the resilience of the patient's demonstrated ego-strengths, revealed here and there, little by little, or perhaps occasionally in some

## Rhythms of Psychoanalysis and Counterpoints of Therapeutic Spontaneity

By John T. Sloma

unmistakable manner, during innumerable prior treatment sessions, which accounts for the analyst's "induced countertransference" (induced by the patient unconsciously).

The resulting sudden spontaneously (seemingly impulsively) uttered observation, interpretation, construction, or other analytic feedback may startle and even shock the patient; but the ensuing consequence will always be useful and diagnostically indicative of further emotional health or psychopathology.

### CLINICAL VIGNETTES

The following clinical examples will, I hope, illustrate the integration of "therapeutic spontaneity" with the expectations of "psychoanalytic rigor."

#### (1)

The patient, a woman I had been working with for 3 ½ years or so, has had ongoing trust issues. During one session, as we were discussing various aspects of her mistrust of me, as these aspects had emerged in treatment, I became silent, contemplating whether I should yet again, as I had so many times before, offer the interpretive perspectives regarding her oppressive father, history of apparent childhood sexual abuse/molestation, and other abusive episodes she had previously reported.

As I was remaining silent while she sat on the couch, she became quite angry with me, accusing me of withholding interpretations from her. So I said, "It's not me you are angry with and can't trust, it's your father!" (In retrospect, I may have also asked her to tell me more about how I have neglected her, but the heat of the transference dynamic at that point was more of the "power struggle" I think I was unconsciously responding to.) Consequently, my statement caused more (transference?) anger and she began discussing her history with her father (unavailable, verbally abusive, oppressive).

In her expression of anger she began telling in more detail than ever, how her neighbor had hurt her, abused her sexually when she was six years old, which then led to how she was raped by her college professor after a night of drinking together with him (he plying her with several beers after a student gathering at his home).

She began to feel flooded with anxiety. I listened as she began now to speak of each man interchangeably, skipping from one to the next. The stories became blurry and vague. I couldn't get a clear picture, as she said "He, He, He," in a frenzy of confused enmeshment.

At this point, I suggested some "Empty chair work", a psychodramatic technique which allows the patient to imagine her internalized, demonized objects (father, neighbor, professor) to be sitting before her in 3 empty chairs. I lined up the chairs and placed a magazine on each one, to signify to her each abusive man. I told her this could help us sort out her feelings about them. I stood out of view as she

## Rhythms of Psychoanalysis and Counterpoints of Therapeutic Spontaneity

By John T. Sloma

told stories of her father, then moved to the neighbor, and finally the college professor. I was able to get a much clearer picture of her cumulative and layered sexual and emotional traumatizations and compounded sense of almost total mistrust of male authority in any guise. She reported feeling significantly less shame with me out of view, compared with our eye-to-eye contact when the interpretive comment first fueled her rage.

This example has several aspects worth reviewing, I believe. Firstly, had I not hesitated with my interpretive statement, uttered many times previously, and usually to her marked resistance (“Why does it always have to be about my father?” she would whine, or angrily protest), my patient would NOT have been prompted/provoked/stimulated? to feel the initial angry frustration that *here was her father*. Here he was, yet *again* withholding his love and attention. I may have been making assumptions here about what she was angry about, and what I was saying that might have irritated her, and I probably should have stayed closer to her affect. But I was quite familiar by this time with her pattern of “defaulting” to the role of the victim as a means of avoiding the responsibility to “own” her real need for her father’s love and attention. In this context, the feared and yet longed for interpretation had been frequently resisted, and rejected by her time and again. She would then have likely argued with me yet again as to its repetitive nature (the same ol’ song and dance!), thus repeating our transference dyadic norm of “ritual analytic interpretation along classical lines”.

However, this time, my hesitation proved to be just the goad or prompt she needed to get more authentically ‘in touch with that “reservoir of rage” that had been so long dammed up inside, awaiting the right trigger that would push her “over the edge” to a more affectively productive session.

Did I *consciously* know she would react with deeper frustration, more ready to “spill the beans” than ever before? No, I did not, but my *unconscious* accumulation of data, the gathering of all the many details of her history of abuse over the 3+ years of our work together, had coalesced into an uncanny awareness, as well as a growing frustration with her avoidance. It was an awareness that if I withheld, and then let her have the interpretation yet again, somehow something different was going to occur, and by acting on my frustration I was able to express some real personal feelings in the moment that perhaps the time had come for some more direct confrontation and self-expression of some of her long-feared rage at these abusive men.

Such unconscious knowledge of the rhythms of the patient can only come about after numerous hours of ritual dyadic patient-therapist discourse, dialogue, and fencing, jousting. The unconscious resistances of the patient to explore and recall more deeply the psychically painful affective level of sexual and emotional abuse, betrayal by the trusted father, neighbor, and professor, profound mistrust of any authority in pants!, et.al. is at times a seemingly endless dance of discouraging rage at the therapist, simply for daring to pretend that such a phenomenon as Trust might really still be available to the patient! (“It makes sense. She is traumatized. Why should she behave any differently.”)—T. Wagner

Only by provoking her rage at having **anything** withheld, were we able to move to new ground in the analysis. She was able to explore more deeply and accurately, and with much more affect and much less



shame, the events of her traumatic childhood nightmares of feeling terrorized by her emotionally oppressive menacing father, from whom she sought escape in the home of the kindly fatherly neighbor, only to have him molest her repeatedly, sometimes at knife-point, with threats to kill her if she ran home to tell Mommy!

However, a deeper layer of mistrust between my patient and me was operating still behind all of the above levels of fear, mistrust, & suspiciousness. She feared she was not my favorite female patient, fearing her own negative self-image of unattractiveness was hopelessly and eternally to keep her from ever feeling and being Daddy's special girl. And her rage with me at withholding my interpretation from her proved ultimately to be more about this feared loss of status as my special favorite rather than any of the aforementioned authentic affective discharge. *She was essentially enraged* with me the real person for daring to hesitate with her on any level about anything, even if it was only the old familiar refrain of "It's your father you can't trust!"

But my patient is still also understandably angry and protective against being annihilated, and requires someone who can sit with her empathically. This is not someone who needs *simply* to discharge her rage, but also to be "fed" (nurtured), reassured in some sense that she is surviving, and NOT being annihilated

So our unconscious rhythms of trust and mistrust, the ebb and flow of cacophonous discordant unharmonious "session work" continues. It is punctuated by euphonious episodes of concordant familiarity, trust at a superficial level, caution to plumb the depths of painful recall of trauma, et al. Thus the work is ultimately a classic mix of "one step forward, two steps back, three steps forward, one step back, et al."

Her frequent tendency to displace her mistrust of men onto me now also often takes the form of jealousy of my female patients. This is likely part of a massive dissociative defense against invasive assault. "I don't trust you or your work!" She will exclaim angrily and fearfully. This basic mistrust of me and my work with others becomes an easy target for her rage and fears to become displaced from the "remembering, repeating and working through" phase of her analysis. She now wails on endlessly, after "good" sessions or "bad" sessions, that she can't trust me and will never be able to trust me because "sex is so much a part of what I do!"

She reads that Freud's office was "saturated with sex." She obsesses about "erotic countertransference." This painful "truth" about me and my work now becomes utilized as her primary mode of resistance to the deeper recall, self-exploration, traumatic memory content, and hopefully, the eventual purging or cathartic release of the affective levels of fear, terror, abandonment, loss of love, betrayal of trust, and whatever else lies beneath the surface of her childhood memory content. Translation: "If men are sexual, and you are a man, then I can't trust you!" (Because you are sexual!)

This layer of seeming "bedrock" of psychological/emotional "truth" for the patient may be inviolable at this point in her analysis. Again, Wagner points out: "That's right and you cannot push against it.

**Interpretations are sexual assaults.** You have to respect that and communicate that given her history

that is a perfectly expectable way to feel about it.” (Tom Wagner, personal communication) But I want to add, **“For now, until her ego strengths are developed more sufficiently to confront this traumata more courageously.”**

(2)

Joe P., a very successful businessman, came for marital therapy with his wife. Her chief complaint: “he’s overbearing, oppressive, demeaning, dictatorial, is probably lying to me, having an affair,” et al. His complaint about her: “she yells and screams at me incessantly over everything for the past 10 months if not longer.”

I sat for several sessions allowing them to complain angrily and loudly about each other. Finally, I said “Here, I want you to fill this out: “3 to 5 ways I can/want to be a better spouse.” It immediately “shut them up,” and caused them to re-focus on themselves and not castigate each other!

What was my countertransference to this acrimonious non-stop marital “cacophony?” aside from a headache from their sheer vocal volume? I was sad and uncomfortable for the husband, who had no clue as to the consequences of his intelligent, aggressive, no-nonsense style of dialogue, criticism, interpretiveness and general righteous posturing towards his wife; and I felt support and sympathy for her growing capacity to stand up to him, albeit so vociferously as to be verbally abusive. So she was developing some emotional courage in her 23-year marriage, and he was becoming “unglued” and emotionally “disoriented” from his formerly dominant position of “boss” of the family. His style of countering her loud rage was to say, “She is crazy, needs medicine, even Jesus would not be able to tolerate her venom and toxicity without capitulating!”

My “spontaneous” countertransference was a creative alternative to their “embattled acrimonious engagement” – Call it “common sense” if you will. It was a message to stop yelling and look at yourselves as individuals instead of deteriorating into the endless demonizations of each other!!! This is the role of the analyst as neutral arbiter, calming the waters of rage, hurt, pain, mistrust, misunderstanding, victimization, self-pity, righteousness: in short, the whole gamut of human emotions flooding this couple at this time.

And why did it “work” at all? Because of their implicit trust in the external authority of the analyst to be sure, but also, I think because of their feelings of helplessness, fears of abandonment, fears of shame around divorce, loss of marital stability, et al. All my conjectures to be sure are not confirmed or validated until “checked out further” in future sessions. But these were useful conjectures, I think, leading to a useful intervention.

And, of course, all of this is based as well on my own conscious and unconscious anxieties about feeling helpless, abandoned, ashamed, losing marital stability, et al. In other words, the identification with my patient’s probable anxiety states was based on an awareness of my own vulnerabilities to such a challenge as was staring at me and screaming at me in my office!

(3)

This final vignette refers to my “courage” to risk the possibility of a patient “shut-down” due to an empathic failure perpetrated by pushing, forcing, acting on an insightful interpretation and the egoistic need of the analyst to show how smart he is, rather than remaining “in touch” with the patient’s inner emotional life, the presumed struggle and suffering.

I use to have a patient who came for therapy to help her workout her inability to find a suitable partner for a long-term relationship and maybe marriage and children. She also had severe low self-esteem issues due to early abandonment by her father, and mother’s disapproval of the acting career my patient had set her sights on for herself in NYC.

She would habitually go for auditions, only to be rejected, unable to find an agent aggressive enough to “market” her more effectively, and ultimately having to abandon the acting career for work producing documentaries. I had a great deal of empathy for her “struggles” to “make it” in the Big Apple. She was attractive, intelligent, educated with a MFA in Drama, energetic, well organized, yet unable to succeed in a very competitive business (theater) in NYC.

I would like to discuss a “failure of empathy” on my part, disguised even to myself at the time, as an “empathic attunement” to my perceived sense of her inner struggle with loneliness, anxiety, fears of inadequacy, little family understanding of her goals or value system or esthetic sensibilities. I too was just starting to work with patient’s analytically, and identified with what I was sure were her valid, challenging, at times overwhelmingly discouraging “inner struggles” to achieve her dreams. But whenever I would attempt to refer to or validate her “struggles” she would balk and become vaguely uneasy. I never knew why until one day she finally confronted me, stating she didn’t like the word “struggle”, and doubted it was accurate or useful in applying to her situation. I interpreted her challenge as a resistance to “owning” just how difficult and lonely her life had become in NYC over the past decade. She herself had begun talking of only giving it another six (6) months before giving up the acting dream. Yet when I used the word “struggle” to refer to her dilemma, she rejected it consistently, preferring eventually to just say “things were difficult”, “life was challenging,” et al.

Her rejection of what I thought was my “accurate empathy” annoyed and frustrated me: it was evident to me that I was failing as a therapist to be sufficiently attuned to her inner emotional life. So I interpreted her rejection as “resistance”, even going so far as to tell myself it was her own fear of a more intimate connection with me that was behind her refusal to acknowledge my wonderful empathy.

She eventually met someone and after several months of dating they moved in to his loft together and became a family. (He had a young son from a previous marriage.) She even brought him to her sessions for a while in an attempt to get him to change, to perhaps understand him better through my lenses, et al.

Years later, I am now realizing I was projecting an interpretation of the affective content of her inner emotional life (“struggle”) from my own sense of myself at the time. While “plausible” in every obvious

## Rhythms of Psychoanalysis and Counterpoints of Therapeutic Spontaneity

By John T. Sloma

dimension of accuracy, it lacked validity: and yet my “narcissistic interpretive myopia” caused me to force a word on her which failed to resonate with her true inner sense of herself, which I now suspect was that of the misunderstood “survivor”, prevailing courageously in a world of harsh insensitivities and cruel indifferences.

### CONCLUSION

As Reik (1948) points out, this work is not easy; we make all kinds of errors, technical and theoretical, in our quest for true and useful therapeutic effectiveness.

When it resonates with the rhythms of our own natural empathetic capacities and the emotional needs of our patients, it is a joyous sense of achievement: “Music” – when we fail it is cacophonous, dissonant, unfulfilling and discouraging for analyst as well as patient.

But it is the persistence, commitment and devotion to the passion and vision of people like Sigmund Freud, Socrates (The unexamined life is not worth living!), J.L. Moreno, Theodor Reik, and countless others that impels the work forward: we struggle to achieve ever greater self-acceptance thru deeper and deeper self-understanding, for ourselves as analysts and for our patients as well.

### REFERENCES

Colby, Kenneth Mark MD. (1951), *A Primer for Psychotherapists*. New York: The Ronald Press Company.

Farber, Barry. (2006), *Self-Disclosure in Psychotherapy*. New York: The Guilford Press, New York.

Freud, Sigmund. (1967), *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*. New York: The Washington Square Press.

Hoffman, Irwin Z. (1998), *Ritual & Spontaneity in the Psychoanalytic Process*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: The Analytic Press Inc.

Modell, A.H. (1990), *Other Times, Other Realities: Toward a Theory of Psychoanalytic Treatment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Moreno, J. L., MD. (1959), *Psychodrama (Vol. 2.)*. Beacon, NY: Beacon House Inc.

Reik, Theodor, MD. (1937), *Surprise and the Psycho-Analyst*. New York: E.P. Dutton and Company.

Reik, Theodor, MD. (1948), *Listening with the Third Ear*. New York: Jove Publications, Inc.

Renik, Owen. (2006), *Practical Psychoanalysis for Therapists & Patients*. New York: Other Press LLC

Rhythms of Psychoanalysis and Counterpoints of Therapeutic Spontaneity

By John T. Sloma

Wolstein, Benjamin, editor. (1988), *Essential Papers on Countertransference*. New York: New York University Press.

**John T. Sloma**, LCSW, L.P. (NY) is a practicing psychoanalyst, and is Board Certified in Clinical Social Work, with a practice in the New York Metropolitan area. He earned a Master's in Clinical Social Work from Fordham University. He was Senior Clinician at the New York State Newburgh Mental Health Clinic for several years before becoming the Associate Director of Associated Counseling Service in Middletown, New York. He has completed his analytic curriculum at NPAP and has appeared in an Anger Management Documentary for MTV. He has now twice presented papers on his thinking and practice style at IFPE conferences (2008, 2010). He also still writes poetry occasionally.

## Heterosexuality – The Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name

By Art Pomponio

---

### HETEROSEXUALITY – THE LOVE THAT DARE NOT SPEAK ITS NAME

By Art Pomponio

This paper was first presented at the IFPE 20th Annual Interdisciplinary Conference, Daring to Speak: Languages Spoken and Unspoken

This presentation is about the surprise of a lifetime: A gay patient's discovery, integration and acceptance of his heterosexuality. The man was not looking for this transformation when he began his analysis over twelve years ago. Indeed had then his analyst ever so much as suggested such a transformation, he would have walked out the door. Heterosexual feelings started to emerge into his consciousness only after he left his male partner of twenty-seven years. It accompanied a redirection of his own sense of masculinity from undeniable to be sure to deepened and more authentically his own. I can say with absolute confidence that this radical expansion of sexual orientation and deepened gender identity reflects the patient's authentic sense of himself because I am the patient.

After living my entire adult life as a gay man with no significant conscious expectation that I could or should be heterosexual, I found myself at age 47 meeting, falling in love with, and marrying a woman. As both the patient and an analyst, I offer to you this story and something of my analytic understanding of it in the hopes that by doing so I can help move the discussion of the fluidity of sexual orientation and gender identity, especially in men, from an academic perspective to one of clinical relevance, especially through the unaccustomed direction of homosexuality to heterosexuality.

I want to go further in today's presentation by treading in what may seem to some like treacherous waters by suggesting that aspects of our analytic theorizing about homosexuality that have been discredited or at least set aside by most of us may actually have clinical usefulness. Ideas traditionally associated with homosexuality such as castration dread, perversion, certain aspects of narcissism, incomplete resolution of the Oedipal stage, profound enmeshment issues with the gay person's mother, and so forth need to be reexamined not for universal application to all gay patients or as evidence of their inherent pathology with respect to their homosexuality, but simply as a means of working with those gay patients for whom they might prove relevant. In other words we may need at an appropriate time in a given analysis to consider that the gay patient may indeed be defending against an array of emotions associated with repressed heterosexuality that, of their own accord, needs vital expression in the world of real relationship. All of these ideas had something to do with me; and I have to assume that I am not the only man for whom they may prove important.

I suspect that many of us--myself included--have strong feelings when we associatively link the words like perversion and narcissism with homosexuality. After all, over decades of clinical work some analysts perpetrated a great deal of harm on their gay patients by trying to "cure" them based on what I believe it is fair to call culturally-informed ideological assumptions about homosexuality. Let me say at the onset, then, that I abhor any notion that an analyst would begin an analysis with an ideological or theoretical assumption about homosexuality being per se pathological or something to be eliminated or worked through. And I do not disavow anything of my past, present and future homosexual feelings. I also want to be clear that like any other ethical analyst, I stay with the productions of my own gay patients and do not presume that they need to have in their lives what I now have in mine.

## Heterosexuality – The Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name

By Art Pomponio

And finally, I hope you will understand that I take the anxiety-provoking risks associated with so much self-revelation because I feel that this necessary story would be difficult to accept by some if it were told by an analyst who was always fundamentally heterosexual. I assert for myself a certain credibility that would not, I feel, be available to that analyst.

\*\*\*\*\*

Let me begin my story with a memory. I was about seven or eight and after my mother scolded me for something, I shut myself in my bedroom closet. At first I felt sad that my mother seemed so disappointed in me. I remember thinking that it would be good if I suffocated in there. After a while I realized that she hadn't missed me and I started to cry and get angry. "She doesn't care. I don't matter at all!", I remember thinking. As more time passed I felt despair. "I hope I do die!", " I thought. "She'll miss me forever." After more time and still no mother, I left the closet and went to the kitchen table where, smilingly, she offered me lunch. She didn't seem to have a clue about my experience. I never told her. I never could tell her how I felt about anything important. In this childhood experience, we might say that I internalized my closet, which became the space of our enmeshment and the space of my silence.

The closet is of course the well-known metaphor for the hidden, frightened, and often self-loathing homosexual. For many, to come out of the closet is to risk, among other things, the security of self-denial for the uncertainty of acceptance and real relationship. The closet is often is a place of a particular condition of love. That is, it is a place one *wants* to stay. It is the place of unconsciously constructed relationships that feel to be the deepest and most cherished of all, as in the case here of my mother and me. I seriously doubt anyone ever occupies the closet alone. I wonder if in there with the gay person is always his most important love who in one way or another feels to him just as committed as he does to the shadows. There is something sublime-feeling about this lonely partnership that can feel impossible to give up or to want to give up, even as relationships with self and others suffer. Of course since these personages are the distorted and internalize part objects of a single psyche, the shared dwelling is actually a house divided against itself. In my case the relationship of the closet remained of central importance even years after I thought I had come out of the closet by announcing to the world that I was gay. Indeed, in my case I only now, with my heterosexuality mined and brought to light, do I feel genuinely free of the closet.

Many years ago, I left the closet to join the community of gay men. Or so I thought I did. I came out for the usual reasons: the press of the body exceeded the push back of shame. Integrity needed to trump an indenturing conformity. The need for authenticity bested my fear of rejection and abandonment. In time I came out to everyone, became an activist and scholar of gay literature and, years later in analytic training, a leader of sorts in my institute on matters of sexual orientation. Most importantly, I met a man and entered into a partnership with him that lasted for twenty seven years. In short, I understood myself to be gay and never seriously considered that I would or could be anything else.

There are many ways I could present my story. My wish to address as directly as I can the theme of this conference about daring to speak the unspeakable compels me to accent a single analytic concept with which I most struggled: perversion; for without a doubt in my mind perverse processes characterized my defensive structure and contributed to forming my homosexual self. It took me many years to work through my transference to older conceptualizations of homosexuality in positive support of my own

## Heterosexuality – The Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name

By Art Pomponio

analysis so that I could take in about these theories what was useful to me even as I rejected what wasn't.

Perversion is also of particular importance to me because a perverse dream compelled me to seek therapy many years ago and became emblematic of all the work I did with that therapist and all the work I subsequently accomplished with my analyst. I had the dream during my twenties while I was in graduate school.

*I bring home to meet my mother a woman from graduate school I was in fact then attracted to. Karen was her name. The sense was that this was in preparation of marriage. At first my mother is warm and welcoming and offers Karen some tea. After a moment, however, my mother transforms into a hideous and terrifying monster. She picks up a bloodied joint of mutton and crushes Karen's skull with it. My mother exulted in her brutal act and cried out triumphantly. The perspective of the dream is such that she towers above me.*

I called this dream figure "Mutton Mother," and she can be understood as the phallic mother of perversion. In the dream, she cleaves me to her by killing the woman who would take me from her. By crushing the "other woman" she crushed my chance at heterosexuality. Except, as analysis revealed and allowed, she didn't castrate me. My heterosexuality simply went into hiding until I could find a way to guarantee its safe return. The story of my analysis is the story of how I came to understand this attempt at castration, the subtle narcissism it implies, and the perverse relationship choices I made with their masochistic and sadistic undertones.

I have had two long therapies, the first with a woman and the second with a man. Again time restraints limit me so I will keep brief my work with Linda, but first a little background relevant to both treatments.

I am the first born of four children and the only male. My mother was a quiet and rather depressed woman who could be very loving and tender but when she allowed herself her anger it was extreme and very cutting. My father was a jovial sort, in some ways narcissistic, but more alive to the world and to others than my mother. My parents were given to clichés of the time about how boys should behave, perhaps my father less so than my mother. Deviations from these clichéd norms were generally met with contempt. Unfortunately I never comfortably occupied the space of clichéd masculinity even as I at times yearned to,

For me being the only boy did not convey any special status although I secretly believed it should. Indeed with the addition of each sister, I felt that there was something increasingly wrong with me. Lynn, the sister closest to me in age, was a great friend but also a target of significant envy. My father loved her tomboyishness and I always felt that I should be more like her. In short I felt like I was the daughter and she was the son. My mother often cringed with contempt at what she considered to be my feminine side. Cringing and other physical expressions of emotion were more common than spoken words.

When my mother became pregnant with the third child (I was about six) I evinced a range of regressive symptoms, the most important of which was that I refused to use the toilet and retained my feces. This led to much family turmoil. Finally, after soliciting a doctor's advice, my mother administered an enema (it happened to be on her bed). I remember jumping up and running away in horror and shame. I actually think she regretted having done this but remained, I felt, disgusted and upset with me for my



## Heterosexuality – The Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name

By Art Pomponio

behavior. This event no doubt informed the creation of the castrating mother that came to haunt me in my dreams so many years later. Freud has likened feces to the penis, so following him at least it made sense that I would want to keep it buried deep within.

At about this time, my parents took us for a day at the beach. While having dinner at a family restaurant, I saw a boy who must have been about fifteen or so wearing a see-through tank top. I was mesmerized by his beauty--I noticed in particular his strong pectoral muscles and his nipples. I wanted more than anything to be him. Throughout my adult life I often thought that I would rather be the man of my dreams than have him in my arms. In analysis I came to appreciate how I split off and eroticized this dimension of my own masculinity. Even as a young boy I felt that this was the kind of boy my mother and father would prefer. He struck me as confident, strong, and given his shirt, sexually daring: good with the girls. There never seemed to be enthusiasm for my preferences of reading, making music, talking about relationships, and other traditionally feminine interests.

My childhood and early teens were unhappy. I felt lonely, sad, ashamed and, I can now say, very angry. I had come to feel that I wasn't wanted by either of my parents, although they were generally quite involved in my life and for the most part loving. In this conflict, I established a psychic truth of estrangement that did not at all match the fuller truth of my parents actual love for me. The pull of the closet strengthened as I didn't let them help me develop a self-concept based on healthy-enough self-esteem. Even so, it was true, I believe, that while my parents loved me there were parts of me that they simply could neither understand nor love.

I engaged in the usual sexual experimentation that boys do; however, I had the sense that my interest in this was more emphatic than I felt the other boys' to be. I knew to keep my mouth shut. While I didn't think of myself as gay, I did think that I was a freak. I dated girls in high school and never for a moment identified myself as gay. Indeed it wasn't until I went to college that I first consciously understood that I was. When I finally had my first gay experience I was both thrilled and filled with shame. Midway through my senior year, I met my partner.

Within three months we were living together. I knew from the very beginning that I was not in love with him yet I felt a strong pull into the relationship. I now believe that I chose him precisely because I knew I could never love him and that by entering into a relationship I knew could not satisfy me I established at the beginning a condition of self-imposed deprivation that supported subsequent selflimiting masochism. My partner and I split up twice in the early years of our relationship and twice we reunited, the second time under very meaningful circumstances. During my late twenties, my mother became ill with leukemia. I had a year or so before left my partner and I had had no contact with him during the duration of her illness but on the very night she died, I called him, ostensibly because I thought he would want to know, but of course it was to reconnect with him. I recall thinking that it was as though the soul of my mother entered my partner for the sake of not letting me go.

Within a week or so of the Mutton Mother dream, I began therapy with Linda. In addition to the dream itself, my presenting problems were depression; discontent with my homosexuality; a pervasive sense of shame; difficulties in writing my dissertation; and my unhappy relationship with my partner. Linda offered me her steady and empathic presence and her keen ability to point out difficult truths about my role in all of this. From time to time, I would profess sexual interest in her, but even now as I look back, I am not sure I ever really meant it. Perhaps they were rehearsals or psychic adumbrations of what was to come. Instead, I felt that she offered me an alternative experience of woman to those harsh Mutton

## Heterosexuality – The Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name

By Art Pomponio

Mother-like projections of myself that I extended to my mother and three sisters. Through our work together, I could take in that a woman could take me seriously as a man and not wish to enslave or kill me. She might even celebrate a fully "out" life that included a satisfying sex life and a solid sense of healthy self-esteem. We began the long work of separating and individuating that would lead to a good enough culmination in my later analysis. If Linda and I discussed with sustained seriousness the prospect of my heterosexuality, I do not now remember it. I do remember that with her help I felt I better accepted my self--as evidenced in many ways but most significantly by completing my dissertation--the first at NYU on an explicitly gay-related topic. I felt this as a phallic accomplishment of great importance. Our work also led me to consider becoming an analyst. My termination more or less corresponded with my entering training. In short, Linda took me a long way on the journey towards finding my masculine self vis-à-vis feeling increasingly safe with a female who refused to keep my projections of unkind, selfish, and castrating women. I had several dreams towards the end of my therapy with Linda that involved a strong yet benign woman leading me on a journey. But the journey would not be complete until I had the chance to work with a man.

I remember my first impressions of my male analyst. He was somewhat reticent, but when he did speak, he was forceful and direct. After Linda's relative warmth, he seemed remote and a little forbidding. Looking back on some journals from the early period of our work, I am reminded how often he made me angry. Although always empathic, he did not then strike me as gentle. I wonder now if I needed him not to be, not in a masochistic sense but from the perspective of modeling a separate existence' that is, he could stand up for himself. I often confused the absence of gentleness with unkindness or cruelty.

I spent a great deal of time during the early years of our work obsessively complaining about my partner. He didn't work. Made no money. Was like a Collyer brother in his obsessive collection of every manner of object including literally thousands of copies of old New York Times newspapers. No manner of discussion, argument, threat, etc. could change him--or us. Although intellectually I could take in my analyst's questions and interventions about this relationship, it didn't click that I was perpetuating this enmeshed state and that if it were going to change, I actually needed to act.

One day, after years of patiently listening and holding my whining complaints about my partner, my analyst said to me in what I took as real frustration: "Can we talk about something else?" Naturally, I was deeply offended. What right did he have to tell me what to talk about, and so on. But this intervention conveyed several things to me that were essential to my development. First, that there was more to me than being my partner's partner. I was, after all, a fairly accomplished person, who had much else going for him than this relationship about which to talk. I had all sorts of strengths to call upon. That I didn't call upon them suggested that somehow I was colluding in this unhealthy relationship. Second, that there is no reason for anyone—even an analyst—to agree to be someone else's used object for all eternity. This intervention also consolidated for me my awareness of the masochistic and sadistic dimensions of my relationship and how they served to keep us in eternally perverse union that itself kept me from appreciating within an intimate context a "whole" other person--male or female.

Our dynamics kept me from ever facing the masochist's perhaps deepest dread: to be abandoned. And since I associate my ex- with my mother, to be abandoned by her. Not long after this session, my analyst had occasion to point out that in not leaving my partner I didn't have to confront my own grandiose fantasy that I was of such significance to him that he could never do without me. My analyst's taking care of himself by saying no to my whining was a powerful message about separation. I didn't leave my

## Heterosexuality – The Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name

By Art Pomponio

analyst, although I was very angry. Indeed, even though he was taking care of himself I could begin to feel how I might begin to take care of myself in a similar way. Through all of this we kept talking. I could speak my anger and he could hold it without attacking me. Slowly I had to acknowledge my own masochism vis-a-vis my partner and my narcissistic defenses while simultaneously experience a relationship of deepening importance with my analyst.

My analyst remained challenging throughout our work together. While very well able to express empathy, kindness, respect, and his love for me, he didn't fail to combine these expressions with analytic insights designed to challenge my resistances to feeling my phallic energy. Further, he kept pointing out that I seemed to shower contempt on my partner in much the same way I felt it poured on me by my mother and others. Over time I came to see how I reduced my partner to a non-person. It was my choice not to really take in how troubled he was (although I did understand this on an intellectual level). My ex had become to me an object rather than his own subjectivity. Of course the same could be said of his experience of me. Mutton Mother did not appreciate the entirety of my personality and her energies strove to keep my personal life organized around part object relationships. Regarding my ex-partner, my analyst kept pressing me to consider that life as I was living it seemed not to be changing and that I had a primary role in maintaining this stasis. For a long time I consciously wished that change would occur from outside myself. My analyst helped me to understand that the continued relationship was something I apparently needed in defense of experiencing an intimate relationship with a whole person. My constantly blaming my partner for our difficulties only served to keep me from ever looking inside myself to find whatever I might need to achieve intimacy.

As the years progressed, my analyst started to return more regularly my projections that would have him collude with my view about my partner. I dearly wanted him to agree that my partner was at fault for my unhappy life. I also wanted him to confirm my impotence and the impossibility of change. Of course, my analyst would not join me in any of these fantasies.

From time to time I thought I heard my analyst snoring from his position behind the couch. Once I jumped up to surprise him. He was awake. The idea that I was putting him to sleep made me very angry. Always he said in my assertion that I was boring him "if I had fallen asleep, couldn't it be because of something else?" That is, couldn't he have a life apart from mine that might result in being tired?

Finally one day I believe he did fall asleep. This occurred well into my training and I understood that it was a characteristic countertransference reaction to fall asleep while listening to the narcissistic productions from a patient. I was very hurt, but not so much with him after we talked about it as with myself. Was I really so narcissistically oriented?

On that day, something started to shift in me. I saw how terribly cut off from related feeling I was, and I didn't like it. I didn't want to lose him to my endless need to complain and stay stuck. I could more fully understand that he was separate from me and that despite this separation he could care about me. With this experience, I started to see how enmeshment is the antithesis of mature love. While I have no idea how he would remember this session, I remember it with tenderness for the both of us.

In short, in my view he worked with the transference in such a way that I could experience the love and support of a man who had my best interests in mind absent any condition of shame or contempt. Within human rather than superhuman bounds he could hear and take in what I had to say. Through the transference I could feel and use his strength vis-a-vis Mutton Mother. I felt safe with it. Just as safe and

## Heterosexuality – The Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name

By Art Pomponio

reliable was his holding of the frame with me as a intersubjective space in which I could begin to play with aspects of myself that had been frightened to come out including, finally, playing with my heterosexual feelings.

During one session, I was talking explicitly about my anxiety about getting up close and personal with a vagina, and he showed me an art book of line drawings of vaginas. As I looked at each page, with him sitting right there, I felt as though I was being introduced into the world of adult men. This was a rite of passage that I had never before allowed myself even as I felt shame over needing so late in my life his help about something many teenage boys could appreciate; I also had to take in how exciting the idea of making love with a woman struck me. Soon I asked a few women to dinner. All were disastrous experiences, but even I could allow that I needed to be gentle with myself about these awkward first attempts.

Perverse process can be about dislocated symbolic penises and throughout my analysis a recurring question that we posed was "Where is the penis?" (OK, we used other language). Even before I ever entertained the idea of dating women, let alone marrying one, this question always served to bring me back to such fundamental questions as "Where is your aggression?," "Where is your desire?" "Are you afraid?" "Why are you hiding?" "Where is your creativity?" Of course these questions often were applied to the prospect of partnering again with a man. But somehow the association of "Where is the penis?" with "Do you want his?" didn't feel right. Wanting "his penis" is like wanting to be the boy with the see-through tank top who seemed so strong and attractive to people. It is interesting to me that after all these years of analysis with a man and after many discussions about this, I never felt sexually attracted to my analyst. I believe that a hidden part of myself needed him not to be a sexual distraction but instead a caring model of what I might someday myself become, but of course in my own way--someone in stark contrast to who Mutton Mother would have me be. With this insight, I came to understand that the creation of Mutton Mother was an act of revenge, a huge "fuck you" to the mother who left me in the closet. It was as though I said "Alright, if you don't love me for who I am, I will make myself into someone you will hate. I will take myself away from you." Of course this meant taking me away from myself too.

And who is it I have become? This question points to the core of this presentation. To me entire linguistic systems with their sociocultural associations and influences feel insufficient for gaining an answer, let alone mere words such as homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual. So for me the question that many people have insisted asking me: "Am I gay, straight, or bisexual?" is more about them or my relationship with them and what I imagine their needs of me to be than anything I care to answer. All I can answer in direct terms is "Yes, and...." or "Yes, but..."

Most of the time these three words--gay, straight, and bi--point to something I can only feel incompletely and can not fully apprehend. In an attempt to render a response, if not an answer, I would like to use four metaphors that have come up either explicitly or implicitly in this presentation: closet, frame, expansion and integration. I offered my understanding of the closet as a place in which the frightened or self-limiting gay person joins with a beloved (or a beloved part object) and swears a fidelity that includes the forswearing of other relationships. While I can not universalize this construction, I am confident that this fantasy of enmeshment applies to gay men other than just me. By comparison, the frame is psychic space within which two relatively more independent psyches meet for the sake of encountering each other in a gesture of mutual healing. Each, I believe, may seek in the other the separate identity with which to begin or continue to strengthen self-states and object boundaries that

## Heterosexuality – The Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name

By Art Pomponio

can be used to exchange narcissistic for object love. From the start my analyst held me accountable for my presence in the frame and would not allow me to overwhelm him with transference energies, even as he quietly held them for many years. "Can we talk about something else?" was a developmental experience in the frame where he reminded me he existed and that he was at my service if I could see and feel him as something other than a used object. In time, he became more and more revealing of himself as the man he is outside the frame. This wasn't a breach of the frame, it was an expansion of it that help make room for my growth too. Actual language about ourselves helped individualize us as speakers with a vested interest in hearing each other. Of course all separation includes deidealizing of one sort or another, and what healthier way to confirm that process then, when ready, for the analyst to allow him or herself to be increasingly real to the patient. In this paper, the expansion of the frame is a corollary to the expansion of my sexuality, that is to the "Yes, and..." and "Yes, but" that answers the question are you Gay, Straight or Bisexual? At present this expansion means the addition of new object relations and dynamic energies that are not necessarily at peace with each other. Conflict still exists as the Mutton Mother encounters new internal and external objects and accompanying feelings of desire, potency, masculinity and so forth. Integration, the last metaphor, means for me a range of experiences that include détente, the agreement to disagree, the enduring commitment to healing as painful conflicts continue to arise, celebration, and for me very profoundly, if incompletely, forgiveness. After all Mutton Mother needed something too. And more importantly, Mutton Mother is not my real mother at all. The ability to love a woman in my life has also helped me to regain my love of my real mother who was so much else than this difficult aspect of myself. These four metaphors help trace the activities of an analysis even as they continue to inspire its meaning. Neither one nor all of them together can reveal all truth but together they offer context for continued meaning making. Today if my wife is upset with me about something, rather than running into the closet as I did when I had upset my mother, or sadistically and masochistically reducing myself and my partner to warring part objects, she and I have a conversation and maybe even a fight, but I know for sure that when it is over I am still loved and able to love.

***Art Pomponio** is an analyst, training analyst, and supervisor in private practice on the Upper West Side in New York City. He is Dean of Faculty and Curriculum at the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis, where he is also a member of the board of directors and an instructor. Dr. Pomponio is also a consultant in the areas of higher educational, professional, and scholarly publishing.*

---

PICTOGRAM

By Oren Gozlan

4141 Yonge Street, Suite 102  
Toronto, Ontario, M2P 2A8, Canada  
[ogozlan@gozlanpsych.com](mailto:ogozlan@gozlanpsych.com)

**Abstract**

Piera Aulagnier's concept of the pictogram elaborates the way in which the body's morphology is determined by erotogenic zones, and how, from the outset, these zones are highly tied to the Other. In this paper I will use Aulagnier's concept of the pictogram as a heuristic device (2001), in the case of S, a 49-year-old male-to-female transsexual involved in mutilation and gender oscillation. The case of S is used to examine the relationship between the development of a pictogram and later sense of the gendered body in the attempt to consider the question of identity development as a felt sense that always occurs in the context of a relation and yet is an unconscious registration of otherness. This conceptualization attempts to shift the notion of sexual difference from deterministic genitality or act of conscious decidability to a psychic ability to hold onto the ambivalence that is inherent in embodied subjectivity. This paper poses a link between the construction of a pictogram of unity and the development of a *sense* of self-cohesion that manifests through gender embodiment as an imaginary unity based on a collapse between phantasy and social reality.

**Keywords**

pictogram, identification, embodiment, sexual difference, linking

Pictogram  
By Oren Gozlan

Piera Aulagnier's concept of the pictogram elaborates the way in which the body's morphology is determined by erotogenic zones, and how from the outset, these zones are highly tied to the Other. The pictogram is a fictive way to imagine how before language, expulsion and incorporation involves perceptual, pictographic images that link perception and sensation to the Other (e.g., the breast), where the "Other" refers both to the concrete other and the "totality of their message" (Verhaeghe, 2004). The pictogram as an unconscious representation is, for Aulagnier, a primal attempt to bind the spaces of the body and the outside world. However, it carries a trace of what language will later become, an attempt to make meaning of inchoate spaces. The pictogram is used in the analysis to begin to represent a mind without words, where a poignant image gives access to a primal scenic enactment. This is also an encounter that repeats the primal inscriptions in the analytic setting.

In the analytic encounter, what is available to the analyst is only the patient's defensive structure. In turn, the pictogram, as an expression of this structure, may provide the analyst access into the patient's mind. I therefore ponder how the patient's enactments in place of words, which give rise to an image in the analyst's mind, also provide access into a primal scenic impression of violence and disjointedness that bring the patient to attack her linking capacity, and hence her identificatory project.

I will present a way to think about the problem of sexual difference through the unconscious act of linking and its failure. I use the concept of the pictogram as a lens through which to consider the constant interweaving of primal and primary modes of relating—a relating that predates language and history. I would like to emphasize that this paper will be limited to the function of the pictogram as an entry into the analyst's speculation about the mind of the patient. In this way the pictogram is viewed as structuring but it is also a conceptual apparatus for understanding how a phenomenon like the pictogram is structured as a precursor to identity.

A case example will be used to examine the relationship between the development of a pictogram and later sense of the gendered body. The question of identity development will be considered as a felt sense that occurs always in the context of a relation and yet is an unconscious registration of otherness. This conceptualization attempts to shift the notion of sexual difference from deterministic genitality or act of conscious decidability (being a man or a woman) to a psychic ability to hold onto the ambivalence that is inherent in embodied subjectivity. This paper poses a link between the construction of a pictogram of unity and the development of a sense of self-cohesion that manifests through gender embodiment as an imaginary unity based on a conflation of phantasy and social reality.

**Narrating origin.**

Every narration is marked by a search for origin; a starting point. Where did "I" come from? In every narration there is a struggle towards cohesiveness, a movement from splitting to clarity, from doubt to certainty. The difficulty of creating a narrative for the self is universal. Soon enough the story reveals its inchoateness in the very place it sews the parts together. Between the pieces of our narrative, meaninglessness, strangeness, and gaps in the inchoate reveal the fragility of identification—fragility that, for Freud, characterizes the "origin of emotional tie to the object" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973).

Pictogram  
By Oren Gozlan

Indeed, language creates a link to the (M)other that is also an acknowledgement of the (M)other's absence. Language is closely tied with identity, which requires a movement away from the singularity of the maternal discourse and towards the group.

The origins of the "I" has been closely tied in psychoanalysis to the "original form of emotional tie to the object" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973, p. 336) and takes as its model the mother–infant relation. The meeting of the infant and the outside world has been imagined as a state of war but also of union and peace. Freud (1914/1961) used the term *primal narcissism* to denote an intrinsically omnipotent mode of relating to external reality that repudiates any registration of difference through wish fulfillment. Through absence, representation occurs as a way to handle loss. Freud thought of primal phantasies as "organizers of sexuality: castration, seduction and, lastly, the Oedipus complex itself" (Green, 1997, p. 19) that are linked with phylogenetic inheritance.

In "Negation" Freud observed, "What is bad, what is alien to the ego and what is external, to begin with, are identical" (1925, p. 237). In other words, the encounter with otherness (what is unknown, painful, or alien) generates defences of omnipotent de-differentiation in the form of identification and symbolic equation, an attack on "psychic space" where symbolic equation becomes a "derivative of the death drive" (Bass, 2000, p. 175). The force towards and away from otherness is contained in the drive—the pleasure principle must contain inherent failure (Verhaeghe, 2004). The drives receive an "intersubjective dimension" from the start, where the infant is totally dependent on the Other and has to take the passive stance and is subjected to separation anxiety—the absence of the Other (p. 6). The experience of tension and its relief is closely tied to identification.

Winnicott, on the other hand, imagined a space of "being," a space before the development of the ego as a separate self-agency. It is a space marked by the timelessness of the unconscious where the outside feels part of the inside, where internal states are indistinguishable, and hence what is sensed on the body is felt as if created by the infant. What Winnicott calls "a primary state of being" refers to a "pre-primitive" state, "an area of peace" (Eigen, 2009, p. 21), "an experience that precedes me / not me duality" (p. 22). It was Winnicott who linked "being" to the future ability to have a cohesive sense of being, hence to the project of identification that is capable of representation as symbolic "identity." For Winnicott, identification, projective identification, and introjective identification are linked to this state of oneness that is linked with the "female element"—a sense of cohesiveness that is transferred generationally with no need for action and is a foundation for "simple being." The state of the infant in this merged space cannot be characterized as omnipotent defence, as there is no "otherness" to defend against; and yet it is a relic of omnipotence—its archeological fragment that is re-found and put to use in the service of return to a wishful state of bliss that never truly existed. It is this remnant however, comprised of sensorial images that carries a potentiality for generativity.

The state of "being" for Winnicott relies on the mother's containment, a capacity that Bion identifies as essential for representation. Bion terms alpha elements pictograms that are capable of containing primal anxieties or "proto-sensorial and projected proto-emotions (Ferro, 2010, p. 2) by linking experience to affect and forming a "contact barrier" (ibid.) between conscious and unconscious, helping



Pictogram  
By Oren Gozlan

to create a phantasy of cohesion. The pictogram is a first attempt at such linking and will be marked by the ability to hold “things” in unity or repel any attempt at linking, which will be interpreted as a threat of annihilation.

Like Bion, Eigen (2009) offers an abstract fantasy of primal beginnings as a non-chronological mystical state, beyond the duality of self/other that can take many forms and is made up of a summation of fragments carried through the unconscious of the mother and the child. In this way, it is a meeting between two unknowns—a meeting that gives rise to contradictory states of peace and persecution “succeeding and merging with each other” (Eigen, 2009, p. 21). Reading “maternal” as a vast state/space opens the child–mother dyad to query beyond the observable infant–mother relation. The illusion of oneness is ruptured not only by the Other (which gains significance retroactively), but by one’s own “developmental drives” (p. 27). The weight is placed not on the concreteness of the mother as good or bad, violent or benevolent, but on a sense of being, which can be known only in retrospect through the patient’s narrative, spaces of enactment, or fragments of images that mark a failure to narrate.

It seems that for Bion and Winnicott and Eigen, primal identification—this mystical oneness that holds the seed of a future sense of cohesiveness—is highly dependent on the maternal *function* of mediating the infant’s encounter with experiences of pain and pleasure that relates to the mother’s actual functioning but is also beyond the mother herself. However, in one’s mind, history is always narrated with one mother in mind, so the relationship with “this” mother becomes the object of analysis. Sight, touch, pain, and pleasure become fused in a mystical way with this maternal sea, which prior to language brings the experience of “being” and “seeing” closer as the mode of primal representation that becomes a relic for identification, a fixed, fused, unmoving image that becomes an imaginary aspect of self-coherence. The mother of our retroactive construction becomes the *Other*, to whom we appeal, and who ensures our projections.

To the reader, the “pictogram” may seem like an alienating concept, and indeed it speaks to the alienation inherent in subjectivity that in the primary mode of relating is experienced as a persecutory outside. In the absence of language, experience becomes a series of pictograms, disconnected images that carry the impact of an impression that casts a “shadow” over the subject in a sense that it enacts a trauma that is not yet known, and perhaps may never be known. The rudimentary quality of the image in the absence of language, and the failure of the image to unify discrete spaces, makes words into objects that are stuck in the timelessness of the primary, that attack linking and render existence meaningless.

The “maternal” function and the pictogram are inherently tied, as mental representation becomes dependent on the function of joining, which, in turn, depends on the mother’s own containment and becomes a container for thoughts. Images turned to narratives become frames through which meaning is given to experience and thus to one’s existence. An image becomes thought through joining that embroiders a placenta-like wrapping of cohesion. With the entrance of language, identification with the signifiers of the Other expands as the Other’s “message” is identified with or repressed. Through the image of the mirror, Lacan imagines the mother as if presenting the child with an image that becomes a

Pictogram  
By Oren Gozlan

primal identity that is never neutral, as it is formed around the mother's own interpretation of the child's arousal. This interpretation is tied to her own desire. Identity, the very thing we often think of as our core, is conceived as an image handed to us from the outside. Identity for Lacan becomes a function of identification with the Other's desire, but it also becomes a process of "drive regulation" (Verhaeghe, 2004, p. 8) as a way to cope with arousal, pleasure, and unpleasure. The image of the body often seduces us into believing in its cohesion. Yet with identification, the body and experience of a self reveals a tenuous place of suspense between an image and a symbol. Our body in this way can be imagined as a writing pad on which stories are written but also where scenic impressions are branded, where stains of unknown origin accumulate.

Sensation gives rise to embodiment through a history made by linking memories of pleasure and pain. Through contact with otherness, identity springs in unpredictable ways, fusing and diffusing materiality and phantasy through pictographic representation and language. The child may hold an image of the mother as a whole, and yet, at the level of the body memory reveals alienation where repetition compulsion enacts some aspects that are not comparable to any experience the child has of itself (Copjec...) So identity is a slippery felt experience, ambiguous like the image itself, subject to its sexuality, diffusing the distance between the other and the self. This is the paradox of identity, as it is the paradox of the image, where perception allows for distinction between the self and the other. However, perception is also a collapse of outside and inside, a unity of planes where the question of the "primacy of the perceiver or the world" (Solomon, 2010) is an impossible one. The bodily ego is a projection of a surface, making the body a "production of a shape" ( p. 30).

Thinking of identification and development through image and imagination, the Oedipal scene, as a theory of exit from maternal dyad through a third; a paternal figure, can be imagined as another primal narration. As a secondary story of origin it enables a wish for a future. It is in a way, an escape route from the fantasized maternal grip and yet, its resolution relies on the ability to hold an image of unity between the two parental figures. Through oedipal phantasy the subject also comes to find that there's no guarantee for the reciprocity of maternal desire and his own, and so there is no certainty of identity. The identificatory wish of the "I" is indeed defined by castration—its ability to take into account the fact that what returns to the self is forever changed (Troisier, 1998).

If the idea of castration can also be framed as the points where identity breaks down, where the self becomes unrecognizable to itself, then identity will be marked by trauma of difference. The failure of recognition opens the space to the possibility of an "elsewhere" where the mother's voice can no longer provide certainty. It becomes a place where subjectivity begins to form. However, to remain a placeholder for identification, the "I" requires a theory of origin, a phantasy link to a history that provides meaning to the self though the meaning invested by the mother (or the phantasy of such investment): a history of its foundation that gives meaning to the pleasure and pain of desire. But if pain exceeds pleasure in this primary phantasy, the very act of linking will be fraught, preventing the capacity to form a pictogram; that is both an internal and an external link, between emotions, touch, perception and the vastness of the environment, that through this link is both separated and united at once. I argue that this phantasized primal unity is a potential for the formation of a necessary phantasy of cohesion

Pictogram  
By Oren Gozlan

that prevents fragmentation and that in its absence, the very sense of embodiment will be directly affected.

**Linking apparatus, Gender and sexual difference**

The conception of the pictogram as structuring the body is in line with the way social theorist Gayle Solomon conceives of sexuality as “one’s intentionality towards the other and towards the world” (Solomon, 2010, p. 50). The pictogram as a structuring preverbal precursor to the identificatory project is akin to how the theorist Merleau-Ponty conceives of the “flesh” (Solomon, 2010): the distinction between the body and the world ceases to have meaning and the relation between the two is neither a union nor the composite of two substances. Yet it is this very vague location of the body that marks the inherent estrangement in the heart of the pictogram and of the body—estrangement that allows for movement at the same time that an encounter with absolute difference is impossible. The fictive image of the unified body relies then on a myth of pure sexual difference.

Through gender, in its diverse embodiments, sexual difference is conceptualized here as a link to the Other that is highly dependent on the Other’s ability to metabolize primal anxieties and thus enables the formation of the pictogram as the apparatus for linking. Hence, an experience of gender embodiment as a place of suffering (where any kind of gender identification is rejected for its fluidity) will also signify difficulties with subjectivity. Imagining the pictogram as the basis from which embodiment and its expression through gender relates to the unique way in which erotogenic zones become linked with the other through desire.

The pictogram, like the flesh, is a place of linkage that relies on difference—a phantasy of limit that acts to prevent the collapse of the “I” into the Other (maternal other, group, culture). For Merleau-Ponty, sexuality is like “an odour or sound,” which, “without being the object of any intended act or consciousness, can underlie and guide specified forms of my experience” (cited in Solomon, 2010, p. 50). In this conception there is a recognition that, like sexuality, identification is accidental (Gozlan, 2008). If we think of sexuality as a sound or odour, the boundaries of embodiment as in the establishment of sexual difference through genitalia or social constructs are no longer adequate and we begin to see the telegraphic power of the body that, just like airways, cannot signify intent. This conception of sexuality helps us understand the accidental nature of linkage to the other and hence of identification and gender.

**Pictogram of destruction: Case example.**

The connection between sexuality, identity, and the pictogram of unity opens up the question of “sexual difference” to a realm beyond a simplistic binary. Imagining a connection between the development of a pictogram and identity illuminates the way in which identity is fragmented from the outset and relies on a narrative of origin that is made up of traces of images loosely embroidering as a fiction of fragile coherence.

Pictogram  
By Oren Gozlan

I illustrate the possible connection between maternal environment pictogram and embodiment with the following case:

S, a self identified male to female transsexual whose external presentation is masculine, but who wished to be addressed as a female. S came to see me after moving to Toronto from another province to start a new position in her company, where she was employed as an electrician. She brought a suitcase full of women's clothing, which she intended to wear after work, as she had done for the past 10 years. Her decision to accept the transfer to Toronto involved what she described as a new hope of finally becoming what 'she'- really was, a woman. She planned to announce her intent to transition at her workplace and start transitioning within the year. However, six months after her arrival in the new city of hope, her suitcase remained closed. She described being "unable to play" and feeling "encased in concrete."

S's appearance was quite masculine and there was no hint of her desire to be a woman. It was indeed as if her femininity were encased in the concrete that was her body. She wore plaid shirts and work boots, kept her hair short, and wore square glasses that are typically wore by men. When I looked at S I immediately identified her as male, despite my conscious attempts to change my perception of her, as she proclaimed, "I am a woman inside." I felt captured by the masculine image she reflected and experienced a mixture of irritation and anxiety in having to address her as female—irritation over what felt to me as a demand to be recognized as one thing while presenting as another, and anxiety over offending S, by treating her femininity as invisible, perhaps repeating her own attack upon something she identified as "feminine" that was well hidden.

S agreed to see me three times a week but refused to lie on the couch. When I asked about her association to the couch, she could not understand what I meant, and her face twitched in a way that seemed to reflect a strange combination of anger, disgust, and incomprehension. This "twitch" became a common response to most of my inquiries or interpretations, unless they were concrete and self-evident. She came to sessions armed with a report of the preceding day, which she delivered in a matter-of-fact manner. When I attempted to link her difficulty in "playing" during the session and her difficulty in opening her suitcase, she again responded with a grimace. She had no clue how the two could be related. I felt drained and controlled in the analysis with S, by the deadening atmosphere between us, by having to be on guard when addressing her gender, by the predictability that characterized her reporting, and by my restrained responses. Despite this seemingly unbearable space, S rarely missed her sessions and became extremely angry over any need to cancel or move the time of our sessions. It seemed this was the only space she felt she could control.

S expressed a desire for the changes to occur in her body "quickly." On the other hand, she felt angry at herself over what emerged as her own resistance to the transition, feeling that she must not reveal her transitioning at work, or go out in public in women's clothes. I struggled, quite successfully, to address her as female. However, something in me could not quite feel settled with S and I kept feeling anxiety and anger during our sessions. I wondered about my difficulty imaging S as a woman and wondered if

Pictogram  
By Oren Gozlan

being a woman was something she herself resisted. S dismissed this idea, stating that the only thing that held her back from fully transitioning was her worry over job security.

As S's features softened as a result of taking estrogens and starting electrolysis, she started experiencing anxiety over losing her "masculinity," which she equated with social status and safety. She expressed feeling trapped in a male body, feeling disgusted by her penis and bodily hair, and yet feeling trapped in her female body, a body that she associated with weakness, vulnerability, and inferior status. She felt as if neither gender embodiment was liveable and described her masculine embodiment as "familiar, old, and useless." At the same time she described her feminine embodiment as feeling vacant and "lacking." She described looking at herself in the mirror and feeling "not quite the woman she imagined herself to be." Being a woman felt like "loss, a not-being." She felt like an "unattractive, grotesque woman." When she walked in the street she felt that others could see her "lack" and was hyper-vigilant about anticipated attacks.

S persisted in expressing a desire to continue her transition but delayed filling her prescription for hormones, missed her electrolysis appointments, and continued to dress as a man. At the same time she became highly defensive when I suggested that perhaps a part of her wanted to hold onto her masculine image, at least socially. S expressed a hatred of having to "choose her gender." She hated being a man and hated being a woman. Neither felt herself, although femininity seemed to her more in line with what she wanted – "to be attractive, to be taken care of," to be handled." However, femininity was also equated with being "vacant," "unsuccessful," "grotesque," "passive," and "vulnerable."

S had been thinking about transitioning since the age of 35 but had been unable to decide whether she should initiate it. When I tried to find out more about the difficulty in making up her mind, S answered blankly, "I don't know." S remembered looking at women's magazines at the age of 13, wishing she looked like the attractive women in the journal. She put those thoughts out of her mind until the death of her mother, when S turned 35. She had no clear recollection of being occupied with thoughts about gender before her mother's death. I tried to get a sense of S's associations with femininity and masculinity but she seemed confused and angry, unable to say much. S said she felt liberated after her mother's death but had difficulty describing their relationship, saying, "She was just there. She was dead for me." I wondered if S's wish was in fact to revive her mother through becoming her.

I sensed that S was frightened by the process of transitioning, could not quite comprehend its significance, and was very ambivalent about the physical changes she was planning to undergo. In the session, any attempts to question S's feelings or thoughts were met with a perplexed yet angry look, making me feel like an intruder. My impression and interpretations felt wasted. She denied any ambivalence or anxiety and blamed her demanding work for leaving her no time to dress as a woman or attend electrolysis. She was angry at me for questioning these simple "facts." My questions seldom made sense to her. Sitting with S, I felt she was hollow, devoid of psychic life.

In the sessions I felt numb and tired, unaffected by S. It seemed that each session replicated the next and I wondered why S decided to come for treatment. S had trouble articulating what she was seeking.

Pictogram  
By Oren Gozlan

She said that she was not sure what she wanted or why she came but thought it was a good idea to see someone to whom she could talk about her intended transformation.

There was something about S's mode of relating to me that made me feel uneasy, suffocated. I could not say much for fear of confusing her or making her feel attacked. There were no symbolic meanings or associations to play with, only concrete "facts." I felt, however, that her enactments bore meaning that might associatively give access to primal scenic impressions that she was left with and for which there were no words. In the absence of memories and a history that wove her theory of becoming, I wondered if S's scenes of binding and torture were an enactment of a story that could not be told, made of a string of repetition of pre-verbal pictographic traces—one of rupture, of the inchoateness of her self and of violence, a psychic disjoining that brought her to attack her own linking capacity. Was her use of "rope play" an attempt to hold what felt like fragments of herself—a fragile attempt at linking that defended at the same time that it enacted an attack on the linking process itself?

I felt as if I was presented by S with an inchoate primal pictogram that was enacted through destructive repetition of endless tying that de-linked any ties as it was wrapped around S's body in a tight grip. My attempts to link her experience to a past, to find some semblance of a construction of history, fell apart. I thought of S as stuck in a time before history could be made, before the birth of the self, which requires language. It is also a time when a trace of cohesion is made from a percept of unity (e.g., Winnicott). S's spasmodic reaction to meaning as reflected in her visceral rejection of ideas, interpretations, or meaning exemplified her primal attempt to limit the difference between her internal and external space. It was as if the incipience of her gender, the lack of coherent history, and her grimace were ways in which she refused to leave a primary space.

S had very few fragments of memories—none before the age of seven—and those that she had were also devoid of affect. S's responses to inquiries about her past and her relationship with her parents were flat. When I asked about her relationship to her mother, she responded in a disaffected way, in a monotone: "I don't even know how I feel towards her. I don't remember how I feel towards my mother." However, there was a clear sense that she imagined herself to be a waste product of a toxic union. S remembered the atmosphere in her family as vacant and cold. She felt no love or attachment to her parents, now deceased, and never felt loved by them. She struggled to describe her father to me, stating only that he was a "drunk" who spent most days in the tavern. She did not recall an actual conversation with her father and felt she never knew him. What she did recall were violent fights between her parents, which she imagined were initiated by her mother, who would hit her father in a fit of rage.

In the session S preferred to report events of the week concretely, matter-of-factly, without being interrupted. There were daily repetitive scenarios involving sado-masochistic ties, one relating to her workplace where she presented as a man, and the other relating to her "night life" where she presented as a woman. She followed a "ritual" at the end of each workday in which she dressed up in women's clothes, put on makeup, and masturbated to her reflection in the mirror or to photos of transsexuals. Since starting her hormone treatment one year before, S began phantasizing about being involved in

Pictogram  
By Oren Gozlan

bondage and found a master with whom she carried out sessions in which she would be tied up, flogged, beaten, and penetrated with an anal “plug”—experiences that she found enlivening. She *reported* the content of each beating session in detail and engaged in them compulsively, daily.

S described being “exhilarated to the point of orgasm” by being tied up in all sorts of ways and described an elaborate range of bondage techniques involving being suspended by her ankles, or being tied to a bed for few hours at a time. Her sado-masochistic sessions involved several feminine artifacts, besides her wig and feminine clothing, such as a pearl necklace, which she inserted anally, and pins, which she inserted through her skin. She also wore shoes with stiletto heels to which she strapped dildos, which she inserted into her anus.

When I tried to access the significance of these objects associatively, S looked puzzled. I commented on the image I had in my mind of S beating up a woman, perhaps her mother. S became enraged and confused, reiterating that it was a pleasurable game that at times gave her “body orgasms”—a sensation she described as “sub-space” where she felt dissociated and laughed for hours. She didn’t know why she laughed; it was a “total *release*” in the face of torture. I did not get a sense that S was trying to shock or titillate me. I felt, rather, that I was the recipient of dry reporting of daily events that were indeed her routine, which she felt compelled to repeat in a senseless way. When I asked what she meant by “enlivening,” she said, “Alive.”

S often became annoyed by my inquiries, which seemed intrusive and confusing, requiring an effort that she could not bear, judging from the grimaces with which she greeted my comments. Any question or attempt to make meaning was greeted with disgust and incomprehension. She became repelling and impenetrable, as if the very act of linking two thoughts that might give birth to a third was a revolting act in which she wanted no part. It was as though the very conception of thought became a horrific sexual scene in the primal theory of a child. Linking pleasure and pain at the level of the body replaced making links in her mind. Any link became a site of pain but also a triumphant dissociation of pain. Any contact, whether physical or emotional, left her untouched, unscathed, and was devoid of meaning. It seemed as if S confused sensations with meaning: when enacting painful contradictory scenes of pain and pleasure, pain turned to pleasure and pleasure turned to pain. Meaning-making seemed to be a painful or even impossible task requiring a coming together of spaces that for S were still fused to the body in a powerful adhesive way, preventing a space where language could come about.

As I began associating to S’s “scenes” I was thinking about a narrative of self that might be “tied” in this visual scene: a fractured story of origin, of failed speech, an image of disjoining. It was as if her roping enactment tried to rope together chaotic fragments, linking the body as it de-linked her thoughts. Was it an act that performed what S could not bear to remember? Perhaps a concrete knotting that also destroyed linkage in thought, an attempt to both replicate and reject maternal tie though a scene where pain and pleasure were so bound. I thought of the holding together of the literal body through the concreteness of being tied, accompanied by a grimace, a way of becoming tongue-tied that tore apart signification—the close contact with the Real—a phantasmic abyss, and a move away from language. Were S’s beating scenes like imprinted images of what at once registered as violence but also as her

Pictogram  
By Oren Gozlan

mother's desire? S's story of origin felt disjointed and marked by absences and gaps of memory. What, I wondered, kept S's narrative fragmented and foreclosed?

What I knew of S's history was starkly limited. However, she felt tyrannized by her mother, who kept S at a close range at all times because S experienced unexplained seizures into her teenage years. She was not allowed to visit friends and, outside of going to school, spent her time with her mother. Most of S's recollections involved sitting next to her mother in the kitchen, in silence. During these times she did not recall being talked to or nurtured by her mother and remembered despising her. When she left home, the seizures disappeared.

During sessions, S described how she enacted a scene that combined her mother's feminine body and her own masculine body, a scene in which her mother's pearls (the mother pearl) were inserted into her anus one by one and were then strung together, like an umbilical cord, perhaps an act of tying and expelling maternal fragments. S dressed in female clothing, only to be beaten in them. She enjoyed being tied up and left for hours without ability to move. At work, S felt that her expertise was exploited, that others called upon her and relied on her "too much." She took no pleasure in being told that her skills were extremely valuable and felt used by co-workers' dependence on her skills. At the same time she could not foresee herself leaving her workplace because finding a job in her field would be difficult and she could never imagine herself in a different kind of occupation.

Hearing S's vignettes of torture, beating, mutilation, fire-play, and near-death suffocation, I felt I was granted entrance as a witness to a site of horror, only I did not feel horrified or shocked. Instead, I found myself numbed to her psychic pain, drifting into boredom. I wondered about my participation in S's internal world and the way in which both of us were caught in a dead end, unable to play or transition because the analysis was unable to become a ground for play or a transitional space. I felt tied up in the session, as any attempt to have S elaborate on her feelings, images, or associations was met with a blank look or grimaces of misunderstanding and impatience. S refused to use the couch and reacted angrily to any attempt I made to talk about her association of lying down on the couch. She denied having associations and refused further discussion on the matter. I thought about S's inability to transition as a reflection of this difficulty in using transitional space and wondered if I too had become completely wrapped in her hopeless, cut-off existence. Where was my affect or hers?

Whenever I pointed to this absence of affect as she described beatings, I was met immediately with a grimace, as if she could not understand my meaning. She often repeated that these beating scenes were an enjoyable "game" that gave her a "high." Her looks of puzzlement and flat responses drained me. I thought of them as a way to disavow psychic pain and attack the potential meaning that could be made from her repetitive scene. In the session I also found myself disavowing any effect her words had upon me by tuning out. Was this the purpose of the repetition, to erase the trace of its own memory?

I was immobilized in my interactions with S, as if fused in an uncanny way, unable to play with words, unaffected by images of torture and descriptions of pain. Her experience was marked by paradox of fusion and diffusion. On the one hand there was utter chaos where things could not touch. Femininity



Pictogram  
By Oren Gozlan

and masculinity, ideas and feelings, she and I were as if disparate objects in space, in a constant incommunicado. Yet, paradoxically, these same objects were tied together as an unrecognizable mash. For S, it seemed, any joining of two spaces, any connection with otherness, brought with it an excess of violence and enjoyment, of consuming and expelling, of killing and being killed, which was contained through the controlled scene of beatings. Perhaps like the fantasized deadening union of her parents, I was cast in the analysis in both roles: the dead mother and an absent father, bored and numb, an onlooker drawn to a crash scene watching without words, terrorized without thoughts. The image of grimace, which de-links any contact between us, and the tight rope, which holds together fragile parts of herself, brought me to a mythic narrative as I attempted to imagine a story of origin for S. Through this imagined story I felt I was attempting to give birth to a child who was refusing to come out. S refused to come out in gender, to acknowledge my separateness, to be released from her tight rope. Her failure to give meaning to experience was also a way of being stuck in the timelessness of an inchoate image—indeed, as a failure of imagination. Anything that stood for the mother, including the analysis, had to be refused, cut up, and expelled in the guise of autonomy. Instead, she needed to rely on the concreteness of a rope at the level of symbolic equation that attempted to bind the fragments of inchoate identificatory markers.

Reflecting on S's repetitive practices, I wondered if the rope play "scene" gives us as spectators a glimpse into S's objectification, being forced to choose between two positions enacted in gender—a non-reciprocal identification with either the agent of beating or the victim, constructed retroactively as a dichotomous male/female split that could not meet through desire. It was a disjointed scene in which all links were broken, where unions became deaths. The onlooker, like her father, was a passive observer, an appendage. It was a scene of fragments of relationships and part objects that collided violently in acts of intrusion—a well-orchestrated torture scene whose origin could be traced to the maternal desire and S's fantasy of her mother's absolute control over her body. It was as if the scene revealed a hidden compliance with the maternal discourse, an after-effect of the trauma and a way of making the world around her comply with her reality, at the same time that it signified an attempt to represent separation from the maternal union. It was an enactment in which the mother's "elsewhere"—a point of reference outside the dyadic tie—had but a minimal presence as the person who was observing the beating.

S came to sessions twice a week without failure but refused to come a third time, stating financial limitations as her reason. Two years into the analysis S ended the session with a proclamation, "Oh, by the way, I am going to come only once a month from now on because my electrolysis is going to cost me a lot. I cannot afford the two." I told S that we would have to talk about this in our next session. "There is nothing to talk about," she told me. "This is what I have decided." I told S that I also had to make my decision, as I do not see patients once a month. S became enraged. She could not understand why I could not see her whenever she wanted to, as she paid for her sessions. She expressed a need to keep coming to see me, despite not knowing why it was so important to her.

I felt paralyzed by S's request and was aware of my desire to end the therapeutic relationship for reasons of inconvenience, for having to keep a space open for one hour a month, and the limited kind of

Pictogram  
By Oren Gozlan

work that such an arrangement allows. I felt that her request might be a way to flee from painful affect aroused in the session through her tie to me and our work. After all, like the pain she endured in turning to sado-masochistic enactments as a way to struggle with and control psychic pain, here she turned to the pain of electrolysis as a way to avoid painful longings. I thought about S taking on the role of her mother, punishing me for any attempt to break the tight knot that characterized the analysis where any interpretation or new idea became a threat and was met by a sort of punishment S inflicted on me, through concreteness, silence, and twitching her face in disgust. I decided to share the image I had an image in my mind of a little girl being tied up and beaten. I suggested to S that I had this image when I thought of her fear of being tied to me.

S responded with a grimace, but I could see that the image of being tied to me evoked some deeper reaction. She associated to a memory—indeed, S’s only memory prior to the age of seven. The scene involved one of S’s rare attempts to rebel against her mother’s demand that S not leave her sight. S remembered sneaking out for a few hours, and upon her return was beaten and kept in the kitchen, by her mother’s side. Her punishment involved being tied to a table, for which she supplied the rope to her mother. She could not recall how she felt during those times and seemed to have cut off from a sense of time or affect. She could not remember how many days or weeks this punishment lasted. However, she could talk about this image in the present, where being tied would mean “having to hide in sub-space”—a way to dissociate from pain into a state of ecstasy, by the very thought of being tied.

### **Working through and psychic bridgespace**

S’s enactments reflect the ways in which the erotic body resists language. Indeed, language cannot represent the experience of sexuality, and it is only through repression that words can replace sexuality (in its complex disruptive forms). What is resisted in her case, I believe, is a repression of an omnipotence fantasy where she is the originator of herself, one that excludes an “Other” and hence refuses loss. Identity, on the other hand, as a spoken representation of identification, requires a narrative, that is both protective of and a contradiction to the “I,” the individual within the group. To represent means to give something up, so there is a risk of loss in being—a risk that for S meant separation from an imagined maternal tie that she phantasized as the only link with reality. But if in every narration there is a trace of missed speech, of estrangement (Ofrat, 2008), any attempt at representation through language is also a sentencing of exile, alienation, and difference. If experience and meaning are always estranged, the project of analysis transforms from attempts to decipher the unconscious into creating conditions for a narrative as a ground for imagination and human freedom. The analytic engagement gives language to pictographic scenes.

Analysis is described by Kristeva (2002) as a work of revolt, where both analyst and analysand attempted to turn a concrete picture of certainty into a question and refuse to be bound by a discourse that duplicates the concealed, violent, non-desiring maternal discourse. The transference becomes the unspoken that can be open to questioning through pictographic associations and that enacts scenes that are held together by a fragile thread, like a dream—a story that hides a story that can be told only in pictures. Representation through speech inherently prevents a return to origin, but something of the

Pictogram  
By Oren Gozlan

scenic collapse paradoxically acts as origin, joining scenes through a fantastical story of desire. Imagining a scenic collapse as phantasmic origin elaborates the paradox of sexual difference, which relies on the ability to hold the body in relation to its surrounding, so that estrangement and unity are no longer held in opposition but rather that subjectivity itself resides in a phantastical and tenuous space between unity and estrangement.

Access to the pictographic traces in the analysis, through images and enactments, gives a glimpse into an individual's identificatory "project"—an endeavour that defines one's *sense* of agency but also inherently involves submission and passivity, for identification is elicited in relation to an Other on whom we depend. It is a fragile project at best, its fractured journey often veiled by an image of coherence that at certain moments collapses into concreteness. If identity can be imagined as a psychic space where one is caught in one's own image that resists its own estrangement, it will always carry a trace from the discourse of the Other that will return as a stranger to the self. There is an illusory sense of ownership over one's self that is at once an enactment of someone else's discourse—and so never belongs to the self—and a preservative facade. Identity is always subject to language, as it has to be presented to others. When presented through language, it grants access to the group and prevents collapse of individuality into this group. However, the subject's encounter with the group, outside of the confines of the child–mother dyad, must never be fixed, placing identity always in a state of tension.

In the analysis, S maintained a primary relation to external reality, one where difference was equated with maternal violence and was actively disavowed. S was guided by her wish for external reality to mirror her projected wish. She could not tolerate gaps in our relation and could not allow for pleasure or desire that might take her by surprise, offered by an external object. We can imagine S, as she indeed imagines herself, as encased in a claustrum, devoid of speech, where any movement is a circular one, which returns the subjects to its psychic source: S's phantasized abject origins of rejection, disembodiment, and pain.

This inherent estrangement that is part of identity was experienced as annihilating for S, and was disavowed at all costs. And yet, in observing this very split marked by disavowal, one bore witness to the way in which her mind was as if colonized by a foreign discourse, preventing her from having her own speech. In the analysis S tried to hijack the analyst's mind in a sense that she rejected any signifiers of otherness expressed by the analyst, including the analytic constraints of time. It is as if the possibility of joining of spaces that relating requires was felt as noxious and dangerous. One can hypothesize whether any relating was equated with a parental intercourse that was phantasized as invasive and deathly, where any link becomes the site of destruction and therefore free association a deadly task.

We may say that S was captivated by the catastrophe of her past but was unable to link her past to her present or future. Being caught in the image with limited outside recourse also means that the image ceases to be a representation and collapses into the chaotic Real. She lived her history on her body—a concrete history that could not be written. There were no anchoring moments to her story; it was a story repeated as if it were a single event captured in a maternal grip. Her identity felt adhesive and relied on an obsessive ritual that ensured a phantasy of certainty. She lacked curiosity or introspection.

Pictogram  
By Oren Gozlan

S's enactment was an empty narrative, a non-story. It was as if her existence was marked by rejection of experience, hence of desire. In the analytic situation, pictographic images were equated and reproduced in my relationship with S as an attempt to undermine desire, which S experienced as frustrating and dangerous. The impossibility of revolt and the tie to what was inscribed as maternal discourse acted as imaginary ropes, preventing S's picture from leaving its original scene and becoming speech that attaches affect to ideas. It was as is she had to maintain a tie to the maternal discourse in order to exist.

The concept of a primal, pictographic representation that is always present in the spaces between our words reminds us how fragile the work of analysis is and how it relies on a paradox at the base of identification: analysts and patients return to the site of trauma to draw another link, while at the same time—like a creative composition of art—our narrative “subverts the link's very ability to function as foothold in existence” (Omer, in Heiman, 2008, p. 198). Between the pieces of our narrative, the gaps of nothingness reveal the fragility of identification. Identity in this way is revealed as repetition: “That which repeats does not return to itself” (Ofrat, 2008, p. 14). S played out a fragment of an affect that was once attached to an idea—a scene that hides its actors.

If psychoanalysis is the working through of meaning making and of mourning inevitable meaninglessness, it is work that relies on the analyst's containment that makes loss bearable over time. The analyst's ability to tolerate incoherence, chaos, and attacks on meaning becomes a potential space for thinking that, through its insistence on difference, allows movement and diffusion of concretized symbolic equivalents and becomes a form of revolt. In turn, thinking of S's enactment as a fragment of a pictogram helped to contain my own sense of chaos and incoherence in my encounter with S and shifted my focus from making interpretations to find meaning, but using the image to create a frame that brings cohesiveness to thinking and allows for meaning to be made.

Throughout the analysis I struggled to untangle the visual tie, to create some space between images where words have to be placed. However, I too became beholden at first to the concreteness of S's presentation, her urgency to “transition,” which I took on as the task of the analysis. I had to fight becoming seduced by images of sadism, vulgarity, and violence all too exhilarating to abandon. I became concrete in my attempt to convince S of the difference between pleasure and pain. But the pictographic image depicting a scene of immobility and violence also marked the place that hinted at a different meaning—at the impossibility of transitioning, which inherently involves movement. If the pictogram is a trace that is left after dissociation between inscription and affect, this affect is bound to be repeated through the transference. In the analysis, I was the one who experienced the affect and turmoil, while S stayed unmoved, unable to differentiate pleasure from pain.

S's enactments involving being tied and suspended paradoxically mirrored the function of the image, to which her enactment gives rise in the analyst. The image is a fused spectacle that maintains an allegiance to the Other's discourse and so stands in opposition to one's “I,” and at the same time functions as fantasy hold that preserves the collapse of the “I” into the Other. On the one hand, identity is a visual fantasy of cohesion between two poles, the maternal and the group, which are always at risk of collapsing into each other. It is as if her inability to reside in this “suspended place” was enacted at a

Pictogram  
By Oren Gozlan

pre-verbal register. The violence that is inherent in the maternal discourse that forces an interpretation through words and touch is the very act that keeps the infant both tied and repelled. Without a representation that joins violence and pleasure in a bearable hold, there will be no thinking, only repetition that fuses pain and pleasure in a toxic, static mould.

Thinking of identification through the concept of the pictogram, brings us to a conception of identification as marked by inherent contradiction, an imaginary stable hold that allows for separation. Sexual difference is then conceptualized as a link or signification that inscribes its own resistance—a wholeness or unity that is enjoyed precisely because of its impossibility. Gender (in whatever form it takes) becomes the embodiment of a link to the other through desire where the interaction with the other constitutes experience. We may say that S's hatred of embodiment, hence hatred of representation and meaning-making, reveals her belief in the unity of the image (e.g. masculinity/femininity as true and complete categories from which the patient is forced to choose). To believe the image means one can no longer identify with it, as identification is always partial, unconscious, and ambivalent.

## References

- Aulagnier, P. (2001) *The Violence of Interpretation: From Pictogram to Statement*, trans. A. Sheridan. Hove, UK: Brunner-Routledge.
- Bass, A. (2000) *Difference and Disavowal: The Trauma of Eros*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bion, W.R. (1967) *Second Thoughts*. Tel Aviv: Bookworm.
- Britzman, D.P. (2006) Little Hans, Fritz, and Ludo. *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 7, 113–40.
- Eigen, M. (1998) *The Psychoanalytic Mystic*. New York: Free Association.
- Eigen, M. (2009) *Flames from the Unconscious: Trauma, Madness, and Faith*. London: Karnac.
- Ferro, A. (2010) *Therapeutic Action and Characters in the Analytic field*. Paper presented to the Canadian Psychoanalytic Society 36th Congress, Toronto, 2010.
- Freud, S. (1925) Negation. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 6, 367–71.
- Freud, S. (1961) On narcissism, SE 14: 67–102.
- Gozlan, O. (2008) The accident of gender. *Psychoanalytic Review*, 95(4), 541–70.
- Green, A. (1997) *On Private Madness*. London: Karnac.
- Heiman, M. (2008) Attack on linking. Exhibition. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum of Art.

Pictogram  
By Oren Gozlan

Kristeva, J. (2002) *Intimate Revolt*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Laplanche, J. & Pontalis, J.B. (1973) *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. London: Hogarth.

Ofrat, G. (2008) *L'autre Derrida*. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad.

Solomon, G. (2010) *Assuming a Body*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Troisier, H. (1998) *Piera Aulagnier*. Tel Aviv: Bookworm.

Verhaeghe, P. (1999). *Does the Woman Exist? From Freud's Hysteric to Lacan's Feminine*. New York: Other.

Verhaeghe, P. (2004) *The Scandal of Sex: Psychoanalysis and Sexual Difference*. Lecture, Vienna Symposium, May.

Verhaeghe, P. (2008) *New Studies of Old Villains: A Radical Reconsideration of the Oedipus Complex*. New York: Other

### **Publications**

"The Accident of Gender," *Psychoanalytic Review* (2008).

"The 'Real' Time of Gender," *Journal of European Psychoanalysis* (forthcoming).

**Oren Gozlan, Psy.D,** is a clinical psychologist and a psychoanalyst in private practice in Toronto, Ontario. He is also Faculty and Director of Clinical Training at Adler Graduate School, Toronto. He is a member of the Toronto Society for Contemporary Psychoanalysis and guest member of the Toronto Institute for Psychoanalysis. His publications include "Transsexual Surgery: a novel reminder and a novel remainder" (*International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, 2011); "The accident of gender" (*Psychoanalytic Review*, 2008); "The 'real' time of gender" (*Journal of European Psychoanalysis*, forthcoming).

Straddling Two Worlds: The writer and the psychoanalytic psychotherapist  
By Elisabeth Hanscombe

---

LOVE LETTERS

By Michael Larivière

“ – the one thing one can do that is somewhat serious, the love letter.”

Jacques Lacan

“There is life, writing, love. Or: love is born of the written life.”

Philippe Sollers

It is simply not true that the other side of the picture can be unveiled. That is why we spend life looking for words calibrated for the circumstances that ornament it. We must accept the restless wandering, the uncertainty. We often just stand idle, stupidly, staring at the open space awaiting us. We look to find balance somewhere, a point of reference in the heavy swell, we hope new perspectives will open as others close. What are we to do with the constant antagonism: moving/staying put? We look for a place far removed from the confusions and pains passed down by those who preceded us. We dream of gardens of desire, and of simplicity. It is important that we consider the story we come from. We must shed the weight of generations dead. If possible lift our heads off the soft pillows of ignorance on which we sleep. Avoid the mistakes of infatuation. And we must find an address – i.e. someone. Someone who would know what it is we need even as we ourselves ignore it, who could give us what we need when we don't even know how to ask. Or even that asking is possible, and necessary. Someone who could reconcile us with ourselves. Love.

\*

Lovers write to one another day after day, year after year. In these times of SMSs, those awkward, primitive haikus, letters have become an endangered species. I mean *real* letters, those that risk an internal voice reaching far beyond their addressees, those whose writing reaches not only the imagined other, out there, reading them, but that open the way towards the new, thrilling, terrifying possibility of living at once with and at a distance from oneself. Let us imagine reading such letters.

One would read them as one wished, or could. For example, as simple invitations to varied walks; as reflections at times learned, at other times naïve, on the risks of corresponding (in every sense of the term); as a worried interrogation on, at once, addressing, archiving, and safekeeping (as well as, therefore, on screening and sorting); as long cryptograms; as erotic devices, or systems; as the unwrapping of very beautiful, very pure offerings. As one wished – including, why not? as real love letters.

\*

Why do we read such correspondences? Perhaps for the distance, or the rapprochement, they make possible. For a correspondence, however “sincere” – whatever that means – is undoubtedly always a

## Straddling Two Worlds: The writer and the psychoanalytic psychotherapist

By Elisabeth Hanscombe

machination of writings that concerns all those who have a keen interest in people's most private – i.e. family, love and sexual – lives. But we must be cautious, for we can never be sure that such letters don't confuse or cloud issues, representations and understanding. Some correspondences, after all, might very well be nothing but ironic devices using all the ruses and illusions of identification and empathy to bring the reader to put himself in the place of the signatory or the addressee, to observe himself reading, dreaming, desiring, loving *as if he weren't himself*. "I could have been that man, that woman", the reader will sometimes inevitably think, and without necessarily recognizing himself in the character of his own gender. Each reader will therefore need to adapt to the idiomatic code of the love being invented before his very eyes.

\*

Some of these correspondences are published anonymously, others under pseudonyms. Inevitably, we then wonder who writes and to whom. But the question, I dare say, is not there. The identity of the signatory or of the addressee is of no importance with regards to the veracity of the love committed to paper. And here is a question, that of the veracity, of the trustworthiness of love, one that is far harder to grapple with.

As one keeps up with what is silently exchanged in the writing that at times follows and at other times either replaces or deputizes for the spoken word, one can hear resonating, amongst others, questions relating to issues such as pleading and asking, promising and giving, refusing and taking back, welcoming and keeping. What do we say, or invoke, or ask for, or promise, or give when we say, "I love you"? And what might we be refusing as well, what is it that we might perhaps inevitably wish to take back no sooner has it been proffered? What is it that we welcome? That we keep to and for ourselves even when we seem to be giving all? And who for, this keeping? Does love ever let itself be named, defined, known? Can it ever be given once and for all? Is it ever, as we say perhaps too naively, *made*? What does it mean, to *make* love? What is it that we hope for in such a "making", assuming that we do in fact hope for anything at all? What unique experience do we have, what risk do we run, in "making" love? And are what is said and what is done in the name of love the same? Is there, in matters of love, anything like what linguists refer to as a *performative*? Is love ever "performed"? Could a letter, for example, ever be its proper performance? Or sex? More importantly, what happens when we must add doing to saying (and vice versa)? Does the doing ever *accomplish* the saying? And what if it were that love could never either be spoken or made? What would it then be that we say, or do, as we strive to put love into words or acts? Might we, for example, strive to make way, or room, for that foreign body we refer to as our own?

\*

Those correspondences that we read, are they exchanges or offerings? Are exchanges and offerings antinomic? Is love itself an exchange or an offering? All love letters, it would seem to me, ask that question – but I am not sure they ever answer it. For they tell, all of them, wittingly or not, of an absolute secret. They re-enact, through the more or less fictitious repetition of a kind of "This is my



Straddling Two Worlds: The writer and the psychoanalytic psychotherapist  
By Elisabeth Hanscombe

love”, as well as through a series of reflections on the fraught nature of both promises and expectations, the experience in which desire appears, dreams are deciphered, pleasure catches us out, and what is unattainable in the other revealed. They tell us that transcendence is close at hand. And that sex, yes, finds its way through everything.

Whoever writes not only takes on a commitment to (as well as thanks to) the other, becomes pure understanding of the other, but ventures on many unknown territories, risks true exiles, pushes back the limits of the feasible as far as they will go – sometimes to the point of losing himself. This is what is known as not selling out on one’s desire. Or: taking responsibility for it.

\*

The writers of such letters try as they might to answer for the strangeness the surprise of love confronts them with. They strive, in other words, to create a language out of that strangeness, so as to parry the distress that inevitably comes with desire. For desire is intrusive, threatening, inexplicable, incomprehensible, always too violent, and its stakes remain unknown. All writers of such letters wonder what the other wants from them, they need to be clear as to what they are ready to give, what they are willing to do in the hope of coping with the *reality* of love, i.e. with its inability to take them away from the incomprehensible solitude in which they are forced to live in spite of it all: in spite of what the other wants from them, in spite of the fact that they are wanted by the other. Desire is what words always miss, and it is the forgetting of that inevitability. It welcomes the unthinkable. It is an experience in that which cannot be appropriated in the body, whether it be one’s own or that of the other.

\*

“What is honestly given cannot be taken back”, writes Plato. Can one ever without hesitation offer one’s flesh with such honesty? He who writes of his love strives, by way of his words, to give to himself what he has always longed for. He speaks of his alarm, of his shock, hoping he will find hospitality while far exceeding the limits of what his addressees can contain, or hold. The whole of his being goes into his letters, swallowed by the vital energy that picks up there and forces him into being once again as intensely alive as he had been when engaged in the making of the love through which he never ceases to be regenerated. Those letters, telling of the love that wanted to be made, are a fight for truth, they want truth just as the bodies that couldn’t lie had wanted it. Such letters struggle to remain at one with their addressees in the hope of pushing them to a point as of which it will be impossible to retract. But they also tell of love’s inexhaustible resistance to the narrative as well as to the act, to the saying as well as to the making. The rhetoric of love is constantly at risk of being undone by what takes place within it and which it can neither contain nor master, yet which it cannot renounce. It binds itself to that part of desire where it is confronted with the terror of dismemberment – and overcomes it.

\*

Straddling Two Worlds: The writer and the psychoanalytic psychotherapist  
By Elisabeth Hanscombe

What all lovers hope for is that the inordinate, the indecency of the naked truth, the joy of pleasure, the intelligence of desire be welcome.

The naked truth.

Truth as nakedness.

The nakedness of truth.

What is nakedness? A dream perhaps. It has often been suggested that the essence of nakedness lies in the sense of decency. I don't know. Someone once wrote that when two lovers make love each seeks the other's nakedness beyond the surface of his skin, wherefrom desire surges, where dreams are understood, where the other's name names love, where pleasure itself is silenced.

The uniqueness of it all lies in language. It is here the advent of love occurs and disappears, is veiled and unveiled, revealed and dissimulated, exposed and disguised in an act of writing that has little to do with certifiable truth. Such letters in turn take on the task of revealing the truth of love, try doing justice to that which can never be once and for all said or accomplished.

\*

There is the secret of love. There is the secret of desire.

Love letters contain a secret that must and must not, that wants and doesn't want to be disclosed. They seek to keep the secret secret. But they also seek, and this may not be contradictory, to let this be known, to make it so that the secret's secret doesn't remain unknown. And they seek at the same to avoid that very divulgence.

Lastly, in these letters the nakedness of love is often mistaken with that of sex or desire. These letters are the arena of the most fiery love, a place where secrecy is welcome, where no judgment is passed, they are a sealed, protected, respected space. In them hospitality is given to thought, desire, silence, waiting, misunderstandings and revolt. Solutions and ways out are examined long before, and again long after, sex has been enjoyed.

\*

I am told by my patients that love, as well as the desire it carries, is half miracle, half terror. I am told that those who are tempted by this perspective must remember that circumstances, sometimes brutal, over which they have no control, can always render its enjoyment difficult, or even dash all its hopes. Letters written in the name of love tell of the wonderful possibility of that risk. Wonderful and terrifying. We sometimes feel quite stupid in the face of that great thing we call love. It sometimes happens that we try to laugh it off or to strike a provocative pose. We look for leafy parks, waterfronts, we hope for sudden sunny spells and secret, shady, sealed off corners where to find reassurance. We write to keep (an air of) composure, to keep a distance between ourselves and our loves. For love can be painful. It

Straddling Two Worlds: The writer and the psychoanalytic psychotherapist  
By Elisabeth Hanscombe

can bring a pain we can say nothing about. So we respond to it with our naked flesh. Or we write. In the hope of discovering the frightening text we unwittingly answer to.

\*

For the same reasons, one reads the letters lovers write to one another, in the hope of finding some hidden relation between what is and one's representation of it. Of living at once with and away from oneself. Love letters are sidetracks leading to the sacred forest. In them we look for a coherent explanation, a plausible version of what had happened, or is happening, to us and before which we are dumbfounded. We seek to find the meaning the jealous gods refused to reveal to us. We search for a way of reconciling, of *holding together* life and its meaning.

Strasbourg, 5-23 January 2011.

**Michael Larivière** is a writer, philosopher and psychoanalyst. His practice is in Strasbourg, France. He was Co-editor, with Conrad Stein, of *Etudes freudiennes*, a psychoanalytic journal. He has held Seminars in France, Italy, Canada and the United States. He has published two books, *Imposture ou psychanalyse?* and *Que font vos psychanalystes?*, both in 2010.

Clytemnestra's Last Day  
By S. Montana Katz

PLAY SCRIPT

CLYTEMNESTRA'S LAST DAY

By S. Montana Katz

CHARACTERS

*In order of appearance*

Clytemnestra

Agamemnon

Iphigenia

Electra

Orestes

Fury 1

Fury 2

Fury 3

*The stage is divided into thirds. The stage right portion consists of an olive grove. It is dry and hot: the colors in the grove are hay yellow, green of the olive leaves, and the crackling dry blue sky.*

*The center stage section shows a lushly furnished chamber of a palace in ruins. There is a table with platters, goblets, food, two chairs, a Turkish carpet, a wardrobe, a bureau, colorful murals in muted Mediterranean colors, sea-purple drapes over the one intact opening, &c. The palace has a suffocating, claustrophobic feel.*

*The stage left section is exterior to the palace, and downhill from it, with mud, shacks, slaves' quarters, domestic animals, &c.*

*Upstage, running from side to side, is a series of four platforms, raised to different heights, each painted a different earth color, on which the three initial, and final, silent murders take place. The platform for the fourth murder (which occurs at the end of the play) is distinctive from the other three in location, height, color, shape. Thus, when the first three murders occur, below, it is visually evident that a fourth murder is in the offing.*

*The stage opens with three spots upstage highlighted on each platform, one after the other:*

*The first spotlight flashes on young adult Clytemnestra, queen at Pisa, holding her infant. She is garbed in royal clothing, crown, &c. and looks stately and powerful. Her body is full and feminine. Agamemnon enters, grabs the infant and smashes it aground, binds Clytemnestra with rope, and sequesters her away, out of the spotlight and into the darkness.*

## Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

*The second spotlight flashes on Agamemnon taking the pubescent Iphigenia, rope in hand, to a stake. Clytemnestra, looking different now, still a queen but not as powerful, diminished, with the young Orestes at her side. In front of her is a barricade (of desperate soldiers), keeping her curtailed, impotent to save Iphigenia. Agamemnon ties Iphigenia to the stake and stabs her with a knife.*

*The third spotlight flashes on Clytemnestra holding a net and a knife at the side of a large bath tub. The knife has a nine inch wide stainless steel blade with a distinctive shape, and a large, handle decorated with gold. Agamemnon is there, stepping into the bath, one foot on a crimson carpet, and about to bite on an apple when Clytemnestra snares him in the net and stabs him repeatedly. As if in a chain reaction to the stabbing, Electra tears off her jewels and cloak as she flees the palace in anger and horror.*

*Darkness falls on the entire stage for a pause. Light comes up slowly on the stage right section, revealing the olive grove and a few fig trees around the edges.*

*Three Furies enter the grove from up stage right. They are dressed simply but elegantly in calf-length draped, toga-like dresses in muted colors, one each of purple, orange, and green.*

**FURY 2:** This cult of the Athenians, this Olympiad thing, is getting out of hand. It may be only a matter of time before it reaches us.

**FURY 3:** Yes, yes. Sister and daughter gods are being palmed off on everyone as fair trade for the wonderfully powerful she-gods.

**FURY 2:** Not to mention the Great Mother god is turning into a passive Mother Earth--

**FURY 1:** In which **men** plant **their** seeds--

**FURY 2:** Yup. The path is being paved for even fertility to become masculine--

**FURY 1:** What a time is coming!

**FURY 3:** *Bitingly.* Our **demise figures in**, as well.

**FURY 1:** *Gesticulating, anxious* Look, things have gone too far. We've got to **do** something before it's too late!

**FURY 3:** It is too late. You know that. We all do.

**FURY 2:** *Coming to a standstill, and the other two turn to look at her* No. We have a job to do. We must act now before **he** arrives. We must plan for it.

**FURY 1:** *Excited* Exactly!

**FURY 3:** *Incredulous, without hope* Hmmm...

**FURY 2:** *Ignoring Fury 3* At the very least, we could try for a reconciliation.

Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

**FURY 1:** Yes! Between mother and daughter. The bond is irresistible.

**FURY 3:** *Cynical* You two are dreaming. They can't stand to be within one hundred meters of each other without one of them foaming at the mouth.

**FURY 1:** *With disdain* Electra, you mean.

**FURY 3:** *Matter of fact* Clytemnestra's rather bristly herself. Can't stand to be reminded of her failings.

**FURY 2:** **We** could mediate. Perhaps run messages between them, be the interpreters.

**FURY 1:** *Pondering the idea* Orchestrate a negotiated settlement, you mean?

**FURY 2:** *Hopeful, but questioning* It could work.

**FURY 3:** *Disgusted with the idea* Bah!

**FURY 2:** *Cautious* Listen. Someone's coming!

**FURY 3:** No one comes here, must be one of the crazed, starved animals.

**FURY 1:** No, look. There **is** a man. Can't make out who.

**FURY 2:** Must be a foreigner to traipse in these parts of Mycenae. *Commanding* Disperse!

*Each Fury hides behind a separate tree, peeking out.*

*Orestes enters the grove, taking in the scene. He is dressed in very pale peach colored linen: a men's shirt, open at the neck, loose and belted pants, and sandals. His hair is in soft curls. He is dressed for the heat; he looks fresh, not shabby.*

**ORESTES:** *Exploring, looking, in disbelief* What I see makes my heart turn sour. Nothing is left intact. Even the fig trees seem to revolt, they look as if they have not born fruit for many seasons.

**FURY 2:** *Speaking under her breath, in surprised horror.* Orestes!

**FURY 1:** *Whispering* Yeah -- And the depletion was from **his** daddy's Trojan war.

**FURY 3:** It doesn't matter, the game is up.

**ORESTES:** Coming here is like walking into a nightmare of encapsulated history. Pagan blasphemies abound everywhere.

**FURY 1:** *Panicky, whispering to Fury 2* We've got to get him out of here!

**FURY 2:** Wait. Wait. Let's see if he leaves on his own.

Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

**FURY 3:** You **know** he won't. He came this far, after all. For blood.

*Fury 1 covers her mouth in horror.*

**ORESTES:** What has Clytemnestra done to my legacy? *Confused* Or, could it be that Electra reigns? *Pathetically* I have been an exile, and am out of touch. I should probably turn on my heels and flee.

*Furies 1 and 2 look relieved*

*Crumbling* I would not have been difficult to locate. *Dejected, Orestes sits* It took me many years to squelch the expectation that each new face was a messenger sent to retrieve me.

*Pause, then becoming resolute and standing* No! I must stay, it is my duty.

**FURY 1:** That's it! *Determined* We've got to try to get rid of him.

**ORESTES:** *Moving about in the orchard, gesturing triumphantly as he speaks.* I will put Mycenae on solid ground. Yes, everything will rapidly be on the up and up. The House of Atreus will never sink again to these depths. The decks will be cleared. The babes born on the Argolid can grow up with a fresh slate. As the old die away, there will soon be no more among us who recollect the old ways. Then, our true liberation can begin.

I will make it happen! *Inspired* I feel it. *One palm up, the other hand a fist that slaps in the palm for emphasis* I can do this.

**FURY 1:** What a vision he has!

**FURY 2** *Trying a ploy, stepping from behind her tree touching Orestes' shoulder* You don't know what you are saying. Things here are not as you remember them. Your own kin may shun you.

**ORESTES:** No, impossible!

**FURY 1:** *Stepping into the open* It is true. Your own sister, Electra, has relinquished her life in the palace.

**FURY 3:** *Coming out from behind her tree, coming closer* She cannot receive you.

*The furies now have Orestes ringed, and he is reeling from their news.*

**FURY 2:** *Enunciating each word individually for impact.* Electra is now a slave!

*Throughout Orestes' next passage, the furies stay in a circle around Orestes.*

**ORESTES:** *With fear* And who rules?

Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

**FURY 2:** Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, of course.

**ORESTES:** *Hands cupping his ears* No!

*Looking up* Some god is playing games with me, tormenting me. Perhaps Apollo, goading me to perform my duty to my father. *Panting through the next three sentences* My own sister, a slave. A Mycenaean princess carrying water jugs. Preposterous.

*Remembering* Shining Electra was everything, my whole world. She took me everywhere, taught me games, fed me! I drank in her infinite love for me. And now -- Now--- she is decrepit. *Covering his face with his crumpled hands, kneeling* Argh!

**FURY 1:** *Going too far too soon* Best to leave things as they are, Orestes.

**ORESTES:** *Pausing to ponder, aghast, moving back a step, away from the furies, awakening* --Do I know you?

**FURY 2:** You certainly will, unless we act soon to prevent it.

**FURY 1:** *Piping in* We'd better.

**ORESTES:** Go away, hostile strangers. I am set on a course. I must rescue Electra and return her to her rightful life. First, *as if drawing a sword, the furies step back in fear* I need to depose the king and queen. I can see it now. *Leaning over with the sword, as if staring Clytemnestra in the face* The queen will try to stop me. When under the weight of the sword, *A look of horror crosses Orestes' face as he imagines* Clytemnestra will bare her breasts in terror, trying to appeal to some ancient filial obligation. *Collecting himself, waving the sword* I will be strong.

**FURY 1:** Think of what you are saying! She is your **mother**, and queen of this land. The price you will pay will be great.

**ORESTES:** *Defiant* Clytemnestra cannot be considered my mother. The parent is he who gives the seed. She who carries does nothing more than an urn holding water, an unremarkable feat which has no claims.

Yet, it is true, *Thinking as he speaks, and building anger in the next few lines* The full weight of killing Clytemnestra will surface. The hypocrisy of ancient custom! No one, not a single soul will begrudge me the death of Aegisthus. No! In this I am squarely in the right. Justice on my side in everyone's eyes. I will be honored for that action. He bedded with the queen, usurped the king's throne. His life is mine to take, as well as the throne. *Truly asking, almost pleading, but below the surface, subtle.* But what am I supposed to do with Clytemnestra? No one will be able to answer me here. How am I to take the throne and yet spare her?



Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

*Stern and angry, below the surface.* And, what of her guilt? If Aegisthus is guilty, Clytemnestra is immeasurably more so. She defied my father and then killed him. I face the choice of heeding an ancient taboo against killing so-called kin, or of championing the forces of good sound justice.

*Decisive* I must live by the code of modern society, how else to measure my worth? Apollo will be at my side and justice in my court.

And, still, those blood lusty hounds will be dispatched to seek my life.

**FURY 1:** *proud, whispering to Furies 2 and 3* That's us!

*The Furies puff up their bodies as Orestes speaks*

**.ORESTES:** Bitches! Those filthy representations of archaic goddesses. I can see them standing up for Clytemnestra's alleged rights. Sniffing at my heels. Wheezing at me. Men have died under their cold eyes. What a chilling thought, that such monsters will try to destroy me.

**FURY 3:** *Nudging Fury 2, whispering with eyes fixed on Orestes* He's scaring **me** now.

**ORESTES:** Electra! Guide me!

**FURY 2:** *Also whispering with eyes fixed on Orestes* There's nothing we can do with him. We'd better stick to our plan.

*The Furies move to the stage left edge of the olive grove to confer. Meanwhile, Orestes moves about in the grove pondering, and then exits, off on his mission.*

**FURY 1:** I think we should approach Electra first. She's young and brazen enough to resist.

**FURY 2:** Once we have her accord, we'll be home free.

**FURY 3:** *Handling some grey-brown cloaks* Here, take some of this slaves' garb, you two. Disguised as her compatriots, our true identities will be concealed. I'll be Theda, Electra trusts her.

**FURY 2:** Let's go!

*Lights on the far stage right portion fade. The olive grove is in partial darkness. The interior of the palace is in total darkness, only the stage right exterior of the palace is visible. Lights on the stage left portion come on. The three Furies are in the stage right section, putting on the slaves' costumes. Electra is in the stage left portion dressed in brown army boots and tightly fitting, brown and grey ragged clothing, no adornments. She has the build and appearance of a prepubescent boy.*

**ELECTRA:** *Speaking from inside her shack, or at the threshold* Another day of clear light to see my misery in.

I awake with the sun. I, a princess. A princess with a life foreclosed to my step. My anxious step.

## Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

My muscles ache to throw off the weight of slavery, my soul to lie mourning to rest. Every motion I make is a cry for retribution. For justice. To bring the murderers to task. They murdered my father in body and me in spirit.

Oh, Orestes!

*She waits, flaps her arms in dismay* No father, no brother. It matters little to tell it here, but I never had a mother. And now no home -- the palace, **my** palace, being off limits to me. Thrust in this horrible mud village made up of horrible mud shacks and a stream which produces only more mud.

Among slaves. Not **as** a slave, I **am** now a slave. I labor alongside slaves, I eat the same substance, for it cannot be called food. I defy food in any case. Nothing but revenge could nourish me now.

The years I have spent exhausted with hopes for revenge. Dreams, really. The fantasies of a slave. Even my one rightful act in life is negative. That I will not live and die in a plagued palace. Better to claw through my days in drudgery. My only respite mourning. My small claim to victory. Thus far.

*The three Furies, dressed in slaves' clothing, enter the stage left portion, carrying urns.*

*Electra moves out and away from her shack, towards the Furies, during the next passage.*

Orestes, do you yearn as I do for our first embrace in freedom?

OOO-Orestes! Orestes, where are you now? When, when will you return to slay the murderers?

Oh! To be set free, to walk on this earth again rather than slithering with venom. Let me topple the criminals from their self appointed thrones, and see how I glide!

**FURY 3:** Electra! Do be more cautious. You speak the words of one gone mad. Too much is clearly said. I may be only a slave by birth, and you a princess, but I must speak what I know to be the truth. Your threats to Aegisthus must go no further. If your words are relayed to the king, you and we, your companions in slavery, will not hold on to our lives for long.

**ELECTRA:** *Calling out* Theda! Have you not listened to a word that I have said? Why do you speak to me thus about that she-man, Aegisthus? After all the time I've spent here, the talks we've had, my mourning prayers, my vows of revenge, how could you hint that he be the target?

**FURY 3:** You have spoken of he who sits on the throne out of line. Who else can this be but Aegisthus? Day after day you speak of nothing else. You cry for Orestes to return, to set your father on the course of eternal peace, and to finally free your mother from the lover's spell cast by Aegisthus.

**ELECTRA:** *With disgust* To **free** my mother!

Words! I am lost without them yet cannot get them to serve any function for me.

## Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

Is there no point to words? Are they never digested the way they are prepared? Ears, their gatekeepers seem to jumble them. Is the message a fiction and the sender deluded?

**FURY 3:** Stop. Stop, Electra. Who are you hurting but yourself?

It was Clytemnestra who bore and raised you. Cared for you. You are part of her, and she you. Nothing can change these facts, not even your strong will. They are reality.

**ELECTRA:** Cared for me! You are an ignorant slave. *Dismissive* You know nothing about this.

**FURY 3:** Reconsider. It is time to shake off your scales and to finally accept the queen's invitations. She has all but begged you.

**ELECTRA:** Yes, oh, yes, she has beseeched me time and again to visit her. I will not be fooled. I will not bite. Not to be budged from where I can see her best.

**FURY 3:** Even you can be wrong. In this case, I'm sure of it. She is your mother! Besides, she has had news of Orestes.

**ELECTRA:** Orestes, here?

**FURY 3:** Perhaps he will be soon.

**ELECTRA:** *Ecstatic* My day has come! *Joyous* Imagine! Orestes grown now into youthful beauty but with mature strength of mind. He has hair the same color as my own. His nose is long and straight. His eyes shine and dance just as our father's did -- and he is as playful and kind as my father was.

**FURY 3:** Electra, this event makes an excellent opportunity for mother and daughter to reacquaint. To unite over the news of Orestes, son and brother.

**ELECTRA:** *Recouping* For once you make sense, old slave woman. Go now and carry my word to the queen that I am ready to meet with her.

*Fury 3 nods with a slight bow to Electra and begins to take her leave. On her way, she pauses to confer with Furies 1 and 2.*

**FURY 3:** *Whispering* You two stay with her and make sure she doesn't waver.

*While Electra is speaking in the following, Fury 3 changes her costume to a Queen's attendant's garb and makes her way to the palace.*

**ELECTRA:** *Happy* I remember all so clearly. Many times Agamemnon would take Orestes and me out into the middle of the pasture to his favorite tree. It was a beautiful, enormous fig tree. It had branches thicker than the trunk of a well stocked man. Its leaves were a deep green that I shall always be able to conjure to vision. Meaty, green leaves. Each perfect in shape.

## Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

What absolute ecstasy this is to feel the tree over me once again with my father and Orestes safe at my side. And, the figs on it! Those pendulous figs bouncing almost imperceptibly before our eyes. And mouths. Just enough to create an undeniable, unimpeachable desire. My mouth rushing almost before my hands to pick the fruit. A chilling sensation surged through my body as I tore away the tender pale green flesh revealing the waving sea of pink and red tendrils within. Just as the sweetness began to trickle down the back of my throat, the fragrant sensation was already electrifying my limbs. Such a quality of being, I never since have achieved.

*Throughout the following, and until Electra arrives at the palace for the meeting, Electra and Furies 1 and 2 perform slaves' labor. The Furies, not being accustomed to such work, balk from time to time, and each tries to get the other to do more of the work. Electra is oblivious to this.*

*The lights come up in the palace. Clytemnestra is in the palace, dressed in a long, majestic robe, hair loose and big, a bit wild, bare feet. She is holding the same knife she used to kill Agamemnon. Fury 3 enters Clytemnestra's chamber by the end of Clytemnestra's first paragraph. Seeing that Clytemnestra is suicidal, she tries to get a sense of the situation, treading very delicately. By the time Fury 3 brings up Electra's visit, she feels she's salvaged the situation and can put Clytemnestra back on her feet.*

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Pensive, but matter of fact, grounded but agitated on the edges. Her eyes are focused on the blade of the knife* I **could** die. Have I not incessantly sought death? *Emphatic* Well, now is a good time. There will be none better.

Why do I not accomplish it? And spare my children from killing me in the same blow. Preserve what little vestige of sanity they have in their already tortured lives.

*Fury 3 comes over to Clytemnestra and puts her arm around Clytemnestra's shoulders, as if the two were singing a serious song together. Fury 3 treading gently, eyes on the knife.*

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Anything to stop my mind's continuous replay of my children's murders.

Agamemnon told me--.

**FURY 3:** *Mimicking Agamemnon's voice* Queen, Iphigenia is not your daughter.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** This on her wedding day, as I was busy with the arrangements for the celebration and feast.

We had prepared everything and set off. Off to that hostile island Aulis. Full of overindulged officers. Sitting, waiting to sack Troy. All those gleaming male eyes fixed on the Trojan gold. Their armor ready, and their rationale in place. I spit on all the dead soldiers' graves! Despicable is too kind a word.

No warning, just

**FURY 3:** *Mimicking* she is not your daughter.

Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Whose is she, if not my own?

**FURY 3:** *Mimicking* You have performed your service well enough and now it is over. Your work is done.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Go away milk goat, your young is fed enough for slaughter.

**FURY 3:** *Mimicking* You have another.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Electra.

Electra, who knew so little. Agamemnon chose Iphigenia over Electra for no other reason than that Iphigenia knew too much of her heritage. She had acquired too many of the powers of Leda. He and the others had begun to fear her as they did me.

Why can I not find any respite from this? *Trying to resolve it* Not now. Not today. *Deliberate, slow speech* Just go slowly, take in seeping smooth breaths.

*After a pause, putting down the knife, or throwing it down in disgust* Argh!

Why was I born? What act of cruelty sprung me loose from Leda's hip? Why does my life persist so long, how much more will it endure? How could I have killed Agamemnon when it was my own life that should have ended? To be sure, he deserved to die and much more, that man. I regret his death only in that it came too late.

Two of my children I had already let him kill.

Die! Die!

I wanted him away. Away, way far as possible from myself and my remaining children.

I wish I could kill you again, torture you. Make you feel true pain.

**FURY 3:** That kind of pain was probably out of his range.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Die! And let some hatred go with you.

**FURY 3:** It did not work that way, though.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** What hatred I sent with Agamemnon in death, was turned back on me by Cassandra.

**FURY 3:** No, not by Cassandra.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Nodding* By myself. Alone I accomplished this. How could I have killed Cassandra? What kind of monster am I that I did this, this horrid act of misdirected frenzy? Because of my own torment I saw reflected in her, I crushed the air from **her** lungs. Cassandra did me no harm. That shackled princess whose eyes no one could stop.

## Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

*Building anger* Those eyes! Her eyes seeing me, watching me froth and set to kill her. Kill **me** in killing her. In my moment, the instant I could have achieved something precious. But self-loathing got in the way. I hacked at it, hacked and struck with my sword.

Until Cassandra fell dead.

In my place.

I wince at what should have been.

**FURY 3:** The two of you standing victors over Agamemnon's cold, dead matter.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** How did I miss this? Instead, I stood seething, looming over Cassandra's body crumpled across the slain carcass of Agamemnon.

**FURY 3:** With Aegisthus at your side.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Recollecting* Strutting and puffing himself up like a bird with its catch. I panting, insensible. I did not yet grasp what I had done.

And what had I done? What did I do? I was dizzy with the sight of Agamemnon's blood. Confused. I had expected his death to release me, to give me some peace. I felt nothing when I killed him. *With the knife, Clytemnestra mimes her murder of Agamemnon* I struck him, plunged the long sword deep into his core. Agamemnon was surely dead with the first lunge. Still I wanted more, needed more. I struck again, plummeting the sword deeper into his carcass. It was not enough. I sought something that did not happen. Some sign that my death in life was over. But it was not to occur. I plunged again. And again. It was not enough.

*Looking at the knife with horror that it also killed Cassandra, that Agamemnon's blood mingled with Cassandra's* Contorted, I seized on Cassandra. I looked on her but saw only the young Clytemnestra captured and stolen by Agamemnon from Pisa, like Cassandra from Troy.

*Clytemnestra begins to turn the knife on herself* I saw myself and hated. Hated.

*Working herself into a frenzy* I saw all the years in between my younger, former self in Cassandra and the seething present mass that I had become, and hated. Boiling over with loathing, bleeding venom. Blinded by accumulation. I had to destroy it! Destroy what had become of me.

*Breaking down* I can still see my slaughtered infant at Pisa at Agamemnon's blood-splattered feet. Quiet, dead. I had barely woken with my baby at sunrise when I found myself shackled at dusk, laced into a chariot alongside some bulging, sweat soaked and dirty commander. My breasts bursting with unsucked milk.

Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

**FURY 3:** *Agitated, Fury 3 is speaking quickly while moving over to Clytemnestra to lower her arms down. Ultimately, Fury 3 takes the knife and replaces it into it's holder on the bureau.* Nothing can bring Cassandra back now, give her life. Place the golden haired princess on the throne of Troy, or Mycenae for that matter.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Slumped, body visibly relaxed, Clytemnestra is resigned to life* Why did I not do this, this the obvious course of action?

I need you, Cassandra. More than that, I love you.

For you, Cassandra, I will endure. My own time is past.

**FURY 3:** *Trying to be cheerful* Queen, listen, I bring you news from the village.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** What is it?

**FURY 3:** Electra, princess of Mycenae, requests a visit!

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Speaking with a mix of excitement and horror* Electra!

*Stirring herself to a new purpose in life* At last. The day I have awaited.

Thank you, kind woman. *Clytemnestra grasps a velvet pouch purse and extends some coins from it to Fury 3* How can I repay you for this news?

**FURY 3:** *Waving her hands at the coins in dissent* No, no thank you, Queen. In this case, your happiness is payment enough. A successful meeting with the princess would be of enduring value to us all.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Yes, yes. So true. *Swaying backward slightly and extending an arm, reaching out for the shoulder or arm of Fury 3 for balance.* Suddenly, I feel unprepared. *Clytemnestra sits down, as if to anchor herself, and as if if she did not, she might collapse* Why is it that I waver just when what I want may be within reach?

Do I not have the strength to go this last round? Shall this be the one too many?

**FURY 3:** *Resolute* No, don't let it be, Queen.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Excited, clasping Fury 3's shoulders* When will my daughter come?

**FURY 3:** At your convenience.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Today!

Ah, things may not be so grim as they appear.

## Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

*Fury 3 begins to exit to carry out Clytemnestra's request, but Clytemnestra grabs her shoulder No, wait! First, help me get ready.*

*Fury 3 and Clytemnestra prepare Clytemnestra for the meeting throughout the following and just as Clytemnestra is ready, Electra arrives Fury 3 silently begins to get set up for dressing Clytemnestra. She starts by setting out jewels from a drawer of the bureau, onto its top. Fury 3 gets Clytemnestra's shoes and sandals out of the wardrobe to examine. Fury 3 begins going through dresses and scarves in the wardrobe. She occasionally takes one out to look closer, sometimes leaving it out, draped over a chair, or hanging somewhere visible. When she is done and ready to dress Clytemnestra (below), the room, especially the chairs, have many garments, shoes heaped around. Fury 3 moves to the chair and digs out a dress and then hands the dress to Clytemnestra. Clytemnestra begins to try it on. Fury 3 helps Clytemnestra dress, Fury 3 does Clytemnestra's hair and puts jewels in it and on Clytemnestra's body. Clytemnestra sits and Fury 3 puts on her sandals Fury 3 holds up a mirror for Clytemnestra to look in. Clytemnestra stands tall and looks regal, imposing, powerful. Stunning.*

**ELECTRA:** I must ready my armor, account for every detail. Everything must be under control.

Beware Clytemnestra! Electra will command your undoing yet.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** I must tread delicately today.

Must not do or say anything to frighten her away.

All must go as much as possible as I have dreamt of this day. My hands tremble in anticipation of the moment I cast my eyes on my last source of light and life, my own blood, my daughter, Electra.

How do I look?

**FURY 1:** Electra, it is time to depart for the palace.

**ELECTRA:** Yes, it is time.

*As if, getting her last words out, before being towed off to jail Hah! What pretense! I can see our meeting laid out before me in full as if it were a piece of the past. "Come back," she will say, luring me with silks and jewels. She will tempt me with my old way of life, as if she had any such thing to offer. That person, that life, had a father.*

**FURY 2:** *Nudging Electra to walk* Come, we will deliver you, as were our directions from Theda.

**ELECTRA:** One question yet remains, Clytemnestra. Which lost daughter is it that you long for?

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** I feel all right. Look intact enough. This may prove easier than I expect. I am ready to ask it, how will Electra see me?



Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

**ELECTRA:** *With a fury on each elbow, guiding her along. Electra stops when she speaks, gesticulating. She is a lion waiting to pounce. She will sit crouched in wait for my weakening, but when she springs out at me she will fall flat.*

**FURY 2:** *Anxious, under the surface. Grasping Electra more firmly and trying to budge her Princess, we shall never arrive at this rate!*

**ELECTRA:** *Standing firm until she is done speaking, she is worked into a frenzy I hereby renew the oath that I made at my father's decrepit grave site, that his murder made our bodies one. We share a single destiny. When he is properly clothed and housed, only then, so too shall I be. This, I swear.*

*Electra arrives at the palace, escorted by Furies 1 and 2.*

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Well, this is finally it, she has arrived. Electra.

**ELECTRA:** *Electra enters Clytemnestra's chamber, the two furies wait just inside the door. I am here. I must stay strong, and all will soon be mine.*

**FURY 3:** *To Clytemnestra. Stand upright.*

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** I cannot.

**FURY 3:** *To Clytemnestra. Relax.*

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** I cannot, my head is blank.

**FURY 3:** *To Clytemnestra. Stop this! Concentrate.*

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Convincing herself I can do it. I will get through this meeting.*

**FURY 3:** *To Clytemnestra. All right, plunge in.*

*Clytemnestra and Electra approach each other, and, when their eyes meet, each is shocked and angered and immediately becomes visibly defensive. Through Clytemnestra and Electra's first remarks, they circle each other cagily*

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Electra! Let me look at you.

I wish the gods would strike me dead where I stand. You are no longer human. You smell terrible. Mottled flesh. Ghastly.

I cannot bear to look. Electra, what have you done?

You did this on purpose. One of your typical ruses to get to me, to hurt me. I will not have it!

Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

**ELECTRA:** My mother. You look your part. You have dressed well for it, Queen. You deftly carved out the look of violence. Of evil.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** It is a good thing that I prepared for our meeting. I have already had the bath chambers appointed and equipped for your needs, though now I see you require more care than I could have guessed.

Once I have you cleaned off, you can be sponged with fragrant waters, if you like. **Then**, we can talk.

**ELECTRA:** You say that I must be restored, that I am to be prepared. Hah! We both know what you mean to accomplish with your delicate words. Wretch!

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Oblivious to Electra's protest* Follow me to the baths and soon you will be ready for a profitable discussion. I shall attend you myself.

**FURY 3:** *To Clytemnestra.* You have no choice. You'd have to be the one, no one else would do it.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** On to the baths!

**ELECTRA:** To the baths! You must think me an utter fool. How dare you mention that blood-stained tub in my presence. You threaten my death without saying anything out of the ordinary. And insult my father with the same blow. You try to put me into that same tub --

**FURY 3:** *Waving Electra to desist and coming up behind Clytemnestra, cradling her.* You must take pause, catch your breath. Being here, so close to Electra, is overwhelming.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Pulling back from the adversarial atmosphere* Electra, hold your tongue. Listen. I seek to welcome you back to the palace. To restore your rightful place as princess and my daughter. We shall be reunited, queen and princess, bound together by our mutual understanding as much as by our blood.

**ELECTRA:** *Taking Clytemnestra's cue for calm* I am uncertain what we can accomplish, yet it is good of you to see me, a mere slave, Queen Clytemnestra. With a slave's eyes I cast a fresh glance about this palace. It is a wonder to behold. And a tribute to your throne. I am weak with awe. I shall always be in your debt for this honor.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Come, now. Give over your stiff manner of speech.

**ELECTRA:** Very well, if it please you, I shall try to refrain from mentioning my slave's life, though this be now my fact. Toil and mud my reality.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** No, stop, Electra, I beg you.

**FURY 3:** *To Clytemnestra.* Softly, Clytemnestra, concentrate.

Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Aside, in the direction of Fury 3.* Just when I feel I can reach out and touch her, Agamemnon looms in between.

The phantom never seems to die!

**FURY 3:** *To Clytemnestra, pushing her. exasperated* Enough! Look to the future now.

You **can** handle this. I must leave. Go!

*Fury 3 exits, taking the other two Furies with her, and the three of them dissolve slowly away.*

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Stronger voice and persona now and in the following.* Come! *Softer* Please. Let us get you ready.

**ELECTRA:** Thank you, no. I must stand my ground. I have no need to bathe here. It is still, after all, **my** body which is at issue. I determine how it is and feels, not you. I am grateful for this visit, but will not be able to stay long.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Why did I not know that this would happen! You are a stone citadel, sealed shut.

How can I feel impotent in the face of you, my own daughter?

Am I not Clytemnestra, the strong queen, Spartan daughter of Leda? I am. I am.

**ELECTRA:** Yes. Yes. You are. Strong and powerful. Bah!

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Dismayed* Look at this! There is no hope. Best to cut this short, than suffer any longer.

**ELECTRA:** Yes, condemn me to silence once again. I know this route. How much of my life have I lived this way? I can take more. Lots more.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Puzzled* Silence, Electra?

**ELECTRA:** *Definitively* Silence. My entire childhood played out in silence, alone. Remember, I was left to my own devices young.

I saw you, of course. Saw you, heard you, even watched you. But, no one spoke with me. At me, yes. Occasionally.

I had to create definitions for myself, about myself. In your absence and as your negation.

*Pause* Funny, for all the silence there was an awful lot of noise. A constant scream of protest that played in my mind. That was outwardly silent too. I played by the rules.

Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** I don't know what you're talking about, Electra. We were always together. Before you left, that is. There was no silence. I recall lots of talk, you and I, you and others. Not enough quiet, actually.

I won't quarrel with rules, though. Some standards are well worth maintaining. And, in this case, it's that you need a cleaning.

Why have you made a point of honor out of dirt?

Give up this stalwart nature over nonsense, Clytemnestra *approaches Electra, hands out* and we can break this silence you so resent.

**ELECTRA:** *Retreating, softening* No. I don't think so, Queen.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Advancing, holding a jeweled, blue robe* Yes. You can. *Holding up the robe* Remember this? You always loved it and said it would be yours when you grew up.

It is yours now.

Here, take it.

*Clytemnestra and Electra's hands are both on the robe at the same time, Electra's hesitantly.*

**ELECTRA:** *Weakly* No...

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Speaking as she leaves the robe in Electra's hands and leads her to a sink area.* Yes. We'll approach this gently.

*Peeling some of the tatters off of Electra and sponging her arms, neck, and face as she speaks* Here. I'll use a soft cloth. And mild barley water.

*Beginning to sponge* First one arm... good. The other... Let me get some of this molded garment away from your skin. *Peeling it off* Ah!

*Electra is beginning to relax and bask in her mother's attention* Electra, you really mustn't do this again. Your body has fungus all over it.

Okay. Let's get to the neck and face. I'll go slowly. Some citrus blossom witch hazel mixed with olive oil ought to do well.

*Happy* This is making me recall your youth. When you would let no one but me clean you. *In the following Electra slowly begins to stiffen, until she makes a move and speaks.* You would get into the mud, head to foot. Then you'd come running to me and we'd make a big game out of washing. Some of our happier moments were spent here at the basin.

Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

**ELECTRA:** *Electra pulls away from Clytemnestra's hands to look at her in part fear, part anger, part panic.* Game....? Happier moments...? Amazing how **somebody's** mind has twisted the truth.

I remember. I remember you. I remember you and I in here. You were **crying. Wailing.** Not playing!

*Electra starts to try to repatch her tatters I've got to get these back on! Electra gets dirt from the floor, or a planter and rubs it over her arms and face. Apply my armor. How did I let down my guard so fast? Electra continues this as Clytemnestra talks in following.*

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Panic rising through her body, tears welling in her eyes* What the hell are you doing?

*Playing her hands and moving them up and down vertically at rib level* No. No. Take pause. Ask the right questions.

What is it that **I** want? Not the daughter who contradicts my every breath. Who obviously wishes that I had no more of them. Who would wrest my remaining days on earth and break them asunder.

**ELECTRA:** You! Murder! You are a fine one to speak of murder. It was **you** who butchered my father. you axed the life out of him. His blood -- my blood! -- spilling out and over onto your hands. He gave you your life, your honor.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** My life? You don't know how wrong you are, Electra. He was a monster, this glorious father of yours. He--

**ELECTRA:** Stop! I won't listen. And I do not want to return to the palace! I left once already, as you surely remember. Orestes too. Both gone. Ten years you spent edging us out. While obsessed with another, you thrust two out!

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Obsessed? You know Aegisthus to be a mere convenience to me. What are you saying now?

**ELECTRA:** Not Aegisthus! You know very well that I am speaking of Iphigenia!

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Iphigenia?

Two for one?

Is that how you describe it? *Cringing* How can you be so cold?

**ELECTRA:** *On a roll* You wailed and wailed only about the one lost. Lost to a cause of pride, it must be noted. Moaned and wailed. The other two somehow did not count, flicked off without thought. Gone. Out of sight, Orestes. Forgotten. Electra, an embarrassment. One weighed heavily, two as much as dust. What made me so different from Iphigenia?

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Flustered, confused, seeking* What is wrong with difference?

Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

**ELECTRA:** *Bitter* You tell me, mother.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Clytemnestra moves about for a moment still flustered, crumbling* I, I don't know. You two were different, it's true. I---

**ELECTRA:** You! It's always you, you, you. And **her**. A team, you two. And, **me**. I was **nothing!**

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Quietly, with horror at this reflection of herself* No.

**ELECTRA:** Well, of course, no. I **know** that, but I had to struggle to know it. A child is supposed to be cradled, rocked. *Pause* **Paid attention to.**

Yet, I had none of it.

You were no mother to me, but the enemy. I had to fight for every inch.

A futile battle.

Until I gave up and made myself from scratch.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Weakening further* Electra. Electra, I can't find the words. They are blocked at my throat. Don't do this now, please.

Try to understand. There are two sides.

*Speaking rapidly* The situation was not as a child would see it. I did not understand your bitterness until this moment. But you couldn't grasp the picture then. Maybe you can now. *Desperate* It may help.

**ELECTRA:** *Bitter* Help who, mother?

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** You!

**ELECTRA:** Bah!

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Electra, listen for once! Can you justify your sister's murder, explain it? For the sake of some long worn pact amongst grown men? Men's games, children's lives. Mother's lives. More than me, and beyond Iphigenia. Thousands of children, thousands of mothers. Trojans, Greeks.

In order to protect Meneleus? To safeguard the throne he gained only by marriage to my sister?

My beautiful child was killed because there was no wind at Aulis. Iphigenia's life was considered the fair toll to bring the wind. And how was that debt calculated, according to whose scales? I, Queen of Mycenae, could do nothing to stop the murder of my own daughter at the hands of the Argive people.

**ELECTRA:** Here we go. I know this story. The phantom first born, again. Again and again. I could say it myself.

## Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Continuing* I stood diminished, dumb. A powerless queen, a concept created by our strange times. Can you imagine at all what it is like to be a queen, born and bred to rule, and yet to watch even the title be demoted to a trinket. Queen, yet slave to men. Lesser men.

My reevaluation was inevitable once I killed Agamemnon. The stories spun were not bad really, creative almost. Intriguing in their review of history.

Iphigenia's murder lurked in people's minds as justification for my act. It took much acrobatics for them to fabricate a new version, that Iphigenia never died. That she still lives, having been lifted away from her father's knife to safety by Artemis.

What fools, did they really think I had no claim to Agamemnon's life but the murder of Iphigenia?

She was the **second** of my children he killed. He sacked my province and took me, the queen, as his prize. His concubine.

He could have killed you! That I took a step of prevention, of retribution, when I needed to is not shameful.

It was necessary!

But this new cult of men cannot countenance the action of women. I was like a plague in their eyes, they needed to amass reasons to reassure themselves that it could not happen again. That no wife will dare to kill her husband.

Pathetic rubbish! It did not hold me back from ruling Mycenae for a single day.

**ELECTRA:** Spew out no more, I have listened to enough of your speech. Do you have any idea how you sound? Your words offend the very core of my being -- and would offend any decent citizen. Why did I come here to hear you denigrate the accepted principles of society. Mores thought over in excruciating detail by learned men, yet you know better. And must instruct me!

Justice will not be on your side in the end, Clytemnestra -- we both know this --

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Justice, Electra? What justice speaks to you? Of the sword, no doubt. Pallas Athene, god of war and justice.

**ELECTRA:** What better form of justice could there be? Athene, sprung directly from the head of Zeus. Born of the lord of us all, gods and mortals.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Reborn, you mean. Do you know so little of your heritage? Until recently, there was no Athene but rather Anatha. The great she-god Anatha. She had many powers and would never confuse justice with war. Those were days of a different ilk. She-gods were magnificent, and did not

## Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

need to pose as the daughters or sisters to he-gods like your Athene. Nor did they renounce their mothers as your Athene so vehemently does.

**ELECTRA:** She has no mother. Born in entirety in full armor from Zeus her father. She has no patience with women.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** What of the poor woman full to the brim with pregnancy whom Zeus swallowed whole, just before this miraculous birthing he performed? Fine thing, he swallows a woman in labor, develops a severe headache and out comes Athene ready for battle. War and justice, now two sides of the same coin. Surely born from the heads of men.

You, too, have unfalteringly aligned yourself with the modern climate. My own daughter. Still, I do not hold you accountable for this. You are too young to remember the alternative, the values based on the propagation of life. Not its destruction.

**ELECTRA:** Life, what do you know of life? Look what you have done with yours, with the life you created.

Me, for example. Look at me! Look at me and you can have a fresh view of where your values lead. You are a fine one to disdain swords. It was your handy use of one that was my ruin. If only your blows could have struck me too.

I have no one. And you can stand here and tell me that I do not understand justice? You, clothed in silks, in jewels, living in more comfort than anyone on the Argolid has known.

You go against all that is good and just, and then wonder why your life is so difficult.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Electra, stop! Please!

**ELECTRA:** *Stopping herself, trying to contain the damage* Yes. I must. One hundred apologies, my mother, please forgive my hard words. I did not mean to cause injury. I go on and on, too exited. Please do not take my outburst to heart.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Clasping Electra's shoulders, trying for a new beginning* Electra, a sense of order can be restored to the Argolid, it is not yet too late. I need you here and you have much to gain in returning. You are what you are. A princess, my daughter.

**ELECTRA:** You are right, mother. Tell me more about the rule of Mycenae. Some pieces seem missing,

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Ah, you do have a prudent mind. You want to hear the details of my plan.

**ELECTRA:** Yes, do proceed. I want to know what you have done about a successor. Every throne needs to have its line of succession marked clearly.



Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Encouragingly* Explain.

**ELECTRA:** Perhaps, there is one who will return and have royalty restored.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** You do want to come back to the palace! You, my aid in arms and I, yours. This is what I have hoped for and dared not ask. What joy this is! Oh, Electra--

**ELECTRA:** *Recoiling* Rule Mycenae? I? It sounds as though you are speaking to a son. You have a son. Why speak to me? Why did you even keep me? One daughter already, you had no need of me. A son, you must have wanted to produce a son, an heir. The future king.

You stand here and ask me to rule -- look at me! I am no man!

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Electra, do not speak such sad words. You, my precious child. I hold you more dear than my own life. What makes you less an heir than anyone? I was in no rush for a son when I carried you inside my own flesh, and was only joyous to hold your sweet body to mine at your birth.

**ELECTRA:** A baby girl was of no use to you. An infant is easily disposed of. Did my father save me? Is that how I survived? I demand an explanation!

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** What can I say to you? I can barely utter the truth, that your father commanded your execution at birth. It is true. No sooner did you draw breath than was it to be withdrawn due to the worst crime you could commit, born female.

**ELECTRA:** No. I will not listen!

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** I loved you then, Electra, and do now.

But you must finally learn what happened. It was my fault, he said, my wretched spitefulness that produced a girl. Yet his seed would grow to manhood. The logic of kings is a mystery to behold.

**ELECTRA:** your insanity is thicker than I imagined. You go too far. It is **you** who has constantly sought my ruin, not him. **He** loved me.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** You see the world upside-down, Electra. You must give it up. Agamemnon did not love or hate you. It was his eyes that made you insignificant, not mine.

Ah! *Clytemnestra extends her hand* Look. Proof of my feelings in my very jewels. Do you not remember this ring? Made with love on the first anniversary of your birth. *Electra bends nearer to look now, becoming curious* It is beautiful, is it not? and, there you are -- see the likeness? Next to you under the tree is your sister. An incredible work of mosaic, made up of such tiny gems. *Seeing Electra's interest, she continues* It will be yours upon your return to the palace. *Silently, Electra comes closer and sits at the table near where Clytemnestra is standing. Clytemnestra is looking at the ring now* Such a fine work could never be duplicated. *Taking it off her finger, Clytemnestra extends the ring towards Electra and*

Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

*places it in her palm. Electra follows the ring with her eyes and her face softens. Electra keeps looking at the ring, slowly closes her fingers over it and closes her eyes, breathing in deeply.*

*As Clytemnestra speaks, she has a subtle smile of victory cross her face. She moves away from Electra to get a platter, leaving the ring in Electra's hand. Come, my darling, I suggest we sooth ourselves so that we can take stock of the present calmly and look to a brighter future. The time calls for nourishment, let me feed you. Rest a moment while I put a selection from this feast on to a couple of platters. Ah, stewed figs, Electra's body begins to stiffen anew and she glares at the ring, and then holds it in a tight fist. You always loved these so well that I will put a few extra out. Here. Take this platter I have put together especially according to your taste.*

**ELECTRA:** *Softly, but firm.* No, thank you.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Confident* Do not be so hard, Electra. Eat. Does my selection not tempt you? It does me. You know some food will make you feel better. Let yourself enjoy this meal, and then we can continue. Come now, do not have me stand here so foolishly with your food in hand, take hold of this platter.

**ELECTRA:** *To herself, still grasping the ring.* Should I do it? Can I allow myself to eat here? Without Orestes, though? Knowing all the while I daintily munch that he roams the countryside a vagabond.

With my brother so deprived I can do nothing for myself. As long as he goes begging, so too will I. It has to be this way.

*To Clytemnestra* I said no! *Brusquely pushing the platter* Move this platter away from me!

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Look out! Such a mess! You did not need to spill the food all over the table to make your point.

Please at least sit here at the table with me.

**ELECTRA:** *Aside, muttering.* If I stick to a little barley, that would be alright. I am hungry, and, after all, even in the village I eat barley.

I spilled so much food. I cannot stand the thought that this food will be swept away to waste.

*In the following, Electra eats ravenously and wildly, clutching the ring clumsily.*

Just a little scoop of barley -- like a miracle descending into my body. Scores of barley grains rushing down my inner passages. Just one more mouthful and that will be enough.

I should not have swallowed so quickly -- I barely chewed. I did not appreciate the taste. From hand to throat, no in between.

Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

So much food that I spilled -- the barley mixed over there with the lamb baked in yogurt. Some of that, just a little, and I will recoup.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Electra, really, you are not a trapped animal. Stop eating off the table.

*Electra transfers her focus to the floor and continues to eat.*

No, not the floor, that is worse! *Leaning down to Electra.* What has become of you? I will prepare a fresh platter and you shall eat from that, not these dregs.

**ELECTRA:** No! I want nothing of this meal. I asked for no handouts and shall receive none. This is your detour out of dangerous waters. Your attempt to circumvent my probes. I still want to know!

I could have been cast away. Why do I have to suffer so? I do not understand how you could hate me so much -- what did I do? You are evil, a viper!

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** *Trying to reach out to Electra.* Let me get hold of you Electra, you are raving. Sit back down now, calm yourself.

**ELECTRA:** Calm. I will be calm in death, plenty of time for that. But you will be first, I assure you.

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** Electra! Do not speak to me thus. I am your mother. Please, do not put the seal of eternity on this.

**ELECTRA:** Do not touch me! Keep back. *Electra throws the ring down at Clytemnestra's feet.* You have weakened me enough with your fanciful delights. I will quit this wretched cavern before I am devoured whole. No more of your amorous pretense, nor your charmed phrases.

We both know that it is just a matter of time. Time that I can better spend as a slave in the village than here fending off your manifold guile. At our next meeting, justice will have its way!

*Electra exits to stage left. Electra stands outside the palace door panting, then, later goes in to get the knife and move toward the fourth platform.*

**CLYTEMNESTRA:** That is it. She is gone.

She is gone. Final, now it is final. Electra will never come back. Never love me, never see me. This is where I end.

She despises me. And herself. Acting as though on foreign ground in her own body and being.

Why was this so difficult? I am a hopeless cripple. Why do I bear the illusion of individuality? A monster on my back. By insisting that I had alternatives, I sealed myself into permanent isolation. The world sweeping along and me in my box. Lonely fantasy.

## Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

Day after day I carry my two children's deaths alongside my life. With them I carry my trudging self into the present. And I am always here. One. Two. Three gone. And now four, finally the fourth. Here I am, once more, plummeted into the current of life with nowhere left.

The palace which once filled me with the strength of pride, seems hazardous. I feel myself being sucked into its dark caverns. Even the stone lions at the outer wall, once my companions, have their eyes on me. I feel them keeping a close accounting of each movement I make. As though my exits were numbered.

*Collecting herself, rational now.* It is over now, gone from me.

Electra, before she was even born, was under a shadow. Like a thick blanket it curled around her. I tucked her in. Electra the conduit. My conduit. The conductor of messages from and to myself.

I bred Electra to carry out my own growing desire. To complete the work of the shadow and finish me off. Push me over into death. I could see long ago that she is her father's daughter and capable of the task. I provided the encouragement she needed. Her loyalty to Agamemnon means that we must both wait for Orestes to return before she can act. Deferring to his right to avenge his father. Denying her own. Because of this she prolongs this dance we pace together.

Yet, soon my son shall return. Soon enough now. I feel his presence growing stronger with each day. It may be a matter of hours.

I tucked myself in, and Electra deeper still.

How could any of this have happened? How? How.

*Clytemnestra picks up the knife as if it is very heavy in this passage and then hands it to Electra, who has entered to take it. Electra is emotionless and directed, silent. Knife in hand, she exits and slowly moves toward the fourth platform.* I am drowning in a morass only to be speared out by the plunge of Orestes' sword. Even in death my torment cannot end. A shadow dripping with my blood and sticking fast to my bare skin. Fast onto the meat and bones of Electra.

And no, I believe nothing once again. I am ready for you this time, Electra, direct your brother to me now.

*Lights fade out slowly to dimmer light.*

*The fourth and last spotlight on the final upstage platform is on Orestes killing Clytemnestra, also with the knife. Clytemnestra approaches Electra at the platform. Electra holds the knife up high over her head, she is holding it with determination and has her eyes focused on Clytemnestra. Clytemnestra is standing upright, unafraid, and is looking straight at Electra. Orestes enters gracefully, slowly, takes the dagger, and, in one motion, moves to stab Clytemnestra.*

Clytemnestra's Last Day

By S. Montana Katz

*Electra screams a long, hollow moan. Then there is a pause of silence with the dry crackling sound heard at the beginning of the play in the field. After a pause, Orestes goes close to Electra.*

**ELECTRA:** *She speaks as if disembodied* My life is gone. **She** was my life. I have no purpose without her. This body is testament to that. I whipped and starved it to keep her at bay. My every thought and movement a reaction to her. As if we had two bodies living out one life. And now she is gone. I cannot be without her as my mirror. Without her negation, I am nothing.

**ORESTES:** *Pleading and placing his hands on her shoulders with concern* Electra!

**ELECTRA:** *Definite and putting distance between her and Orestes* No. You cannot bear witness to my demise. You have everything in front of you. Everything that I cannot participate in. Go. Go, Orestes, and make your plans. Leave me here with her, alone. I beg you, obey me that much.

*Orestes exits with hesitation. Electra goes to Clytemnestra's body, standing over it.*

So, there you are. You and I, face to face. How easy it looks now. Why could we not do this before?

*Pause, then in agony* Mother! Answer me!

*Pause, kneeling to Clytemnestra's head* Why couldn't you fix **me, help** me. *Emphatic* **Understand** me.

I needed you to touch me. To hold me as you held **her**.

*Bitterly* Iphigenia.

**Why** did I let her come between us so readily. **What** could we have done differently?

It was I who needed you most, and it was **you** who abandoned me. I had no choice but to align with my father. He was all I had to hang on to, and **he** was dead.

So, too, are you now. What I **thought** I wanted, so that I could exist. When what I really wanted was you. Your attention. Your love.

*With detest* I hate you!

**S. Montana Katz, Ph.D., LP, is a psychoanalyst with offices in New York, NY and Greenwich, CT. She is on the faculty and a training and supervising analyst at NPAP and NIP.**

Little Mary Sunshine  
By Claudia Bader

POEMS

LITTLE MARY SUNSHINE

By Claudia Bader

Dying  
Is an art, like everything else.  
I do it exceptionally well.  
Sylvia Plath

In the grueling cacophonous moment  
Horns blare ruthless applause.

Open the curtain; Little Mary Sunshine falls out.  
A perfect doll of mold and maggots;  
A smiling skull with ribbons and bows.

Her eye socket 's crusted, her hair's all undone;  
Her gingham keeps time as she tries to have fun.  
And the tappy tap tap of her little feet  
Congratulates her latest complete  
Opus--where the worms seep in.

And Little Mary Sunshine crawls in the desert  
Her crinolines catch fire as she bleaches to bone.  
Legs scale to claws as she circles up higher;  
To the red-eyed watching, the merciless caws.

Still her years yawn and are lined with teeth  
Ever more terrible for being unkempt.  
The gums are inflamed, they need an excavation.  
They stink to high heaven  
But taste just like Hell.

Yet into that maw our perfect doll goes-

Little Mary Sunshine curtsies,  
and crows.

Little Mary Sunshine  
By Claudia Bader

**Claudia Bader**, MPS, ATR-BC, NCPsyA, LP, LCAT, Level IV NCGR Counseling Astrologer. Former Executive Director of the Institute for Expressive Analysis, training analyst, faculty, supervisor, IEA. She is passionate about symbolic work, specializing in Art Diagnosis, Alchemy, Dream Interpretation, Symbolism and Art Therapy, Symbolization and Creativity, Color, Mandalas, and Astrology. She lectures and teaches at three NYC universities, IEA, and abroad. The summer of 2010 she taught color symbolism and mandala work in a weeklong intensive at Mjunggi University in South Korea. Claudia is currently a PhD candidate writing her dissertation on "Duende and Psychoanalysis," a topic she presented at IFPE in 2009. A poet, she is thrilled that her first publication of poetry will be with *Other/Wise!*

Therapy  
By Rachel Jennings

---

THERAPY

By Rachel Jennings

stone            notes  
silent            listen  
scares            caress

***Rachel Jennings** teaches English at San Antonio College in San Antonio, Texas. Her poetry chapbook, **Knoxville Girl: The Walk to the River**, will be released by Finishing Line Press in May 2011. She has also published two other books of poetry: **Elijah's Farm** (Pecan Grove Press, 2008) and **Hedge Ghosts** (LaNana Creek Press, 2001).*



Mortified  
By Rachel Jennings

---

MORTIFIED

By Rachel Jennings

At the thrift store  
two weeks ago, I bought  
an elegant, form-fitting,  
but half-finished dress  
with no hems or neat facings,  
just a forest of loose strings  
fenced in with masking tape  
and pins that scarify the flesh.  
I wore the dress to a lunch date  
with an old friend, but she  
quickly spotted a hanging thread,  
which she yanked like the cord  
to a lawnmower—not to break  
the thread, nor to unravel  
the corporeal secret, but to tug  
into being a small pucker  
in the outer fabric—  
to make visible to all  
that single flaw.

*Rachel Jennings teaches English at San Antonio College in San Antonio, Texas. Her poetry chapbook, Knoxville Girl: The Walk to the River, will be released by Finishing Line Press in May 2011. She has also published two other books of poetry: Elijah's Farm (Pecan Grove Press, 2008) and Hedge Ghosts (LaNana Creek Press, 2001).*

Bedroom Door  
By Vanessa Bezbrozh

BEDROOM DOOR

By Vanessa Bezbrozh



The image of the bedroom door  
Imprinted in my eyes  
And any moment I will see  
The one who heard my cries

Alone, and hopeful that you know  
How urgently I need  
But...I've been calling you a while  
And anxiously I plead

Will you return? Are you aware  
That I've been calling out?  
Will you be angry, or concerned?  
Will you relieve my doubts?

More minutes slowly going by  
And still I watch the door  
It seems unfair, but I don't know  
What I've been punished for.

Alone and aching for her care  
I'm trapped, a helpless pose  
And when so many minutes pass  
I only hope she knows...

*Vanessa Bezbrozh is a NYS licensed acupuncturist running a community acupuncture clinic in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. She has found that using poetry and other creative arts as part of her own analysis is an immensely healing and satisfying means of expression. Many of her poems such as the one above were written on the basis of subtle memories and feelings from a preverbal stage in her life. She plans to study psychoanalysis formally in the near future to add to her practice as an acupuncturist, intending to create a therapy that deeply addresses both body and mind.*

The Lines  
By Stephen Michaels

SHORT STORIES

THE LINES

By Stephen Michaels

Eddie Morelli, a wiry man in his mid-seventies, was standing on the lip of the shabby, little, third-floor proscenium of the American Theater of Actors. He held a glass of fake Scotch, and looked out over the audience, as if through a picture window at the sunset. He was speaking, presumably, to the beautiful, blonde young woman seated on the Chinese red couch behind him.

It was opening night of “Private Island,” a new play in which Eddie had the leading role—an aging and unscrupulous lawyer who had made a fortune planning takeover strategies for large corporations. The role was a stretch for Eddie, a retired printer who had grown up in Brooklyn, and sounded like it—but the artistic director, Jed Jensen, was sure he could do it, and Eddie took on the challenge. He’d never played a part this large: the play was a hundred and twenty pages, and his character never stopped talking.

Things were going surprisingly well. Eddie had remembered all his lines—well, he had bobbed a couple in Act I, but he’d recovered. The lines had been his chief concern. Eddie, who never went to college, and who only began acting in his early sixties, always worried about lines. They were hard to learn, and harder to retain. But he’d worked five hours a day for weeks, and had them down.

He had the character down, too. Eddie felt wealthy, powerful, and ruthless—he was none of these things—in his dark blue, satin dressing gown. The audience was with him, and he was cruising.

“Poor James, he’s always been a hothead,” he said, snickering. He was referring to his son, who had just stormed off stage, after his father—Eddie—refused to finance his screenplay, leaving his girl friend and his father alone together. Later, she would try to seduce the old man, to get him to put up the money.

Eddie looked out the imaginary window. He was dimly aware of the tiny opening night crowd—fifteen or so, friends of the cast. The theater ran on a shoestring and couldn’t afford publicity. Nor had Eddie, who had done over twenty shows there, ever been paid.

“Tell me, Mr. Marsden—” said the girl.

“Call me Arthur,” said Eddie. He was approaching his big Act II monologue. Her next line was his cue.

“Arthur.—How did you get to be so...unforgiving?” Eddie smiled, and looked back at her. She was also sipping Scotch, and smiling, seductively.

The Lines  
By Stephen Michaels

Cheryl in the play, her real name was Sandra. She was twenty-three, a graduate of the Neighborhood Playhouse—and thought she was the next Naomi Thornton. Her arrogance offended Eddie, who had learned the lesson of humility, but she was good in the part. She was tall, slender and sexy, with a narrow face, sharp nose, fleshy lips, and long, straight blond hair. She wore tight jeans, and a white blouse, unbuttoned to show her cleft. Her long legs were pulled up on the couch, and she was barefoot.

“I’m a realist, my dear, that’s all,” said Eddie. “But, I had to learn the hard way.” He paused, and stared wistfully into the distance, as if considering the best way to explain. At seventy-five, Eddie—as well as the character he was playing—had a lot of past to look back on.

“I was third in my class at Yale Law—and breathing down the necks of the first two. Plenty of offers from big law firms. I was on top of the world—young, brilliant and bursting with idealism. Oh, yes, I was going to *help* people! I was going to make the world a *better place!*”

He shook his head, and laughed, as if remembering the follies of his youth, and then, since the moment had gone so well, made the mistake of glancing into the audience, to see if they were with him. Scanning a line of faces floating in the darkness, he thought he saw—Jesus, was it Larry Thornton, his acting coach? He didn’t say he was coming opening night! He was so critical! With those damned *eyes* of his, he’d see right through Eddie’s performance!

Eddie went blank. He couldn’t remember the next line, or any line, or where in the play he was, except he remembered it was Act II. Seeing a moment later that it *wasn’t* Larry after all, didn’t help. Eddie stood there, terrified, as an abyss opened before him. He ransacked his brain, trying to come up with a line, any line—nothing. The abyss was becoming a gorge. He had to say something! He tried to remember what the character had been *doing*, so he could improvise, but he couldn’t remember *that*, either. He felt no impulse to go in any particular direction. He was lost! The audience was staring at him. The pressure was mounting; he could hardly breathe. This was the possibility he always dreaded: a complete lapse of memory!

The audience began to rustle. A few people looked around. Unable to face them any longer, he turned and walked to the bar at one side of what was supposed to represent the sumptuous living room of his mansion on his private island—the set, put together with no budget, required too much imagination. Besides the couch, there were two worn easy chairs with elegant-looking material tacked on, a glass coffee table, a rug and a standing lamp. It all came from the theater’s storehouse of old junk.

The actress followed him with her eyes. She knew something was up. He wasn’t supposed to move until later.

“I think this merits another drink,” he said, stalling for time. Her eyes flashed—he could tell she was angry. She’d shown her irritation in rehearsals several times when he’d had trouble with the lines. He poured himself more Scotch, and tried to look like he was ruminating, while he racked his brain. If only he could remember *where* in the play he was—he was talking to the girl, obviously—but about *what*? The words “a better place” popped into his mind—that was it! “I was going to make the world a better

The Lines  
By Stephen Michaels

place”—referring to his youthful idealism, of course! But what was the *next* line? He strained, but it wouldn't come.

“Ah, yes, I was going to make the world *better*,” he said, stalling. “A ridiculous idea, don't you agree?” He looked at the girl, and sipped his Scotch. If she threw in a line or two, it would give him time. It was a cheap shot, putting the ball in her court, but he was dying! She stared at him. She looked furious.

“I really don't have any opinion on the matter, *Arthur*,” she replied, icily. “Why don't you tell me what did you do after you graduated from Yale?” Eddie's cheeks burned. Hadn't she made it obvious to the audience that he had forgotten his lines? But, she had given him a clue. What *did* he do after graduating? He remembered the facts, but not the *lines*. He had no choice but to improvise, again.

“I went down to New Mexico, to work on an Indian reservation,” he spluttered. Eddie didn't like improvising.

“Ah, but what happened to make you do that?” This was an interview, not a conversation! She was feeding him, but in a way meant to humiliate him in front of the audience. But he had to continue.

“Well, I, uh, worked as a public defender, then married, and had a child—a son, and then—I met this American Indian, who became my best friend, and”—he stopped. He couldn't just recite the backstory. If only he could remember!

“Was it he, by any chance, who suggested you go down to New Mexico?” said the girl. He thought he heard someone in the audience snicker. But he had to go on.

“Yes, his people were being forced off their land by a coal company, and needed lawyers to represent them, so I...took my wife and child, and we went down there.”

His words sounded nothing like the character's—and the author was in the audience. What would he think of the hash Eddie was making of his dialogue? Eddie knew he had lost the character's voice. He sounded like a printer from Brooklyn, now, not a graduate of Yale Law. He'd been worried all along that he'd been miscast. Now it was obvious to everyone!

But the clock was ticking. The girl fed him his cues, and he struggled to piece the monologue together. He got it out, in the end—badly mangled.

“Later, they were both killed, in a car accident. It made me bitter. I gave up my dream of helping people, came back east, and—well, to make a long story short, I decided to make a lot of money. And I did.” It sounded dumb, but this way.

“I'm so sorry, Arthur,” she said. She looked disgusted—but he felt she was enjoying it, somehow. He limped to the end of the scene, remembering a line here and there, but mostly faking it, and dashed off stage, covered with sweat, his heart pounding, his face flushed.

The Lines  
By Stephen Michaels

He stood in the little darkened area offstage, which was also used as storage. A few old, painted canvas flats were leaning against one wall. There was sawdust on the wooden floor, which had been painted, and repainted, black. He was shaking, and gasping for breath. His back and armpits were soaked. He felt dizzy, and his head ached, as if he'd been hit. It felt like it might explode. He wondered if he was in shock. He wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of one hand.

He tried to absorb what had just happened. He had dropped a few lines now and then, but never in his whole career—he'd done close to forty shows at little theaters like this one, mostly in New York—he had gotten so lost. He'd ruined the opening night performance! He'd let down the cast, the writer, everyone! In his whole life, he'd never felt so ashamed.

He leaned his forehead against the wall—it felt cool against his burning brow. He should never have taken the part. It was his pride, really. He had wanted to prove to himself he could play a really big role—that he could remember a lot of lines—and look what happened! Besides, he was miscast. This guy was educated, wealthy, arrogant—and Eddie was from a poor Italian background, and never finished college. And he had been beaten down all his life, how could he look arrogant? But Jensen had insisted he could do it—Eddie had been good in every show he'd done. And it was true. Everyone always said how terrific he was after the show, didn't they? And so, he'd taken the plunge.

Everything went wrong. The rehearsal time was shortened, because of the rewrites, and the director, a woman—a girl, really—with hardly any experience, didn't show up for rehearsals, and didn't direct, when she did. And then Jensen wouldn't let them have space, because he was renting out the top floor of the theater and was short on rooms, and they were stuck in Ruth's apartment, which wasn't big enough for them to go through the blocking, even. They just sat around reciting lines. Eddie was in a panic. He needed more rehearsal to get the lines and the blocking to come together. He called Larry a few days before opening.

"For Christ's sake, Eddie, they're not paying you," Larry said. "What are you getting out of it, anyway? The director is fucking up. She should be at rehearsals, and she should make sure you have space, no matter what. They're a bunch of amateurs! Tell her you want another week of rehearsal, in a real space, period. If she doesn't like it, she can get someone else. You have all the power."

But Eddie didn't have the nerve to confront anyone. Instead, he took the burden on himself, and went on trying to achieve the impossible. And now, the worst had happened, and—but he couldn't afford to think about it, now. He had to go back on in a couple of minutes, for the Act II finale. He had more long speeches—would he fall apart again?

He had an impulse to run out the side door, through the drab, carpeted lobby, down the two curling flights of metal stairs, and out onto West Fifty-seventh Street. His car was parked a few blocks away, he could just—but no. The show must go on. He was an actor, and that was his code.

The Lines  
By Stephen Michaels

He tried to remember his entrance line—he couldn't at first, felt a stab of panic, then it came—"Still here? Isn't it past your bedtime?" He could hear the girl talking on stage to his son. He glanced out at them from the wings.

"I think he's cute," she was saying.

"He's seventy-three, Cheryl. 'Cute' hardly applies. Besides, he's a bastard," said the young man. Donald in life, he was dark-haired, and slender, with bushy eyebrows and big, vulnerable eyes. He sounded angry. Was it because Eddie had ruined the performance?

"Bastards can be cute," said the girl. Despite his shame, Eddie couldn't help thinking of the stage kiss he and Sandra would share. He never could help looking forward to it, though he always felt her holding back. How would she react tonight, after what he had done?—but that was later in the play, which he still had to get through. He was supposed to interrupt them talking about him, and pretend not to notice. He had his entrance line, thank God. The cue came. He took a breath, and stepped on stage.

\*\*\*

An hour later, Eddie took his curtain call in a daze, unable to meet the eyes of the audience. The rest of the show had gone well enough—he'd acted as well as he could—but the damage was done. He hurried offstage, and down the narrow, junk-filled corridor to the dressing room. He kept his head down, trying to make himself invisible.

He bumped into Marsha, the female stage manager, who gave him a look of compassion. She was a tall, frizzy-haired young woman with big glasses and a professional manner. He couldn't meet her eyes. She put her hand on his arm, as if about to say something, but he rushed away.

He stopped at the door to the dressing room, and peeked inside. He felt like a criminal. No one else was here, yet, thank God. The row of unpainted wooden chairs facing the mirror that ran the length of the wall, was empty. The line of bare bulbs above—some of them burned out—glared at him, hurting his eyes. The faded lime green walls, peeling in places, looked even more depressing. The room felt like an interrogation chamber. He scurried to his place and sat down.

He stared in the mirror. He looked older than he had before the show. His narrow face, with its flat nose, high cheekbones, thin lips and square chin, was paler than usual, and covered with beads of sweat. His flesh looked like wax—he was reminded of a corpse. He could see the pain in his blue-gray eyes. His curly, gray hair, combed back, looked greasy—thank God he still *had* his hair. The males in his family never lost it—their only positive quality. They were miserable alcoholics, mostly, like his father, who had beaten him at the slightest provocation. Eddie had been a drinker, too, but he had gone straight, after his first wife died.

He studied his reflection in the mirror. He could see the resemblance to his father. Except his father had balls. Eddie shivered. It was like facing the old man, again. He remembered him, drunk, coming up to

The Lines  
By Stephen Michaels

Eddie one evening in their little apartment sixty-five years ago, or more, and swatting him, hard, on the top of his head. It stung.

“You’re so stupid!” he was saying. His breath reeked of Scotch. “I told you to buy some milk on your way home! You can’t remember nothing! Stupid, stupid, stupid!” He swatted him with each epithet. It made Eddie dizzy.

Eddie shook his head, to get rid of the memory. But his headache was worse. The lines etched in his forehead, and the furrows running from his nostrils down to the sides of his mouth, seemed to have deepened. Black eyeliner was smeared across one cheek—he must have wiped his eyes with his hand. It looked like dried blood. He ripped a tissue out of a nearby box, and wiped.

He noticed his hands—they looked old, too. He held them up to the light. The skin was tight, and criss-crossed with tiny lines, the finger joints swollen, the nails flat and brittle. Every day he got older. His heart was weak. His lungs weren’t getting enough air. He got winded climbing stairs. He could die anytime, couldn’t he?

He heard a voice in the distance. He had to hurry—the others would be coming in. Should he remove his makeup, or just change and get the hell out? He was glad his wife Daisy hadn’t been there tonight. He never let her come to openings. He made her wait until the show was going well. This one never would. There were only four performances, and he’d fucked the first one up, totally.

He heard footsteps, and looked up. It was Sandra, entering briskly. She glanced at him, sharply, then away, tossing her hair to one side. She went to her chair and sat down. She held herself erect. He glanced over at her, apologetically, but she ignored him. He could feel an icy cold coming off her. It almost made him shiver. She began removing her makeup. She applied cold cream, and rubbed it in, and removed it with a tissue. He couldn’t help admiring her profile. He remembered the kiss near the end of Act II, and how her lips had felt—so soft, so moist, so warm—so *young*. His own lips, he knew, were dry and hard—another sign of age. And then, she could remember her lines, and he couldn’t. Memory problems were a sign of old age, too. Wasn’t he too old to be doing this anymore? Didn’t tonight prove it?

The silence was unbearable.

“The hell with makeup,” he thought. “I’ll just change my clothes and leave.” He got up, went to the costume rack at one side of the room, and untied his dressing gown. Donald, the young man who played his son, walked in. He looked at Eddie and tried to smile.

“Hey, man, you OK?”

“Fine,” said Eddie. Donald looked at him.

“Don’t worry about a few lines. The audience didn’t even know.” Sandra made a sarcastic face in the mirror.



The Lines  
By Stephen Michaels

"I'm not worried," said Eddie, turning away. He busied himself at the costume rack, untying his dressing gown. He'd let Donald down, too. The kid was doing such a good job—his scenes with Eddie were always full of emotion. He really gave a lot. Eddie had flubbed a couple of lines with him, too.

Donald went to his place, sat down, and cleared his throat. He began taking his makeup off. Eddie hung up his dressing gown, and started unbuttoning his shirt.

"Shitty show, wasn't it?" said Sandra to Donald. Eddie knew she was referring to him. He flushed again, and took his shirt off as fast as he could.

"I'm sure it'll get better," Donald said, glancing at her, awkwardly. He didn't sound sure.

"Do you, really?" said Sandra. "We only have *three* more performances." She was brushing her hair violently, pulling the loose hairs out of the brush and dropping them to the ground. "Thank God nobody who is *anybody* was here tonight. Just fucking relatives. But I've got agents coming tomorrow, and other people...I worked very hard on this!" Her cheeks were red. Eddie caught her eyes in the mirror—a frightful moment—but they both looked away.

"We all did, Sandra," said Donald, sighing.

"You wouldn't know it."

"It wasn't that bad. We needed more rehearsal."

"You have to make do with what you get! It's Off-off Broadway, for Christ's sake!" Eddie felt that she was talking to him, while ignoring him, totally. It was chilling. If she was so angry about it now, why hadn't she helped him at the time, instead of ridiculing him in front of the audience?

He put his own shirt on and buttoned it as fast as he could. He unzipped his pants, and pulled them off, catching them on one shoe, and almost falling over onto the cement floor. He had to slow down—he didn't want to make more of a fool of himself than he already had. And then, if he fell, he might break something. His bones weren't as supple as they had once been. He freed his pants, hung them on the rack, and stood there in his pinstripe boxer shorts. His legs were spindly. His knobby knees looked ridiculous. He shivered—he was especially vulnerable to cold, another sign of old age. He felt goose bumps forming.

Ruth, the older actress who played his wife, came in. She looked exhausted. He'd acted in other plays with her, at ATA. She looked at him, a little sadly, and placed her hand on his arm, but didn't say anything—that hurt. She was in her sixties, plump, gray-haired, with a round, fleshy face. Her hair was tied in a bun in back. She was wearing a peach-colored gown from the last scene, with strings of fake pearls—she was supposed to be a woman of wealth. She slumped in her chair.

"I'm done," she said. She began taking off her white, high-heeled shoes—she was always complaining how they hurt.

The Lines  
By Stephen Michaels

“Ow. These shoes get smaller, or my feet get bigger, every night.” She rubbed her feet. Eddie glanced at her twice, but she would not reciprocate. She was too busy with her feet. She was ignoring him, too—and they were supposed to be friends. She began taking clasps out of her hair and dropping them on the table—click, clack. Each sound added to the insult.

Eddie pulled his pants on, carefully. No one said anything more. An eerie silence descended upon the dressing room, punctuated only by tissues being ripped out of boxes, clasps dropping on the tabletop, throats being cleared, and the rustle of clothes being removed. They got up, walked to the costume rack and back, in silence. They were freezing him out. But he deserved it, didn’t he? He had ruined their work, too.

Marsha, the stage manager, appeared at the door. She looked at them, and cleared her throat.

“The call tomorrow is for 6:30. The director wants to run the lines before the show.” No one said anything. She looked worried, and went out.

The director, Carol, appeared. She was twenty-three, and just out of Hunter College. She was slender, with short brown hair, a sharp nose, and an efficient manner.

“Well, we got through it. OK, I know, it wasn’t perfect. We can do a lot better, and we will. Consider this our real dress rehearsal. Tomorrow, we launch. Carol told you about the 6:30 call, right? We need to run the lines. Too many gaffs.” Eddie felt like throwing his chair at her. “OK, get a good night’s sleep, everyone. You need to be sharp tomorrow evening. Some important people might be coming.” She whirled and rushed out, before anyone could respond.

“Useless bitch,” said Donald.

“Aren’t they all?” said Ruth. “Directors. Ugh.”

“It wasn’t *all* her fault,” said Sandra, cuttingly. Eddie knew that was directed at him. He buckled his belt, grabbed his coat, ran for the door, and didn’t stop until he was safely in his car, blocks away, with the doors locked.

**Stephen Michaels**, a graduate of Harvard College, is an acting teacher, director, writer and actor. He has taught at many New York acting schools and studios. Currently, he teaches at the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute, Tisch School of the Arts, and the New School. He has directed sixteen productions in New York City. Roles he has played include Jim Tyrone in “Moon for the Misbegotten” and Judge Brack in “Hedda Gabler.” Stephen has written plays, screenplays, short stories and a memoir. Two of his plays, “Rude Awakening” and “Release,” were produced in New York. This is his first published fiction. He is also a candidate at NPAP.

Flying Blind  
By Elizabeth Singer

---

FLYING BLIND

By Elizabeth Singer

Grammy's house sits between Unkie's and Mrs. Backus'. Unkie's house smells like old sweaters and there's nothing to eat there. Mrs. Backus always has date nut bread and cream cheese. Her husband keeled over before we got here. Mrs. Backus whispered the Act of Contrition in his ear.

I used to take the bus to school, but here I can walk in five minutes and come back to Grammy's for lunch. My job is to find Grampy and tell him it's time for lunch. Grampy doesn't go far because he has bad lungs from smoking. I can hear him breathe all over the house, even at night. When we first got here, his breathing seemed so loud. Now I only notice when I don't hear it.

"Grammy says come to lunch."

He doesn't say anything and he doesn't come either.

Back to the lunch table, I sit with my sister Maryrose, my mother, my little brother Tommy and Grammy. Nobody is allowed to start until Grampy gets here and nobody knows when he's coming. My sister Bette used to do this job, but since she had her tonsils out, she only eats buttered noodles and sleeps. If she ever gets better, she can have her job back.

And then his breathing comes closer. He sits down, and now we can eat.

School's okay. I sit in the back because I am tall, but to see the homework assignments, I have to walk up the aisle and put my nose on the blackboard. Mary Ann Cloonan said it looked like I was smelling the chalk. Sister Magdelene called Mom and told her, "Take John to the eye doctor."

After school, Mom makes me play cards with Bette. When I'm done with cards, Maryrose has to play checkers with her. Tommy is too little to play anything. Bette is only five. I am in the second grade and have my first Holy Communion in eight weeks. Grammy says the doctor didn't sew up Bette's neck right so she had to go under the knife again the next day. The TV is in her room, and Mom sleeps with her.

"Mom says to play cards with you."

"Okay."

"Okay, what? Rummy? Spit?" She doesn't know how to play Spit, and I know it.

"Who taught you Spit?"

"Marty."

"Will you teach me?"

Flying Blind  
By Elizabeth Slinger

“Not while you’re sick.”

Before she would have made me teach her. But she just gives up now. I don’t like her white moon face and the chips of skin hanging off her lips.

The phone rang just as I woke up the day after she was operated on. Grammy says she threw up blood. Bette told me it was black and red. Everybody but Grampy went to the hospital without eating breakfast. Uncle George came over and told me and Maryrose to go to school. As I ran down the front steps, I heard him shouting into the phone.

“What in hell are you doing to my niece?”

I shuffle and deal. We arrange our cards and put down our plays. The throw away pile gets so long it falls off the bed. I crawl around picking up all the cards and when I get up, Bette’s eyes are closed.

“Bette, are you asleep?”

“I don’t want to play anymore.”

“Okay.”

I spring off the bed and run lightly down the exact middle of the hall so no one can hear me running because running isn’t allowed. The stairs squeak out their song. I jam my hat on, flick my earflaps down, zip my coat, and wind my muffler twice around.

My Christmas Schwinn waits against the garage out back. The sun has already slid behind the mountain. I grab the handle bars, take three long strides and slam onto the seat. Cold air knives into my chest and my spit makes a frozen patch in my muffler as I pump the pedals and start going fast. Rounding the corner to go down the hill, I bang my knee on a fence post. Cinders swirl up from the ruts as I bump along faster and faster. A tree branch rakes my cheek. I hear a car somewhere near Carroll, so I speed up. The car’s horn billows then fades away. Down the alley into the dim blue air, I fly.

*Elizabeth Singer is a psychoanalyst in private practice in Greenwich Village and a writer. She serves on the Public Relations committee for the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis (NPAP) and the committee which runs the Theodor Reik Consultation Center, a low and moderate fee referral service in the tri-state area. “Flying Blind” is Liz’s first publication.*