

Countertransference and the Erotic

The Other Question

In focusing on the erotic in clinical work, we usually begin with the analysand, with the erotic transference. We ask what is constellated in the patient and projectively identified with the analyst who becomes the love object, the one who recognises my subjectivity which occasions a whole response pouring out of me.

In that spot, right there, of being seen and witnessed, the analysand is usually young, not yet developed or differentiated and the transference scoops up everything to make a bridge to the other, the analyst, a bridge that never was. Whether the pre-oedipal mother was never found, or the oedipal mother was never desired, or the father never reached, now right now, at whatever age the analysand may be, all this affect awakens, constellates, and fire ignites in the analysis.

This is a dangerous time in the work, for at stake is the analysand's chance to grow, widen and deepen his or her psyche and life in this world, and secure a sense of being itself, a soul dimension not before dared. Mistakes can result in maiming. The analysand is in a tender condition despite all the force of emotion. Such dependence on the analyst, such endowing of the analyst with ultimate significance, can endanger the analyst

as well—into inflation, as the one who knows, the one who brings the healing balm, as the one who does not know, who may panic and rise above the affective heat into talking the fire to death, taking up all the oxygen in words, or as the one who falls into the fire and gets burned.

Such important juncture points in an analysis have been written about by many clinicians, myself included (Ulanov 1996, chapters 6, 7, 8, 9). Today, I want to explore the other side that is little talked about: eros and our countertransference. What do we bring into the analytic field in relation to eros before anything awakes in the patient? A dramatic way to picture this question is to ask not of the child's oedipal complex, but of the parents' erotic feelings for the child. We all fall in love with our newborns, and that loving all-out with heart, soul and mind contains the sensual, the sexual, the spiritual. That is one reason children offer us potential for our own repair. All the unlived emotions flood in when holding this tiny baby, astonishing us that here is someone where before there was no-thing. We are given a chance to live at an emotional depth deeper than we have lived before.

I want to focus on how our relation to eros influences the clinical work we undertake. Where we are unlived erotically, where chinks exist in our erotic life, the young, undeveloped places in ourselves that might

spontaneously pour out to another who recognises and prizes us. For make no mistake, the psyche presses us to become all we can be, that ruthless instinct to individuation that cannot be lived except in relation to others (Jung 1946/1954, paras 471, 474). If we do not consent and undertake that journey voluntarily, it will be imposed upon us, urging us to live up to the moment of our death, in the spirit of Winnicott's prayer, "O God! May I be alive when I die" (Clare Winnicott 1978, 19), Winnicott of whom Marion Milner said, he was on "excellent terms with his primary process; it was an inner marriage to which there was very little impediment (Milner 1978, 42), thus evoking Jung's description of the complexity of the erotic field between analyst and analysand.

The field contains their actual relationship to each other; and each person's relation to depths of themselves, personified as a contrasexual part of themselves, the other within themselves who looks at life from a different departure point, thus introducing into consciousness a gender fluidity, a surprise that within oneself one moves over a whole range of masculine and feminine currents, with all their attendant couplings, at least imaginatively. The field also contains contrasexual parts of each person relating to the contrasexual aspects of the other, unconscious to unconscious; as well as the unconscious contrasexual part in each person relating to the conscious ego of

the other person (Jung 1946/1954, para 423). With such a field of potential erotic conversations, attractions, confrontations, explosions, we think, Yikes! How will we get out alive?! A veritable force field that convicts us how very serious this work of analysis is.

Eros

Definitions will lend some clarity, not as complete but as guidelines into this fascinating territory. Erotic comes from Eros that clinicians of different schools recognize as central to analysis. Freud links libido as “that energy of those instincts which have to do with all that may be comprised under the word ‘love.’” The nucleus of love, for Freud found in sexual love, must also be taken in the fuller sense of our drive to make unities--within ourselves, with others, in the world, and in relation to the cosmos: “In its origin, function, and relation to sexual love, the ‘Eros’ of the philosopher Plato coincides exactly with the love-force, the libido of psycho-analysis....”(Freud 1921/1973, 90-92, cited in Lear 1990, 140-141).

Loewald writes of loving the truth of psychic reality in loving the analysand “whose truth we want to discover.” (Loewald 1970/1980, 297; see Ulanov 1996/2004, 398). The existentialist analyst Medard Boss believed the analyst must be imbued with agape love to do the work (Boss 1963, 259-260). I think what Ogden refers to as the private conversations we have with

ourselves that are never exposed to others, that turn up as an analyst's reverie stirred by the patient's unconscious, that may eventually issue in an interpretation, those conversations are a form of love of oneself, an ongoing conversation with our own subjectivity (Ogden 1999, 43, 114, 159). Kohut believes empathy that sees the self and the world from the other's point of view, is itself the healing agent in treatment, thus recalling Freud's remark to Jung that "the cure is effected by love" (Kohut ; McGuire 1974, 13). Both intersubjectivist and relational analysts emphasize the centrality of the connection between analyst and analysand as the locus of therapeutic action, recalling Fairbairn's proposing that libido seeks relation to an other, not gratification. We are, *au fond*, relational, recalling Jung's dictum that treatment demands the whole person of the analyst as much as it does from the analysand (Jung *ibid.*, 367). Jung grounds the relation of the two in their relation to the third of eros, and the converse as well: our relation to eros as a psychic force gets embodied in relation to another. A wonderful example of this eros force, real in itself as psyche is real, is Kekule's vision of the dancing couple—surely an erotic image—as the key to the benzene ring, which is the vision of what eros seeks: the *coniunctio*, the conjoining of the opposites, of the king and the queen, the mystic marriage, the warring parts of us, and of our world, to create a living wholeness (*ibid.*, 353).

Eros is the function of psychic relatedness that can be primitive or differentiated. It urges us to connect, get involved with, poke into, be in the midst of, reach out to, get inside of, value. Eros moving in us does not make us abstract or theorize but get in touch with, invest energy, endow libido. But relatedness does not mean relationship; that requires conscious participation, development of feeling toward the other and toward what is elicited in us in response to the other. The pull of the erotic is more wanton, bawdy, lusty, ardent, passionate. It is personified by Cupid shooting his arrows here and there, arousing libido that lavishly invests itself in objects, in others, in causes, in pursuits.

The pull of this daimon ranges from Mozart's Don Giovanni who pokes into one woman after another, opening her and abandoning her, for she wants passion and permanence, and he wants the chase, the conquest, the taking and the leaving. Eros ranges from that extreme to the dart of the golden arrow in the breast of St Teresa of Avila which Bernini immortalised in luminous marble. This arrow was "the liquid flame of love" between Teresa and her God in mystic union issuing in a life of works of love. That this penetration by the Holy includes the sexual is left in no doubt in Bernini's sculpture, because under the luxurious folds of marble that depict Teresa's robe, falls out her bare left foot (as founding the Discalced Carmelites),

whose gesture of complete abandon, spentness, is matched only by her mouth, open and slack, as if from consummated passion (Teresa of Avila 1957, III, 282).

I stress again in defining eros that psychic relatedness, as libido with instinctive backing, is not equivalent to conscious relationship. It may begin erotic embodiment in connection with another person, with one's God, with what conveys to us the loving of life, the gladness in it and the transpersonal source and value of it. Eros is like a huge spark that ignites our passion, and then confronts us with, how will we live this fire in ordinary space and time? How will we nurture this flame into an abiding source of warmth? The early philosopher-theologian Origen described the Fall of humans as the "Chilling loss of the divine 'warmth' of love" (Drewery 1975, 33).

What then do we each know in our hearts of this spark, this urge, this flame? How did it come to us? Who or what was its object? For some of us it could be actual objects--of beauty, art objects. Or eros may manifest as a blind urge toward amassing something we have not yet differentiated ourselves from, so we feel compelled to collect items, whether as shoppers for clothes and jewels or first editions or businesses to buy.

The most common understanding of eros is sexuality. Eros in the body is sexuality. For Freud the sex-drive transforms into eros, the life and love

instinct striving for eternal forms of truth and goodness, a force for unity in ourselves, with another person, with life itself (See Lear 1990, 141-147) Yet such a spiritual development can also arouse again the sexual in the body, and then we feel the full force of eros moving us toward meaning as well as pleasure, toward a large receiving and giving, a sense of the splendid in the ordinary. Eros initiates us into the mysteries of desire to bond and believe in the other and ourselves as a unit, as a union that enhances both of us, and even gives something into the world, benefiting others, as if our loving adds more to the sum of light available to everyone. It is in such junctures, that can happen in analysis, that professionals fall into ethical violations, for where spirit is, there will be sexuality, and where sexuality is, there will be spirit, creating flammable situations.

My clinical involvement with patients for whom this has happened with their former therapists means a lot of hard work to find our way back to that juncture point when the work split, one fork going now toward what was called personal relationship, and the other fork which had carried the work, going into oblivion. If we can return to that pivotal point, often the prior good work with the former therapist can be secured and the analysand can find his or her way through the thickets of desire to differentiate its

sexual and symbolic levels. If we cannot reach that juncture point, the work is lost, and often parts of the patient too.

Two Kinds of Relationship

When the erotic is constellated two possibilities of relationship offer themselves to us: first to the actual other to whom we feel drawn, by whom we feel arrested, toward whom attraction and fascination generate. The object is there and must be reckoned with, and the object is real; we did not invent it. The other is there, over against us, toward us, wooing or startling us, galvanising our attention. We need, as clinicians, to review our lives and such remarkable others who interrupted our sense of self with a moreness we had not yet known and ask, how did we respond? Did we flee? pounce? swoon? Pretend it did not happen? Did we try to talk it away with big theories? Did we demonise the other, especially if relationship did not work out? Did we perjure our experience by reducing it all to our early object relations, or mere sex, or only projection, or to conclusions about what men and women should be? Or did we fall into inertia, away from the jazz beat of life fully alive? Or did we secure a solid relationship with an other, full of currents alive to this day? As clinicians we need to know where we stand with eros experience, where the chinks, where we are unlived, still to be lived, still willing to be surprised and live more. We bring our erotic selves

into the work with our analysands, what we love, the unities we believe in, and those we still hope to grow.

Consciousness is our protection against falling into the soup with our patients. Consciousness can make a container where we neither have to act out nor theorise away the bindings with our analysands. I remember being surprised by being pierced by a man saying with intensity he wanted to take me off to a Caribbean island. I was surprised because I knew myself to be deeply in love with and contained in relationship with my husband, and hence, I thought, immune to random attractions. My patient enlarged me, and set me on a journey to discover how one could be deeply in love and thus pierced. I dreamt of very carefully driving around and around my big crescent shaped driveway, up onto the road and back around the driveway's semicircle again and again with a big tiger in the car. Tiger energy! How to live with this?

The second kind of relationship offered to us in the sparking of eros is to psychic content evoked in us in response to the actual other, or which arises within us and provokes interest in an actual other. This psychic content exists objectively in us; we do not invent it; we are not in charge of it; it arrives. It comes up in us, as a man once explained his sexual interest happening upon him; noticing it, he then directed its energy to a specific

person. As clinicians we need to be familiar with these happenings, for we bring this potential into our work as analysts. We bring it into the field. We need to ask, what is the psychic content stirred in me by erotic attraction, to be familiar with it, so it doesn't sabotage our work with our analysands.

What has been my experience with this electricity, this setting something in motion? What is my desiring like and what is it for? What dream images and imaginative symbols convey to us the meaning and the instinct in our erotic attractions and their spiritual pull? I felt the gender fluidity in myself already there as I listened to a woman speak of her new (and first) sexual meetings with another woman whom she loved, at the same time she also knew love for a man. She rejected definitions and categories for herself, was she this or was she that, or had she been this all along and only now discovered it. Those were not my questions but rather the currents that stirred her so profoundly, the sense of expansion approached heretofore only by heights reached in her work as an artist. The erotic link between the two women transgressed their previous boundaries but seemed no less real, and to be taken up to look into the regressive and progressive aspects of their relationship and ours. What was it scooping up that had not been included in her living, and what was it expanding her toward, toward what unseen purpose?

Eros and Kinship

Eros brings with it a sense of purposiveness, a sense of going somewhere that feels important, that matters, that enlists body, soul and spirit. It is that purposiveness that makes people break vows, betray, make messes, as well as sell all they have in order to pursue it. I think of young Matisse in hospital after his psychological collapse, where his roommate suggests he take up painting to help his convalescence. Matisse's mother bought him a paint-box, and he said of it: "From the moment I held the box of colours in my hand, I knew this was my life. Like an animal that plunges headlong towards what it loves, I dived in...It was a tremendous attraction, a sort of Paradise Found in which I was completely free, alone, at peace...." (Spurling 1998, 46).

What that purposiveness aims at in our own erotic life is not clear until we give it fullest attention, working on the outer relationship and on the inner psychic content. We must flesh out the personal embodiment of such purposiveness, to bring over into living a purpose that becomes our own, what we love and serve. An example for all of us here, I would suggest, is our work on our own particular wounds in order to serve our profession, to be qualified. I believe that is a right we must earn again and again if the work is to stay alive and meaningful. The psyche presses for integration and

for us to be and become all we can be, and that is what underlies our work with each patient, that they, too, be and become all they can be. Where eros leads shows infinite variety, as idiosyncratic as we each are from the other. But hidden in our personal stories is the larger aim of eros to serve life, to make unities, and that brings up to the surface another hidden purpose in all of us finding our own purpose.

In a deep analysis (and usually an erotic transference/countertransference field indicates depth), both the analysand and analyst are altered. The unconscious material between them is alive and presses for differentiation. The focus on the analysand coming to clarity about the hard facts of the self they are which, as Jung says, “together make up the cross we all have to carry or the fate we ourselves are” also means entering into the joy of being one’s own particular person. The analyst too undergoes such a process, for “relationship to the self is at once relationship to our fellow man...”(Jung 1946/1954, 400, 445). The bond established for the analytical couple is important not just for those two individuals, but contributes something to all the rest of us, to society. It lays down another strand of uniting, sharing in common our differences, differing in our distinctness as we share this life in common.

We work as clinicians for this particular patient and at the same time we are working for our own soul, promoting the coming to be of life as a person, as persons, not discardable objects, not dismissible collateral damage, not remaining sunk in inertia, not forgotten on the margins whether those margins are the rich or the poor. As Jung says, the analyst is “laying an infinitesimal grain in the scales of humanity’s soul. Small and invisible as this contribution may be, it is yet an *opus magnus*, for it is accomplished in a sphere but lately visited by the numen, where the whole weight of mankind’s problems has settled. The ultimate questions of psychotherapy are not a private matter—they represent a supreme responsibility” (ibid., 449).

In the work of analysis, in the face of eros, we discover again and again that in making connection between conscious and unconscious, securing an open path for eros binding our two great mental systems, we also link to our neighbor and to his or her connection within himself: we accept our kinship. Yet eros presses further still, for the soul that finds its other side always in a “you”, as Jung says, finds also that our combination of I and You are parts of “a transcendent unity whose nature can only be grasped symbolically.....” (ibid., 454).

References

- Boss, M. 1963. *Psychoanalysis and Daseinanalysis*. Trans. L. B. LeFebre. New York: Basic Books.
- Drewery, B. *Deification. Christian Spirituality. Essays in Honour of George Rupp*. Ed. P. Brooks. London: SCM Press.
- Freud, S. 1921/1973. Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego. Trans. James Strachey. *Standard Edition XVIII*. London: Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis.
- Jung, C. G. 1946/1954. Psychology of the Transference. *Collected Works 16 The Practice of Psychotherapy*. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. New York: Pantheon.
- Kohut, H. *How Does Analysis Cure?*
- Lear, J. 1990. *Love and Its Place in Nature*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Loewald, H. W. 1970/1980. Psychoanalytic Theory and Psychoanalytic Process. *Papers on Psychoanalysis*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- McGuire, W. 1974. Ed. *The Freud/Jung Letters*. Trans R. Manheim and R. F. C. Hull. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Milner, M. 1978. D.W. Winnicott and the Two-Way Journey. *Between Fantasy and Reality*. Eds. S. A. Grolnick and L. Barkin. New York: Jason Aronson. chapter 3.
- Ogden, T. H. 1999. *Interpretation and Reverie*. London: Karnac.

Spurling, H. 1998. *The Unknown Matisse*. Vol. 1 of 2. New York: Knopf.

Sutherland, J. D. 1989. *Fairbairn's Journey Into the Interior*. London: Free Association Books.

Teresa of Avila. 1957. *Complete Works*. 3 vols. Trans. E. Allison Peers. New York: Sheed and Ward.

Ulanov, A. B. 1996. Follow-Up Treatment in Cases of Patient/Therapist Sex. *The Functioning Transcendent*. Wilmette, Ill: Chiron, chapter 6.

_____. 1996. Disguises of the Anima. *The Functioning Transcendent*. Wilmette, Ill: Chiron, chapter 7.

_____. 1996. Transference/Countertransference; A Jungian Perspective. Wilmette, Ill: Chiron, chapter 7.

_____. 1996. Self-Service. *The Functioning Transcendent*. Wilmette, Ill: Chiron, chapter 8.

_____. 1996. Disguises of the Anima. *The Functioning Transcendent*. Wilmette, Ill.: Chiron, chapter 9.

Ulanov A. and Ulanov B. 1987. *The Witch and the Clown, Two Archetypes of Human Sexuality*. Wilmette, Ill.: Chiron.

_____ and _____. 1994. *Transforming Sexuality: The Archetypal World of Anima and Animus*. Boston: Shambhala.

Winnicott, C. 1978. D.W.W.: A Reflection. *Between Fantasy and Reality*.

Eds. S.A. Grolnick and L. Barkin. New York: Jason Aronson, chapter 2.