

Thinking in Cases

John Forrester

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THE PSYCHOANALYTIC CASE:
VOYEURISM, ETHICS AND
EPISTEMOLOGY IN ROBERT
STOLLER'S *SEXUAL EXCITEMENT*

Psychoanalysis is an impossible profession. Freud had begun to think so as early as 1900 and amplified his hunch in 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable', where he notably wrote that psychoanalysis shared with education and government the quality that 'one can be sure beforehand of achieving unsatisfying results' (Freud, 1937: 248). The Lacanian gloss on this would add that it is impossible successfully to transmit psychoanalytic knowledge.

The case history as a genre, so anathematized by Lacan, is both the pedagogic and institutional attempt to overcome this impossibility. While not unique to psychoanalysis, the case history has a distinctive function within the profession. It is the privileged means for attempting to convey the unique psychoanalytic experience of *both* patient and analyst.

Freud's case histories were and remain exemplary in this respect. Analysis of them reveals that the process of their writing obeys the same laws of transference and countertransference as the analytic situation itself. One can show with Dora, or the Wolf Man, or with the rhetorical strategies of the auto-analytic *The Interpretation of Dreams*, how the reader is implicated in Freud's countertransference – his rhetorical mastery or lack of it. Thus the transmission of psychoanalysis via Freud's clinical writing implies the repetition – or at very least the remobilization – of the original relations of transference and countertransference evident in the relation between patient and analyst.

Psychoanalytic writing is not just writing *about* psychoanalysis; it is writing subject to the same laws and processes as the psychoanalytic situation itself. In this way psychoanalysis can never free itself of the forces it attempts to describe. As a result, from one point of view,

all psychoanalytic writing is exemplary of a failure. Psychoanalytic writing fails to transmit psychoanalytic knowledge because it is always simultaneously a symptom. Psychoanalytic cases, in particular, betray the founding condition of the psychoanalytic relationship, namely its confidentiality, and are perverse through involving a 'third party' as alibi and (un)willing partner or spectator. What kind of human practice is it for which it is impossible to bear witness, and impossible to transmit without betrayal?

On the other hand, the fact that psychoanalysis enacts the very forces it attempts to 'capture' could be taken as a demonstration of the very facts it is 'communicating'. We have here a knife that cuts both ways. Either psychoanalysis is irremediably contaminated by its subject matter, with no hope of objectivity. Or psychoanalysis is incessantly revealing the phenomena its literary and conversational technology endeavours to produce, despite the fact that in this very act it willy-nilly demonstrates a lack of mastery of its own field. Ordinary readers of texts and ordinary folk engaged in social intercourse may on occasion bemoan the fact that there is no interpretation-free zone of human relations; similarly, psychoanalysts and their critics may bemoan the fact that there is no transference-free zone of description of those relations. Given this aporia, what is the best strategy of the psychoanalyst? Should she or he fight the good fight for objectivity, thus depriving psychoanalysis of its own logic, pretending that it is something other than it is? Or should she brave the sceptic and undress – as far as she dare – in public, because any other way would be to pretend that she is not naked underneath the respectable clothes of professional everyday life and would deny that nakedness is the point of wearing clothes in the first place?

*

My principal concern here is with a case history by the great and perhaps too little known Robert Stoller (1924–91), a psychoanalyst who lived on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles and practised there from the 1960s to his untimely death, as well as teaching at UCLA. The author of several books, written from the mid-1960s on, his principal concerns were the psychoanalysis of gender and sexuality – he was one of the first to introduce the concept of 'gender' into modern English.¹ Stoller's work never led him towards essentialism in the domain of gender and sexuality, whatever its influence on others may have been. In his work on gender he was interested in the full array of variations on themes of gender and sexuality: on surgical transsexualism; on every variety of gender-crossing and perversion.

in particular on fetishism and on sexual activities that defy categories, such as erotic vomiting; and thence to the generalized conditions of erotic excitement. His work in the late 1970s focused on the relations between hostility and sadomasochism.

Somewhat in the fashion that Winnicott always maintained an intimate connection with paediatrics, Stoller kept his non-psychoanalytic psychiatric hand in – he was also Professor of Psychiatry at UCLA – inventing different models of conversation, discussion and investigation in pursuit of his relentless curiosity to find out more about gender and erotic excitement. His work is full of hints of the unconventional channels by which he acquired his interests and his knowledge, allowing him to write sentences such as the following: ‘In the early 1960s, a fetishistic cross-dressing informant (a transvestite) left with me several pieces of his pornography. At first uninterested, I filed them away, but I returned to them a few years later, when I had come to understand better some of the dynamics of gender identity’ (Stoller and Levine, 1993: 4). This pattern – of experience that was at first uncomprehended and then returned to later when he began to realize what it might mean – is a ruling trope of Stoller’s work: the case history I will discuss is certainly governed by it. Let me point out, in passing, that it is a ruling trope of Freud’s work as well: the crucial insights of psychoanalysis were all given to him in the ordinary run of things, in life and in clinical practice, but could not be made use of until something else had happened to open his eyes. It is a complex dialectic of innocence and experience at work here. But it is also one corner of what I hope to show eventually is a complex network of concepts linking secrecy, privacy, confidentiality, revealing, exhibitionism, writing and the communication of scientific knowledge. Here, I am mainly concerned with secrecy, exhibitionism, writing and knowledge. I will fill in the links to confidentiality, the cultural conditions of possibility of psychoanalysis and privacy subsequently.

In the 1980s, Stoller worked with, and again I quote, ‘a group of sadomasochists who met to teach me about S-M’ (Stoller and Levine, 1993: 3). He went on to conduct what he called ‘an urban ethnography of pornography’ (Stoller and Levine, 1993: 5); his writings on pornography were the last to be published. His final book, *Coming Attractions: The Making of an X-Rated Video*, was co-written with Ira Levine, who had been a member of the S-M group he met with and had worked in the pornographic industry. Ira Levine had not been, Stoller was careful to point out, his patient, even though Stoller gave some details about his co-author’s psychopathology. In the ‘Introduction’ to *Coming Attractions*, Levine reports that in 1991,

just as the book was being completed, Stoller was killed in a car accident on Sunset Boulevard.

The Case History

The case history I will be discussing was published in 1979, and makes up a large part of the book which bears the title *Sexual Excitement: Dynamics of Erotic Life*. Like most of Stoller's other works, it is, as he makes us well aware, both slightly scandalous and deeply committed to being serious. Throughout his career, working in a prestigious Californian university in that period when psychoanalysis, probably sooner than anywhere else in America, began its nose-dive in popularity amongst university scientists and within the psychiatric profession, Stoller was self-conscious about what kind of discipline psychoanalysis was and what sort of knowledge one could expect from it. His overall attitude in the 1980s was summarized as follows: 'At our best, we analysts are naturalistic observers of behavior with techniques – unstable but powerful – that no one else has. That's a good start' (Stoller, 1985: 2). In his view, one couldn't expect psychoanalysis to be a science because there was no possibility of confirmation. In *Sexual Excitement*, he wrote: 'Most analysts believe analysis is a science. I do not, so long as one essential is missing that is found in the disciplines accepted by others as sciences: to the extent that our data are accessible to no one else, our conclusions are not subject to confirmation' (Stoller, 1986: xvi). This preoccupation with the standing of psychoanalytic observations led Stoller to emphasize that psychoanalytic texts require underwriting by the epistemological and ethical standing of the analyst:

there is no way to calibrate the primary research instrument of psychoanalysis, the analyst, so the audience has no reliable way to judge the accuracy of our work. I worry that we cannot be taken seriously if we do not reveal ourselves more clearly. To do so, however, may lead to messy reporting (and confuse the readers, whose own fantasies may make them feel they are peeking in on forbidden scenes). No one but the analyst can know how much the uncertain process of fixing and editing the data renders this reporting enterprise a fiction. In regard to research, says David Shakow, 'Love, cherish and respect the therapist – but for heaven's sake don't trust him' (Wolfson and Sampson, 1976: 559). Artists lie to tell the truth, and scientists tell the truth to lie. (Stoller, 1986: xv–xvi)

As Stoller recommends, I wish to take up a position of benign scepticism as to the story he tells in his case history. In particular, I wish to explore the complex position of the analyst as reporter, observer, participant-observer, narrator and as subject of the written. Necessarily there are moral and epistemological implications of the task the analyst-writer sets him or herself in the production of a true narrative or believable story. And, as I've already indicated, these implications converge interestingly with a development from within psychoanalysis, that associated with countertransference.

Sexual Excitement is some 240 pages long, excluding the notes and apparatus. It is arranged as a triptych of parts ('Hypotheses', 'Data', 'Theories'), followed by 'Conclusions', themselves followed by Appendices. The first part, of some 50 pages, consists of two hypothetico-theoretical arguments, one entitled 'Sexual excitement', the second 'Primary femininity', by way of a summary and of a preface – it is sometimes difficult to determine which. The second part, 'Data', is the case history of Belle – it occupies around half of the book; however, in the final two Parts (3 and 4) it is continually referred to, with new case material being added, particularly in chapter 12, which is the first chapter of the 'Conclusions'. Once Belle has entered into the book, at the very beginning of Part 2, on p. 59, Stoller finds it difficult to take his leave of her – there are more concluding sections and valedictory notes in this narrative than any other I can think of. It recalls the complex structure of Freud's Dora case history – which also has introductions that are extensive, footnotes that add important material seemingly as an afterthought and a postscript that rewrites what went before. Thus both Freud's and Stoller's case histories bear witness to the work required of the author-analysts to extract themselves from their relationships, from their preoccupations with their patients. There is one crucial passage in Stoller's book, the last two pages of chapter 12, which I will discuss at length, and which is not given a separate by-line in the Table of Contents; this passage is called 'An Addendum to the Treatment'. It probably was not intentional on his part, but the equivalent word to 'Addendum' in German is '*Nachtrag*' – a term that, through its adjectival form of '*nachträglich*', has become of supreme importance in understanding how psychoanalytic understanding (including writing) works. As you will see, Stoller's '*Nachtrag*' includes an epistemological bomb that is truly *nachträglich* in its effects.

While I will not explore the theoretical arguments surrounding the central case history, it is important to note that Stoller's explicit purpose in the book is to propose a new theory about the nature of sexual excitement, which he states as follows:

it is hostility – the desire, overt or hidden, to harm another person – that generates and enhances sexual excitement. The absence of hostility leads to sexual indifference and boredom. The hostility of erotism is an attempt, repeated over and over, to undo childhood traumas and frustrations that threatened the development of one's masculinity or femininity. The same dynamics, though in different mixes and degrees, are found in almost everyone, those labeled perverse and those not so labeled. (Stoller, 1986: 6)

Having given you the theory which the case history is meant to illustrate, I will now – finally – come to the case history. I should apologize beforehand for the length of some of the quotes – but Stoller's writing is so striking that part of the effects I will be discussing need to be placed entire and intact before you.

Stoller introduces his patient as follows:

Let us call her Belle, for that suggests how she felt she was when analysis began: old-fashioned femininity; a touch of exhibitionism; gentle masochism; a slightly addled yet refreshing innocence; soft, round, dreamy erotism; an unbounded focus on males, romance, silken garments, flowers and bees, bosoms, bare behinds, and babies.

At the start of her analysis she was twenty-four, a quiet, intelligent, attractive, well-groomed, feminine woman, white, American, Southern, middle-class, college-educated, single, Baptist (fundamentalist sect, her mother heavy on the dramas of sin, her father bored with church). (p. 59)

We are somewhere between Hollywood, *Playboy* and Smalltown, Alabama. We are also, you will have noticed, immediately engaged by a question about the author: is this how he, the analyst and clinical author, viewed his patient at the beginning of the analysis? Or is this vivid and curiosity-provoking description a result of him being able to write his patient's view of herself on her behalf? Eight words into the first sentence we stumble on the phrase 'How she felt when analysis began', which immediately lets us loose on the problem of psycho-analytic knowledge: whose knowledge is this? Saying the words 'how she felt' has the effect of raising the question 'how did he feel?' How he actually felt is of course of great interest, both theoretically and practically.

Having introduced his patient, with short cameos for the various members of her family, her dream life, her style in analysis to begin with, and the central theme of her analysis – the fear and reality of being abandoned in her childhood – Stoller moves in the next chapter to the principal object of the case history: Belle's prototypic daydream, which he says, it is 'my task in this book . . . to take . . . and, as Belle and I did in her analysis, separate out its components'.

A cruel man, the Director, a Nazi type, is directing the activity. It consists of Belle being raped by a stallion, which has been aroused to a frenzy by a mare held off at a distance beyond where Belle is placed. In a circle around the periphery stand vaguely perceived men, expressionless, masturbating while ignoring each other, the Director, and Belle. She is there for the delectation of these men, including the Director, who, although he has an erection, makes no contact with her: her function is to be forced to unbearable sexual excitement and pleasure, thereby making a fool of herself before these men. She has been enslaved in this obscene exhibition of humiliation because it creates erections in these otherwise feelingless men; they stand there in phallic, brutal indifference. All that, however, is foreplay, setting the scene. What sends her excitement up and almost immediately to orgasm as she masturbates is not this scene alone, for obviously, if it were really happening, she would experience horror, not pleasure. Rather, what excites her is the addition of some detail that exacerbates her humiliation, e.g., the horse is replaced by a disreputable, ugly old man; or her excitement makes her so wild that she is making a dreadful scene; or her palpitating genitals are spotlighted to show that she has lost control of her physiology. And, behind the scenes, a part of herself permits the excitement because it (she) knows that she, who is masturbating in the real world, is not literally the same as 'she' who is the suffering woman in the story. In the story, she is humiliated; in reality, she is safe. (p. 68)

Each of the chapters that follows – 'The Underground Fantasy', 'Anality', 'Somasochism', 'Exhibitionism', 'Lovely' – is linked into the analysis of this daydream, an analysis that stretched over several years. Each theme is latent in the daydream and is therefore justified in the light it then throws on the daydream. And each theme is worked in the same way: there is initial obscurity, a small detail emerging after years of unprofitable analytic work. This obscurity places the analyst in a characteristically frustrated and confused position. As more material emerges, he interprets, and for months may find himself giving the same interpretations with slight variations, until one day something entirely new emerges. All at once, Belle has shifted, and with her shift, the analyst now understands what he has been doing for all those months and what he is now doing without

having intended to. The themes are woven into Belle's history and woven back into her analysis. These familiar techniques eventually allow Stoller to come good on his claims: he can point to each element of the erotic daydream and show its functioning, its history and of course its slow, dreamlike manifestation in the transference and countertransference of his communications with Belle. Thus in unravelling the meaning of the daydream, he also tells us the story of Belle's inner life from infancy to adulthood, the story of her analysis, and reveals the structure of the traumatic incidents that constitute the starting point for the daydream's power and its defensive functions.

The model for Stoller's case history and for many other pieces of analytic writing is Freud's clinical writing – in this instance, most clearly the Wolf Man, whose case history revolves around the analysis of a dream and its resolution by the narrative of the primal scene. This unexpected narrative device has become the prototype of analytic understanding: the single dream text, fantasy or sexual act, whose full analysis, which may take years, is revealed to be the perfect miniature in which all a person's life and modes of relationship are depicted in coded and distorted form. The trauma was the original scene of psychoanalysis and then the dream became its exemplary scene; but the most surprising and yet now commonplace locus for this single set-piece is the sexual or masturbatory fantasy. And Stoller's writing of Belle's daydream, to my mind, performs this task in an elegant and classical fashion. He self-consciously refers himself to Freud (and Klein), while subtly developing their theories:

I want to underline what analysts since Freud and Melanie Klein have endlessly shown: that our mental life is experienced in the form of fantasies. These fantasies are present as scripts – stories – whose content and function can be determined. And I want to emphasize that what we call thinking or experiencing or knowing, whether it be conscious, preconscious, or unconscious, is a tightly compacted but nonetheless separable – analyzable – weave of fantasies. What we consciously think or feel is actually the algebraic summing of many simultaneous fantasies. (p. xiv)

Thus Stoller is a supremely classical analyst in his approach to the material: in the analysis, he sets out a complete continuum between unconscious fantasy, daydream, conscious scripts and books, films, stories from Belle's daily life and so forth. He is also classical in a further respect: taking the erotic daydream, he shows how it can be broken down to reveal every major theme of Belle's childhood – the pattern of abandonment by her parents between three and six years old; the influence of her mother's silly femininity; the crucial part

played in the development of the relation of her body to the world by the woman who looked after her in her mother's long absences, the Caretaker, who was preoccupied with cleanliness to the point of frequently inflicting on the little girl those anal rapes known as enemas. He is, also, classical in making evident, in the gaps and slippages in his writing, the strange epistemic status of all the work done on the erotic daydream, including even its status as stable object. This is where I will start my analysis.

Opening the first working chapter of his book with this striking quotation of Belle's daydream is bound to make the reader assume that this was a conscious daydream that was available to Belle and the analyst in some stable, mutually acknowledgeable form. However, Stoller's account of its analysis slowly makes clear that this was far from being the case. The analyst only belatedly learnt of its existence: 'A year or so into her analysis, Belle first mentioned the daydream' (p. 68). Prior to that date, he suspected nothing – indeed, the analysis had hardly got going despite Belle supplying dreams, associations and so forth. The daydream emerged in small moments, bit by bit, as the result of other work. In one session, when Stoller noted that it was odd he had never seen her angry, she responded by remembering how upset with him she had been after the previous session, and added:

'You hate everything about me.' She thinks of a battleship, of a childhood fantasy of being peacefully underground in a silent and happy community . . . and then: 'Did I ever tell you the first sex fantasy I ever had? There are men and women performing on a stage. They are defecating and urinating.' The hour ended shortly thereafter. (Only months later did I learn that this was not the first erotic daydream.) (p. 69)

In the next hour, with Stoller encouraging her by saying 'there was value in detailed description' (p. 69), he writes:

With more embarrassment and struggle than I had seen before, she said there was a daydream: 'It's about a horse having intercourse with me.' Silence. I then nudged her, asking her not only to announce what the fantasy was about but to reveal its details. (The resistance of secrecy often takes the form of people telling what they are thinking *about* but not *what* they are thinking.)

She continued, saying that in the story she is watching herself having intercourse with a horse. Then, 'No, that's not quite accurate. It really isn't myself that's watching. It's some man, and he is watching me doing this with a horse. And the reason that I am doing it is because if I do this with the horse, it will excite the man who is watching. So I do it for his sake, and in that way I can prove to him how great he is and that I am

willing to make a fool of myself, humiliate myself, in order to gratify this man.' (p. 69)

From one point of view, it is obvious that the analyst will see such material emerge slowly over time; in its essence, psychoanalysis is a process in time – often a great deal of time. But here we catch the emergence of the daydream when it is already part of a complex relationship between analyst and patient: the daydream is *for the analyst* – the process of its discovery is visibly part of the transference of the patient on to the analyst. We are tempted to see 'the man' for whom she is making a 'fool' of herself as the analyst – and the scene of her humiliation as a rendition of the analytic scene itself.

We are not, and I wish to insist now, we are never seeing things happen in this text, in this analysis, which Stoller (and Belle) did *not* see. It is never a matter of being smarter or more perceptive than them; never, even, a matter of us having insight where they necessarily are blind. This is Stoller's text, he was the analyst, and he is making available to us the analytic process which produced the daydream. However, that does not mean that Stoller knows what he is doing when he is writing – to be writing, or to be an analytic patient, which all analysts have been, is to be in a position where one cannot see things that other positions or roles make possible. We, as readers, necessarily see something different from patients, analysts, and authors. So what I am engaged in is a reconstruction and commentary on the analytic process, and on the different positions that offer different vantage points from which sexual excitement, and specifically Belle's sexual excitement, can be viewed. More exactly, this is a deconstruction – in what I take to be the original sense of that word – whereby a text is made to reveal its own internal stresses and strains, the forces within it working at odds with each other.

Over the next weeks and months, more details of the man in Belle's daydream emerged; then details of how she is tied down – a detail connected to her experience of not being able to move in intercourse because it would make her partner ejaculate ('she converted her angry suffering into growing excitement' [p. 70]), and Stoller offers us an historical view of the gradual development of erotic daydreams, 'often only a sentence at a time. I did not get the feeling that the horse story was a central one, nor, for years, was I interested in knowing its complete form' (p. 71). Having shown how the parts of the daydream moved only slowly to centre stage of the analysis, Stoller ratifies its centrality by detailing the development of Belle's erotic daydreams from childhood on: at age seven to nine, she imagines women whip-

ping women, with her watching; at ages ten to twelve, there are men on a stage urinating on women to make babies, with a powerful Queen silently watching – this was a period when her mother was famously involved with glamorous men. Belle first appears in the scene as a girl watching the Queen – it was the watching which was the exciting part. By age thirteen, it is Belle herself who is the victim – those humiliating her are Amazons and their Queen; and a few weeks later, men are introduced, solely for their penises. Finally the Director replaced the Queen. With this account of the antecedents, and their place in her overall development, Stoller confirms the centrality of the erotic daydream as a summary of Belle's erotic life and as the upshot, a kind of *curriculum vita*, of her past erotic experience.

Having reassured his reader that all past daydreams have led to this one, Stoller also reassures a smaller class of readers, the psychoanalysts, that the daydream is sufficiently rich to count as an epitome of Belle's inner life. He lists all the themes that found expression in it: her heterosexuality; her homosexuality, via the voluptuous women conspicuous in its earlier drafts; her anality, as found in the theme of the 'peaceful interior'; the central theme of her abandonment; both her masochism and her sadism; her femininity and sense of femaleness – the gender-theoretical issues with which he was strongly associated; Oedipal rivalry and primal scene, particularly with the stallion and mare. He also notes that,

In early childhood, daydreams filled in for her parents' abandonments. (Before age six, when she thinks her daydreaming began, her favorite fairy tale was about a beautiful Snow Queen who lived far in the north and had a gnome working for her – not an ideal oedipal configuration.) (p. 67)

Finally there is the question of her guilt and redemption – Stoller notes that her 'heroic suffering redeems' her 'being oversexed' (p. 72). He also includes amongst these principal psychodynamic themes that of her audiences: 'one – portrayed – that, in watching her, is the agent of her humiliation, and the other – implied – that stands witness to her martyrdom' (p. 72). We will return to this particular theme.

Thus the daydream plausibly functions historically, structurally and in the analytic process as a true summary of Belle's inner life. As I've indicated, Stoller makes it quite clear that the full text of the daydream only emerged over a period of years in the course of a long analysis; and he also indicates that the progress of the analysis, its success, can be calibrated accurately against the change in the daydream and its function in Belle's erotic life – the details of this process I will have to pass over. Hence we see the daydream emerge through

the work of analysis and be slowly dissolved and transmuted by that work. It is therefore clear that this daydream could also be called a transference daydream, on analogy with Freud's concept of the transference neurosis: the structure of the relationship of the patient to the analyst that is created by the work of analysis, into which all the symptomatic energies of the patient are channelled, only to be dissolved in the work of successful analysis. In this sense, as you've already probably guessed, I want to argue that the daydream is an *artefact* of analysis, in the same sense that the transference or transference neurosis is. Stoller is careful to give us the clues indicating this is the case. He also has other reasons for letting this be seen.

The first of these reasons is that there is another parallel, unsentimental education being recounted in this book – that of Stoller himself. Alongside the slow construction, reconstruction and deconstruction of Belle's daydream, there is the story of the development of Stoller's own theory of sexual excitement. In the 'Introduction' to the book – which is paginated in roman numerals, to accentuate its set-off-ness from the main narrative – Stoller writes:

Some of my thoughts on the dynamics of excitement started years ago (before I shifted from an ordinary analytic practice to one primarily involved with gender disorders), especially with the analysis of the woman – Belle – on whom this book is focused. In the years since her analysis ended, my ideas have become clearer. They are tentative and need testing, especially by other analyses, but they are, I hope, a useful start. (p. xiii)

In the course of the book, we get more direct clues as to the development of Stoller's ideas in tandem with the analysis. But there is something else happening to Stoller which we must mention as well. He is, as is inevitable, being incorporated into the daydream, principally as the Director. Of course he is acutely aware of it – indeed, I could have told the story of the uncovering of Belle's daydream as completely consequent upon his adoption of the position of or realization that he was the Director in the daydream. Stoller writes a chapter entitled 'Who is Belle?'; I want to concentrate our attention on the question: 'Who is Stoller?' There are (at least) three Stollers:

Stoller the Director in Belle's daydream
 Stoller the analyst of Belle's daydream
 Stoller the theoretician of sexual excitement

My hypothesis is that the emergence of Stoller as Director – the emergence of the daydream *qua* transference neurosis – goes hand in hand

with the emergence of Stoller's theory of sexual excitement. More ambitiously, I am suggesting that this sexual theory and the transference figure of the Director are internally linked, both genetically – in terms of their emergence over time – and conceptually. Stoller's theory of sexual excitement is internally linked to his taking on the transference role – the Director – assigned him by Belle. In that sense, insofar as the transference is Belle's creative production, so is Stoller's psychoanalytic theory also her creative product.

Let us look at some evidence of this twin process. Stoller often casually refers to the fact that he is the Director: one can see that his role as Director immeasurably facilitated the work of analysis, and he, like all good analysts, gratefully accepts the fantasy roles he is granted, while offering to Belle his interpretations of his role rather than acknowledging the gratifications she thinks him playing that role will accord her. Thus:

An element I missed for years . . . present but unknown in the transference until I caught it in the day-dream: the advantage in always being the victim was that her two Directors (he and I), though they mistreated her, concentrated wholly on her, unlike her undependable mother. . . . Before understanding this, I was simply her victim, puzzled as to why she was doing this to me. Insight is a relief. (p. 79)

At the end of the book, Stoller spells out how his coming to 'know' what function he is performing is also the same as the completion of the analytic process of discovery:

Once we knew Belle's sexual fantasy, we could have predicted how she would deal with me in the analysis. . . . But until I knew the scripts, I could not understand what she was doing to me, and as long as one of her scripts was that I knew her scripts, she would not (consciously) understand what I did not know. (p. 207)

And he lists some of the things he was 'doing' with her:

She and I are performing a sexual drama, in which I – frozen and phallic – observe her as she humiliates herself by lying before me, saying what comes to her mind.

As does the Director, I sit behind her, sexually excited because I get turned on when humiliating women.

No analysis is actually in progress; there are only the two of us pretending – and both knowing it is simply pretense . . .

As she lies there, she is a delectable morsel that I will devour with my eyes, if not my mouth . . .

These scenarios . . . are, however, disguises for an underlying, essential, secret . . . script: no matter what happens, no matter how manifestly

bad he is, the Director is steadfast. . . . Only late in the analysis did we discover that this fantasy, always present at some level, made her secretly comfortable with me. . . . All that counted, till we dealt with this belief, was that I not abandon her. (pp. 207–8)

Having shown how Stoller the Analyst manages his relationship with Stoller the Director, I want to show you how Stoller the Theoretician and Stoller the Director are linked. Throughout the book, small interventions, footnotes or comments in parentheses, reveal the intertwining of their functions. For example, to the sentence I've just quoted, Stoller adds an endnote:

Perhaps the form all analysts take with their patients has in it a touch of Belle's Director. (p. 208, n. 5 on p. 269)

In other words, he is suggesting that the structure of Belle's daydream and the analytic situation are inherently connected; to be an analyst is to play the part of the Director. This is a theoretical suggestion. There are others, more significant and more distinctively Stoller's:

The Director gradually became clearer, especially by the third and fourth years of the analysis. . . . During the two or more years in which this material emerged clearly, I began to think dimly some of the ideas now being made fully conscious in writing this book. I did not think them and then transmit them to the patient; it was the other way around in that, in time, she revealed the structure of the daydream and, with her associations, its roots. Meanwhile, I was showing her how she had transferred her daydream into our relationship, so that she believed she was there to resist being humiliated in my presence by excitement that was the result of my directorial sadism. (Erotic excitement felt for the analyst is not easy to analyze. It carries into the treatment a sense of reality, for it is actually experienced, not just a memory from another time, or an intellectualization, or even an insight. Being a sensation, it is a truth of the body. It also, of course, fit into Belle's key fantasy, for my analyzing rather than sleeping with her was the equivalent for her of the Director's refusal to touch her, his exciting her from a distance without involving himself.) (pp. 76–7)

Stoller indicates, somewhat bashfully, the parallel process of 'becoming the Director' and of developing his theories of sexual excitation. Other hints are less crafted. Here is one example: as I mentioned, the slow transformation of Belle's daydream was an important index of her overall cure. Stoller writes:

A change in a variant script when, as the analysis progressed, her hostility was decreasing: a dirty-old-man is watching her masturbate. Instead

of being humiliated, she has an assignment: to teach him (mother, father, stepfather, me*) about her excitement. If she teaches him clearly, he will know how to handle her erotic needs skillfully. She is on her way to becoming a child, a better role than that of victim. In the next phase, although the men may be depicted doing things she considers perverse, they do so to help, not humiliate, her. (p. 86)

The slow evolution of the daydream is a clear index of the changes induced in Belle's inner life: the Director or the dirty old man is being taught about her – so that his actual actions, which may not change very much, nonetheless are intended for her enjoyment rather than for her humiliation. This educative dimension is obviously one that is closely linked to the analysis that Belle is undergoing and to Stoller's role in that. So it is very striking to find the following footnote (as opposed to endnote) attached to the reference to 'me' the analyst:

*My interest in analyzing her excitement was always in the analysis, years before I imagined writing on this subject. (p. 86)

Why did Stoller add this note? On the face of it, he is reassuring the reader that Belle's new aim of teaching the observer does not derive from her knowledge that her analyst is interested in the theory of sexual excitement; he is disclaiming a prior interest in order to reassure the reader that her intentions are not contaminated by his prior interests. On the face of it, Stoller is telling the reader that *he had no particular interest in sexual excitement at the time of the analysis*, and that his interest in the topic was only kindled years after. He portrays himself as the innocent analyst, devoid of excessive curiosity or desire for knowledge, with *no prior theoretical commitments*. On the face of it, he is informing the reader that he had no interest in her sexual excitement *outside* of the analysis; only *in* the analysis, as *part* of the analysis, did such an interest arise. Of course, if he were to say that, even in the analysis, his interest in her sexual excitement was not aroused, he would be denying his own analytic function. The Director *must* pay attention, *must* be involved in Belle's sexual excitement for the scene to work. Thus in order to interpret the transference, Stoller had to become aware of and interested in her sexual excitement – to resist doing so would be a countertransference resistance. If a patient deploys an erotic daydream in analysis, dreams it, replays it with the analyst as a protagonist, the analyst is professionally *required* to get interested. What Stoller is emphasizing is that he had no interest *other than* this strictly analytic-process interest.

So we are brought up short, by wondering if this moment, when Belle's daydream began to shift from performing for the male

onlookers to educating the male onlooker, including her analyst, is not *also* the moment when Stoller's extra-analytic interest in sexual excitement was born. Instead of just watching, as if he were the Director at the movies, he is now being educated through life, being required to play a part in Belle's education of the analyst. Remember how I was careful to point out Stoller's wide and flexible range of methods of working with people: as analyst, but also as professor, as psychiatrist, as ethnographer, as sympathetic collaborator in S-M groups, in interviews of porn stars and directors. In other words, is this book the product of Stoller's education by Belle? Did Stoller add on to this analytic function that of being educated by Belle about sexual excitement?

Now we begin to see the epistemological point: Whose ideas are these anyway? I've argued that Belle's daydream, which seems so distinctively hers, is in fact a construction of analysis – a transference phenomenon. Now I'm implying that this may also be the case for Stoller's theories of sexual excitement. Critics of psychoanalysis often put in question either the patient as a reliable source of data, or the reliability of the analyst as a scientific observer. Sometimes these criticisms take the extreme and therefore clear form of accusing the analyst of suggesting *all* the data to the patient, or they take the form of seeing the analyst as the dupe of the patient – if you believe *that*, you'll believe anything! What I'm suggesting is that the epistemological problem recognizes the partial truth in both of these criticisms, but takes the argument one step further. The transference, it should be remembered, was, in Freud's view, both real and not-real. As Glen Gabbard put it recently: 'Freud also stressed that transference love should nonetheless be treated as though it is unreal, a dictum that may appear confusing. . . . Neither analyst nor patient is likely to believe that the feelings are "unreal"' (Gabbard, 1994: 1086). The transference neurosis should be fully recognized as a genuine case of mutual irreality. And here we see the consequences: Belle formulates her own daydream so that it coalesces in a very productive way around Stoller the Director, while Stoller, through adopting the role of the Director, is able to develop a theory of sexual excitement. They have created a relationship in which both participate equally – if not in the same way – in the creation of something new.

We now come to the '*Nachtrag*' I referred to, with its epistemological bomb. Writing in the late 1970s in California, Stoller is acutely aware of the issues of confidentiality, privacy and informed consent involved in medical treatment – the doctrine of informed consent, I can remind you, was introduced into law by a Kansas judge in 1961.

Freud had solved these problems in his own way; Stoller finds a new solution to the problem of publishing a revealing case history of a patient.² On the surface it is a solution to a medico-ethical problem; what it contains, however, is of enormous consequence for the whole notion of psychoanalytic truth and its relation to transference and countertransference. This is a long quote, but I think it is worth it – and it is essential evidence for my argument:

To be sure that Belle's anonymity was preserved, I contacted her while writing this book and told her it would not be published without her complete approval. To do this, I asked if she would review every word of every draft. She has. Doing that became an addendum to the analysis, a new piece of work that focused on her responses to reading about Belle. In this way, I not only hoped that she would catch details that might otherwise reveal her identity but also that I would be ensured accuracy in all other respects. This process became for both of us a creative and surprising experience in which we could, from this new perspective, check each of our impressions, first of what had happened between us in the analytic process and second of what had happened in the unfolding of Belle's life from infancy on.

Not only were the fires of transference rekindled, but the book's reality in itself re-created a central theme of the erotic daydream. As you recall, the Director makes Belle reveal her excitement, as a display for an audience. And that, most literally, is what I do with this book. So not only was reality conspiring with fantasy, but she was in the dilemma of deciding what were her motivations in cooperating with me: to what extent would she give me permission, from the detached view that it was of use in the study of erotics, to tell her story, and to what extent would she do so simply because she was still under the daydream's spell. For surely it is unethical to get her permission if she is unduly influenced by a persisting, powerful transference effect. (It has been Belle's absolute right, till the moment the book is actually published, to stop the production simply by asking that that be done.) Only when we both felt this was worked through, when we knew it was depleted of erotic charge, were we at ease that I could proceed. I recommend this technique – of doing a piece of analysis with one's patient during the writing – to colleagues in a similar situation.

For Belle this experience was a valuable 'review,' in which, with full impact, she relived the analysis and was able to reconfirm the insights and changes that resulted. For me, it was, at the least, a test of reliability, in the sense that 'reliability' is used by the experimental psychologist. Did the data re-emerge pretty much the same? Yes. Were there many or important corrections in the facts or perspectives? No. Nonetheless, it was an amusing and sobering experience for me to see where interpretations I *knew* were correct – they came out of me with

that sense of spontaneous, enthused creativity that is the most fundamental confirming experience one can have – had been wrong. Wrong either in emphasis or in significance if not just flat-out wrong. (Of course, now I know, with the same enthused conviction, that *this time* my impressions are correct.) Not all of my truths, we discovered, were Belle's truths.

This experience I also recommend to colleagues. (pp. 217–18)

Amongst the many remarkable things in this passage is the criterion for publication of this book: Stoller thinks it unethical to publish if Belle's motive for agreeing is the result of the transference; the index of the disappearance of the transference motive is the depletion of the erotic charge – from what? From the new version of the erotic daydream, in which Belle's humiliation is on display not only to the Director, not only to her analyst, but to any reader of the book. At this point, I recall Freud remarking to Sándor Ferenczi that one could never eliminate unconscious structures – 'we can bring about nothing more than exchanges, displacements; never renunciation, giving up, the resolution' (Freud, 1910: 123) – the most one could do was to change the balance of investments of those structures. The shift from a small child consumed by murderous sibling rivalry to that older child's enthusiasm for dissecting live spiders and insects to her, on becoming an adult, practising as a skilled surgeon is simply a change in the investments of the structures, not their elimination. In a sense, it is us readers who have the ethical obligation as well – to adopt the position of Director and be steadfast for Belle.

Looking at it from the point of view of the analyst, we see that Belle and Stoller collaborated to ensure that the publication of the book was entirely depleted of erotic charge – for her. We might say that the elimination of the erotic charge *completes* the analyst's transference education, rather than *destroys* it. In this as in many things, Stoller hands over authority to his patient's version of the world – that version of the world that he had immediately spotlighted in the opening sentence: how she felt she was when the analysis began. By the end of his piece of clinical writing, we know how Belle felt she was when the analysis ended. And that transformation involved turning the analyst into someone who knew about sexual excitement. Otherwise the analysis would not have been a transformation. Here we see something like an epistemological obligation for Stoller to write about Belle and to write about sexual excitement. If he had not published this book, her analysis would have been a failure.

In a sense, I am pointing out that Stoller's analysis of Belle is a clear example of what have come to be called 'countertransference

enactments', defined as 'a joint creation that depends partly on what the patient coerces in the analyst and partly on what is present in the analyst to respond to that coercion' (Gabbard, 1994: 1084).³ But the coercion here is mutual – so it is a transference–countertransference enactment. Stoller and Belle become acutely conscious of the sexual reciprocity of their relationship, its enactment of sexual intercourse – 'I recalled that at that moment, it was as if she had offered an opening into which I could move; so I did. The metaphor became the feeling that I literally was allowed to move into her body, and yet her resistance was still present. But now it was resistance-plus-opening' (p. 109). That is a fine description of sexual intercourse (including the anal overtones which are crucial to Stoller and Belle's enactment – remember the enemas); and it is a fine description of the discursive relationship between Stoller and Belle. But the more profound enactment is not that of the details of Belle's humiliation by the dirty old man in view of the Director, but the final bottom line which I have already quoted: 'All that counted, till we dealt with this belief, was that I not abandon her.' In her erotic daydream, she was safe because, in the end, she was the person watching the Director watch her being humiliated:

behind the scenes, a part of herself permits the excitement because it (she) knows that she, who is masturbating in the real world, is not literally the same as 'she' who is the suffering woman in the story. In the story, she is humiliated; in reality, she is safe. (p. 68)

Adopting the position of watching the watcher, thus having the watcher unaware of being watched, is ensuring that the Director not abandon her. Stoller, in writing this case history, enacted this fantasy for her. Not only did he not abandon her, but he asked her to go over every word of every one of his sentences – she truly became the watcher watching the watcher. As Stoller remarks:

By the end of analysis, she knew (most of the time; like the rest of us, she had her episodes of backsliding) that whatever may have been done to her in the past, in the present she is the victim of herself: she can be free if she knows that she is the Director's director. (p. 87)

The book that 'they' produced – and in this 'they', we can include Belle the Watcher (the Director's Director), Belle the Humiliated Woman, the Director, Stoller the Analyst and Stoller the Theorist – is the final monument to and proof of Stoller not having abandoned her. He, as the author, she as the 'case', are there, in print, for all time to come. Safe.

In conclusion, I want to rerun my argument very quickly in a different area of Stoller's case. To do so, let me return to a term that became an important part of Stoller's theoretical vocabulary, and which we have come across already: 'scripts'. 'A script or scenario', Stoller writes, 'is a story line – a plot – complete with roles assigned to characters and a stream of action. When a script is conscious, it is, if private, either a spontaneous, unwilled emergence or a daydream' (pp. xiv–xv). Belle's daydream is in this sense a master script. And she lived her life in such a way that everybody participated in her scripts all the time – until she was woken from this life-long dream by her analysis. But it is not only Stoller who thinks in scripts; it is quite clear that Belle's language is also that of the script – isn't the Director, the key figure of her erotic life, someone with a script, someone who directs a script, someone who follows a script?

It is at this point that I want to interject something that is not in Stoller's text. Gossip being gossip, someone – and I can't remember who – told me who Belle's mother actually was in 'real life'. I am not going to reveal that, and not only because there's a strong possibility that the information was false – even though I'm a firm believer in the virtues and epistemological function of gossip – but I will say that she was a Hollywood film star of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. This much is almost evident in Stoller's description of the histrionic mother, surrounded by admirers, always in connection with famous men, going off for long periods for work. But this piece of information makes us wonder some more about Belle's inner life. When she constructs the daydream of the Director, it is modelled in part on her stepfather, her mother's second husband, who, as husband to a film actress has very much the domestic role of a Director. Read as part of the culture of Hollywood, the book takes on a different resonance entirely. In particular, one part of the relationship between Stoller and Belle comes into sharp profile: the fact that much of his countertransference work was done in the field of the visual. By that I mean that he found he had to pay enormous attention to her visual performance for him: in particular, the clothes she wore, and the exhibition of her body that she then performed using those clothes. He referred to these in various ways: as 'storms of exhibitionism', a 'skirt-waving attack'; 'the big show', which he thought was the single aspect of her that was 'so loony that it struck me as little short of delusional':

sitting up on the couch, she would pose herself in pin-up-girl fashion, leaning against the adjoining bookcase with back arched, legs drawn

up in knee-chest position, skirt fallen so that her thighs and part of her buttocks showed (but with the genital area always 'casually' covered by clothing and posture). (p. 144)

Stoller's observations of her clothes and how she used them, how she would wiggle her skirt up her thigh, then move it down again, began to be drawn into the analysis; almost against his will, he found that he *needed* to comment on her clothes, on how she was lying on the couch, on what point up her thigh her dress had reached, and so on. He became the analytic voyeur:

She came in one day dressed deliciously. . . . She kneeled on the couch in order to go on display. . . . She was so edible that I wondered to her if the couch was not functioning as a table on which she was serving herself up. The suggestion gave her an acute erotic attack, for which she was ripe. (p. 154)

I quote these passages not only because they are unconventional analytic observations, as Stoller knew better than anyone, but because they give a sense of the dramatic and filmic ambience in which the analysis was conducted. This analysis was about femininity, and it was also about Belle's conception of the feminine as the 'given to be seen'; but it was also conducted with a mother who was a film actress, in a town in which the 'given to be seen' is not only a culture but also an economy. This analysis was not only conducted in Hollywood – it was also Made in Hollywood. And out of that collaboration between Stoller, Belle and the ambient culture came the theory of scripts, closely linked to Stoller's critique of the theory of repetition that focused on the medium of representation by insisting that analytic repetition was not true repetition but was simulation.⁴ For me, the confirming evidence of Stoller being obliged to collaborate at all these levels – transference–countertransference, theory and cultural ambience – comes in his very final comment on the success of Belle's analysis.

At the end of her analysis she was still likely to begin the process of communicating important messages to me by being a character in a staged scene, with me as another player. Only after I caught on and described to her the plot and our parts in it was she able to understand an interpretation. (p. 217)

Each patient and analyst jointly construct a common language in which to conduct their relationship – a private vocabulary, set of references, images, signifiers, so that a pause, a chuckle, a grunt, a couple of words come to speak volumes. Certainly Stoller never persuaded

Belle to speak the language of classical psychoanalysis – a language that he too grew to detest – being open to the ‘ludic drift’⁵ of language and reference to which the analyst should surrender himself. But in this passage we see that, right to the very end, Stoller was obliged to speak Belle’s language – the language of drama, of characters, of plots and of enactment. Stoller took some of these terms and turned them into theory. Or to put it another way, in putting forward his theory of scripts and sexual excitement, he is still speaking her language – he remains true to the inner content and means of her representation of her daydream. In this sense, he did not so much transmit psychoanalytic knowledge *about* Belle as *infect* readers with the terms and frame of reference of Belle’s analysis. We should not forget – though we can if we wish – that they were ‘originally’ Belle’s terms, from her daydream, from her way of being in the world, and maybe even from her mother and her world. In not forgetting, we re-enact the ethical obligation of the analyst in taking up the epistemological functions assigned to the Director.

What, as a result of reading Stoller’s case history of Belle, can we add to my preliminary dogmatic remarks concerning the function of case histories in psychoanalysis? Can we credit Stoller with the achievement of objectivity, or is his case one more instance of the analytic self-exposure which gives epistemic pleasure – the Director’s pleasure – but no more? Stoller strived for the variety of objectivity achieved by intersubjective agreement – a rare enough event, psychoanalytically, but still subject to the suspicion that it derived from the logic of the *folie à deux*. Given the materials on which this essay is based, how could it provide *more* than that? And isn’t it more plausible that my argument cannot achieve even this, and will instead simply repeat the elements of the staging of the scene of Belle’s desire and of Stoller’s (analytic) desire, simply redeploying their transference–countertransference relationship in a displaced mode, even conniving with and exacerbating the exhibitionism and voyeurism so conspicuous in their work? If Stoller can muse that ‘perhaps the form all analysts take with their patients has in it a touch of Belle’s Director’, we may readily acknowledge that the same will apply to the readers of psychoanalytic case histories.

This theoretical and interpretative aporia may not be soluble as it stands. Perhaps we should turn to the crude but crucial criterion of ‘cure’ and ‘progress’. Stoller had mapped the progress in the development of Belle’s daydream and regarded it as a key indicator of the progress of the analysis. As we have seen, Belle becoming aware of her powers as the ‘Director’s director’ was for him the sign

of this progress. But an alternative formulation was: 'The Director, however, never returned' (p. 87). We can thus view it in one of two ways: the Director had been fired, got the sack, because a higher authority stepped in (the Director's director). Belle had her way with the Director, and then even had her way – as final arbiter – with Stoller. Getting rid of the Director is a neat allegory for the end of the analysis too. And if Belle was satisfied, if Stoller got what he wanted (the case, the theory, the satisfaction of a cure), who are we to know better? It is always open to the reader, my reader, to judge otherwise. And another conclusion is also a feasible option: that this psychoanalytic case, like others, through its failure to secure more than a parade of its own remarkable dynamics, demonstrates how the dispatch of the Director can also be seen as the exit of the analyst.

Notes

- 1 See Robert J. Stoller, 'A Contribution to the Study of Gender Identity', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 1964, 45: 220–6, paper presented to IPA Congress in July 1963.
- 2 Other solutions have since been found. Sybil Stoller informed me that her husband had sometimes had recorded tapes of sessions, which his secretary would type up for him to write from. When he died, UCLA destroyed these tapes in order to protect patient confidentiality.
- 3 See also T.J. Jacobs, 'On Countertransference Enactments', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 1986, 34: 289–307.
- 4 The genealogy of the concept of 'script' is clearest in the line developed by the transactional analysis of Eric Berne in his *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy* (1961) and *Games People Play* (1964). Berne first introduced the notion in a reasonably casual fashion in one of his few conventional analytic papers, 'The Psychological Structure of Space with Some Remarks on *Robinson Crusoe*', alongside another notion, that of 'unconscious protocol' (Berne, 1956: 557). Another important analyst at work in the 1970s who made ample use of the notion of 'script', particularly for sexual perversions, was Joyce McDougall; see, for example, 'Primal Scene and Sexual Perversion', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 1972, 53: 371–84. It may be of relevance that I date Belle's analysis to the 1960s, probably the early 1960s, well before the notion of 'script' had become widespread outside of Carmel in California where Eric Berne practised. When Stoller introduces his concept of 'scripts, scenarios, scenes, daydreams, and fantasies' (Stoller, 1986: xiv) – whose connotations he recognizes overlap – he cites not Berne but Laplanche and Pontalis: 'Even where they can be summed up in a single sentence, phantasies are still scripts (*scénarios*) of organised scenes which are capable of dramatisation – usually in a visual form. The subject is invariably present in these scenes; even in the case of the "primal scene", from which it might appear that he was excluded, he does in fact have a part to play not only as

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an observer but also as a participant, when he interrupts the parents' coitus' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1974: 318).

- 5 A phrase I owe to a personal communication from Page DuBois, e-mail dated 15 May 1998.