

The Stolen Girl and other stories: seven psychoanalytical tales

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The presentation of clinical material is perhaps the most important way in which the theory and practice of psychoanalysis is communicated but it is fraught with difficulties. Perhaps it is because of these difficulties that many published accounts of what takes place in the consulting room seem formulaic. Whether it is because of the question of confidentiality, or the issues concerned with the authorization of the analyst, or the transferences to Freud or Lacanⁱ or the problematics of turning a private conversation into a public document, somehow many published case histories are a dull and predictable read. As Bion remarked, 'The reader [of clinical case histories] is prepared for the triumph of psych-analysis in contrast with the patient's previous misfortunes ...'ⁱⁱ. Touton-Victor's *psychoanalytical tales* avoid the conventional format; they are not case histories, but love stories, stories of broken love affairs, of lovers lost, parental love and, less explicitly, stories of transference love.

There is an increasing tendency in psychoanalytic published work to explicitly fictionalize case material. Mitchell does so in order to provide a vehicle for her own research interests and to further her argumentⁱⁱⁱ. Orbach argues that fiction must be deployed in order that accounts of psychoanalysis can be believable. 'The stories that I have heard in the consulting room are so extraordinary, so unpredictable and often so unlikely ...' that she invents 'by contrast ... less startling and rather more ordinary' patients^{iv}. Touton-Victor's tales, on the other hand, 'take root in analysis. They are accounts of what is left to the analyst to ... make fiction with' (p.xiii). They are stories created through a distillation of the many words spoken in analysis (p.xv). She makes no argument nor is there any concerted aim to convince the reader of the truth of the tale, and yet both the content of the stories and her writing style captures something of what happens in analytic work.

The 'stolen girl' of the title of the collection first comes to tell her story to the analyst with her partner but continues the telling alone. Her story is one of a difficulty in loving, unable to show her child how much she loves her, unable to express her love to the father of her child, telling her listener how she imagines she would like to be loved, about her disturbed nights, dreaming of ex-lovers and asking whether she is 'barred from all forms of love?' (p. 46). There is no triumph of psychoanalysis or analyst in this story. As Touton-Victor reminds us: 'There are cases in analysis when no real clarity comes naturally, when resolutions only happen in a concrete way'. Characteristically of this collection, the story ends with a question. What was meant by the 'stolen girl's' statement: 'With you, there is so much affection?'

The writing is peppered with question marks. Questions brought by the people who come to consult her and questions posed by Touton-Victor herself. The style of the narrative also leaves the reader with many questions, as each story is written in a combination of the past and present tense, in concise, economical sentences that leave a lot unsaid. There is a quiet humility in the writing and in the way this 'licensed eavesdropper' responds to the 'unusual privileged invitation' (p. xiv) from those who come to consult her. She tells us how she doesn't understand what has happened, how she was unable to discover her patients' history, how she 'muddys the water' (p.25) when unable to listen, of her worries when she is unable to receive someone or has to interrupt the work. She also tells us about the pleasures of her work, how she enjoys the unpredictability of each encounter, her affection for her patients, how glad she feels when an analysand returns to the work following a premature end, the gifts – of words and of objects that are received. Every analysis is unique, there is no formula, no prescribed way of undertaking analytic work and there is also an impossibility in knowing what takes place in the consulting room. These seven tales give the reader a glimpse of what psychoanalysis may be.

The tale 'Love. With death? With Life' (pp 25-35) best illustrates, to my mind, Touton-Victor's stated aim or 'hope' (p.xiv) as she puts it 'to bear witness to the nature of analytical meetings, and present the complexity of an uncommon venture with a simplicity disentangled from theoretical construction' (ibid). It is a love story. The reader is told that the patient – who like many of those whose stories are told is not given a name – consults Touton-Victor following the death of her beloved first analyst. The patient is a nurse in intensive care, responsible for keeping people alive and for the grief of the bereaved. As a child, she has to manage the insane rage of her father. Her lover, 'Sophie', dies during the course of the analytic meetings. The story ends with the birth of an unexpected baby, the result of a spectacular falling in love to the utter bewilderment of the patient. The reader is not told about the time of this analysis, but it can be deduced that it did take place over a long period of time. How to capture all those meetings in ten pages of text? Touton-Victor is able to convey the sense of the unpreparedness of the analyst, the acute anguish of the analysand, and how events unfolded over the years. There is no message in the telling of this tale. Rather, the reader is left with an impression, an inkling, of what took place between the storyteller and her listener. It is an account of this woman's particular love story and of the (transference) love story between analysand and analyst. It is a love story and not a formulaic romance, and it leaves the reader – and the story-teller and her chosen listener with many unanswered questions. Nevertheless, it is a completed tale.

Patricia Touton-Victor is – amongst other things – a visiting lecturer at the Centre for Psychoanalysis, Middlesex University where she tells her love stories to those curious about psychoanalytic work. The publication of *The Stolen Girl and other stories* extends her invitation to listen to anyone who is interested in what psychoanalysis in practice might be. Her short stories are a poetic and courageous attempt to describe and illuminate the particularity of what might take place in the analyst's consulting room – for the lover and for the beloved – and with the confusions in-between.

ⁱ See 's paper in this volume

ⁱⁱ W.F. Bion *Second Thoughts*. London:Karnac, 1967. 120

ⁱⁱⁱ J. Mitchell *Mad Men and Medusas*. London: Allen Lane, 2000. 226; 246

^{iv} S. Orbach *The Impossibility of Sex*. London: Allen Lane, 1999. 3