

The Grace of a Psychoanalyst

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It means a great deal to me to have been invited to speak with you this morning, but I'm not here to speak but also to listen. I have only known Danielle and her work in English. This morning I have been able to hear about her in French. I've had the pleasure of hearing Olivier speak of her early articles available only in French. I hope all of her work in French will find its way into English. In French I have heard this morning the echoes of the Danielle I came to know in English. My reflections this morning are entitled, “The Grace of a Psychoanalyst”.

“Simone’s suffering touched me.” With that simple, direct statement, Danielle opened the first of her two papers discussing her complex psychoanalysis with Simone, a male to female transsexual. Today, at least in the United States, important discussions regarding transsexual and transgendered individuals are everywhere to be found in both the professional and popular literature. But Danielle’s paper was written 20 years ago, at a time when the understandings of gender dysphoria and identity were profoundly limited, with fear and bias all too common.

I am sure many of you here know this case. At 18 years of age, Simone, born a boy named Simon, chose to have gender reassignment surgery, transforming his male genitals into those of a woman. At 38 years of age, deeply troubled, Simone sought psychoanalysis.

Simone's suffering touched me. What a simple statement. What an honest statement. What an unusual sentence to read in a psychoanalytic paper. But this was not an unusual statement for Danielle.

Simone was in crisis. She came to Danielle wondering that, if in having turned himself into a woman 20 years earlier, had he simply been denying his masculine part? Had he created a monster, rather than a woman? He said to Danielle, "If I *am* a man, then I am now a monster. I have no reason to go on living."

Simon/Simone was a patient that I suspect many psychoanalysts would not have accepted into analysis. The rationales, or excuses, could have been many. I remember the first time I read this paper. I sat at my desk imagining myself hearing those words. I could imagine how much I might have wished to turn away. Danielle did not. She had serious questions about undertaking this treatment, which she carefully outlined in her first paper. She asked, "Might the analysis result in a breakdown, even suicide?" In her second paper

written after the termination of analysis with Simone, she reflected back on her initial decisions and questions. Might this not have been too dangerous? Might the analytic confrontation of her psychic reality with the actual limits of her physical and emotional transformation from one gender to another have been overwhelming? These were questions Danielle took very seriously. But then these clinical questions came up against the fact that *Simone's suffering touched me*. In this sentence is an attitude that was ever present in Danielle's work as an analyst: she was not afraid to be *touched* by her patient's struggles and internal world. She welcomed this. She knew that in order to "touch" her patients in the places they were most deeply troubled, she had to be touched as well.

Her clinical questions (and I would suggest the biases of the analytic theories of the time) also came up against another fundamental characteristic of Danielle as a person and as an analyst, her trust in people's capacity to grow. Reflecting back on her decision to work with Simone, as a transsexual woman, Danielle wrote, "However, I trusted that, if a patient developed psychically, he/she would be able to invent a way out of a difficult, seemingly impossible, situation: the patient's development would surely enable him/her to assign a new meaning to a situation that had not changed on the concrete level."

Back home in Pittsburgh we have a group of psychotherapists, psychoanalysts, and psychiatrists who have been meeting six times a year for nearly 20 years. We call our seminars, "keeping our work

alive,” bringing in analyst and therapists of various disciplines to work with us and shake us up on a regular basis. It was in one of our seminars, over ten years ago, that we read Danielle’s papers of her analysis of Simone. It provoked a lively debate. Although we did not all agree with her approach or her conclusions, we were all deeply touched by the depth of thought and profound respect Danielle brought to her work. On behalf of the group, I wrote to her to thank her. It came as quite a surprise—although it may not surprise many of you in this room—that she wrote back. Not only did she write back, but she invited me to dinner with her and Jean-Michel. Our first dinner was the beginning of rich professional and personal friendship. My group in Pittsburgh had the pleasure of working with Danielle and Jean-Michel on two occasions.

Danielle’s trust, her commitment, to her patient’s capacity for psychic growth is evidenced throughout her writing and her work as an analyst. Danielle was well aware that her patient’s psychic growth depended on her own. In her wonderful book, *Words that Touch*, Danielle’s subtitle, is *a psychoanalyst learns to speak*. Not the patient, but the analyst who needs to learn to speak—in a way that can give voice to those places in her patients that have been held so long in solitude. Danielle was well aware that there were damned good reasons that these places had been held in solitude. And yet she wondered, “Might the ‘mad’ part of the patient be capable of growth in the analysis?” She knew that there were irreversible consequences resulting from patients’ (and our own) long-standing

psychological and interpersonal difficulties. Nevertheless, she comes down on the side of her patients' capacities for psychic growth and the new meanings and possibilities that such growth can bring to life. Danielle argues forcefully that madness is made no less mad by being left invisible or silent. *And* she wonders if *she* will be capable of standing along side them in that difficult and uncertain process. This work of psychic growth is not for the patient alone. This book is an account of Danielle's own story, as well as those of her patients, to find ways of speaking, of relating, that could welcome and deeply touch the most troubled and sealed off aspects of her patients.

Danielle refused to turn away from these troubled places. She refused to leave these places alone in silence, fear, and shame. She gave herself the freedom to speak *to* these places in her patients. Hers were only interpretations *about* these parts and where they came from. She did not simply talk *about* them. She sought to speak *for* them, *to* them. I know well—and I am sure I am not alone—of the frequent wish, when facing the most troubled parts of my patients, to want to subtly turn away, to turn toward the more rational, the more reasonable, the more comfortable. But the silenced parts of our patients do not live in comfort, and they are not rational. I have read and heard Danielle say things to her patients that are from any rational perspective completely bizarre. And then to see a patient feel profoundly understood. I have heard her speak to patients with stunning bluntness about the realities of living or about the consequences of their defenses. But her bluntness was always

delivered in an envelope of respect, or an envelop of her subtle, wry sense of humor, that signaled that her bluntness was always on behalf of her patient's well being.

She did not ask the classic question, "Is this patient analyzable?" She asked instead, "What will it take of me to find a way to analyze this patient." To reach, to understand, to touch. She refused to leave her patients alone in their places of trouble or "madness".

In the development of her theory and approach to working with "heterogeneous" patients, Danielle has made a major contribution to psychoanalysis. Jacqueline and Bernard have spoken eloquently this morning to those aspects of her work. What I want to underscore here this morning is the *person* who Danielle was in her work, the unyielding *grace*, the curiosity, and the devotion of this woman who decided to become a psychoanalyst.

In her last book, *Growing Old*, Danielle again enters territory seldom visited in psychoanalysis, that of undertaking psychoanalytic therapy with the elderly and those facing the ends of their lives. She writes, "Some elderly people find it more and more important to have a good relationship with people who are a part of their *internal* world; they look after them with great care." "As people grow old, they need to put their internal house in order." One can look back on life, and "new shaded of meaning develop." There is still time for reparation.

Growing Old is a book of vitality, it is a book that welcomes, celebrates the persistence and richness of Eros, life, standing in the face of death. Here again she stands along side her patients and helps them look—inward, backward, and forward. She does not shy away from the encroaching frailties that accompany aging. She does not turn away from the inevitable ending of life. But she invites her patients to look again, to look anew, and to find the capacity for continued emotional growth.

If I were to summarize what I have taken from knowing Danielle and her work into one phrase, it would be “Do not turn away.” She did not turn away. As I’ve been here this morning and listened to colleagues who were so deeply touched and inspired by Danielle, I’ve been recalling what it was like to see her illness beginning to encroach upon her life, her vitality. I wanted to turn away. As I look at this audience, I am sure I was not alone. But Danielle had a way of being in the face of her illness and her growing pain that let me know I did not have to look away. There would be no comfort for her in that. Danielle did not turn away. She faced her dying without turning away from her life, her work, or those she loved.

I want to close today with Danielle’s own words.

First from *Growing Old*:

When life episodes are split off, they remain immobile because, since they are no longer connected to the person’s life networks, they

cannot benefit from the ongoing development of his or her mind.
...Indeed there are times in the lives of all of us that have escaped the ongoing process of our development and have remained immobilized. The work of integration in order to improve our internal harmony is one that knows no end.

And from *Words that Touch*:

It is sometimes from the poets that we learn how to invent words to unleash the capacity to dream; as Charles Trenet used to sing, “Long, long, long gone are the poets, but their songs run on through the streets”. If our interpretations are *alive*, they will be like those songs: they will not only make people sing, but will run on *inside* them...for all of their lives

Thank you.