

Editor's Introduction to
Intimacy and Separateness in Psychoanalysis
Warren S. Poland, Routledge, 2018

A Freedom of Mind: Warren Poland in Word and Deed

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Making art, making poetry, yes even analyzing – these create meaning and value perhaps best not as a denial of horror but defiantly in the face of horror. (Poland, 2007, p.40)

It is a rare contributor to psychoanalytic discourse who insists on the independence of his own mind while granting full freedom and agency to the mind of the reader. In *Intimacy and Separateness in Psychoanalysis*, Warren Poland takes up many of the themes and controversies that often enliven--and at times deaden or divide--contemporary psychoanalytic conversations. His thinking on the mechanisms of therapeutic relatedness in particular is notably more nuanced and integrative, avoiding such simplistic demarcations as “one-person” vs. “two-person” models of psychoanalytic theory and technique. As Poland articulates his own searching positions, he never invites the reader to disclaim or acclaim one point of view over another or to simply take up his. Rather, he insists that the reader engage her or his own thinking anew.

Engagement with paradox constantly informs Poland's work. He argues for the necessity of an approach to theoretical discussions from both unobstructed and disciplined frames of mind in the service of professional maturation. By “unobstructed,” Poland may well be invoking the true meaning of Freud's notion of neutrality—to be open, curious, and deeply receptive—applied at the level of analytic theorizing as well as to analytic listening. “Discipline,” as Poland defines it, necessitates and relishes “rigor in conceptualization, regard for prior learning, and tolerance in the face of unyielding paradox” (p.88). Inherent, too, in Poland's valuing of discipline is his repeated demonstrations of the centrality of self-analysis that is fundamental to his clinical work. He wryly observes that while, each clinical analysis does come to a defined point of termination, the need for self-analytic reflection never ends.

It has been only recently that I met Warren in person. My knowledge of his work had previously been through a series of encounters with his writing over many years and then through an occasional exchange of letters. My own graduate school training was in phenomenology and existentialism, followed by transactional analysis, not psychoanalysis. I have always been grateful for that, because as I undertook my own professional exploration of diverse

psychoanalytic authors, I have felt freed of the burdens of the orthodoxies that have so often rendered the psychoanalytic literature as gospel rather than as guidance and inspiration, the orthodoxies so many of my analytically trained colleagues have had to so achingly climb out from under. My non-analytic grounding has undoubtedly been an important part of what drew me to Warren's writing over the years. His has been and remains an independent mind in which I found a kinship that excited and challenged me. It was this kinship and valuing of Warren's singular voice that led me to offer to edit his more recent papers for *Intimacy and Separateness in Psychoanalysis*.

I use the phrase "encounters with his writing" quite intentionally. The notion of encounter is central to existential thinking. Reading Poland's work over the years has had for me the quality, the impact, of encounter—a coming up against my self, my assumptions, and my therapeutic comforts. His writing does not yield ground easily to the preferences of the reader; nor does it attack them. Rather, it simultaneously invites the reader to pause, to wonder, to grapple with familiar knowns, and to consider the unfamiliar and the unwanted. Warren does not shy away from his own encounters: with colleagues, with the literature, with his patients, with himself, with life and death.

The Writer and the Reader

One lets oneself go in order to take something in, but what is taken in is not swallowed whole; it is selectively chewed over and only then digested. That is so as you consider what I write; it is so when the lights come on between acts at the theater; it is so when an analyst emotionally steps back to think about what has been heard and felt; it is so when a patient contemplates an interpretation; and it is so when a reader pulls back after being lost in a book. The *becoming as-if-one-with* and the *separating from* are at the heart of both reading and analyzing. (2018, p.122)

Poland's is the voice of a man who loves language. His immersive embrace of literature and theater echo through almost every essay contained in this book. For Poland, psychoanalysis shares much more in common with the literary arts than with the scientific traditions, arguing that both psychoanalysis and literature seek the articulation, through language, of the frailties of human existence coupled with its transcendent potential. He reminds us of Freud's frequent efforts to bring psychoanalytic understandings to the literature of his time (and of the eras that preceded him) and to bring the wisdom and creativity of literary minds to psychoanalysis. Poland argues, quite fiercely, that the immersion of psychoanalysis in the culture of its time—art, literature, politics, history—is not merely "applied" as opposed to "clinical" psychoanalysis, but rather an endless source of vitalization to psychoanalytic thinking. A retreat to purely clinical

theorizing may protect the clinician from the impact of cultural and social intrusions, yet it impoverishes the reach of psychoanalytic inquiry. As Poland wrote in his earlier book, *Melting the Darkness*, “sensitive involvement with reading, drama, music, and visual arts can open inner emotional areas that have been closed” (1996, p.258).

Through his essays on literature, theater, and poetry included in this volume, we witness Poland’s holding of the inevitable tensions between the arenas of commonality evoked by the timeless power of great art and those of the deeply, and often darkly, held regions of one’s psyche that art can bring to the surface—often unbidden and at times unwanted. He quotes Proust’s observation that although the reader is involved in a conversation with the author, each of us reads in the midst of our own solitude. So, too, Poland argues that what is ultimately assimilated in an analysis occurs within the privacy of the self.

The Analytic Approach

Thus, not only does the patient benefit from the content of what the analyst says focused on the specific issue of the moment, the patient has the benefit of observing, and observing repeatedly, the analyst’s way of handling conflicts, the analyst’s preferred ways of delaying impulsive discharge and instead turning inner conflict into data for consideration. The analyst’s approach informs the patient *how* the analyst analyses. (p. 69)

In his clinical articles, Warren places great emphasis on the analytic *approach*, in contrast to analytic *technique*. He argues that over the course of an analysis, while a patient may well profit from the moments of insight and other forms of analytic content, it is the attitude and approach of the analyst--gradually observed, experienced, and internalized--that is the primary factor in the patient’s psychic growth and the lasting gift of psychoanalytic therapies. So, too, in reading the essays in this book, the reader has the benefit of watching and experiencing Warren’s ways of thinking and working inside and outside the consulting room. For me as a reader—as well as a therapist and author—this has opened up a much-appreciated space for reflection.

Warren repeatedly challenges the parochialism that can infect psychoanalytic communities and foster defenses that limit open dialogue among professionals. Observing that, “the anxious uncertainty intrinsic to creativity stimulates the pressure for team loyalty,” (p. 94) Warren describes the conscious and unconscious forces that too often make it difficult, if not impossible, for colleagues of different theoretical preferences to truly listen to one another. Here again he speaks to the essential paradox inherent in maturational processes:

Narcissism speaks of the emotional investments aimed inward, while curiosity refers to those aimed outward...like conjoined twins, the two always go in tandem even when in conflict. ...Self-concerns and experience of the other are unitary in the process of creating meaning. (p.97)

Not only in clinical engagement, but in professional and theoretical engagements as well, our work carries the responsibility for self-analysis when the capacity to listen receptively falters. Curiosity and uncertainty live at the heart of open clinical inquiry. At its best, Warren contends, “theory reminds us to wonder,” but theory can also serve “the defensive comfort of closure...insistent knowing so as not to feel uncertain” (p.84).

Warren argues forcefully for an “exploratory rather than revelatory approach” (p.51) in listening to and speaking with patients:

The analyst provides a holding environment, an empathic ambiance, and a capacity to contain the anxieties and conflicts taken in from a patient’s projections. The analyst respects, listens, hears, regards, and witnesses. (p.69)

But these services to the other are not those of submission, acquiescence, or union with the other. Poland holds his mind quite distinct from that of his patient while holding the mind of his patient quite distinct from his own. It is in this terrain that we see Poland at work in a subtle, ever-evolving nexus the involves the other, the quality of otherness, and the experience of outsidersness. In his clinical papers, he offers discussions of the interpretive attitude, empathy, containment, intersubjectivity, witnessing, and regard—each and all as necessary elements of an analysis and each, as presented in his unique voice, fostering psychic separateness and maturation.

The Therapeutic Attitude

Poland seeks to expand the meaning and function of interpretation, shifting the focus from content to process, from what, to how. While he does not deny the relevance of the declarative interpretation as an effort to bring new meanings and connection to a patient’s awareness, his emphasis is on the interpretive *attitude* as embodying the lived experience of curiosity, investigation, and discovery that is the core of a free mind:

That curiosity about as yet unknown deeper explanations is what places the unrestricted interpretive attitude at the heart of the psychoanalytic approach. (p.58)

Essential to the lasting productivity of an analysis is the patient’s gradual internalization of a self-interpretive capacity, one that serves the coherence, efficacy and delight of finding and keeping a mind of one’s own. The analyst works in service of this maturational process:

Any transference exploration and resolution is possible because the mature strengths of the analyzing pair can be brought to bear on experiences that had originally developed when the analysand was less mature (p.52).

Poland does not presume that all transference relations are backward-looking, nor that all interpretations need to articulate their archaic roots. Eros is alive in transference relations, pressing for more life, seeking, even demanding a future different from the past. The exploratory attitude of interpretation is based in the belief that there is something new to be found.

Witnessing

By "witnessing" I refer to an analyst's activity: the analyst's functioning as a patient's other who maintains an actively observing presence, who recognizes and grasps the emotional activity in the mind of the patient at work, and who is himself recognized by the patient as a distinctly separate person in his own right, not merely as a transferential object. Recognition of autonomy and respect for otherness are central to witnessing. (p.18, emphasis in original)

In his elaboration of the analytic function of witnessing, Poland provides a stark contrast to the notions of therapeutic empathy:

At moments of pain as one deals forthrightly with personal responsibility for one's role in what had been painful to oneself or others, at those moments it matters that another know, that another understand, that another have some appreciation of the implications. Recognition, not exoneration, is what is then called for. (p.106)

Witnessing does not alleviate suffering but acknowledges it.

As catalyst to the patient's capacity to know and to define a self as unique among others, witnessing enables a deepening personal testimony and meaning. Poland suggests that the credit due an analyst at the end of a challenging analysis is rarely for interpretive virtuosity but much more likely for the analyst's capacity to keep the faith in the face of recurrent and often disheartening periods of frustrating, draining, and corrosive constriction.

When taking up the place of empathy in contemporary psychoanalytic practice, Poland throws down a gauntlet: "[Empathy] has been seen lying at the heart of growth and development; its lack has been posited as the centerpiece of pathogenesis; and it has been put forward as the essence of what is mutative in the analytic process." (p.103) [\[Limits of empathy\]](#) He goes on, "This misuse of empathy sidesteps the observer's need for the uncomfortable work of self-analysis...[and] is an undermining of the patient's separateness and

uniqueness.” (p.103) He offers a powerfully different casting of the function and place of empathy in the analytic project:

Empathy, which refers to how one person perceives another when two separate people come together, can be valid only when founded on profound respect for otherness, the full respect of the observing person for the singularity and particularity of the other. (p.106)

Poland's insistence on respect goes both ways as he argues that the patient, too, must come to see the analyst as a separate and unique person, “No, I am not you, nor am I one of your ghosts. ...No, I am not your fantasy actualized” (p.23). It has been in this terrain that Poland's perspective has deeply fostered my own self-analysis in my work with those patients who have pressed relentlessly for “empathy”, which too often conflated agreement with the patient's perception of events as a form of compassionate understanding. As a younger therapist I often felt mute in the face of these transference pressures. Even as I knew such merger and pseudo-comfort would not serve my patients, the resonance with my own family history and my functioning within the family stopped me in my tracks. Warren's papers, with those of James McLaughlin and Christopher Bollas, gave me a way to begin to think more effectively. Gradually I could find ways to bring my self to these patients, neither as a merging object nor as an invasive, controlling object, but as one of two separate people deeply engaged in looking at the world (and selves), side by side.

In the opening paper of this volume, Poland elaborates the concept of “regard,” suggesting that it might be a word that captures this intention of therapeutic engagement better than his original use of “witness.” The English for this alternative word is derived from the French *regarder*, which conveys the meanings of watching, looking, guarding and protecting. It is an active perspective--attentive, sustaining, a keeping of the faith.

Encountering Strangers

The underlying analytic process is premised on a shift from what is conventional to the emphatically unconventional process of openness beyond the usual taboos, an intimacy structured for expression, exposure, and exploration. *In this new world of the analytic situation, each partner approaches the other as a stranger.* (p.40, emphasis in original)

It has been twenty years since the publication of Poland's first book, *Melting the Darkness: The Dyad and Principles of Clinical Practice*. In that earlier volume, Poland explored facets of the clinical partnership engendered through the analytic process. Offering numerous case examples, he demonstrated a clinical

attitude grounded in the interplay of two distinct, individual psychologies, a perspective that he came to call “two-person separate”.

This new volume of essays more fully articulates Poland's fundamental respect for the uniqueness and separateness of the patient's and the analyst's psyches emerging from the profound intimacies afforded through the psychoanalytic encounter. *Self* and *other* have been fundamental organizing concepts in psychoanalysis for decades, bringing the inevitability and vitality of clinical attention to the therapeutic dyad in all of its myriad manifestations. Poland does not diminish the importance of the dyad, but he offers a profound regard for the private universe of inner experience, thus placing the interpersonal in dynamic tension with the private. His focus in many of his recent essays shifts significantly to the exploration and elaboration of this terrain. Writing during a time of theories valorizing co-creation, mutuality, empathy, and intersubjectivity within the analytic dyad, Poland instead invites the stranger, the alien, the unknown, and the unwanted self into the consulting room for the reader's careful consideration. He underscores the courage and risk both parties bring to the fore in entering this field of analytic endeavor. Poland makes it clear--especially in the essays, “The Analyst's Fears” and “On Long Analyses”--that the analyst is rarely the master of his or her own house. It is fundamental in all of his writing that it is only through rigorous, ongoing self-analysis that the analyst can ensure the clarity and receptivity of his mind to that of the patient. Self-analysis is the greatest insurance of the analyst's capacity to hold the other in true *regard*.

Poland argues that there are aspects of psychic life and the therapeutic process that are not contained or best expressed in dyadic terms. He challenges the ways in which the valorization of the dyad can offer hiding places and deflections from facing the quite separate realities of the analyst's and the patient's actual and psychic worlds. While curiosity and uncertainty are essential to an analytic process of any depth and significance, Poland speaks to the analyst's vulnerability in the face of the inevitable limits to the understanding of the patient's psychic world. “*Each partner approaches the other as a stranger.*” Here again a paradoxical pairing: that of a unique form of intimacy with an unavoidable strangeness, the profound depths of otherness and differentness that will constantly haunt the emergent and fragile “we-ness” of the analytic process.

It takes two to witness the unconscious, in Poland's view. But he asks, what is the nature of that two-ness? He repeatedly returns to the question of how to integrate human commonalities and fundamental singularities within the ongoing analytic endeavor. In the contemporary analytic literature, intersubjectivity often takes center stage as an answer to this vexing question. Does an individual ever truly exist outside of a relational context? Relational and intersubjective theorists seem to answer “no” to that question. Poland brings a unique perspective. He posits two forms of intersubjectivity. The more common contemporary usage

connotes a therapeutic pair in which experience and understanding are co-created through the formation of an essential unity: two into one. While acknowledging this aspect of therapeutic engagement, Poland questions whether it is a primary mutative factor in psychic growth and maturation. He posits instead a second perspective on intersubjectivity, that of “the communicative emotional flow between two different parties.” [page] Separateness again comes to the fore. He brings our attention to the quality of intersubjectivity created by the reciprocal experiences generated by subject-object separation and differentiation.

Otherness and outsidership open different terrains. Otherness refers to the emotional realization that one’s self is different from the lived actuality of others. In otherness there are aspects of one’s self experience that will remain inevitably “other” to others, embodying unique and private aspects of the individual psyche that can never be fully grasped and known by someone other than oneself. Outsidership has its own particular lived quality, one of being fundamentally apart from the world of others. Outsidership is not just about being different, it is about being *apart*, not fitting, not belonging. Outsidership has long been the subject of the existential literature but has been little explored in an analytic context. Poland brings this experience into an analytic frame as he outlines the near universal vulnerability to feeling outside—*alien, unbelonging*-- over the course of one’s life span. Once again, he addresses the paradox of outsidership. He posits that analyst and analysand begin their work together each being an outsider to the other’s experience; they meet as strangers. Each lives with the possibility and vulnerability to painful misunderstandings. And then the work unfolds as “the world of transference and dream can come alive” (p.41). Analyst and patient “share the effort to move from strangeness to familiarity, from parallel outsidership to a mutual and growing, shared *insidership*” (p.40). But the work does not stop there. Poland argues that to be satisfied with the achievement of mutuality and insidership would be to cut short the final emergence, recognition and regard for the compelling individuality of each—therein lies the unique quality of intimacy afforded through psychoanalytic exploration.

Poland draws upon Freud’s brief, but exquisite essay, “On Transience,” which to my mind speaks to the heart of the existential perspective that the impermanence of life makes all we do more precious and vital. This is the terrain in which the individual psyche reaches the full, fragile depths of the self. Poland concludes that some things can be accomplished and realized alone that cannot be accomplished with someone else. Patient and analyst part no longer strangers yet still left ultimately with their own resources to encounter the disappointments, the travails, as well as the unending richness of being alive, while awaiting death.

Encountering Darkness

Does our therapeutic zeal lead us to put an unduly happy face on endings in order to salve our own anxieties of uncertainty and helplessness? Might we do better with a bit less encouraging inspiration and a bit more respect for the verities of loss and death? Those are questions not only for psychoanalytic technique but for living life itself. (p.160)

The essays in this book were written in the latter years of Warren's life and career. Now "darkness" does not so much "melt" as surround, encroach, and enrich. Here the existential underpinnings of Poland's thinking sweep to the surface: "impermanence is an essential organizing principle that defines our species. ...Transience is in the very structure of our minds" (p.164).

One of my favorite essays here is his brief "What play did Shakespeare write when he wrote *Twelfth Night*?" Warren brings a warm and humorous touch to his personal accounts of his reckonings with the dodge and chase of one's maturational efforts. In his taking up of *Twelfth Night*, he describes the multiplicity of meanings he has discovered over the course of his life through many readings and viewings of this play. He takes notice that the text of the play could not itself have actually changed but then wryly comments, "It took a long while before I recognized that it has also consistently served as a precious interpretive companion, one profoundly valuable to mark self analysis by which I struggle to mature, trying to keep maturity up with age" (p.154). We again witness the generative interplay of Poland the reader, Poland the audience, Poland the writer, and Poland the analyst. As it is a play that I, too, have seen in several versions over the years, I could easily relate to Warren's evolving experience of it. Even more so, I could relate this essay to my own readings and re-readings over the years of various, favorite papers by Freud, Winnicott, Berne, Reich, Winnicott, Bollas, McLaughlin, Dimen, and of course Poland, which unfold in greater depth and meaning as I struggle and mature (hopefully) in expertise as well as age.

I find the essay, "The Analyst's Fears," to be the heart of this book. First written when Poland was in his late 60's, he noted with "chagrin" that only after working and writing for more than thirty years that "my looking directly at fear comes so very late, nearer the end rather than the start of my thinking" (p.74). It is a frank and unflinching examination of human and analytic frailty. Here, again, we meet paradox as Poland observes that as his analytic skills have deepened over the years of practice, this very fact has "either led to or permitted more openness to more deeply felt dread and sadness" (p.79). In his reflections on *Twelfth Night*, it was not until his fifties that he was able to see "how dark a stain ran through the play, ...a nakedly, ruthless malice" (pp.153-154)

Just as I was forced to accept in my own world the persistent presence of disappointment, a view of the universe far different from the wonders of delight I had imagined in my adolescent idealism, so too the play now exposed evil, not only its brutality but also its eternal presence. (p.154)

Poland as reader, analyst, and self come into a blunt encounter.

This brief essay and “The Analyst’s Fears” echo through my life and my own personal analyses, each essay evoking memories of those moments when I finally encountered and truly faced the consequences of my persistent refusal to meet head on the tragedies and losses that I had so fervently disavowed in my life and in the lives of those I have loved. So, too, I think of those moments in treatment and in my intimate relations when I came to confront the nasty aspects on my character and of those poignant, essential moments in therapy when a patient begins to take ownership of the potential for malice that lurks in each of us.

The sense of psychic frailty is a quiet presence throughout Poland’s work. In “Fears” he brings a fierce attention to the reality that “fear is not a theoretical concept; it is something that lies cold at the bottom of the stomach” (p.77). He leads us through a series of clinical vignettes in which he had to confront and resolve his own fear in order to do his work. His final vignettes are of a patient whose father was dying during his analysis and of a woman who was herself dying during her analysis, presented so as to illustrate bluntly that “an analyst is not invulnerable to the perils of reality” (p.78). Poland insists that we look at the actual dangers that exist in life interfering with and facilitating therapeutic efforts—again paradox. He goes on to delineate the sense of clinical and life dangers that foster fear in the analyst. He returns to a recurrent theme of the misuse of theory to ward off the uncertainty and fears of entering uncharted territories with patients. He concludes:

I analyze, in part, ...to take revenge on reality, to prove to myself over and over and over and over that insight can gain dominance over terror. Yet I learn repeatedly that fear can be tamed but never fully vanquished. (p.84)

In Life and in Death

Warren and I share an abiding passion for the arts, yet there is just enough difference in our ages that Warren and I are from different generations in the art and music that filled our formative years. As a young man, I was immersed in a particular generation of poets and artists. I spent countless hours reading the Beat poets—Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Kenneth Patchen, William Everson, and Phillip Whalen—whose photographs hang in my consulting room. I had the good fortune to meet many of them and so to hear their voices as well as read

their words on the page. Their poetry, when I first encountered it, was passionate, ferocious, rebellious, and relentlessly sexual. Inevitably, as they aged, Eros met Thanatos. Their work faced and brought voice to loss and death, as has my own (Cornell, 2014). William Everson, a poet of ferocious intensity and eroticism, was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. As he turned sixty-five, he wrote of his then standing "in the center of a twilight field, distantly circled by dark woods" (1980, p.1). He did not find himself fearing death. Rather, he feared "the passing of rapacious joy, that appetitive sensuality and intellectual thirst" (1980, p.!).

Warren closes his book, *Intimacy and Separateness in Psychoanalysis*, with "Slouching towards mortality: Thoughts on time and death". I first *heard* rather than read this paper. It brought me to silence. It brought me to tears. When Warren finished speaking, it was as though I was witnessing the end of a brilliant theater performance, one where I am not clapping or standing for the ovation but am sitting in utter silence, alone even though I am surrounded by a loud and enthusiastic crowd. To *hear* Warren's quietly passionate voice speaking to the wizened creativity that age and risk-taking can spark into life brought a new understanding to his words that I had been reading for many years. Warren speaks to the deeply personal meeting of intimacy and loss, vitality and reality, Eros and Thanatos—"facing Thanatos stirs the defiant vitality of Eros" (p.166). In so doing, he offers his final paradoxical pairing.

He closes the essay with the story of a patient dying in his early 50's during his analysis, his son still an adolescent. The patient asked Warren to meet with his son, whenever his son was ready, and speak for him of his father as a man, of his profound love and regard for his son. Warren did, carrying for his dead patient a voice he had not himself been able to bring to his young son. He was able to convey this father's wish for his son to flourish in his own life.

I have been in this work for nearly 50 years now. As a student and then young therapist, my days were often filled with the dark but idealistically defiant music of Bob Dylan, Patti Smith, and Lou Reed. These are artists whose work has stayed alive and maturing from one decade to the next. Each has faced profound losses and the deaths of loved ones that they have transformed through their music. Lou Reed was a poet and performer of relentless, unyielding self-scrutiny. As I prepared to write this introduction and re-read the papers in this book, especially the closing chapter, I kept thinking of Lou Reed's image of a "talking book," written for a theatrical collaboration with Robert Wilson. Reed described his wish for a *talking* book, not just words on a page, but a book that talked and could *speak* the "keys to past and present memories" and *speak* the name of someone now gone, so that they would "still remain more than a picture on a shelf" (2000, p.430).

Warren gives us just such a talking book. As he writes:

Generosity of spirit, creative generativity, is the way Eros defies Thanatos, the way one generation can deeply regret its own death yet be comforted by the continuation of loved others. ...And what is the essence of the word 'generation' but a group defined by engendering those who follow? (pp. 16-169)

Intimacy and Separateness in Psychoanalysis is a generous book, a talking book of hard-won and heart-felt generativity. It is a book that I hope will speak to our future generations of psychoanalysts and psychotherapists for many years to come.

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