EROTIC TRANSFERENCE AND COUNTERTRANSFERENCE

Although Mann is basically object relations oriented there is a flavour of the existential and transpersonal in his approach. His basic question is why do we ignore the erotic in therapy when it surrounds us in everyday life?

He is really asking questions rather than articulating a position. The resistance to valuing our emotional reaction to our clients goes right back to the start of psychoanalysis and the case of Anna O, Breuer's famous client. Their relationship was undoubtedly erotic but not sexual. It caused Breuer to give up and Freud to eventually discover transference and countertransference.

The key word here in defining the erotic is desire. The desire to love (or hate) and the crucial point for us as therapists is to recognise it, talk about it but not to act on it. Breuer didn't but Jung, Rank and Ferenczi did.

Those occurrences between Breuer and Anna O were in the 1890s and since then there has been a gradual but increasing valuing of the transferences with refinements in our definitions and use.

Mann recognises that the erotic is dangerous and includes loving and hostile reactions but he insists it is there and is better recognised and dealt with. The origin for Mann is unsurprisingly in the mother-baby relationship which he describes as an erotic process of falling in love. This is our template and our desire to repeat is strong in therapeutic settings.

We are not analysts but the feelings Mann talks about and the ethical issues they raise are something we have to consider and deal with. He suggests that we work on the edge and out of our guts rather than from theory, which links him to Winnicott and Bion.

For Mann (like other theorists) transference is always bisexual so the client's gender is irrelevant. He talks about the homoerotic and asks where it is in the relationship. Clients come to get difference from you to help them transform their relationships and transference is just two people trying to understand each other.

So the basic message is try to understand the relationship, which is different every time, but always contains some form of the erotic. Recognise it, discuss it with your client- BUT DON'T ACT OUT!