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Watching Over Sleeping Beauty--Working with Psychic Stasis in the Transference-Countertransference Situation

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Learning Goal:

Progress to verbalisation in psychotherapy as a means to connection and recovery, through persistent presence and adherence to the agreed parameters of the psychotherapeutic frame may assist a patient to emerge from malignant regression, from a psychotic state of mind.

Abstract Text:

This paper consists of reflections on fifteen years of work with a young adult patient seen thrice-weekly in psychoanalytic psychotherapy, without resort to pharmacotherapy. Comparative reference is made to the patient's internal world and that of the fairy tales of the brothers Grimm – 'Briar Rose' and 'Snow White' – and other versions of the story of Sleeping Beauty. Encounters with regressive pressures – threatened engulfment and psychic stasis – are discussed. This work is construed as a dynamic struggle towards the possibility of triangulation, in which the psychotherapist and significant others function for the patient as anchors to an awareness of the passage of time, the possibility of endings and the sustenance of life. The author discovers to his surprise, in the course of the work, that he has been struggling to establish and sustain connection with a patient who is suffering with a psychotic illness, alienated from herself internally, and functioning very poorly in her personal life, while apparently working well in her demanding occupational role as a clinician in a metropolitan hospital. The relational connection between therapist and psychotic patient, once established and expressed in spoken language, serves as a base from which the patient is able to internalise a sense of external reality and overcome her sense of alienation, establishing intimate relational connectedness beyond the therapeutic relationship.

**ON THE HEALING POWER
OF HUMAN RECONNECTION**