

“An Analysis With Bion”

An Interview with James Gooch, M.D.

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Abstract: In 1968 Wilfred Bion moved to Los Angeles, escaping the perils of fame in London. He lived in Los Angeles until a few months before his death in Oxford in 1979. He made a deep impact on psychoanalysis in Los Angeles through those he analysed and what he wrote. James Gooch, psychiatrist and founding president of the Psychoanalytic Center of California describes in detail the transformative experience of his analysis with Bion in an interview with JoAnn Culbert-Koehn, Jungian analyst. Dr. Gooch describes important differences between his analysis with Bion and his classical Freudian analysis during his analytic training.

Key words: Bion, Learning from Experience, Psychoanalysis.

Many people mistake the practice of psycho-analyses for an adequate substitute for real life. I don't know what 'real life' is, but I am jolly sure that psycho-analyses is no good unless it resembles it.

From a letter to his children in 1977 (Bion 1985)

INTRODUCTION

Wilfred Bion was born in Muttra in northwest India in 1897. He had an Indian Ayah who he always remembered. He was sent to boarding school in England as an eight-year old boy. He endured painful separation and did not return to India during his lifetime. He did however maintain an interest in Indian culture.

After the outbreak of the First World War, he served in the Tank Corps in France and was awarded both the Distinguished Service Order (DSO), and the Croix de Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur.

Subsequent to the war he studied history at Queen's College Oxford and medicine at University College London. In 1938 he began analytic training but this was interrupted by the Second World War. Bion worked as a psychiatrist in several hospitals and also in the front lines in North Africa. It was at this time that his wife Betty died 3 days after giving birth to his daughter Parthenope. Bion returned immediately to London to take care of his infant daughter and began a private practice. The stress of this time led him to analysis with Melanie Klein.

He became Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Tavistock Clinic, London, in 1945; Director of the London Clinic of Psychoanalysis from 1956 to 1962; and President of the British Psychoanalytic Society from 1962 – 1965. In 1951 he became engaged to his second wife, Francesca, who he met at the Tavistock Clinic. They had a loving and fruitful marriage with two children, Julian and Nicola.

In 1968, he received an invitation to work in Los Angeles. According to Francesca, this gave Bion the opportunity to escape from what he called “the cozy domesticity” of England. The vegetation in the hills of Los Angeles, like bougainvillea, evoked memories of his childhood in India — however, the culture was new to him and according to his wife, gave him the freedom to entertain “wild” thoughts (Bion 1985). Although there were plenty of analysts waiting to see him, he was not welcomed by the psychoanalytic establishment in Los Angeles. Bion’s influence in Los Angeles was on those he analyzed, the lectures he gave, and the books he published. The Bion analysts in Los Angeles are now widely published and read, and have influenced the Jungian community in San Francisco and Los Angeles. In 1979, a few months after Bion returned to Oxford England, he died of leukemia.

James Gooch, the subject of this interview, graduated from the Southern California Psychoanalytic Institute in 1970. He is currently a practicing analyst in Beverly Hills and the founder of the Psychoanalytic Center of California (PCC), which became an IPA component Society in September 1987. He was in analysis with Bion from 1971 to 1976.

The following interview took place in the lecture room at the C.G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles, as part of the public programs Clinical Dialogues Series.

Interview:

JoAnn I understand that your analysis with Bion was your second analysis. I wonder if you could tell us something about why you chose Bion and how you made that decision?

Jim I basically knew nothing about Bion. In reviewing the literature for my graduation paper from the Southern California Psychoanalytic Institute, I just stumbled across Hannah Siegel’s book *The Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein*, and in the chapter on the depressive position was a list of the depressive affects, and a reference to Klein’s two papers on the depressive position. I included some of this material and I had a very scary experience when I got a critique on my paper in graffiti across the title page that said “Gooch is tarred with the Kleinian brush” and I thought, “Jesus, what have on earth have I gotten myself into.”

I then learned about this war that was going on between the ego psychologists and the Kleinians in Los Angeles, and I thought, “my goodness, I didn’t even know anything about this...I better find out more about this because it damn near cost me my graduation from the institute.” I immediately purged my paper and took out those references, but I thought, “my goodness, this is more like an indoctrination place than a place of higher learning,” which was an unpleasant shock.

I put together a study group to read the object relations literature, and in the process, during a conversation with a fellow resident, I mentioned this whole experience to him...and my interest in finding out what object relations was all about. He said to me, "well, do you know Mason and Bion?" "I said no, I've never heard of them, who are they"...and he said, "well, they're London Kleinian analysts who are here in town practicing, and you ought to ask one of them to join your study group." I asked Mason, and he wasn't interested in reading literature, he wanted to talk cases. I took the opportunity to present to him for a time, an analytic case I was working with and I found his ideas certainly totally new and very helpful and after the last session I said, "Dr Mason, I'd like to learn more about this...I found it to be very helpful...how would you suggest that I do this?" He said, "I would suggest you have an analysis'

I said, "Dr. Mason, are you kidding or do you really mean that? I just finished 8 years of analysis." He replied "No, I really mean that" and I said "With whom would you suggest I go for analysis?" and he said "Well, there's me or Bion ... I suppose I would go to Dr. Bion because he has had so much good experience and is so well known". So, Bion, being not well-known at all to me...I called Bion, and I got another sort of off-putting response which is that he doesn't want to talk to me on the phone, but instead, he wants me to write him a letter, saying what I start out trying to say on the phone. I wrote him a one-page letter and in a couple of weeks I got a letter (a very brief letter) back from him, probably in March, saying, "starting on such and such a date in September I can see you on Monday at this time, Tuesday at this time, Wednesday at this time, Thursday at this time, Friday at this time...." Bion.

So, I showed up ... but I didn't have any idea who he was, or what I was getting into.

JoAnn

So, in September you arrive in Bion's office. What was the beginning like? Was it strange, or did you just sink right in...what happened in the beginning?

Jim

It was certainly different, but one of the things that struck me from the very beginning, was Bion's very early on beginning to make interpretations about my omnipotence, which I had gotten [for] 2 years of my classical analysis except there was a dramatic difference. And that is, that I do not recall one single incidence in which Bion made that interpretation in which he did not interpret what he *guessed* and always made it clear [that] he couldn't read my mind, he wasn't *telling* me.... it was his speculation. He would cite the evidence, if there were evidence in the session, but he would often say something like "well, I can't tell from what you said why you would need to be reduced to omnipotence, but my

experience is that people are feeling helpless about something when they are in an omnipotent state of mind". Invariably, I would know what I was feeling helpless about even if there weren't evidence in the material of the session. So I found every one of the interpretations scored, whether he could cite the evidence or whether all he could say is "I don't know what it is but I suspect you are feeling helpless about something."

JoAnn But you *could* find the evidence?

Jim I could find it, and usually quickly. I can't tell you how different that experience was, because I found it extremely painful to have interpretations being made to me about my omnipotence and not know why. Usually I knew that I was in that state, so it was not news to me...but what I didn't know was why on earth was I in that state. I don't remember that once with my classical analyst ... who was incidentally, a decent human being and did me no harm, which I am extremely grateful for. It felt so different; that he (Bion) was really *with me* and tried to help me understand...and whatever it was I was feeling helpless about, to grow the capacity to stand that.

When he made interpretations he always made it clear what the evidence was – he was meticulous about that. It was not a pronouncement, but a theory or an educated guess, and *only I* could know whether there was any truth in it or not. I increasingly could feel in the music, and the dance, the cadence...the timbre of his voice that he was speaking to me from his heart; that he had to be having an emotional experience himself to be speaking to me that way. So even though he wouldn't tell me what his associations were, it was clear that he was in touch with something within himself that had been evoked by me. As a matter of fact, it was not an uncommon thing for him to say, "Even though I tell you almost nothing about myself, you're likely to know a great deal about me based on what I'm able to understand about you and what I'm not able to understand in you."

JoAnn It would seem to me that his style and manner of interpretation was quite different than Klein's or Hannah Siegal's. Is that your understanding...that he came to this on his own?

Jim I would guess that he came to it on his own. When I read Klein's analysis of Richard however, I have the impression that she was doing the same, though she was much more cagey about it, and she would not write nor talk about what her private associations were, nor how she used them. But I can not imagine someone speaking to another human being as she spoke to Richard, with the respect and compassion that I feel when I read it, without coming from her own heart and having respect for the anguish that she was trying to call attention to.

JoAnn Jim, can you say something about Bion's attitude towards the use of the couch and other frame issues...and something about how he defined analysis.

Jim Well, he didn't have to say anything about the couch because when you walked into his office, the couch was sitting in the middle of the room; it was an analytic couch, there were chairs, but it spoke for itself.

So, as I recall, I laid down on the couch the first day I went into his office without it even being discussed; but it has been a few years ago, maybe I've forgotten something by now.

Bion was meticulous about starting on time, stopping on time, expecting to be paid for sessions if I didn't show up. He gave me a bill at the first of the month for the preceding month's work and expected to be paid shortly. There were times when I might not pay him until the end of the month if I was tight, and I would tell him and he didn't object; but sometimes he let me know that it cost him something not to be paid for a few weeks.

Jo-Ann I've heard this story that somebody went to him for analysis and they said 'Dr. Bion, I only want to come four days a week' and he said 'fine' and when the bill came it was for five days a week.

Jim I don't know that he said 'fine' but the bill *was* for five days a week, according to this person who told me the story. I have no reason to think he wasn't honest in telling the story.

JoAnn How do you think Bion defined analysis? Obviously you can feel it in the books, but what are your thoughts.

Jim Well, I can tell you that one of the things that stands out in my mind that he said to me about analysis is "this is just an ordinary conversation about a very delimited range of experience—namely your emotional experience,—and what happens to you if you cannot have emotional experience". Something like that. I think that he believed, based on his experience that the analyst needed to understand with respect—mature respect — compassion and discipline what the analysand's experience was, and add to that as he could, which I think necessitated his using what was evoked in him by the experience. He not infrequently would say to me when I would say something in conceptual terms, "could you give me an example of that, because I might better understand and it might give me some clue as to what to say." I think he was using the evocation of the imagery and the affect associated with the specific to stimulate his own emotional experience that he would then use to elaborate what else there was to my own emotional experience. He felt it was essential to show the person

how to *stand* what they couldn't stand, in order to understand their experience. But the main thing was in *standing it* in an atmosphere of respectful compassion and discipline. Through that process, a mysterious experience that we call internalization, or introjection, or introjective identification will occur. But actually, it's a mystery how it happens. But that something can begin to grow that wasn't there before.

Jo Ann Did working with a celebrity analyst from London at first make you self-conscious?

Jim I didn't know he was a celebrity, number one; and number two he was assiduous at interpreting idealization of him, positively or negatively. I remember his disclaimers that he couldn't read my mind...that he needed me to doubt what he said, and to question what he said...that he needed me to keep him properly informed in order to have any idea how to do his work...and that it was not something he could do by himself.

JoAnn So, he was modeling a kind of non-omnipotence.

Jim Oh ya, in a big way. One of the things that struck me about him was the care with which he dealt with the practical epistemology and the conduct of a session. What was the evidence? What was corroboration, or not? I can remember saying to him things like, "I can't feel that." And his saying, "Well, this or that that you said suggests that it's correct but we'll have to wait to know till you can feel it", or "even though you've said you agreed with the interpretation the fact that you said this, that, or the other thing makes me suspect that it was not correct, but we'll have to wait and see."

JoAnn Some people describe him as quite formal. It doesn't sound like you experienced him that way.

Jim No, but he did have that; I could see how people could take him that way. He did have that bearing about him, but you didn't have to listen very hard to feel through...you could see through that.

JoAnn I've never asked anybody this, but was he comfortable talking about sex in your opinion?

Jim Based on my wife's experience in analysis with him, I had the impression that he actually was very uncomfortable with her love for him. That made him uneasy. It was very painful for her and she certainly confronted him with something like, "well, you can say what I'm not to you, but you can't say what you are to me."

JoAnn Is there anything else you'd like to say, especially more about what you gained?

Jim What I gained was that it opened up my heart in a way that is still opening. I found that utterly miraculous and something for which I feel eternally grateful.

I would bring up what seemed to me quite disparate issues that I would not have connected myself, and he would point out that by the very fact that they occurred in the same session they were different aspects of the same experience. He was bringing together the splits. They were very simple interpretations that were extremely helpful for integrating my own experience.

There was a dramatic one was relatively early in my analysis when he made this interpretation in part object Kleinian language like breast-penis kinds of talk. I was utterly outraged – “what kind of Kleinian bullshit is this?” I was ready to get up and walk out – it was a powerful experience – except, he went right on thank goodness, and said, “I haven't the slightest idea whether there is any truth in that or not, nor do I have any idea what on earth it would mean if there is, but you may.” It was amazing, it was as if the room literally got brighter and I thought to myself ‘God that's amazing how communication works and the analytic process works’. But also I had a flash “this is what I need to learn to do on my own one of these days to continue with my self analysis after I've terminated this analysis”.

JoAnn He wasn't force-feeding you...he was just putting something out and you could take it or leave it – and that makes a big difference.

Jim Oh, ya.

JoAnn Did he ever talk to you about his own analysis with Klein, or did he ever say anything to you about Freud or about Jung?

Jim He made references that gave me the impression that he gave Klein a very hard time. And that ... she wasn't easy. He said something like “well, you can have some idea what it must have been like for Mrs. Klein to have me as an analysand” or something like that . He could be very ornery and very tenacious and stubborn at times. ... he didn't back away from any emotional state with me.

JoAnn Is there anything else about Bion the man that you could tell us?

Jim He was by then in his eighties probably, or certainly his late seventies [but] it was very clear he had been an athlete from the way he carried

JoAnn So that would be another parallel between Bion and Jung?

Jim (nods).

JoAnn Are there things you personally found lovable or especially difficult about Bion?

Jim I found his emotional honesty profoundly moving and touching. [I also admired] his courage not only in a session, but when I read his books to this day. Initially I would get so furious that I would literally throw the book or quit because I couldn't stand the frustration and consternation that I felt. However, I stuck with it, because it had a unique affect on me that I had not had in reading any other book or author - when I worked [at it] my mind was amazingly open to intuitions that I had never been able to have before. That made the struggle very, very worth the effort. It had a very profound effect on my life.

I discovered something that made the practice of analysis feel extremely different. It felt wholesome but it was much scarier. I would be very frightened at the start of a session about what I would have to confront; would I be able to stand up to it and would I be able to understand it. I realized that if I could just get through the session and avoid saying something crazy, or faint, or get up and run out of the room, this will have been a successful session.

JoAnn What did it feel like when you finished your analysis with Bion?*Jim*

I felt like I could continue as an analyst and not do violence to myself or somebody else.

JoAnn One of the things that Bion talks about is the capacity for alpha function and how that can grow in an analysis. Was that a palpable thing for you?

Jim Yes, I could stay with feeling experiences that I couldn't stay with before. This is something I'd intuited from the very beginning of my training in psychiatry - that if I didn't grow, my patients weren't growing. This is a very underestimated notion of Bion's...the importance of "*is growth occurring?*" and if growth is not occurring, then this is not a wholesome and useful analysis - something is awry.

JoAnn What about intuition in the analysis and the growth of intuition? Did Bion talk about intuition explicitly?

Jim It was clear he was using it. I remember an interpretation for instance - He had cited the evidence as he usually did, and I remember saying well,

himself and the way he moved. He was probably 6' 2" ... he was slender but you could tell that he had kept himself in good shape and probably all of his life had been in excellent physical condition. ...

Have any of you been to hear Bion give a talk? Well, let me tell you it was an experience. And he referred to them as experiences. He would have an assigned subject, he never read anything ... he only spoke extemporaneously. He spoke for a few minutes and then he expected the audience to respond with comments or questions or whatever they wanted to...and then he would sit down and shut up and he would not budge...until somebody said something. You would feel like you were gonna explode until somebody began to have dialogue with him. Now my theory about this practice was that he felt that psychoanalysis was about emotional experience and that the great danger in psychoanalytic writings, and lectures, and seminars was that people lost touch with their emotional experience and got into some dissociated intellectualized state with which he was determined not to collude. You couldn't go to one of his happenings and not have powerful emotional experiences.

JoAnn In what way does your practice of analysis today reflect your analysis with Bion?

Jim One of the things that Bion was very sensitive to throughout the analysis was the danger of an analysand or supervisee imitating their analyst or supervisor.... For him being an analyst meant discovering the psychoanalyst within you. It's like a fingerprint.

Another thing I learned from Bion, that I find very useful, is the importance of respecting and appreciating the complexity of emotional life. In this mode I can hear the different voices within the personality that may be in the room at any given moment, and, as a result can try to address the ones that seem to be the most urgently in need. In addition, I learned to respect the full cast or ensemble of all the voices. This gives the person a sense of the complexity of themselves. He would say something like, even though psychoanalysis may be the most thorough on-going instrument for understanding and observing the human psyche, it has barely scratched the surface.

JoAnn Did Bion ever talk directly in a session about religious experience with you?

Jim He would borrow the language of religion to describe the experience and it was clear that he felt it was of fundamental importance. He talked about how the evidence is very strong that a human's need for religious experience is a fundamental thing – a human need.

“I can see why you say that, and believe that it’s probably true, but I just can’t feel it.” And he said, “Well it may be the sort of thing you experienced with [your] aunt.” And, (snap of fingers), there it was.

JoAnn What about the termination?

Jim I worked with him for five years, and at that point we both felt that the zest and the growth in the analysis had slowed down and yet I felt there was a hell of a lot more I needed to do, so I said “well, what about my wife taking my hours.” He agreed that we would experiment with that and so within two months, I had gradually cut down from my four hours per week, and she began to go two, and I went two and within a month or two ...

JoAnn So there was an overlap period?

Jim Ya, two months at most.

JoAnn Did you ever regret giving up your hours to her? Was that hard in the beginning?

Jim Actually, no it wasn’t. I felt that she was able to make better use of it than I was. And, she was not hesitant to share her experience with me and I learned through her.

JoAnn Um! Can you say anything about the fact of having had the same analyst and how both of you had such an important experience ... how that affected the marriage?

Jim For the better! Not that it made it easy. Marriage is the hardest thing I’ve ever done. Raising kids is the second hardest thing – and these are the most growthful things I’ve ever done.

JoAnn What books or articles that Bion wrote would you recommend to beginners?

Jim I think each person will have to discover that for themselves...where does it resonate with your emotional experience, and when you read Bion, or for that matter as far as I’m concerned any analytic literature, what is the emotional experience that the person is writing about? Now Bion actually gave up trying to describe it, and said he didn’t feel he could do that, but he did feel that he could evoke the emotional experience in the reader that he was trying to communicate. And hence, the painfulness of reading Bion is that he’s trying to evoke what it was actually like when he worked with his analysands.

Read Bion, but the only way you are going to grow from this will be if you concomitantly read yourself. Also it's useful to have a dialogue with Bion in your mind. Often there are multiple meanings in what he's trying to communicate, and it's important to tolerate the complexity, not knowing, the confusion, the doubt and the uncertainty, etc. So, it's an exercise, you've got to really work emotionally when you're reading Bion, and resist the temptation to do too much intellectual work.

JoAnn What do you think is important in Bion's writing that gets ignored, that's really important?

Jim I think the importance of growth and also his appreciation of the importance of practical epistemology. Bion was actually an extremely practical man and his analyses were meant to help – at least they helped me in a very practical way of being myself, living my life, and learning from my own emotional experience. He talks about 'learning from experience' but if you get into a head-trip about that, you'll lose it; it's about your own emotional experience in encounter with someone.

JoAnn It seems to me that *learning from experience* is the thing that helps one get away from omnipotence.

Jim I think speaking from one's heart and the appreciation of the complexity of psychic life at any given moment; those are some of the things that I think aren't often inadequately appreciated about what he's trying to call our attention to.

JoAnn What do you think Bion meant by "the language of achievement;" what was your understanding of that?

Jim It's "what is the kind of thinking that leads to being oneself in life?"¹ – in relating to others and one's self, that is not just off in some obsessive or intellectual mental masturbation that goes nowhere. 'The language of achievement' I believe is Keats's phrase .. it's column six on the grid². ... [In] my classical training, I felt like I was giving the patient advice when I made column six interpretations and they can be easily misunderstood or

¹ See Bion W. (1970) *Attention and Interpretation*, p 125, London: Karnac

² Jim Gooch (personal communication) describes the grid as a pictograph of Bion's theory of thinking and feeling. It is an attempt to organize the communication in an analytic hour for reflection by the analyst outside the session, a kind of psychoanalytic play. Gooch sees column 6 interpretations as relating to the language of achievement – column 6 interpretations are a prelude to/or substitute for achievement. Bion himself writes 'The column 6 category is intended for something which by contrast is thought, even though it is thought apparently instantaneously transformed into action, or to reverse Keat's formulation of negative capability, action which is used as a substitute for thought and not action which is used as a prelude to thought' (Bion 1977, p.7).

abused as advice, but if correctly done, it is truly an interpretation and not advice. Being able to feel the difference is very, very, freeing.

JoAnn Can you give us an example?

Jim To give an overly simple example of column six interpretation. The patient comes in and describes, say what sounds to me like they're actually having an angina attack and they are seemingly oblivious to this: I might make the interpretation: "Sounds to me like you may be afraid to think about your worry that you could be having a heart attack and that you may have the idea that you may need to consult with your doctor when you leave here, or go to the ER [emergency room]. Now, that could sound like advice, but it's actually meant to be a guess about what the person is unable to think then.

I went to a lecture during the "Kleinian Wars" in which there were Kleinian analysts and Ego Psychology analysts having a panel discussion and after that, I had a dream that these men were having a fistfight, a brutal fistfight and I told Bion my dream, and Bion said "I think you'd like for me to make an interpretation about what this means about you, and not take your experience last night seriously."

JoAnn I want to ask you to say something about Bion's idea about psychoanalytic training.

Jim Well, I was at the time developing a training program in psychoanalytic psychotherapy at the Reiss Davis child study center that was modeled after the Tavistock training program in psychoanalytic psychotherapy. I went to talk to Bion about his ideas about psychoanalytic education and boy, were his ideas radical. I asked him if he would come speak to our faculty about this and he was very reluctant. However, he did agree, but then he called me and said "No, I've changed my mind, I don't want to do that...they won't listen to me." And they wouldn't have listened, I realized later.

He felt that the training schools should list a bunch of core concepts that the trainee would be expected to learn about before they applied for graduation. They could learn about them in whatever way they chose. He thought that the Institute should invite people to teach what they were interested in teaching, with a list of what the students were expected to learn about. But, he said, it should be very clear that there was no guarantee that anybody will show up for your class and there should be no requirement that anyone should take a seminar with an instructor or other students if they didn't want to. A seminar should never be more than four weeks long, with at least a four-week break in between seminars.

He was cagey about the requirement of having a training analysis but, reading between the lines, it seemed that he thought it should be a personal analysis and that people need to go to whom they choose for an analysis ... probably needs to be somebody who graduated from analytic training but he wouldn't say. ... Or even when it should be relative to the training time, how many hours or any of that stuff. He just said "I would suggest you read Sigmund Freud's letter to Salome about training."³ ... And his idea of qualifying as a graduate was to me kind of brutal; that when the person thought they were ready to present themselves for graduation, they should present their work either to the entire membership or to a committee. And the membership or the committee should vote on whether or not they had met the standards for graduation or not. And I said "what if the group or committee is prejudiced?" And he says "Well that would be too bad, but such a group shouldn't survive anyhow".

JoAnn What did he say to you on his ideas about the psychoanalytic establishment?

Jim That the psychoanalytic establishment was in danger of crushing the life out of psychoanalysis; that there needed to be [one] but there was always the danger that it would not nurture psychoanalysis, but kill it, squelch it, stunt it.

JoAnn Could you say something about his ideas about the relationship between the mystic and the group?

Jim They need one another. The group needs the mystic (which is a synonym for genius)⁴ who can think thoughts about things that haven't been seen that way before and communicate that to the group. ... the mystic needs the group to keep them from going off the deep end. So he felt that the essentialness of a wholesome symbiosis for the individual and the group was a fundamental human need.

JoAnn Do you want to say something about Bion's experience in the First World War .. he was decorated, and was really a war hero. Although, if you read the autobiographical stuff, he was always kind of uncomfortable about his being decorated and so forth. But what do you think about the effects of the war years on him and how it affected his writing and his person?

Jim He was profoundly affected. I read an (unpublished) paper by a college professor teaching a course in composition to freshmen – an undergraduate course. He/she used Bion's war diary as the text for the class. The author felt that the reason that Bion was able to write in the way he did was because of his unique personal experience, particularly in the

³ See Sigmund Freud and Lou Andreas-Salome letters (1972) New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich

⁴ See Bion W.R. (1970) *Attention and Interpretation*, pp 64-75 London: Karnac

First World War, but also the trauma of leaving India when he was eight ... being in an English private school ... his profound loneliness and trauma, and that his life's work was to try and turn that to good account so as not to stay completely stuck in a PTSD state. I think Bion never got over the [First World] War (⁵).

JoAnn I mean, some things are too big to integrate, but he did make use of it.

Jim Yes. You can see how some of the imagery that Bion uses in his writing came from those early traumatic experiences...whether it was in his childhood or in the First World War.

This is particularly evident in *Memoirs of the Future* (⁶). It's written like a play with different characters speaking different lines, but it's obviously written by Bion. I think it was his attempt to illustrate psychic life by describing an internal dialogue amongst the different characters that are internal parts of the self who are in occasional dialogue, but more frequently cacophonous miscommunication.

My own feeling is that Bion probably wrote the book to make a sort of a time capsule for when psychoanalysis had been destroyed by the establishment. What was inside could then be re-discovered at some future date.

Audience My understanding is that Bion was a fairly good watercolorist...and I'm wondering if he ever spoke about how the creative process informed the analytic process.

Jim He uses the metaphor of a painter creating a canvas in a number of places, particularly in the book on transformations (⁷). I don't think he writes about his own experience as an artist...he certainly felt that aesthetes, mythologists, and theologians had a lot to teach psychoanalysts if we'd listen.

...he felt that using psychiatric diagnosis and the idea of psychopathology, even though it may have its place...is potentially, extremely hurtful. When we give a person a diagnosis we obliterate what a schizophrenic or other seriously disturbed people have to teach us.

Audience I'm interested in your remarks about what he said about training...and when you said that analysts would have classes but there would be no

⁵ Bion F. (1997) *W.R. Bion War Memoirs 1917-19*, London: Karnac

⁶ Bion W.R. (1991) *A Memoir of the Future* London:Karnac

⁷ Bion W.R (1965) *Transformations*, pp1-6, London:Karnac

mandatory attendance and I was just thinking about what would happen if we did that. So, is the reason why he would do that is so that the analyst would be in the same place of anxiety as the candidate? In other words... they would both be in the same soup...the analyst would have to sit there and wonder if anyone would show up?

Jim Well, I think that was part of it, but I think it also had to do with his idea that analysts-in-training were adults, and needed to be responsible for themselves and not be infantilized.

Audience Because mandatory attendance certainly takes care of the analysts anxiety!

JoAnn Takes care of the analyst's ego...

Jim ... as well as the analysand's or student's responsibility for how and what they are going to learn...and what's useful is to be able to use their own experience in deciding how they learn best.

Audience Tagging along with that, I wondered when you said the candidate presents their work in the end...what constitutes their work? What is that they would present?

Jim Implicit in it would be how they worked clinically.

Audience So, present a case?

Jim Yes. And then whatever theoretical approach they thought relevant. However, what seems most important would be "how does this person make emotional contact and facilitate psychic growth and development".

Concluding Remarks (JoAnn Culbert-Koehn)

Despite Bion's fecundity, Gerard Bléandonu⁸, one of his biographers writes, "to those who met him, Bion seemed an extraordinary person, unlike others in his manner of speech, in his style of writing, and in his behavior. He nevertheless remained fundamentally a solitary man..." A Los Angeles colleague told me that Bion said, "If *one* person understands what I've said, I consider myself lucky."

His wife Francesca Bion, confirmed he was always nervous before he spoke. She said that "he would often say to me, with a look of alarm just before 'going on stage' as it were, 'but I have nothing to say' or, 'whatever am I going to say to them?' He did not in fact know beforehand what he was going to say. What we heard was freshly minted, even

⁸ Bleandonu G. (1994). *Wilfred Bion: His Life and Works 1897-1979*. London: Free Association Press.

new to him; there would appear a phrase, a sentence I had not heard him use before – a bright flash of insight, leaving an afterglow in the mind’s eye.”⁹ (Bion 1985, p. 240)

References

Bion W.R. (1977) *Two papers. The Grid and the Caesura*. London: Karnac, 1989.

—— (1985) *All My Sins Remembered: Another Part of a Life and the Other Side of Genius - Family Letters by Wilfred R. Bion*. London: Karnac.

⁹ Bion W.R. (1985). *All My Sins Remembered: Another Part of a Life and the Other Side of Genius - Family Letters by Wilfred R. Bion*. London: Karnac.