

# Re-membering the Infantile: A Dialogue between Prenatal and Postnatal Selves

Panel discussion from the IPA conference, 2021, following the film which can be viewed here:

<https://youtu.be/M9qETA6beHo>

*Alison Vaspe (UK), Meg Harris Williams (UK), Vera Regina Fonseca Montagna (Brazil), Vivienne Pasioka (Canada)*

We invite you to join in our Panel's discussion of this short film inspired by Bion's review in his *Memoir* of his childhood experiences, and how they become transformed or translated in the process of remembering, throughout life and especially in the process of his own self-analysis. The longer version of the film, *The Becoming Room*, can be viewed here:

[https://youtu.be/14Wc8U6m2\\_w](https://youtu.be/14Wc8U6m2_w)



This panel discussion can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/GlQVTrUteXc>

*Introduction to the session by Alison Vaspe*

I first encountered the film dramatization of Bion's *A Memoir of the Future* in Reading, England, in 2016. Meg Harris Williams, the script writer, showed the sequences as they then existed, pausing between them

to read unfilmed parts of the script, and to comment on their context in relation to Bion's autobiographical writings and ideas.

From these fragments of scenes, and from Meg Harris Williams's interjections and responses to the audience, I received an impression – in a way that moved me, and clearly moved the audience – of Bion's mind, with its sudden shifts towards becoming, its unexpected movements, and its sudden departures from narrated experience to fictitious, imagined encounters with internal objects. Here was a sense of the humanity of this thinking, feeling, and – most importantly – questioning man. As Meg Harris Williams puts it: here was Everyman.

Since then, the film has grown, and from the full length version, now extending to an hour and a quarter, Meg Harris Williams produced the 30 minute version you have watched: *Re-membering the Infantile*. Her piecing together of this film in its various editions has truly been a labour of love, born of her intimate acquaintance with its making, and with Bion's work.

It is a great privilege and pleasure to introduce this panel in which Meg is joined by Vera Regina Fonseca Montagna (from Sao Paulo, Brazil) and Vivienne Pasioka (from Toronto, Canada), each of whom will respond from their own subjective experience of the film. Their thoughts span Bion's own work, especially *A Memoir of the Future*, as well as that of Martha Harris, Esther Bick, and Donald Meltzer. But they go beyond the psychoanalytic literature to poetry, philosophy, linguistics, and art: to the novels of Proust and Joyce and the stories of Borges – and to the places that in Neolithic and ancient history cradle our earliest notions of the mind and the imagination. Their rich associations, like the film, evoke what Vera Montagna calls 'thought ruins' – primitive relics of thought that dreamed aright move the infant ego to learn from experience in a continuous and never-ending process of mental life.

These presentations will be followed by a panel discussion, after which we hope to hear your own responses, thoughts and questions.

We begin then with Meg Harris Williams, a visual artist, a writer, and also a teacher of psychoanalytic ideas, focusing on the nature of aesthetic experience and the links between psychoanalysis and the arts, especially literature. Her books include *The Vale of Soulmaking: The Post-Kleinian Model of the Mind*, *The Aesthetic Development: The Poetic Spirit of Psychoanalysis*, and *The Art of Personality in Literature and Psychoanalysis*. She was

co-author with Donald Meltzer of *The Apprehension of Beauty*. In Bion's *Dream* she wrote about Bion's autobiography, *A Memoir of the Future*, for which she also wrote the filmscript, together with Kumar Shahani. More recently she wrote the script for *The Becoming Room*, based on that film, which was performed in Delhi by Tom Alter in 2017. Her latest book is *Dream Sequences in Shakespeare* (Routledge 2021) and we come to this from her recent session on 'The infant's bond with the absent mother in *King Lear*'.<sup>1</sup>

### *Introduction to the film by Meg Harris Williams*

Many years ago, in the 1980s, I was involved in making a film about Bion's *Memoir of the Future* with the Indian director Kumar Shahani: a project that was planned before Bion's death and was originally intended as a documentary and discussion with Bion himself who had agreed to go to India to do it – the land of his childhood of course, which he had not revisited since leaving it for school in England at the age of eight. After Bion's sudden death the idea turned to making a drama of the *Memoir* itself. That film was never finished, for many reasons, but it had a wonderful cast of actors who retained a special affection for it, and about 5 years ago one of them, Tom Alter, asked me to write a short play based on the film that he could include in his series of one-man plays 'The Play of History', about figures with an Indian connection. This play and the video that was filmed at its performance in Delhi in 2017 was called *The Becoming Room*. It can be watched on YouTube. Today's film *Re-membering the Infantile* is a selection of scenes from *The Becoming Room* focussing on Bion's childhood experiences and how they become transformed or translated in the process of remembering, throughout life and especially in the process of his own self-analysis.

The film was never intended to be a literal biography of Wilfred Bion. He was a very private person whom none of us can know and his actual life is of no interest to us – we were not there and it is none of our business.

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<sup>1</sup> *Alison Vaspe* is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist and psychoanalyst, formerly co-ordinator of the Wessex CPD programme. She worked for 15 years at the Maudsley NHS Trust and is editor of the book *Psychoanalysis, the NHS, and Mental Health Work Today* (Routledge, 2017).

After teaching a course on Psychoanalytic Autobiography for many years I have become increasingly aware of the difference between biography and autobiography. As Bion points out at the beginning of *The Long Weekend*, he is not writing about the real people, places or events in which his life-story took place, or seemed to take place: he is 'writing about Me', that is, his inner self not his outer self. All the characters, however realistic, are fictional and they represent aspects of his own mind. This means that we can identify with them from a learning point of view, they become internal objects of our own.

It is an interesting feature of autobiography that it always seems to be about ourselves. This is regardless of the fact that everyone's life circumstances are different. Their internal struggle for development encounters the same obstacles owing to what is unfashionably termed 'human nature' – unfashionable, yet psychoanalysis is based on this premise of common humanity, not just in the political sense of the Rights of Man but his psychic experience. So we identify intimately with the writer of an autobiography, by contrast with a biography, in which there is a temptation to believe in the illusion that we are possessed of the facts about somebody else's experience – a temptation described in psychoanalysis as countertransference action, in this case usually taking the form of possessiveness about 'understanding Bion' – the 'new Messiah' (as my mother Martha Harris predicted this phenomenon).

So it is with Bion's autobiography. Because it is his dream about himself, not a portrait of his actual parents or friends, it is also about us, if we can see ourselves there, which means we have to undergo our own subjective experience, in the manner of the analyst's useful countertransference, called by Meltzer the 'countertransference dream'.

Indeed the title *The Becoming Room* was chosen because this project of filming the *Memoir* had for those of us involved in it taken on a lifetime quality. The cutting room where films are edited was getting associated with the becoming room of life, on the lines of Bion's description of himself as perpetually 'becoming a psychoanalyst' but never reaching the goal – such is real life.

Bion's Indian childhood, his schooldays, his war experience, narrate a sequence of internal dramas. [that focus above all the struggle of how the child or infant aspect of the self learns to think, or is distracted from think-

ing]. As a child, the objects who promote or sometimes (unintentionally) thwart this developmental struggle are inevitably his parental and family figures – here his mother, father and ayah. In a sense he had two mothers, representing two directions and sets of values, the Indian and the British (or British Raj), the female-emotional or religious and the male-scientific. They seem incompatible and yet he suspects they have a hidden link, and as always in his thinking, the link is the key to the situation. The problem is how to deal with hidden emotional turbulence when it becomes noticeable, how to gather different parts of the personality into a work-group rather than avoiding the experience by sheltering in a basic-assumption group, which is always a false exoskeleton rather than helping to develop a true endoskeleton.

The film is an attempt to visualise the growth of an idea, and the growth of a thinking process, or capacity to think – to convert intolerable or incomprehensible sensations into material for thinking about them. For Bion every thought has a prenatal origin, just as every human being does. So the scenes from the film are not truly chronological, though there is an underlying structure of a life-story from birth to death of an individual, as he describes it in the *Memoir*. They are more dreamlike in the way they switch from one time to another. What they are really hoping to dramatize is this attempt to evolve a work-group from the interaction of internal objects. The central events of childhood are really metaphors for internal group meetings – the Tiger Hunt, the Train and ‘electric city’, the Run; hence Krishna and Christ, the Devil and the Virgin, the ‘green hill’ of sacrifice. These conflicts represent the positions and processes defined by Bion as ‘Pairing’, ‘Dependence’, and ‘Fight-Flight’, and the movement towards ‘K’ (Knowledge) or away from it to ‘-K’.

Throughout there is a dialogue, or caesura, between pre-natal and post-natal perspectives. The pre-natal is always complaining that the post-natal, however clever it believes itself to be, is unable to ‘feel the feelings’ that it is trying to get across. So the film both begins and ends with an image of the birth of its subject, Wilfred Bion. The second birth re-visits or re-members the first traumatic caesura from a ‘watery’ to a ‘gaseous’ way of being, and tries to shed new light on this catastrophic change, to make it constructive rather than destructive. On one level it can be seen as a dramatization of his Grid.

Bion often says (as he does in the film) that he feels his main difficulty

in communicating his ideas is conveying his belief that the mind is a real place, not just a way of talking: ‘How can I explain that I really think there is a mind?’ It seems he chose the medium of autobiography, at the end of his life, not so much to convey any special message about psychoanalysis, as to convey the reality of his internal adventures and struggles. He is not just saying it, he is living it. But unless this reality can somehow be conveyed to others, it will be lost and of no use to future generations. It has to be made to look real so that people can identify with it, can stimulate their own imaginations and their own re-membering processes. This was the aim of the film, to make it look real, as real as the fictional characters whom Bion says kept his mind alive, deep in the realms of the unconscious, even when he was sure it must be dead from his incapacity to re-organise its domination by traumatic memories.

In a sense the resemblances to the life and times of a man called Wilfred Bion are fortuitous, though provided by him in the hope of telling us something that lies ‘beyond’ their face value: namely universal conflicts and directions in the psyche of Everyman. As he says at the beginning of *The Long Week-End*, ‘if I could have resorted to abstractions I would have done so.’ Unknowable knowledge can only intersect with everyday existence in the form of a fiction. The idea of this film has been to clothe certain universal abstractions in the fictional guise of one individual and the dreams he has offered us so that we can dream them too.

*Alison Vaspe introduces Vera Regina Fonseca Montagna*

Vera Regina Fonseca Montagna is a clinical psychologist and child psychotherapist. She has worked in public hospitals in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and in the University of São Paulo. Her pre-clinical training was at the Department of Children and Parents at the Tavistock Clinic in London, and while in England she was a psychotherapist at the Epsom Child Guidance Clinic in Surrey. She qualified as a psychoanalyst in 1999 and in that capacity has been an Effective Member of the Brazilian Psychoanalytic Society of São Paulo. She was a member of the IPA Cultural Committee between 2010 and 2016 and a member of the Documentation and Historical Research team of the São Paulo Psychoanalytic Society. Besides her professional activity as a child and adult psychoanalyst, she has practised the art of

painting and engraving for almost 30 years, as well as studying art and psychoanalysis. Her published articles include 'Rembrandt: resonances of a self-portrait' (2018) and 'Drawing and its variations' (2010).

*Response to the film by Vera Regina Fonseca Montagna*

We know our aesthetic sensibility is affected in a fulminating way by the mystery of a creative work. The unrest and the emotional charge of such experience not only provoke a destabilizing impact but also add the propulsive force of a singular inner process 'to make room for new discoveries'. How can we transform the singular subjective experience generated by such an unstable and elusive aesthetic object?

We are born and we die inside the symbolic field of a language. Language is used to transfigure and create worlds. In this way, language gives us the many possibilities to express enchantment and disenchantment, joy and pain coming from our "emotional and intimate relationships". In addition to the possibility of expressing feelings 'the life of intimate and emotional relationships' was considered by Bion as 'the stage, the area of life in which the personality grows' (Meltzer, D., 1991).

So, reading an autobiography may be considered as an intimate conversation with the author not to transmit knowledge, facts of life but to be an agent of change. Then, it requires a receptive attitude to the unknown of the emotional experience that emerges from the intense and contradictory movements of the narrative. Additionally, the poetic language used by the writer instigate the capacity to observe. Then, fostering something new, a great book offers, according to Proust, the key to open 'the door deep inside us' opening to the vastness of oneself to 'places we would not otherwise have known how to reach' going beyond what the reader is accustomed to grasp. (Proust, M., *On Reading*)

These considerations lead us to Meg Williams when she re-visits Bion's *Memoir*, maintaining in her film script the strong charge of mystery and enchantment arisen from the extraordinary mobility of her aesthetic object. And this is not a simple purpose, because Meg, preserving the uniqueness of the author's poetic language to weave a film script, uses her own intuitions emerged from her deep knowledge of Bion's work. Thus, she establishes a lively conversation with this radical autobiography, in the fine

selection of some dialogues between the prenatal and postnatal parts of the personality. And more, Meg shows with acuity her capacity to grasp the originality of this psychoanalyst's thought, attentively articulated with her extensive multidisciplinary studies. In fact, this is a remarkable example of the 'aesthetic reciprocity' so well discussed in *The Apprehension of Beauty* (1988) by Meg Williams and Donald Meltzer.

Then, Meg also gives Bion's autobiography her own close reading, showing her ability to bring together and relate many contradictory emotional aspects of the narrative, following the author's purpose 'to write a book unspoiled by any tincture of common sense, reason, etc.' (*A Memoir* epilogue).

Reading this autobiography and watching the film we acknowledge the role irony plays, inviting the reader to follow the thread of his narrative with 'Happy Lunacy' and 'Relativistic Fission', quoting Bion. We are urged to think in multiple directions, without any possibility of reason and certainty. Moreover, the mobility of the aesthetic object invites the film viewer audience to observe the wide variety of resonances coming from verbal and nonverbal communication. The ironic and provocative tone of this narrative generates an emotional atmosphere characterized by disturbing relationships with the *status quo*, inducing the reader to face the 'fission' between one idea and another, one person and another, contradictory feelings raised between the reader's emotional experience and the thread of the narrative, kept in an incessant motion. The gaps and the constant instability of words, the agile mixture of contrasting ideas creates a whirling rhythm in the mind of the audience also promotes openings to imaginative life. The viewer observes the 'disruptive' effects inside himself attentive to other deeper levels of apprehension which involves the capture of unexpected elements, the so called 'wild birds of meaning', using Meltzer's expression.<sup>2</sup> Thus, a receptive attitude enables the reader to follow what is going on inside himself and on the other hand pursue how the poetic elements are tangled and disentangled to engender something unexpected, new and incongruous, reinforcing the beauty and mysterious character of both *Memoir* and film.

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<sup>2</sup> 'On the cruelty of symbol formation', in: *A Meltzer Reader* (2010): 'Bion has made it very clear to us that the essence of thinking is symbol formation... The thing about poetry, is that it captures something. [...] that seems to me to be a good metaphor for the way symbols are formed and they work: that they capture these wild birds of meaning.' (p. 122).

This demands a struggle, a genuine movement to the heart of oneself. It is an 'aesthetic struggle within our infant mind' to face a new language which may provoke the emergence of unusual ideas, of 'ruins' of primitive forms and words in free associations or in dreams. However, these intuitive new ideas involve emotional turbulence and sufferings coming from the tension and conflict between positive and negative emotionality and need to be contained in order to not escape or be destroyed.

Furthermore, this is not an automatic psychic achievement. To transform these new ideas and its turbulences we need to host and process them in a dreamy mind, as Bion said, by a 'thinking breast' through 'meditated love' in order to engender symbols and to develop further thoughts. Crossing the gap or *caesura* results in the expansion of the infant ego, the 'learning from experience' a continuous and never-ending process of mental life.

In *The Becoming Room*, the independent moments of the scenes are used as a metonymic procedure. By bringing together multiple voices of the characters and disparate elements, this technical procedure also opens to a metaphorical field. That resembles Bakhtine's concept of a 'carnavalesque perception of the world' where it is possible to express a range of contradictory possibilities, in constant motion.

The film unsettles the viewer by shattering expectations, also generating a detached critical view. Thus, the watcher is thrown into a new emotional experience explored through the web of characters voices of this dreamed autobiography. This 'polyphony' the author's used to express contradictory feelings of beauty and joy also his scars and terrors, 'the burden' of abandonment, phantasies of a very frightening quality of his childhood, and other agonistic duplication of the author's own consciousness. The polyphony is often expressed in caricature dialogues. Dialogues that trigger an emotional experience of strangeness in the audience threatened by the reification and by an apprehension of nonsense or absurdities of life. The capture of these surreal scenes stuns the viewer and immediately launches into another region of sensibility, creating an illusory space in which the boundaries between reality and imagination, life and death, past and future, individual and group, between parts of the personality are abolished. Paradoxically, we realize that 'all the forms and all the symbols of carnivalized language are imbued' not only with nonsense and strangeness, but with 'lyricism, alternations and renewal' (Bakhtine, M., 1970).

So, in this way like in dream they cease appearing contradictory.

The surprise effect of these two artistic works subverts logical relations, opens cracks and instigate an awakening of attention to the musicality of words, not as dead signs, but ‘to give them life’, to promote the ‘resurrection of the word’, using here an expression of Jorge Luis Borges. We know that poetic language is born from the persistent and incessant search for the word to engender the unthinkable, the irreplaceable poetic image, ‘this mysterious transformation of the emotion in symbol’ (Bion’s work of the alpha function).

*Alison Vaspe introduces Vivienne Pasioka*

Vivienne is a psychoanalyst and a member of the Toronto Psychoanalytic Society and the IPA, practising in Toronto. She originally trained as a clinical psychologist in Dublin. Her research at the University of Toronto explored the impact of the maternal holding function, of revisiting primitive mental states, and being intimately engaged with an infant state of mind. She works in private practice with adults, children, adolescents, couples, and parent-infant dyads, and is actively involved in bringing psychoanalytic insights into the community. She is on the faculty of the Toronto Psychoanalytic Institute, and is Chair of the Between Hours interdisciplinary dialogues at the Toronto Psychoanalytic Society, a programme that coordinates an annual symposium on applied psychoanalysis, and which inaugurated Toronto’s first Freud Café, now operating in the community since 2014.

*Response to the film by Vivienne Pasioka*

Bion’s *A Memoir of the Future* invites the reader to participate in the lived experience of the very developmental process he is attempting to convey in the text: the ongoing journey of coming to be one’s authentic self and developing a thinking mind through intimate engagement and the internal obstacles encountered along the way that thwart it. The narrative depicts a ‘dream’ of this inner journey in the writer’s mind and it is through emotionally engaging the text that our own reverie potential is set in motion, offering the possibility of discovering something new of our own becoming through a re-acquaintance with our primordial roots. What in

the text/film are we being asked to bear witness to and to bear?

The fictional format used by Bion brings to mind Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, which defies logic. Its inherent disorganization and chaotic arrangement arouse resistance and challenges the reader to find a way to endure the disorienting impact of being hurled into chaos and kept in the dark, while being faced with the bombardment of the narrative's incoherence and emotional charge. This encounter with conflicting, multiple vertices coming from different angles, converging and colliding all at once, sends us hurtling to find a through line, a structure to frame the chaotic, contradictory elements. The reader has to reconcile the dual challenge of abandoning oneself to the immediacy of 'being in the experience' and discovering its essence, while resisting the urge to prematurely define it as a means to escape the feeling of being engulfed. For some time, one is submerged in the narrative's deep undercurrents, subject to unpredictable tidal turbulence, without having access to an orienting compass with which to locate our bearings.

Might this evoke the first sense of the infant being catapulted 'out of outer space without a space suit', in search of a light or something continuous to hold onto to hold its own nascent parts together, as described by Bick (1986)? Or that of the mother herself immersed in the maternal waters of the early postpartum period succumbing to momentary boundary diffusion to intuit what the baby needs, while also needing to keep a foot on solid ground?

In Meg Harris Williams' dramatization of Bion's 'dream', the elusive quality of the unconscious is brought to life through her own characterization of its internal objects interfacing through a kind of distorted 'inner speak' in various discordant groupings (scenes) across different dimensions that vitalizes our sense of being in the dream itself. Through their interplay, we are jabbed, moved, perturbed, not just by their words and the gaps between them, but by the timbre and emotional tone of the voices as they rise and fall, and by the gradual build-up and crescendo of the felt caged-in feelings that reverberate in the face of every palpable strained effort to emancipate them.

Even the muffled sound quality of the film that amplifies and fades lends to the subterranean feel of the inner world. We are at the same time jolted by the portrayal of the jagged, zig-zagged movements across the develop-

mental trajectory with its scarring, tearing at the fabric of the psyche, and its strained tension between longing and constraint – longing in the face of absence, the excruciating pain of parting (the opaque glass of the train window that shields emotion), and the abandonment to bear alone the intensity of the affect, the confusion, and the strangulated curiosity. The ‘untouchables’ and ‘unspeakables’ are kept outside the constrictive walls of reasoned thought that break through time and again to haunt the psyche, drawing our attention to the very blindness to the infantile captured in Yeats’ sardonic line, ‘What need have you to dread the monstrous crying of wind?’

We are both pained and offended by the blindness and yet we turn away from the chaos of the narrative itself. The vivid personification of aspects of the self in the film prompts an identification not just with the frustrated and imprisoned infantile self, but also with those parts compelled to flee the emotional upheaval, such that we meet head on our own censor. We too, arch our mental apparatus outward towards obtaining some sense of organization in the name of trying to understand the bigger picture, the potential meaning, the meta meaning even, that amounts to a form of simultaneous telescoping in and out, in response, perhaps, to the impact of the shifting foregrounding/backgrounding effect (the reversible perspective) embedded in the script.

The experience of engaging the narrative is one of being pulled in different directions all at once, the back and forth between primary and secondary process, between PS and D, caught in the dialectic tension between our own maternal and paternal functions, both compelling. It is this very tension and struggle to find a way to remain immersed in the chaotic aspects that captures my attention. To endure it, I reach to the poets and to mythology.

We are at one and the same time in Plato’s cave and outside it (blind to what is before our eyes that we cannot yet fathom and blinded by the intensity of the emotional bombardment), realizing at the same time that the shadows and what they reflect are only ever approximations of the truth. Can we stay in the dream to experience the Forms without pushing too hard to realize them? Can momentary illuminations – soundbites of insight – sustain us on this journey? Who are our internal companions?

I envision as a framing structure the Neolithic ‘passage-tomb’ at New-

Grange, whose construction pre-dates the Pyramids of Giza and Stonehenge. Here, on the Winter Solstice, the light of the rising sun enters the portal above the entrance to illuminate the passage within, shedding light on the floor of the inner chamber, an illumination that lasts no more than 17 minutes. Pilgrims wait long hours in awe to catch a glimpse of this wonder. Can we wait with an open mind for the chance encounter of seeing what the momentary light of the morning sun might unveil?

Newgrange, known as a Brugh, from the old Irish, 'brú,' meaning 'womb' (with Brú na Bóinne meaning 'womb of the Moon'), consists of three separate chambers off the central passage/chamber, with the layout thought to have a resemblance to the female interior. Metaphorically speaking then, within this matrix are the makings of generative possibility or claustral entrapment (Meltzer, 1992).

The ritual importance of the site is evidenced in the numerous references to it in Irish myths. The Tuatha Dé Danann (children of the goddess, Dana) who ruled Ireland in ancient mythology and brought elements of 'civilization' to the Irish Mythological Cycle, were said to have built Newgrange as a burial place for their deity, including one of its pre-Christian chiefs, Lugh Lámfhada (Lugh of the Long Arm), Celtic god of sun and light, and spiritual father of the great mythical hero, Cúchulainn, who himself was thought to have been conceived there by his mother, Dechtine, when Lugh visited her in a dream while she slept.

The epic legendary tale, *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (*The Cattle raid of Cooley*), tells of the brave Cúchulainn who already by age seven, had obtained hero status and singlehandedly held off Queen Medb's invading army to secure victory of Ulster. We also hear something of what lies beneath this fierce 'exoskeletal' structure in *Serglige Con Culainn* (*The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn*), which tells of a 'curse' befalling the warrior (his falling ill for a year) for attacking a pair of swans (female Underworld symbols), in an effort to obtain their feathers to adorn and impress his wife, Emer. There ensued an intense love entanglement with one of the Underworld women that left the hero bereft, while sparking jealousy in Emer. There are many legendary accounts as to his eventual recovery from his sunken retreat.

This mythological legend, itself a symbol, takes us to the nexus of psychic tension within the maternal matrix and opens out the possibility of seeing the universal/multiplicity in the individual experience. The relevance

of the Trinity to Bion's concept of birth of a thinking mind through its sojourn in the mind of the other – the three chambers of the cave, Cúchulainn's triangulation, and the 'blush on the uterus wall, already marking a passionate union – lies in his view of the 'oedipal myth' as a 'container' of an emotional experience that permits its apprehension. It reminds us that the father as Other is already present in the mind of the mother (her own paternal function) and in the infant psyche through the felt gaps in their union.

To walk inside this passage-tomb is to be moved by the echoed silence that reverberates with the feel of blood pulsating through the veins of an entire generation with its mythical past emanating through the cave walls. Like the transformative potential offered in the momentary merger states experienced in the early postpartum period, this encounter, too, holds transcendent possibility. In this cave, where myths abound, I am in good company and have faith that the light will eventually appear and bear fruit.

Bion's *Memoir* presents us with his own 'mythic' narrative, itself a trilogy, whose initial amorphous form is gradually given shape over the course of the three-volume text. Birth and death (of growth of the thinking self) are presented as one and the same and come full circle in the narrative, with the prenatal beginning and a return to primordial beginnings reflected in the film's format. Retrospectively, we can trace the unsequenced progression from the initial war between Psyche and Soma over whether the essence of experience can ever be grasped and represented (Harris Williams, 1983), through the raw, undifferentiated 'double-speak' and 'over-speak' between the different parts of the personality, with one voice drowning out the other at vital junctures. The ruptures prompt our own re-jigging. Finally, there is a coming together of the parts, as portrayed in the emergence of a more coherent, Socratic-like dialogue that now champions questioning over knowing, itself giving way to a return to beginnings – to the formless, 'unity-in-oneness' – and a folding back upon the self with a new calmness in reconnecting with the 'spark of sincerity, buried underneath all that rubble.'

In engaging the text, Bion had urged the reader/analyst to pause, not close in too soon, but rather to wait, without 'any irritable reaching after fact and reason' (Keats' negative capability) for the possibility of momentary illumination to arise. He remained wary of the use of words to capture

the essence of experience and drew inspiration from the ancient mystics and poets whom he felt intuitively grasped this tension. Arriving at knowing, for Rilke, entails more than experiencing, but rather a progression ‘from feelings through experiences through forgetting’ (Mood, 1975, p. 93), what Rilke called ‘blood remembering’:

It is not yet enough to have the memories. One must be able to forget them when they are many and one must have the great patience to wait until they come again. For it is not yet the memories themselves. Not till they have turned to blood within us, to glance and gesture, nameless and no longer to be distinguished from ourselves – not till then can it happen that in a most rare hour the first word of a verse arises in their midst and goes forth from them. (ibid., p. 95)

The form of engagement that Bion had in mind was to listen to our own spontaneous thoughts that arise in our own listening so as not to close in too soon and restrict thinking. In speaking of the ‘gestalt’ that gradually takes shape in the reader’s mind through such engagement, Grotstein (in Vermote, 2019) offered the image of an archipelago: a group of islands that, while seeming disconnected to the naked eye, are actually connected and form part of the same geological terrain beneath the ocean’s surface. The reward in waiting is seen as coming to see that we don’t ultimately get to the answer but to another open question which further expands the capacity for thinking.

A poem, *Old Biddy Talk*, by Paula Meehan, captures the immediacy of the visceral thrust of the driving force, while revealing at the same time its timelessness:

*Have you no home to go to...*

The young mostly on one another’s screens  
– but these two rapt in each other  
at the boundary wall: that genetic imperative,  
the force that through the pandemic  
drives their flowering, is my spring rain,  
is my restorer from the deep delved wells,  
hauled to the healing light of this world  
pure water tasting of gemstone & iron,  
quartzite & gold:  
starlight & planets,

the sun & the comets, the moon herself,  
she sacred to Brigit, mirrored in my bucket.  
My own breath, old spirit, stirring in the cowled  
reflection of the earth geologic, old seas,  
old forests wherein once we swung from tree  
to waterlogged tree become shale, become coal,  
underground tributaries to rivers of oil –  
breath lit fuel in their veins. They are fire –  
vestal and flame. They are immortal.



Alaknanda Samarth and Jonathan Page in *A Memoir of the Future* (1982)