artlit.info – writings and artwork © Meg Harris Williams

Psychoanalysis as a form of art: working with Donald Meltzer

Paper presented at an anniversary celebration for Donald Meltzer, Buenos Aires 19-20 August 2022

Introduction

Donald Meltzer always thought of psychoanalysis as an art-science, in which the practice was an art, and the findings those of a science: He wrote:

> If the practice of psychoanalysis is an art, as I firmly believe, and its findings are those of a descriptive science, it is essential that it be done by individuals who can think for themselves. (*The Apprehension of Beauty* 2018, p. 215)

The growing body of knowledge about the mind evolves in a spiral manner, in which new phenomena are observed that expand the existing model of the mind, and this in turn enables new observations to be made that could not be seen before. This is 'thinking for ourselves' and it is an art form.

The post-Kleinian view of the way in which we learn to 'think for ourselves' is an object-related one. Bion said 'our minds are made up for us by forces about which we know nothing', but to say this is already to know something: it is to know that our internal objects proceed in a mysterious way and our choice is to follow (into the depressive position) or to substitute (in a paranoid-schizoid way). Meltzer always considered that these mysterious processes were in fact observable and describable, if one was careful to avoid premature explanations. The symbols that result from dreamwork and unconscious thinking are observable, as they are in art forms, and they are created in an analogous way, even if not identical (primarily owing to their private rather than public significance). Often indeed these symbols include imaginative representations of the objects themselves, especially the 'combined object' that originates from the underlying phantasy of creative parental figures.

Thinking for oneself, or 'becoming' oneself as Bion puts it, means learning to be faithful to these internal directors, just as the poets and artists describe following their Muse. It is what Milton meant when he said his ambition was to 'be a true Poem' – not to become perfect but to serve these inspiring forces, and to follow the ideal of Beauty 'through all the shapes and forms of things'.

For Meltzer, this is also the way psychoanalysis works: its goal is not to create a preconceived picture of a respectable personality, but to set in motion the innate organic shaping of the self by internal objects, and it does this by means of what he calls a 'conversation between internal objects' – of the analyst, and the analysand. The transference relationship (which he says is by no means restricted to psychoanalysis) has the capacity to revive and relive the prototypal mother-infant relationship, learning to think through emotional reciprocity with the object.

He called psychoanalysis a 'forcing-house' for symbol formation (*Studies in Extended Metapsychology,* p. 87), and considered the process of coming-to-knowledge through symbols

of emotional experience to be not just artistic but beautiful. Unlike some, he does not split the idea of beauty from that of creativity or symbol formation. The process is a beautiful one even when the psychic organisation it reveals may be ugly or distorted – it is the beauty of truth. This is inseparable from the Kleinian view of reparation of or rather by internal objects. The therapeutic value of the process is entirely dependent on a recognition, conscious or unconscious, of its beauty despite the painful feelings associated with aesthetic conflict – love and hate of the object. When Bion asks in his Memoir 'Could Beauty help?'[1] Meltzer's answer is an emphatic yes, and also a demonstration.

Meltzer often described his own counter-dreaming processes, such as, sitting in Plato's cave watching the shadows on the wall, or watching for intuitive flashes like deers'-tails in the dark, or listening to the music of the analytic conversation and noting his own response, since it is the music – over and above the lexical significance of an interpretation – which the patient hears. These features of artistic method, or similar ones, have since been adopted and echoed by others, and were intimated by Bion especially in his Memoir; but Meltzer is also characterised by his vision of the 'natural history' of the psychoanalytic process – in a way analogous to the making of a work of art through symbolic structures. Each individual analysis contributes not just to an improved, more complex, more ethically sophisticated mental structure (in both patient and analyst), but also to an expanded model of the mind which is the more public result of the artistic method.

I have been asked to say a little about how my own work as a literary critic together with Meltzer. Don always said his talent was for reading dreams; mine was for reading poetry. It was a kind of interdigitation that began a long way back. Although Meltzer had had a love of art since his own childhood, when he went on a European tour with his parents, he was not especially interested in literature although he had certain favourite dramatists - Brecht, Pinter, Miller. Meltzer married my mother after my father Roland Harris died (he was a poet and teacher) and then became immersed in the environment of our literary family and fascinated by the English poets that my sister and I were studying. In the context of individual writing and family discussion, the links between psychoanalysis and literature began to be evaluated in a natural way – it was not an academic exercise. The ghost of my father was also present, I could say. Only later did I learn that he and Don were working together on a study of linguistics and language development, some of whose content is included in the book Dream Life in the sections on symbol formation and deep grammar. At that time Don said to me that any intimate relationship, personal or work, must depend on finding objects in common. My father had expressed the same idea in one of his early poems:

We are of those blessed lovers
    Who loved before they knew,
Without pursuit or fleeing;
    And met as pilgrims do,

Whose eyes, bent on the going,
    Turn once to ask the day
And find their end's companion
    Going the same road as they.[2]

1 See M. H. Williams, 'Could Beauty help? Responses to turbulence' http://www.artlit.info/pdfs/CouldBeautyHelp.pdf

2 R. J. Harris, *Selected Poems*. Perthshire: Clunie Press, 1970. https://www.harris-meltzer-trust.org.uk/pdfs/HarrisPoems1970.pdf

The ‘same road’ is that of aesthetics – and its role in life’s pilgrimage. Other shadowy figures of course were also present – Don has mentioned how he found a suitable internal psychic partner for Mrs Klein, namely the naturalist and philosopher of organic growth Darcy Wentworth Thompson. On my side there was also my remarkable schoolteacher Joie Macaulay, whom Don considered a mysterious phenomenon owing to her ‘passion for literature’; with hindsight I now attribute certain moments that emerged even from the days of my own analysis when I somehow conveyed her ambience, as marking the sowing of seeds of later collaboration. One moment, for example, was when he said that the main division in psychoanalysis was between those who thought that mental events were real, and those who thought Mrs Klein’s language was purely metaphorical and the idea of the ‘inner world’ just a matter of phraseology. There were parallels here between the study of literature and of psychoanalysis – is literary interpretation just a language game or an attempt to describe the psychic reality of one’s own response.

At one point I quoted, from my school lessons, Coleridge’s ‘Such is the life, such the form’, being the guiding principle of the Cambridge school of ‘Practical Criticism’ in which I was reared by Miss Macaulay. There, too, Don found a kind of structural analogy with psychoanalytic practice. Practical Criticism entails a type of close reading of poetic diction and formal structures that is designed to note the movements of the ‘deep grammar’ of an emotional situation – the signs beneath the lexical surface significance – the ‘art symbol’ as Susanne Langer defines it. As such it is analogous to close observation in the analytic consulting room, the training for which was developed by Esther Bick’s method of infant observation and then developed further by my mother Martha Harris into a full training programme at the Tavistock. Simple and obvious though it is, the role of observation is so often sidelined (because it is so difficult) in any art or science – and theories and interpretations are substituted, as Bion so often lamented.

Meltzer often cited the philosopher of aesthetics Susanne Langer, who differentiates between ‘presentational form’ and ‘discursive form’.[3] Discursive form is the superficial level of interpretation, the straightforward lexical connotation like a medical diagnosis. Presentational form describes the deep grammar (as it is called in literary criticism), the symbol with all its sensuous qualities, which contains meaning in a three-dimensional way and cannot simply be paraphrased, although it can be described. Don introduced me to Langer and the Wittgenstein-Cassirer tradition, which I realised was actually a continuation of the Coleridgean-Kantian neo-Platonic philosophy of aesthetic experience followed by the great poets. Langer says it is characteristic of all art forms to present in symbolic form not just ‘feelings’ but ‘the life of feeling’ (that is, the dynamic for developmental thinking), a philosophy parallel to Bion’s theory of thinking. Don also introduced me to the work of Adrian Stokes, who provided a model for aesthetic criticism in Kleinian terms that I named ‘symbolic congruence’ – the reader’s counter-dream.[4]

It was my mother, a very non-shadowy presence, who encouraged Melter to take Bion’s work seriously (he was previously suspicious of him, but came to find in his work theoretical reinforcement for his own belief in the predominance of ‘the aesthetic’ in psychoanalysis). She presided over and knitted together the links between Mrs Bick’s infant observation, literature, and psychoanalysis, in the way Don described her knitting jumpers to keep everyone in a good temper during the filming of Bion’s *Memoir* in India (https://youtu.be/_wQNA3JkiyI and https://youtu.be/14Wc8U6m2_w). As he wrote on the jacket cover of *The Apprehension of Beauty,* for which he asked me to write two chapters (on Hamlet and on literary criticism):

3 S. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art*. Harvard University Press, 1941.

4 M. H. Williams, ‘Holding the dream: the nature of aesthetic appreciation’, in *The Apprehension of Beauty*, p. 187. New edition: Harris Meltzer Trust, 2018.

> This volume has grown over the years almost as a family project of Martha Harris, her two daughters Meg and Morag and her husband, Donald Meltzer. It therefore has its roots in English literature and its branches waving wildly about in psychoanalysis. Its roots in English literature – Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Keats, Coleridge and Blake – are as strong as the psycho-analytical branching from Freud, Klein and Bion. Its philosophical soil is certainly Plato, Russell, Whitehead, Wittgenstein, Langer, Cassirer and, in aesthetics, Adrian Stokes. (Meltzer, jacket cover to D. Meltzer & M. H. Williams, *The Apprehension of Beauty.* Original edition: Perthshire: Clunie Press, 1988.)

Gradually all these points of interest, guided by their inspiring figures, focused and fused in support of Meltzer's innate belief in psychoanalysis as an art form.

In the mid 1970s I was working on my thesis *Inspiration in Milton and Keats*, which became my first book and the basis for all my books: it was a study, based on analysis of poetic diction, of different modes of identification in poetic influence and poetic identity. Don said to me, this book is really about aesthetics; and in a sense that statement demarcated the scope and direction of subsequent work – everything was subsumed under aesthetics. He wrote for the jacket cover:

> Literary criticism has often been taxed with a lack of psychological insight while psychologists, and perhaps psychoanalysts in particular, when writing about literature, have been accused of being beside the point, aesthetically. This book explores the nature of creative thought, through its focal concern with the phenomenon of inspiration. It approaches the works and lives of Milton and Keats from two directions, and with a dual purpose. Equipped with both formal and informal training in literature, art and psychology, the author has mounted a most complex and fascinating attack on this long-avoided problem: is the Muse a formal figure of speech or a psychological reality? (Meltzer, jacket cover to M. H. Williams, *Inspiration in Milton and Keats*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982.)

He thought literary criticism was itself an art form not merely an academic exercise (as viewed by Oxford), in the same way as psychoanalysis had to be an art form in order to perform its dual function – discovering more about the mind, and rescuing the lost children of the personality. The mind of the analyst had to investigate itself at the same time as that of the patient, just as in aesthetic criticism (in any field) the critic's response is a type of countertransference to the emanations of the art-symbol. It is not an arbitrary subjective response attributing its own vision to the art-symbol, but a structural readjustment of the mind. Coleridge described this as the instantaneous identity of the subjective and the objective in the 'life of ideas'.

Meltzer appreciated the early work of Hanna Segal on symbol formation but thought it did not develop further. His own work is not so much 'a psychoanalytic approach to aesthetics' as a vision of psychanalysis as a new branch of aesthetics. Aesthetics subsumes psychoanalysis; as it does literary criticism, and all art forms. What is new is that personality development is also seen as an aesthetic activity, governed by the activation of the sense of beauty – something new to psychoanalytic thinking but traditional and quite explicit in poetry. In a complementary way, the traditional poetic relation of poet and muse gains a psychological validity in terms of Kleinian object relations, which was the subject of my book The Vale of Soulmaking, the last of my books that he read, near the end of his life. In his Foreword he wrote that these internal gods are 'the superior, most evolved segment of the human mind, and their evolution takes place in advance of the self', and that 'The Vale of Soulmaking promises to become the text for post-Kleinian thought… and the upshot of it all is to establish Mrs Klein as the first "post-Kleinian".' Of course the term 'post-Kleinian' has, since then, been used in different ways. But it is worth

noting that Meltzer did not see it as in any way going 'beyond' Klein, but rather, as a way of better defining Mrs Klein's own analytic practice, which he regarded as essentially equivalent to that of the poets.

The poet, like the analysand and also the analyst, is not a primary creator but a follower of guidance from internal objects whose messages are interpreted through symbol formation. This is what is meant by being an artist. For as Langer says, the advantage that symbols have over sign-language is that they can transcend the interpretant's existing knowledge. Coleridge said, an idea cannot be apprehended except in the form of a symbol. Symbols are vehicles for new ideas and, by nature, are seeded in a psychic state of not-knowing, as in the modern view of psychoanalysis.

To be an artist, in Meltzer's view, is to be impressed by both the beauty and the attacks on beauty that fill the world around us. Where there is aesthetic there is also anti-aesthetic: there are substitute symbols. The poet or artist has always, throughout history, been obsessed with whether their art is 'true' or 'false'; and often, unsure initially which it is. Is their symbol shaped by themselves or by their internal object, the muse? Only the latter has reality, although virtuosic talent can disguise the distinction. The question in psychoanalytic terms is whether the depressive or paranoid-schizoid orientation is dominant. The perpetual drama of the depressive and paranoid schizoid positions – taking the form of true art versus false art – is the subject of most world literature. But it is not only the universal, underlying theme of the protagonists; it is also the internal drama of the poet who, in the vicissitudes of symbol formation, has an infinite interest in the subtle machinations of the 'devil within' and its attempt to hijack creativity. Whatever the surface subject of the work may be, its underlying subject is always this drama of object relations, and it takes the form of self-made symbols versus object-made symbols. Object-made symbols are often displeasing or disturbing at first, until time has revealed their worth; self-made symbols are often fashionable and appeal to basis assumptions about how we ought to look and feel, in a given moment in a given society. All forms of substitute art, pseudo-art, narcissistic display masquerading as art, etc, fall into this category of retreat from aesthetic conflict, the confusion intensified by the beauty of the breast.

And this applies as much to the analytic process as to the analysand's own struggle. Dreams, he says, can be read 'pornographically' as can artworks. An interpretation constitutes an action if it colludes with a pornographic (excitable) rather than a contemplative mode of viewing the dream. Again, this is avoiding the aesthetic conflict demanded by symbol formation, and substituting a true symbol with a false one. When Meltzer expanded on his 'Anal masturbation' paper in order to write *The Claustrum*, he asked me to contribute a literary example from Macbeth, to specifically illustrate the destruction of thought processes through fake-imaginative equivocation.

Symbolic congruence

Symbols, unlike the language of the already-known, have 'possibility' as Louise Bourgeois said, or as Emily Dickinson put it:

> I dwell in Possibility –
> A fairer house than Prose –
> More numerous of Windows –
> Superior—for doors –

They contain meaning, beyond that previously known to the artist. They are not paraphraseable. In psychoanalysis, as in art forms, the quest for symbol formation begins at the dream-level and is founded on reading the dream. It is the 'reading' that is complicated – listening to the message from the objects; formulating it is secondary. Meltzer's view of 'dream life' as a continuum that is 'sampled periodically' in the consulting room, is different from the older view of the unconscious as a chaotic system. He focuses rather on the quality of the dream, which can vary through a spectrum from dull-derivative day residue, to condensed, rich and imaginative as in the basis for an artwork with its aspiration to become beautiful. He writes of the varied qualities of dream life in a way very similar to literary criticism, concentrating on structural qualities; thus dream life, and individual dreams, consist of

> a number of formal structures… drawn up into juxtapositions to create a space scintillating with potentiated meaning. Sometimes words and visual forms are seen to interact… At other times spaces are being created as containers of meaning. At other times the movements from one type of space to another, and the emotional difficulties of making such moves, are made apparent. (*Dream Life*, 2018, p. 165)

Such a stream-of-unconsciousness allows for the fact that not all dreams necessarily have an aesthetic character in themselves. Nonetheless if mental movements, spaces, linkages and closures are to have any aesthetic quality, it will have its foundations here – in dream-life. For dreams, Meltzer said, are how we deal with our aesthetic experience; they embody our absorption of – or locate our turning away from – the beauty of the world and its manifestations.

The ancient Greeks grouped dreams into those that came through the gates of horn or the gates of ivory – differentiating them as being either prophetic or misleading. As an alternative to the twin gates, dreams could be categorised according to how developed their aesthetic quality may be. The greater the poetic quality of the dream, the more integrated the scintillation between the various different senses and the more poetic it becomes, in the sense of fusing the visual, verbal and musical elements. The crucial distinction is between dreams which are repetitive evacuations (for this is the psychic state of the dreamer) and dreams which embody an integrated understanding, shaped by the gods.

> Our first striving is towards order, for the material impinges on us as analysts in just as confusing and 'meaningless' a way as it does on the waking dreamer himself – probably more so. But this striving is not to put order into the chaos of the dream, for that has its own order. Rather we seek to put order into the confusion in our own minds. (*Dream Life*, 2018, p. 151)

The initial impact is one of not-knowing – to the degree that Bion describes the analyst as repeatedly in the position of a new-born infant. It is the simultaneous self-analysis, the internal dialogue with the object, that reveals the meaning, or aesthetic order, of the dream – not precisely the one had by the patient, but the symbolic congruence of a dreamed response.

The analytic conversation

Meltzer says that the analytic work is done by the transference from internal objects 'which enables us to seem to perform functions for the patient that are essential to the development of their thinking'.[5] He says the analytic pair aim at a 'congruence' in their phantasy, so that – as

5 'On thought disorders'. In: *Selected Papers of Donald Meltzer,* vol. 2, p. 82. London: Harris Meltzer Trust, 2021.

he often put it in later years – there can be a 'conversation between their internal objects'. What sort of conversation is this?

The analyst's unconscious (and conscious) intentionality is the key to whether psychoanalysis is being used solely as a sign-language or as a symbolic one - Bion's 'language of achievement'. It is possible to imagine a hypothetical scenario where the same words might be said but with a different underlying meaning. Martha Harris speaks of the 'enabling' interpretation – as distinct from the correct one – meaning, the interpretation that enables the patient to proceed with the next stage in their thinking.[6] (Coleridge calls this reactivating the spirit of growth.) Whether psychoanalytic interpretation is enabling or dogmatic (end-stopping) is something not visible to anybody but the analyst, who has to look inward for 'the intention that he discerns within himself'.[7] An enabling interpretation is founded on symbolic congruence with the patient's dream – something that stems from the empathy or 'imagining-into' (Keats) of which poets provide such prime examples.

There are different views of what is happening in the analytic conversation. The most popular is probably the 'intersubjective' model that implies literally a merging of minds, based on the fantasy of a mythical state of oceanic oneness, which is equated with artistic intuition. This is essentially a flow-of-libido model with the ideal of homeostasis and dissolution of boundaries, rather than an object-relations model. In the post-Kleinian model with its prenatal extension, there is no merging or oneness; object relations begin with the complementary roles of sperm and ovum, and are always a dialogue based on a process of projection and introjection. Imaginative or artistic intuition is based on countertransference, not on merging with the personality of another. The blurring of identities based on a phantasy of original oneness is liable to disguise intrusiveness, the illusion of manipulating the object (or the patient) from within, or even a *folie à deux*.

Symbolic congruence on the other hand refers to the movement of projective and introjective processes that defines a structural change and reorganisation. It applies to the relation between art forms, as well as to the internal conversation between self and object that takes place within an art form. The projective movements are communicative, questing ones, not omnipotent ones designed to control the object. As Stokes puts it, the art-viewer first loses his separateness and then regains it, but in a changed form, 'as he absorbs the stable self-inclusiveness of the art object'.[8] In this way, not only does the final shape of the work of art become known, but also the developmental thrust of its author's mind become introjected. But the lack of instant understanding, such as that which often happens when reading literature, lead to defensive reactions against experiencing aesthetic conflict. As Bion says, if it is difficult to read literature, how difficult is it to read people.

Meltzer's aesthetic conflict is Bion's alignment with O (reality /the object), not a merging but an intersection or a 'psyche-lodgement', a sharp disturbance, a psychic pregnancy where the existing structure of the mind is invaded by a new seed of growth, contained in a symbol. Meltzer sees the moment of symbol formation as feeling 'cruel', and in a sense being cruel,[9] as the meaning is captured inescapably, and the truth can no longer be blurred, substituted, or otherwise evaded by clever lies and manipulations.

---

6 R. Negri & M. Harris, *The Story of Infant Development: Observational Work with Martha Harris*, p. xviii. London: Harris Meltzer Trust, 2007.

7 'Bion's Grid'. In: *Selected Papers of Donald Meltzer*, vol. 2, p. 111. London: Harris Meltzer Trust, 2021.

8 A. Stokes, *Painting and the Inner World,* extracts in: *Art and Analysis: an Adrian Stokes Reader*, ed. M. H. Williams, p. 124. London: Harris Meltzer Trust, 2014.

9 'On thought disorders'. In: *Selected Papers of Donald Meltzer,* vol. 2, p. 74. London: Harris Meltzer Trust, 2021.

The craft of psychoanalysis

Meltzer liked to think of psychoanalysis as a craft whose methods were still evolving in sophistication, by contrast with the wealth of experience already acquired by the arts over many generations. Near the very end of his life he said 'that's what it's all about – the craft'. (This was in the context of remembering my father's book for schoolchildren The Craft of Verse, which the publishers had idiotically titled Poetry for You thinking it would sell better.) He also said the craft was essentially, and in a way simply, the art of human communication – sensitive, not overbearing, respectful of the other, mindful of boundaries, distinguishing between privacy and secrecy.

He always emphasized the 'musical deep grammar' of the psychoanalytic dialogue, together with the negative capability required to heighten sensitivity to its communications. Reading the deep grammar entails taking into account matters such as intuition, posture, nuance, and resonance, 'temperature and distance', the balance between 'routine and inspired interpretation'.[10]He speaks of initial or background 'ruminative interpretations' whose function is to 'facilitate emergence' of the material rather than to pin down its significance. Beyond this, and extending the inquiry, is the 'poetic function' which 'finds the metaphoric means of describing the inner world through the forms of the external world'.

The analyst's craft consists in facilitating the analytic process as a container for symbols; his primary role is to manage the setting, not to manage the analysand.

> But perhaps to state [this] as if the analyst were the container misses the point that it is the fitting together of the analyst's attention and attitudes to the cooperativeness of the patient that forms and seals the container, lending it the degree of flexibility and resilience required from moment to moment. (*Studies in Extended Metapsychology*, p. 250.)

Meltzer's description of `fitting attention to co-operation' has similarities with Bion's image of the diamond-cutter who intensifies the diamond's brilliance by virtue of reflecting the light back along the same route. The pathway to knowledge is a function of reciprocity. The cutter, like the analyst, merely opens the pathway; the insight is a function of the light itself, described by Milton as invoking the heavenly light to 'shine inwards'.

The container whose boundaries allow the symbol to take shape is something beyond both partners, created by a 'conversation between internal objects', not by either party on their own, nor even both together in their ordinary egotistical selves. In this conversation the 'music of the countertransference, says Meltzer, is 'absolutely what the patient hears'.[11] It may be in the tone of voice, but mostly the music is, as Keats puts it, a 'ditty of no tone' – or as Bion would put it, 'atonement': it is essentially an abstract conversation that goes beyond the identities of the couple, and they are both babies, listening together to their individual internal reveries, not knowing the answer until the symbol takes shape.

And each time that the 'underlying pattern' (Bion) becomes visible, or symbol formation takes place, the experience of the analysis as aesthetic object is reinforced. Although for Meltzer, the weaning process is when this is most evident, it is – from the time of the establishment of the infantile transference – known to be such, as a form of preconception, though this knowledge may be denied or buried. This is in line with the aesthetic conflict, where the experience of beauty and the finding of the first aesthetic object – the breast – is primary, and the clouding-

10 'Temperature and distance as technical dimensions of interpretation'. In: *Selected Papers of Donald Meltzer* vol. 3. London: Harris Meltzer Trust, 2021.

11 'On supervision'. Meltzer with R. and M. Oelsner. In: *Selected Papers of Donald Meltzer* vol. 3, p. 20. London: Harris Meltzer Trust, 2021.

over with paranoid-schizoid distrust is secondary. The hope of rediscovery of that first 'dazzle of the sunrise' – Wordsworth's 'trailing clouds of glory' – is what sustains the whole endeavour (*The Apprehension of Beauty,* p. 28). And, in aesthetic conflict, it is inseparable from the awareness of separation. This, like all inspiring processes, is not something that is achieved once and for all, any more than the `depressive position' is a badge or qualification. It is something that has to be continually renewed when each new idea sends its premonitions over the horizon of consciousness – the `shadow of the future' as Bion puts it in his *Memoir of the Future*.

An endoskeletonal personality (Bion) evolves from within, is not imposed from outside in the form of codes of behaviour. Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* called this activation of the spirit of growth in poetry 'ab intra' (organically) not 'superinduced', 'ab extra' (mechanically). As Bion said, if it is hard to read poetry, how equally hard it must be to read people. He often spoke of the third person in the room, the internal observer or observers of both patient and analyst. Meltzer however was much clearer than Bion in insisting that the analysis is being conducted by his objects in communion with the internal objects of the patient. Without this psychoanalysis would still be two dimensional, a sign-language, a 'talking about' rather than a 'becoming' through symbol formation. Meltzer said that symbol formation was indeed the key to unlocking two-dimensionality and the aesthetic dilemma of autistic defences (*Studies in Extended Metapsychology*, p. 247). For this, psychoanalysis has to be a present experience; so Bion's emphasis on eschewing memory and desire provided a missing link which was necessary before Meltzer could elucidate the function of 'beauty' in clinical psychoanalysis, through the concept of the aesthetic conflict. This in turn enables a new structural link between psychoanalysis and art forms such as literature, which has as yet only begun to be developed.

An example: Keats

Keats, in his great Odes, demonstrated the impossibility of fusion – of being mystically swallowed up by the object, to 'cease upon the midnight with no pain'; yet this did not mean death in the sense of abandonment by the symbol-making gods; the nightingale may sing in the next valley-glade. This is the last stanza of his 'Ode to a Nightingale':

> Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
> To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
> Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
> As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
> Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
> Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
> Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
> In the next valley-glades:
> Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
> Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

In a series of 'adieu's, the poet longingly traces the bird's fading song through the everyday landscape, including a gentle, wistful rebuke that the fancy has not cheated him -has not allowed him to fade away into the forest dim, to cease upon the midnight with no pain. He has to come to terms with the fact not that the experience was an illusion, but that he is alone once more: that not he, but the Nightingale, is fading away. The burial-place which he gives the song in his imagination, however, 'deep/ In the next valley glades', is not a purely natural habitat, but recalls the sensuous enclosure of the aching heart with which the poem began, and

the embalmed darkness at the centre of the experience. When the song is no longer audible, its underground rhythm still pulses; the Nightingale still exists, and is remembered. The ache of a 'happiness' which at the beginning of the poem threatened to lead to Lethe, has instead found a place in the Vale of Soul-making.

And finally, the last two lines of the poem look at the experience from the outside, framing it, giving context to the psychic drama that up to now has been viewed subjectively: was it a vision or a waking dream? asks the poet. He conveys both the mystical moment of knowledge and the sense of disorientation that arises as a result of conversing with the object. There is a further process of digestion to take place. No reverie, no thought-process, is ever finished: each episode merely opens up the next stage in the mind's journey, following the Nightingale into the next valley-glade. The song, or mental feed, is no longer heard but neither is it lost, since the listening self (the baby) has an increased capacity for imaginative introjection.

Conclusion

So psychoanalysis as an art form depends absolutely on an appreciation of the analysis as an aesthetic object, and of the psychoanalytic method as a beautiful means of revealing the influence of the object – one might almost say (as do the poets with their Muse), paying homage to the object, as in Keats's lines to Psyche:

> Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane
> In some untrodden region of my mind,
> Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,
> Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:

The underlying idea in both poetry and psychoanalysis is of course that of individual development: to rely on the internalised teaching object rather than on projective identification with a narcissistic substitute, and in this way, to become oneself rather than a pale shadow of somebody else.

Meltzer says he was 'impressed by the experience of the beauty of the process which regularly emerges' during the weaning phase of an analysis, and which he realised was also present in his patients at that stage. The sense of beauty was a sign of the threshold of the depressive position, the point at which an analysis could come to a natural end since its thinking processes were internalisable.

It is an indication that a complex form of introjection is taking place in which the thinking function (alpha function) of the analyst's mind is becoming part of the patient's own equipment. It is useful if the patient can understand the analyst's thoughts about him, on the discursive level of sign-systems. This is part of the scientific body of knowledge that he is accumulating. But it is far more essential that the patient introject the analyst's capacity to think about him, on the level of symbol-formation, if he is to be able to continue the process of self-analysis which is the ultimate goal of the psychoanalytic art. What is hoped for is not just to establish dependence on the introjected object, but to acquire through inspiration its capacity for clear sight and responsibility.

> Thus an adult appreciation of the beauty and goodness of the analytic process and method of discovering the truth can begin to sort itself out from the infantile transference which seems to attach itself so tenaciously to the person of the analyst. He can now be seen to preside over the process in a way which reasonably yields to the assumption of these responsibilities by the patient himself. (*The Psychoanalytical Process*, p. 48).

And this happens in the context of recognising that the analysis itself is the aesthetic object, the ultimate product of its aesthetic method.

This elaborates a new definition of analytic 'success' which distinguishes it from social adaptability, normality, or relief from symptoms, that analysts these days consider unsatisfactory. In this sense the analytic process is itself the artwork, capable of going beyond the experience of one analytic couple and being employed in an increasingly sophisticated way by future couples – the future babies of psychoanalysis, or 'hungry generations' in Keats's words.

Donald Meltzer used to refer to psychoanalysis as 'conversations between internal objects', and this is how I saw my working relationship with him, bringing in the role of the poets as internal objects for the psychoanalytic process. Meltzer also adopted occasionally the Kantian phrase that Bion often used, about psychoanalysis as 'a thing-in-itself' – meaning a spirit underlying not just official art forms but all types of humanistic endeavour. Psychoanalysis, in Meltzer's view of Bion, is an idea that has always existed, but it had to be 'thought', it had to get into the world – beginning with the 'mystic genius' of Freud but then spreading outwards, following (as the Milton said) 'the idea of beauty through all the shapes and forms of things'. Or as Virginia Woolf expresses it: 'It is not exactly beauty that I mean. It is that the thing is in itself enough: satisfactory; achieved.' [12]

This Platonic underlying idea, which is essentially that of psychic development, is engaged in some way by all creative writers or artists, and Meltzer saw psychoanalysis as finally acknowledging its antecedents and joining the 'family' of the artists in the communal search for psychic reality.[13] In the words of Virginia Woolf, who imagined there was a 'pattern' of reality behind the 'cotton wool' of appearances, that we experience in moments of turbulence: 'Behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern, that the whole world is a work of art; we are parts of it ... We are the words, we are the music, we are the thing itself.'[14]

12 V. Woolf, Diary of 1926, *A Writer's Diary* ed. L. Woolf, p. 85. New York: Harcourt, 1954.

13 Meltzer, Foreword to M. H. Williams, *The Vale of Soulmaking*, p. xix.

14 V. Woolf, 'Sketch of the Past'. In: *Moments of Being*, ed. J. Schulkind and H. Lee, p. 83. London: Pimlico, 2002.