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BION'S "EVIDENCE" AND HIS THEORETICAL STYLE

BY GIUSEPPE CIVITARESE

The author discusses "Evidence" (1976), a brief but very intense and fascinating paper in which Bion provides a unique opportunity to see him at work in his clinical practice. In the story of a patient, Bion reconstructs two sessions that are all the more true for being imaginary—i.e., narrated ("dreamed"). The matter of language and style in psychoanalysis is of the utmost importance, according to Bion—one could say, literally, a matter of life or death. In Bion's discourse, writing, reading, and analysis converge in the same place, the author notes; all are significant if they involve an experience of truth and the ability to learn from experience.

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> I'm not interested in writing short stories. Anything that doesn't take years of your life and drive you to suicide hardly seems worth doing.
>
> —McCarthy (2009)

> The experience in reading that Bion is imagining . . . may incite murderous feelings in the reader.
>
> —Ogden (2004, p. 287)

"'I remember my parents being at the top of a Y-shaped stair and I was there at the bottom . . . and . . . .' That was all" (Bion 1976, p. 312). These are the opening words—a quotation from a patient—of "Evidence,"

Giuseppe Civitarese is Editor of the *Rivista di Psicoanalisi,* as well as a member of the Italian Psychoanalytic Association and the American Psychoanalytic Association.

an eight-page paper that Bion wrote three years before his death. The Italian translation of the expression *Y-shaped stair* (*scala a forma di Y*) fails to render the significant fact that, in English, *Y-shaped stair* could also be understood as *why-shaped stare*—i.e., *a look in the form of a "why?"* This is how Bion immediately reformulated the patient's words to himself.

In the Italian version, a note at the bottom of the page explaining the double meaning (the pun) is supplied by Bion's daughter, Parthenope, who lived in Turin. Just as Bion's patient looked up the stair at his parents, so she looks up from the bottom of the page at her father.

Immediately, we become immersed in a climate of ambiguity: who is speaking? What is the actual scene? Is it the (realistic) scene of the patient's memory or the fantasmatic one of the addition to the text by Bion's daughter (fantasmatic in that it is transfigured into the first)? True, there are quotation marks, but they are not enough to dispel doubt.

The patient offers no associations. Some things, however, occur to Bion. We have barely reached the sixth line and already he surprises us with one of his typical throwaway phrases: "I am supposed to be the analyst" (1976, p. 312). Just like that, between parentheses. Like a thought that emerges from the preconscious. What does he mean by "supposed to be"? Is he perhaps *not* the analyst? And the patient he has just told us about—is he not the patient? And if Bion is not the analyst, then who is he? Any father? And what kind of father was he to Parthenope? What kind of daughter was Parthenope for Bion?

Bion is struck by the ambiguity of the expression the patient uses, but says nothing. "After a while the patient went on, and I started producing what seemed to me to be fairly plausible psycho-analytic interpretations" (p. 312). Again, what is meant by "producing" (the term suggests mechanical activity and routine) and "seemed"? And why "fairly plausible"?

We recognize Bion's unique style. Like a Brechtian actor, he plays the role of the analyst, then he steps to one side and shows us what he is doing. The world is a stage, he seems to be telling us, and I, all of us, we are merely players. Between roles and people, and between words and things, there is no correlation.

At this point, the reader may begin to wonder what "evidence" or what truth such a skeptical author might want to talk about. Among other things, in English, the word *evidence* is even closer to the concept of truth

than the Italian word because it also means *proof*—in particular, in legal language—as well as *trace, sign.* So far the author has done nothing but disappoint our expectations as readers, exasperating us and reversing our natural perception of things.

Bion continues to play around with the idea of something Y-shaped. He imagines the figure turning into a funnel or a cone, and finally into the shape of a breast—for an analyst, something "fairly plausible" (p. 312). Less ordinary, however, is the path he takes to gets there. Although going by the name of free association, it is more like a daydream. What he does is describe how the image gradually forms in his mind. He did not find this "fairly plausible" thing by looking for it in memory and desire; actively suspended, memory and desire give it to him while he is in a state of passivity.

Meanwhile, this digression has given zealous servants of the psyche the chance to tap into unconscious psychological work. Here ends the "patient's" first session. Bion uses neither an invented name nor an abbreviation for him; throughout, he calls him merely *the patient,* as if to maintain an aura of mystery about his identity or to be able to abstract some general truth from a particular case.

About the next session, he writes, "I seemed to be killing time with conventionally acceptable interpretations" (1976, p. 313). Conventional, but acceptable—so he decides to communicate them to the patient. The patient responds: "Yes, that's right. But you've been a very long time about it" (p. 313). As you can see, we are in a play by Beckett. The Irish playwright was in fact in analysis with Bion, and at times it would be difficult to say who is imitating whom (Anzieu 1999); after all, what does it matter how long he has taken?

However, the patient's remark chimes in surprisingly well with Bion's comment about killing time. It is unclear here whether Bion, by reporting the answer, wants to emphasize, with a hint of annoyance, the patient's ingratitude, or simply to be seen in a distorting mirror of self-irony so as to share with the reader the sense of emptiness he feels at his efforts to come up with something that sounds significant. His "killing time," to which the patient responds by telling him that "you've been a long time about it," means the words that say something true—and that

are thus food that nourishes and nurtures the mind—came too late. It is agony for the patient.

In fact, thinking does not come from the mere absence of the object, but from his return after an absence that was bearable. For this reason, however, *killing time* here stands for *killing new thoughts,* subjectivity itself. When the patient says, "that's right, but . . . ," this actually reminds Bion that a truth that does not involve feeling together, moving at the same pace, living in unison, is not a truth. But how then can one communicate so as to be on the same wavelength as the patient (or, likewise, how can one write so as to be in tune with the reader)?

As we can see, Bion continually distances himself from himself. He shows how constantly dissatisfied he is when measuring himself against the ideal image he has of himself as an analyst and as a person. While Freud writes using a rhetorical style that constantly struggles to convince a critical reader, Bion struggles with himself. He suffers in his own flesh the conflict between the pleasure principle and the reality principle, between desire as the expression of the phantasm and material reality, between patient and analyst. He becomes—in the recommendation he makes to everyone—the O of the patient. In some ways, it is hard to work out who is the analyst and who is the patient; rather, one gets the impression of two subjects immersed in a common field of interactions ceaselessly buffeted by waves of emotional turmoil.

For Bion, O is the ultimate, ineffable, unknowable reality, or even the "inexpressible truth of one's experience" (Ogden 2008, p. 17). It is close to Lacan's concept of the Real and to Kant's *thing-in-itself. Becoming O* means that we cannot know it rationally but that we can approximate it through experience. In session, *becoming the O of the patient* would mean to grasp the emotional truth of what is going on unconsciously in the analytic field, entering a state of passivity in order to be receptive to reveries, to the products of our unconscious psychological work. So O/*being* is opposed to K (knowledge)/*knowing,* which indicates an intellectual understanding. Ideally, in clinical work, the analyst should continuously go through the sequence of O → K → O → K, a process I would reformulate as a continuous oscillation between immersion and interactivity (see Civitarese 2008).

When we read Bion, we are far from the position of superiority of the classical Freudian analyst who cultivates an objective vision of things. Here, through multiple, dynamic, and reciprocal identifications, roles and positions change constantly in an endless game of variations in points of view.

By presenting himself in this way, Bion is not trying to get around the matter of truth. The key question he poses can be summed up as follows: What evidence has the patient provided and what evidence can be garnered from the associations of the analyst, from what he has seen or believes he has seen?

When interpreting, the analyst merely engages in imaginative guesswork. Emotions can be guessed at; when they are evident to the senses, or clearly legible in the body, it is already too late. Language has no words to describe emotions. One needs rather to be a painter or a musician, or at least to have their means of expression.

In these initial remarks, Bion comes across as an extremely serious author—responsible, anti-narcissistic, a writer for whom writing means struggling to solve a problem that obsesses him, and who is both intellectual and emotional. Then he changes register and (by dint of imagination) also place. As in a reverie, he remembers the lesson Freud learned during his period of study in Paris, when he was the one to question his master with a *why-shaped stare*. In his obituary notice for Charcot, Freud emphasized that the master had taught him we must keep on observing an unknown phenomenon until some pattern emerges. But in analysis, he added, "we are not supposed to use our senses in physical contact with the patient" (1976, p. 313), as a doctor of physical medicine might do.

Elsewhere Bion says that the analyst's interpretation should be the fruit of sense, myth, and passion. There is no contradiction between these propositions because, for Bion, using the senses means getting rid of the sensual realities of pleasure that are to be found in the memory of the past and in the future and in perception, and dealing instead with present reality. He is thus referring to a particular use of the senses, namely, what occurs when the analyst is in a state of hallucinosis that is inverse and symmetrical to that of the patient, whose hallucinosis is designed to exclude internal reality completely.

This state of formal regression of thought (Botella 2012) is used to see what the patient sees, his (invisible) hallucinations. It is a way of bracketing off material reality and intuiting what comes closest to being a "fact" of analysis, an emotion or a feeling.[1] In analysis, what is truly important is not the patient's biography as certified by official documents, but his person (subjectivity). What matters is if he comes back every day: "The problem, in a sense, is that of trying to make it worthwhile for the patient to come again another day" (Bion 1976, p. 313). It is a trite thing to say, but Bion is never trite. He is suggesting that if the patient is to return, he should receive something that is not a matter of sensual or material gratification. What then? Truth, food for thought, as previously noted; but what is this truth? How can we grasp it and, most important, how can we communicate it?

Bion explains indirectly in the following paragraph, again through the words of Freud, looking up at him from below, as if Freud were his father ("'I remember my parents being at the top of a Y-shaped stair and I was there at the bottom . . . and . . .' That was all" is clearly the leitmotiv of the text; 1976, p. 312). Bion quotes a famous passage in which Freud (1926) calls into question the caesuras (the discontinuity) between life in the womb and birth: "There is much more continuity between interuterine life and earliest infancy than the impressive caesura of the act of birth would have us believe" (p. 138).

Bion extracts a whole way of thinking from this passage. Transcending the caesura of binary oppositions that structure the theoretical and technical field of psychoanalysis can be seen as his ruling principle of method (Civitarese 2008). It is significant, therefore, that he should comment that Freud stopped there, seeing himself as the child who surpasses the father.

Earlier, Freud (1914) noted:

> I learnt to restrain speculative tendencies and to follow the unforgotten advice of my master, Charcot [this time it is Freud looking up at his father from below]: to look at the same things again and again until they themselves began to speak. [p. 22]

[1] "Sometimes I think that a feeling is one of the few things that analysts have the privilege of seeing as a 'fact'" (Bion 1976, p. 317).

It is hard not to be reminded of another famous phrase of Freud's, "*Saxa loquuntur!*"—translated from Latin by Strachey as "stones talk!" (Freud 1896, p. 192n)—as well as of his comment in relation to Dora: "He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore" (Freud 1905, pp. 77-78). This is what he himself means, Bion explains—in the very act of acknowledging the legacy he has inherited from Freud (but also pointing out one of its limitations)—by the famous precept that, in listening to the patient, the analyst should refrain from memory and desire.

The truth must speak for itself; it must impose itself. The mind must be as far as possible a *tabula rasa.* More precisely, it is the idea that one must suspend voluntary attention and veil consciousness to listen to the poetic truth of the unconscious.[2] Then, as Emily Dickinson puts it in her extraordinary turn of phrase, "Truth stays Herself" (Dickinson 1864, p. 884)—or, as Ogden (2003) writes, "The unconscious speaks with a quality of truthfulness that is different from, and almost always much richer than, what the conscious aspect of ourselves is able to perceive and convey" (p. 603).

What Bion means becomes immediately clear in a practical example. It is a matter of taking risks—for example, the risk of taking oneself seriously if one thinks that a given patient is not married when in fact he is, or that the date of birth on his birth certificate does not count. What matters is the moment when one is born, and the two do not necessarily coincide. That is the kind of sensoriality needed in analysis. If one thinks this way, however, one runs the risk of appearing crazy. The idea that a person may have a memory of his life in the womb was not commonly held at the time Freud expressed it. According to Bion (1976), psychoanalysis is revolutionary because of its idea (which he calls "disturbing," p. 314) that nothing can be "forgotten in the sense of really

[2] "I know that in writing I have to blind myself artificially in order to focus all the light on one dark spot, renouncing cohesion, harmony, rhetoric, and everything which you call symbolic, frightened as I am by the experience that any such claim or expectation involves the danger of distorting the matter under investigation" (Freud 1916, p. 45). The resonance of Freud's metaphor with Oedipus's gesture of expiation for having wanted to know what he did wrong becomes deafening; it amounts to saying that one pays a price for the truth.

disappearing" (p. 314). But what is revolutionary here is that Bion takes this concept of Freud's to its logical extreme.

In the meantime, however, we realize that there has been an imperceptible shift between the planes of investigation; or rather, a deeper and more personal plane has emerged. Beneath the question of "what is truth in analysis?," we can now make out the truth of the relationship with the parents and in particular with the father. It will be noted that, throughout the text, what Bion does is to place before us the central figure of the relationship of the child with the father. The *why* brings to mind Christ's "Father, why have you forsaken me?" from the Gospels, and "Father, don't you see I'm burning?" in one of the most poignant dreams described by Freud (1900, p. 509). The *why* also recalls Freud's own father, Jakob; in the dream Freud had after his father's death, Freud begs him to close his eyes ("you are requested to close the eyes" [Masson 1985, p. 202], Freud says in describing the dream in a letter to Fliess). Furthermore, the *why* makes us think of Freud himself in silent contemplation of Moses, in the Basilica of St. Peter in Chains in Rome. All these inevitably recall the curiosity of Oedipus and that of the child, imbued as it must always be with guilt and helplessness.

Beneath the technical-theoretical problem of truth in analysis lies the oedipal fantasy, but there is more. We read "a why-shaped stare"—a Y, a cone, a breast. But the Y is composed of three segments. After Freud had to come the other segment of the Y: Melanie Klein, his mother, his analyst. Bion looks to his analytic parents with an eye in the form of a Y ("why-shaped stare"). What is taking place here, as we can see, is a deep-seated unconscious identification with the patient, with the child whom he was, with the daughter, with Freud, with Charcot. It is as if he were living simultaneously in an infinite number of possible worlds, which is belied by raw sense perception.

Where does the patient finish and the analyst begin, asks Bion elsewhere, but here he asks this while showing himself in the act of becoming the O of the patient. He is the one who is projecting onto the patient his anxieties about his daughter; his doubts as father and analyst, the residues of transference onto the masters. Or is it the patient who is prompting thoughts and feelings of countertransference in him? But Bion would not write it like that. He would go beyond this caesura: he

would write "(counter-trans)-ference" (Bion 1977a, p. 56) to indicate, in the very way the word is written, that what matters is something between analyst and patient, the intervening space.

After studying Freud, and by way of developing the speculative idea that he had first articulated and then stepped back from, Bion leans on Klein to support his hypothesis of the existence of a fetal "psychic" life. He again picks up the formidable idea of projective identification: the powerful fantasy of getting rid of something of one's own, something one unconsciously rejects, so as to put it into the other. Could this mechanism underlie the formation of an "archaic mentality, unconscious thought . . . which is extremely active" (Bion 1976, p. 314)? As a person might ask his father and mother to explain where they came from, so Bion takes from Freud and Klein fragments of theory that obsessively refer back to the archaic life of the fetus, to the point of assuming there is a completely physical mechanism of projective identification: *what matters is the moment of being born.*

Assuming, however, that all this makes sense, then we would have something that *does not* happen and that cannot be seen from outside, but whose effects are very powerful. Again, what evidence do we have of such a process? If an analyst went around saying that an adult patient shows remnants of fetal life (which is what he does!), in the same way as a surgeon readily diagnoses a tumor of embryonic origin, he would not be taken very seriously.

When necessary, Bion does not spare analysts his sarcastic barbs, because nothing infuriates him more than the whitened sepulchers of psychoanalytic institutionalization. Thinking of an imaginary patient, he describes him as follows: "He prides himself on being grown up and on not believing in that sort of psycho-analytic rubbish" (1976, p. 315). But he is not in the habit of absolving himself completely: it is not clear, at least at first glance, what he is talking about, the patient or the analyst, who of course has become a caricature, who has became grown up and part of the establishment, or in other words has allowed his thinking to become rigid.

While the surgeon has his instruments, the analyst has to fall back on words; he can use only everyday, debased, impoverished words. For this reason, he should develop a personal vocabulary. *Personal* suggests a

lot more than what one might expect at first sight. It reflects the analyst's entire subjectivity—his person, in fact. It is not a question of choosing a few effective words or efficacious formulaic expressions, but of forging a personal style.

Bion thus distances himself from the abstract language of science and draws our attention to the performative nature of his text itself. It is obvious that the author's intention is not only to illustrate the concepts, but also to put them to work. If truth in analysis and the way of telling the truth coincide, since the way of expression allows one to play with the possibility of emotional sharing, the truth then becomes a question of aesthetics. And asking oneself "what language the full-term foetus speaks or understands" (1976, p. 316) becomes a rhetorical way of couching the problem of the ineffable in radical terms, since it is related to the inaccessible or nonrepresentational unconscious (Civitarese 2013). This becomes a way of hyperbolically expressing the concrete, intercorporeal quality of human communication. For the full-term fetus, there might be only a musical language, a being contained within a tactile-sonorous housing, a stream of sensations that are rhythmically ordered but continually exposed to disorder. But, we might ask, is this not the constant challenge of writing and style—namely, how to talk to our "fetal" or embryonic or somatopsychic elements?

Clearly, if we were artists, it would be easier. Leonardo and Shakespeare would know what to do. And even philosophers understand what to do—for example, Francis Bacon. About half way through the text of "Evidence," Bion quotes from *Novum Organum*:

> There are two ways, and can only be two, of seeking and finding truth. The one, from the senses and particulars, takes a flight to the most general axioms, and from these principles and their truths, settled once for all, invents and judges of intermediate axioms. The other method collects axioms from senses and particulars, ascending continuously and by degrees, so that in the end it arrives at the more general axioms; this latter way is the true one, but hitherto untried. [Bacon quoted in Bion 1976, p. 316]

Note the metaphor implied in this passage, which rotates around verticality (down/up). A centripetal movement of attraction that runs through the text brings us back once again to the "why-shaped stare" that we met at the beginning. The true method views (humbly) the *whys* from the bottom upward (in accordance with the logic of induction). In addition, Bion found in Bacon (or rather, he was inspired by Bacon to find?) the psychic transformations he had described himself, from beta to alpha, and the dream thoughts that give rise to the concept—from sensory experience to ideas, along a continuum without rigid caesuras.

But what is the point of invoking this procession of fathers, of yoking together Shakespeare and Bacon? Here again, by way of explanation, Bion transcends the gap that separates art from philosophy by quoting another eminent philosopher, Kant: "Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind" (Kant 1781, p. 86). He reformulates this idea:

> When I tried to employ meaningless terms—alpha and beta were typical—I found that "concepts without intuition which are empty and intuitions without concepts which are blind" rapidly became "black holes into which turbulence had seeped, and empty concepts flooded with riotous meaning." [Bion 1977b, p. 229]

It is important, then, that there should be a mixture of dream thinking and logical-abstract thinking, to redeem unreflection through reflection, to graft intuitions onto concepts and concepts onto intuitions.

At the level of manifest discourse, this is the heart of "Evidence" (1976), the point of convergence toward which all its lines of force are moving: the problem of truth and what truth receives its first unveiling in psychoanalysis. Neither mystical/aesthetic nor scientific/philosophical thought can give us the truth. The former is lacking in concepts, the latter in emotions/feelings. The former is wholly unconscious, the latter wholly conscious. But truth in analysis has to do with the ability to make sense of personal experience. In *Transformations* (1965), Bion explains that "something seems real [we might also say "true"] only when there are feelings about it" (p. 77).

Those analysts who stop up their holes with theories are like amnesic patients who invent false memories to fill the voids: "If you are at all tired and more than usually ignorant, it is useful to reach out for the nearest paramnesia that is handy, the nearest psycho-analytic theory that you find lying about" (Bion 1976, p. 317). The sense of disillusionment with which Bion dismisses theories as paramnesias, on a par with history and voluntary memories, is amazing. But of course we know that he can afford to do so only because he has a more all-embracing theory. The value of this theory, however, is that it takes its own weakness and turns it into strength, in the same way that Freud sublimates into ethical responsibility the crisis of an ego that is no longer master in its own house.

The problem is how to forge a language to describe things accurately. Artists are clearly at an advantage because "they can resort to the aesthetic as a universal linguistic" (Bion 1976, p. 317). In describing the trial of Socrates, for example, Plato

> . . . points out what a great disadvantage it is that in spite of the fact that Socrates and Phaedrus can apparently talk very accurately and precisely, they are actually using extremely ambiguous terms . . . . If we consider that there is a thing called a mind or a character, is there any way in which we can verbalize it which is not a complete distortion? The mathematicians talk about "quantum intermediacy," something unknown in between . . . look at it [my hand] from one side: there is a psycho-somatic complaint; turn it round: now it is soma-psychotic. It is the same hand, but what you see depends on which way you look at it, from which position, from what vertex—any term you like. But does one look at a character from any direction at all? [Bion 1976, pp. 317-318]

Having established the assumptions underlying his argument, Bion goes on to indulge in imaginative conjecture:

> . . . a flight into fantasy, a kind of infancy of our own thought. I can imagine a situation in which a nearly full-term foetus could be aware of extremely unpleasant oscillations in the amniotic fluid medium before transferring to a gaseous medium—in other words, getting born. I can imagine that there is some disturbance going—the parents on bad terms, or something of that

> sort.[3] I can further imagine loud noises being made between the mother and the father—or even loud noises made by the digestive system inside the mother. Suppose this foetus is also aware of the pressures of what will one day turn into a character or a personality, aware of things like fear, hate, crude emotions of that sort. Then the foetus might omnipotently turn in hostility towards these disturbing feelings, proto-ideas, proto-feelings, at a very early stage, and split them up, destroy them, fragment them . . . . I can imagine the foetus being so precocious, so premature that it tries to get rid of its personality to start off with, and then . . . he may preserve a mind at the deeper level, which knows nothing about that, but which might nevertheless have well-established feelings of guilt. [Bion 1976, p. 318]

The theme of deep-level guilt reverberates here like a warning signal. Similarly disturbing is the reference to "sub-thalamic fear"—an expression especially coined by Bion to refer to fear unrestrained by a higher level of the mind. What is he driving at? The answer is not long in coming, because Bion finally decides to show us his cards. And the cards are tinged with darkness:

> I remember [a patient] . . . who was quite articulate, in fact articulate enough to make me think that I was analysing him rather well. Indeed the analysis did go extremely well, but I was beginning to think that nothing was happening. However, the patient checked all that. After a session he went home, sealed up all the crevices throughout his room, turned on the gas, and perished. So there was my highly successful analysis—a very disconcerting result indeed, and no way of finding out or learning for myself what exactly had gone wrong, excepting the fact that undoubtedly it had gone wrong. [Bion 1976, p. 319]

Bion accuses himself of being unable to feel this "primordial," "physical" fear that had exploded again and led the patient to suicide. As he was analyzing him "well" and the analysis seemed highly successful, the

[3] See the exhilarating opening to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767), in which the protagonist traces back the misadventures of his life to an accident that happened during the copulation that led to his conception. At a critical moment, his mother had asked his father whether he had remembered to wind the clock . . .

patient took his own life. This brief sequence of statements condenses a deadly brew of conflicting and violent emotions.

A veritable *coup de théâtre*. With an impressive crescendo, Bion takes us on a journey of discovery: from the theme of what is true in analysis to the truth sought by the helpless child in the sphinxlike eyes of the mother, or faced with the spectacle of the hideous monster invented by Klein, the ghost of the combined parental figure, and finally on to the ghost of death summoned up by the suicide of his patient, foreshadowing his own death and the fulfillment of what had already taken place on the battlefield of Amiens, as he had written in a memoir (Bion 1991).

Thus, writing, reading, and analysis converge in the same place: all are significant if they involve an experience of truth, the ability to learn from experience. As Bion writes:

> The practising analyst must wait for the analytic system to evolve . . . for an evolution to take place so that O becomes manifest in K through the emergence of actual events. Similarly, the reader must disregard what I say until the O of the experience of reading has evolved to a point where the actual events of reading issue in his interpretation of the experiences. Too great a regard for what I have written obstructs the process I represent by the terms he becomes the O that is common to himself and myself [*sic*]. [Bion 1970, p. 29]

This brief but very intense passage helps us realize that the matter of language and style in analysis is one of life or death. Bion makes this clear in "Evidence" as well:

> Supposing we are in fact always dealing with some kind of psychosomatic situation. Is it any good talking to a highly articulate person in highly articulate terms? Is it possible that, if feelings of intense fear, self-hatred, can seep up into a state of mind in which they can be translated into action, the reverse is true? Is it possible to talk to the soma in such a way that the psychosis is able to understand, or vice versa? [Bion 1976, p. 319]

Now, talking to the soma (the fetus) is what makes this style—it is the how, not the what, and the semiotics, not the semantics of the expres-

sion. Sometimes, understanding the language of the body and speaking to the body (knowing, for example, that the setting, as Winnicott says, is the maternal womb) may be the factors that save a life or lose it.

On more than one occasion, I have found myself wondering whether I would have become interested in psychoanalysis if Freud had not been such a great writer. The thought has always been somewhat disturbing because it seems to mean that what impassions me about psychoanalysis has always been something extrinsic—in other words, not the *thing* itself. But in actual fact this is not the case, because writing in analysis is not ornament, not the mere vehicle of concepts. It is the truthful transposition of the thing, almost the thing itself. A type of psychology that seeks to account for the private, subjective world of the individual strives to combine insights and concepts; mind and body could not be expressed at a lower level.

It is no coincidence that the great authors of psychoanalysis, those who nourish our love for this discipline, are all great writers, although they differ enormously in style. Through style they convey the understanding they have attained of the mind, of humanity and existence. The theory is in the writing; it does not precede the writing because it is a theory of how to see a mind, touch a character, smell an emotion. In philosophy, the same constraint of necessity that binds concept and expression is found in the "literary" style of Derrida, a writer unsurprisingly steeped in Freudian thought and often misunderstood—and here the misunderstanding is sought, is desired and considered productive.

In the same way that the metaphors we use direct the gaze of the researcher, so, too, does the style. Freud does not discover the unconscious; he writes it. He discovers and invents it at one and the same time in the act of writing it. Analysis as theorizing and as care is a practice of texts, of texts as people and people as texts. The style is the body, emotions, history—everything specific to a given person. The body (the music) of writing comes before the concept, the idea; it is the unconscious of the text.

In "Evidence" (1976), Bion offers us a unique opportunity to see him at work in his clinical practice (his style): in the story-dream of a patient, he reconstructs two sessions that are all the more true for being

imaginary. It is not "verbal exactitude" (Bion 1965, p. 20) that counts. A psychoanalytic text "should stimulate in the reader the emotional experience that the writer intends . . . and the emotional experience thus stimulated should be an accurate representation of the psychoanalytic experience (O) that stimulated the writer in the first place" (1965, p. 32).

An analytic text also demonstrates how to re-create psychoanalysis in oneself, namely, in one's personality, which is, according to Ogden (2009), what every analyst should do. We come to admire the maddening beauty and fragile power of Bion's style as central factors in his thinking. As a writer, Bion carefully avoids an academic style, what he pillories in his last "literary writings" in *A Memoir of the Future* (1991), where the dangerous character of satanic jargon comes onto the scene. The style is not dry, impersonal, but is intermingled with emotions. He speaks in the first person, and like all great writers is not afraid of appearing naked. He uses an expressive minimalism designed to lend a maximum of brevity, simplicity, and concision to his style.

"Evidence" (1976) is pervaded by a tone of bitter and skeptical wisdom. It is grief work. What Bion expresses in this text is sarcasm and pity toward himself, and pain and fury toward a patient who committed suicide. It is atonement in the sense of unison/identification (at-one-ment) and expiation, a coming together of anger and despair. "Evidence" is a painful meditation on a dramatic personal and professional failure, which, due to the extraordinary fascination of the text, is transformed—as in Philip Roth's novels—into a sense of awe at the beauty of human existence and indignation at the horror that all this must end.

Bion's systematic doubt, so characteristically present in this text, does not resolve itself in a sophisticated intellectual exercise—as in Descartes, where deep down there lies a sense of vertigo and fear, albeit apparently under control; it is pure emotion, the balance of a life, and the life of a man who carries within himself the terrible experience of war. Evidence is something that is there but cannot be seen; it is the evidence of a person's death, the evidence of death. We all need to take shelter from this evidence behind some form of lie. The other side of the lie is

truth: that which can be shared emotionally with the other and that thus becomes the vital fullness and joy of existence.

In Bion's style, human matter and thought merge in an inimitable style. The body joins with the mind, and ideas become musical again; they become *sensuous* (Carbone 2008). Bion becomes his patient and suffers the patient's inner turmoil in the same way that a mother who hears her baby crying *lives* its pain. "Evidence" is structured in such a way that, as Benjamin (1955) says in his reflections on Nikolai Leskov's *The Storyteller*, what gives meaning to a story is the death of the protagonist (especially if it is exemplary).

The final section of "Evidence" retrospectively illuminates the whole paper, but it does so by opening up a dizzying array of perspectives. As in the phantasmagoric transmutations we find in dreams and poetry, Bion is father, son, person, man, analyst, and patient. As Vitale writes (2005), underlying psychoanalytic thinking is the image of the apocalypse. The revelation will come to pass at the end of the world—the imminent becomes immanent. "Evidence" is an apocalyptic text, but also the apocalypse of meaning since it strongly reaffirms the circular temporality of Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*.

The end of this paper prompts us to go back and reread the beginning, and so on, as in life itself. Why else would we be so hungry for stories? After all, every symbol, every word comes into being under the aegis of the (albeit tolerable) absence of the object—an absence that does not kill but establishes temporality. The return of the object rewrites the absence and transforms it *a posteriori* into symbol-truth.

As a whole, the text of "Evidence" is a text-symbol by which Bion grieves—for his analytic fathers and mothers, for his daughter, for the patient. Make no mistake: underneath his bitter sarcasm lie harrowing experiences and nostalgia for the beauty of life. In Rilke's words, it is "a terror we're only just able to bear" (Rilke quoted in Gass 1999, p. 66).

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Piazza A. Botta 1
27100 Pavia, Italy

e-mail: gcivitarese@gmail.com