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'The Music of What Happens' in Poetry and Psychoanalysis

Thomas H. Ogden ⓘ

The author presents a close reading of a Frost poem and a detailed discussion of an analytic session. Using specific examples from the poem and from the analytic session, he then offers some thoughts concerning the relationship between the way he listens to the language of the poem and the way he and his patient speak with and listen to one another. The author illustrates in this reading of the poem and in the way he speaks to his patient that he is not primarily engaged in an effort to unearth what lies 'behind' the poem's words and symbols or 'beneath' the patient's report of a dream or of a life event. Instead (or perhaps more accurately, in addition), he attempts to listen to the sound and feel of 'what's going on', to the 'music of what happens'. This is achieved to significant degree in the analytic setting by means of the analyst's attending to his own reverie experience.

There are the mud-flowers of dialect
And the immortelles of perfect pitch
And that moment when the bird sings very close
To the music of what happens.

(Heaney, 'Song', 1979)

In this paper I will be asking the reader to do a somewhat different sort of work from that which other analytic writers and I usually ask of the reader. In the course of this discussion, I will ask the reader to listen to his listening, that is, to listen to the ways he listens and hears me listening to an analytic session. I will try to stay out of the reader's way as he or she does this work and only at the end of the paper will I offer some thoughts about what I currently think listening to and saying a poem have to do with listening to and speaking with a patient in analysis.

Before turning to **Frost's (1928a)** 'Acquainted with the night' and to a session from the twelfth year of an analysis, I will make a few introductory comments. Over the course of the past fifty years, there have been a number of important shifts in the theory and practice of psychoanalysis. Among them is an increasing awareness that the most interesting and productive avenues of analytic enquiry seem no longer to be adequately addressed by the question, 'What does that mean?'—that symptom, that set of dream images, that acting out, that rageful response to the sound of the analyst's coughing, and so on. An enquiry into personal meanings has become inseparable from an understanding of the unconscious intersubjective context in which those meanings are generated. Consequently, the question 'What does that mean?' has gradually expanded in such a way as greatly to increase emphasis on such questions as: 'What's going on here?' 'What's happening between us consciously and unconsciously and how does that relate to other aspects of the patient's (and the analyst's) past and present experience, both real and imagined?' With this shift in our conception of the analytic process comes the need for a commensurate change in the way we use language to speak to ourselves and to our patients. It seems to me important that we develop a capacity to use language that does justice not only to the

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- 979 -

task of understanding and interpreting the conscious and unconscious meanings of our patients' experience; in addition, our use of language must be equal to the task of capturing and conveying in words a sense of what it is 'that's going on here' in the intrapsychic and intersubjective life of the analysis, the 'music of what happens' in the analytic relationship.

This paper is offered as a contribution both to the understanding of the shift I have mentioned in our understanding of the nature of the analytic process and to the development of our capacity to use language in a way that is adequate to that shift. In the course of this paper, I will look at the ways in which a poem grapples (often with great success) with the challenge of getting into the language the full richness, complexity and movement of living human experience. (See **Ogden, 1997a, b, c, d, e, 1998**, for previous contributions to the exploration of the use of language in psychoanalysis.)

In what follows, I will not be offering an analytic interpretation of a poem, nor will I attempt to provide a piece of

criticism that treats the analytic session as a literary 'text'. To do so would be to sap the vitality from both the poem and the experience in analysis. Instead, I will address the experience of the Frost poem and the analytic experience each in its own terms. I have made no conscious effort to select a poem that 'fits with' or 'speaks to' the aspects of human experience that are most alive in the analytic session or vice versa. I urge the reader to read the Frost poem aloud several times before proceeding to my discussion. Frost's best poems come to life through the play of the sounds and meanings of the words and the feel of the words in our mouths as we 'say the lines' (Frost, 1962p. 911).

While there has been some discussion in the analytic literature concerning aspects of the relationship between poetry and psychoanalysis (see, for example, Edelson, 1975; Hutter, 1982; Jones, 1997; Martin, 1983; Meares, 1993), as far as I have been able to determine, there has been to this point no contribution to either the literary or the analytic literature that has undertaken to offer a close reading of a poem, a detailed description of an analytic session, and some thoughts about what the two have to do with one another.

'Acquainted with the Night'

When 'Acquainted with the night' was published in 1928, Frost was in his early fifties and already had achieved extensive recognition as a poet, not only in this country but also in Europe. Frost and his family, however, were in a state of exhaustion brought on in large part by Frost's frequent travelling for purposes of reading and lecturing and from the many moves that the family had made (from New Hampshire to England to Massachusetts to Michigan and back again to New England) as Frost pursued his ambition to be not only one of the 'great poets', but also a widely read poet. When this poem was written, Frost's wife, Elinor, and their children were in poor health, their daughter Marjorie seriously ill. Frost's third child had died a decade earlier only three days after her birth.

Acquainted with the Night

I have been one acquainted with the night.
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.
I have passed by the watchman on his beat.
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet
When far away an interrupted cry
Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say good-by;
And further still at an unearthly height,
One luminary clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.
I have been one acquainted with the night.

The opening line, an apparently simple sentence, is remarkable for the complexity, subtlety

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- 980 -

and self-sufficiency of the language. It is not at all apparent how to read this line. Depending on where the reader places the emphasis in the words 'I have been one', a different 'sentence-sound' (Frost, 1914p. 675) is made, each with its own meaning. The line, as I have lived with it and struggled with it, seems to me to be most enigmatically alive when one says it with equal lack of stress on any one of its words. The enormity of the force of the restraint of the language of this first line is palpable and sets the tone for the rest of the poem.

Even the syntax (which is 'the nerve and bone structure of language' [Steiner, 1989p. 159]) of the first sentence contributes to its sombre vitality: grammar is pushed to its limit, is unobtrusively broken just a bit, and is newly created. It is as if the structure of language itself is unable to contain 'some strange resistance within itself...As if regret were in it and were sacred' (to borrow from Frost's [1928b] 'Westrunning brook'). The 'grammatically correct' form of the first line would read: 'I am one who has been acquainted with the night'. A new grammar (both broken and newly made) is required that dissolves the immediacy of 'I' (or 'I am' or 'I am one') in the present, and instead creates an unlocalisable past that is present and a present that is somehow already past: 'I have been one'—and still am? Or have been until recently? Or used to be, but am uncertain about whether I am now?

The sounds and rhythms of the first six lines of the poem are mesmerising and are inseparable from the connective tissue of the overarching metaphor of the poem: the poem as a walk. The poem is not a poem about a walk: the poem is a walk. The alternating unstressed and stressed syllables of the iambic metre¹ all but disappear into the larger two-stride 'sentencesounds' of walking-and-breathing-and-thinking-while-walking. The speaking voice naturally breaks the sentences into two parts:

I have been one...acquainted with the night.
 I have walked out in rain...and back in rain.
 I have outwalked...the furthest city light.
 I have looked down...the saddest city lane.

This 'walking poem' (in a style reminiscent of the 'walking poems' of Dante and Wordsworth) manages to get into the language what it sounds like and feels like to be alone, talking to oneself 'in one's head' and in one's body (in the sensations and rhythms of breathing and walking and being). The sound of the voice in this poem is not the sound of story-telling or of the narration of experience; it is a sound that is as close as I have encountered in any poem to the background sound of being.

The voice in the first two stanzas manages to encompass not only sadness and loneliness, but also irony and a dark humour, that seem to protect the poem and the poet from the embarrassment of excessive earnestness of voice.² There is pleasure taken (and perhaps shelter found) in playing with words: 'walked out' in line 2 becomes 'outwalked' in line 3. The walked is both 'in rain' and 'reined in'. 'Looked down' in line 5 carries a double meaning of seeing (experiencing) the sadness in the city lane/line and at the same time, the sense of defeating (looking down) the sadness in a battle of I's/eyes (eyes locked in a struggle that ends when one or the other turns away, averts his gaze).

Frost seems unable to resist the mischievous use of the phrase 'And dropped my eyes' ('I's) at the beginning of line 6, the only line in the first two stanzas to begin with a word other than 'I'. At the same time, this phrase 'dropped my eyes' is part of one of the most desolate, and yet thoroughly matter-of-fact, moments in the poem:

¹ Iambic metre is composed of two-syllable units ('feet') in which an unstressed syllable is followed by one that is stressed.

² In a letter to his close friend, Louis Untermeyer, **Frost (1924)** wrote 'Irony is simply a kind of guardedness. So is a twinkle. It keeps the reader from criticism...Humor is the most engaging cowardice. With it myself I have been able to hold some of my enemy in play far out of gunshot' (pp. 702-3).

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 - 981 -

I have passed by the watchman on his beat
 And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

The speaker is not only unwilling to explain, he is unable to explain. The poem itself is what stands in the place of an explanation.

A subtle shift occurs in line 7, which is felt largely through the disruption of the sound and rhythm of this walking-and-thinking-and-breathing poem: 'I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet'. The words 'stood still and stopped the sound of feet' require that the voice pause after 'still' and 'stopped' and finally come to a halt mid-sentence at the end of the line. This stopping of the sound of feet (both anatomical and metrical feet) at the end of line 7 is achieved without the help of a period, a semi-colon, or even a comma: for a moment words cease; the rhythm of walking ceases; the sounds of thinking and breathing cease.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet
 When far away an interrupted cry
 Came over houses from another street,
 But not to call me back or say good-by;

Out of the silence comes an interrupted cry, which has a disturbing, uncompromising otherness to it. It is not a cry intended for the ears of the speaker, but it is nonetheless a sound that changes him, becomes a part of him, as it seems to give voice to inarticulate feeling. The word 'interrupted' (both harrowing and utterly indifferent) is for me the most unexpected and newly made word in the poem. (What is an interrupted cry?) The sound of the word 'interrupted' itself interrupts the more flowing phrase that immediately precedes it ('And far away') and the one that follows ('Came over houses from another street').

In this part of the poem (lines 7-10), the experience of being acquainted with the night gathers into itself new sounds and meaning. The soft rhyming of 'night' (in the title and in the first line) and 'not' in line 10 ('But not to call me back or say good-by') unobtrusively links the two. Being acquainted with the night is becoming an experience of being 'acquainted with the not': the 'not' of the empty space, the interruption in the middle of the cry; the 'not' of the force disrupting the rhythm of the poem; the 'not' that is the 'strange resistance' that will not be reined in by the rules of grammar and the laws of time; the 'not' of the 'I'/eye that is dropped and refuses to see or to be seen. But at the same time, the 'not' that is being created in this poem is the 'not' of imaginative possibility, a space in which something new, something never before heard (the poem itself) comes into being. The not/night of this poem has a reticence about it; the reader will be allowed to glimpse it, hear it fleetingly (in the interruption of the cry and of the rhythm of the words), but the reader will only know/no it as an acquaintance, never as a friend.

The poem concludes in a surprising way:

And further still at an unearthly height,
One luminary clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.
I have been one acquainted with the night.

The final four lines of the poem are mystifying, and more than any other part of the poem, defy paraphrase. The speaker in these lines seems to marvel at the vast indifference and vast beauty of the night sky. He seems no longer to ask or to expect that the sounds of the night should acknowledge his presence ('to call me back or say good-by'). But at the same time the language is doing something quite different. The poem in these lines personifies, makes human, the 'luminary clock against the sky' (a clock-tower as metaphor for the moon or vice versa?), which talks (proclaims) to him (or is it proclaiming to nothing but the night sky?). And what the luminary clock momentarily proclaims is the lack of moment, the lack of significance of the temporal movement, rhythms and punctuations of life ('the time is neither wrong nor right'). Moreover, the proclamation is delivered not in a hard, mechanical cadence, but in the very human, softly flowing rhythms of what Frost describes as the 'living sounds of speech' (Frost, 1915p. 687).

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- 982 -

The 'I' that begins the final line is a very different 'I' from the 'I' that began the poem. It is an 'I' that has earned the right to say 'I have been one acquainted with the night', I have been one acquainted with the sound of solitary walking-thinking-breathing-being, acquainted with feelings of sadness and remorse and shame that cannot be explained, acquainted with the loneliness and unexpected curiosity stirred by the sound of an interrupted cry, acquainted with the feeling of humility and wonder engendered not only by the indifference of the night, but also by the way in which that strange inhuman otherness is created in language that is derived from and saturated with the uniquely human living sounds of speech.

All of this, all that the poem is, is unobtrusively gathered together into the sound of the word 'night', which is the final sound of the poem. I say final sound and not final word because 'night' sets in motion cascading resonances and disruptions of sound (largely through a variety of forms of rhyming) from every part of the poem. In addition to the rhyming of the final word/sound 'night' with the 'I' that opens the poem (and the six that follow), there are a half-dozen line-ending rhymes with 'night', several internal rhymes (by, eyes, neither, time), as well as a number of soft internal rhymes (for example, night/not/nor). These echoes continue to reverberate in one's ear long after the final word is said. In this poem of cycles, of endings that are beginnings, there can be no final word.

An Analytic Session

From my consulting room I could hear Ms S, a woman in her late thirties, close the door to the bathroom in my office suite. In the twelve years that we had been working together in a five-session-per-week analysis, it was only in the previous year or so that Ms S had begun occasionally to use the office bathroom. As I waited for her, I recalled an event that had occurred five or six years earlier when on leaving the bathroom, Ms S had realised that she had failed to button some of the many buttons on her trousers. In reality, there was no danger of them falling down, but she experienced intense feelings of embarrassment when she noticed the unfastened buttons. I remembered having suggested to Ms S that she might have felt that the bathroom was a place where both she and I were undressed (although at different times) and it may have felt as if we had been undressed together in that small room. My interpretation seemed heavy-handed and formulaic in retrospect. This 'bathroom incident' was followed by several months of profound emotional withdrawal on the part of the patient. At that time, I was practising at a different office building. I recalled, more in visceral sensation than in visual imagery, what it felt like when the office next to mine was occupied by my closest friend, J, and how empty

that building had felt when her office was rented to someone else after her death.

These thoughts and feelings, which began as I heard the bathroom door close, left me feeling diffusely anxious. When I met Ms S in the waiting room, there was an unexpected and uncomfortable formality about it.

Once in the consulting room and on the couch, Ms S began without a pause to tell me that she had had a dream the previous night that she was looking forward to telling me. She said that it was an unusual dream in that it was about the two of us and a friend of hers and not about female students of mine. (For years she had imagined that my students were far more interesting and likable to me than she was.) The dream seemed to her to be a very important one.

In the dream, your office has very white walls. You have a collection of ten statues in the closet behind your chair. You've had them there all along, but you've never known quite what to do with them. It's you, but you don't look like you. Each of the statues is a talisman. One represents Victory and another Courage. I forget what the others represented. You've taken them out over the years. My friend, R, is there and I'm glad that the two of you are meeting one another. She tells you a story of my swimming in an ice-covered

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- 983 -

lake. There is a really nice feeling in listening to her tell you the story. I laugh and say, 'I wouldn't do that now'. You take out a statue which has real green grass growing in it. I think it's a woman cooking, a woman making things. I forget what happens next, but at the end, R and I leave the office. In the dream I think that this is my lot in life...I will have friends, but not a love relationship with a man. I've begun to accept being alone... I know how difficult I am to be with.

I was struck by the simple directness of the dream. Things of significance were being taken out of hiding. Feelings were being accurately named. Her practice of swimming in an ice-covered lake, which was portrayed (rather optimistically I thought) as a thing of the past, seemed to refer to the patient's chronic state of psychological detachment in which she is unable to know what she thinks or feels or experiences in her body. Ms S had relied heavily on histrionic imitations of feeling and on efforts to elicit feelings of anger from me by means of endless provocations. Her ability to get me angry would momentarily relieve her profound feelings of psychological deadness. The naming of the statues in the dream reminded me of the fact that the patient's mother, who was 20 years old when she gave birth to Ms S, was so ambivalent about having a baby that she was unable or unwilling to give the patient a name for almost a month after her birth.

After telling me the dream, Ms S said that she missed the excitement of expecting magic from me each time she came to her sessions. (She was referring to her previously unconscious wishes that 'the treatment' would involve my giving her my thoughts [in fantasy, parts of my vitality and sense of self], which would magically transform her into a person who felt alive, albeit, with my feelings.) She told me that in the dream *the statues did not feel like magic charms that would give her victory or courage or anything else. They were interesting pieces, particularly the one with the grass growing in it.* She said that that statue gave her the feeling that, unlike the other statues, it was not an object 'left over from some ritual performed by an extinct culture'; rather, it felt like 'part of an event that never stopped happening and is still happening'. She said that she had the thought as she was telling me the dream that I might have been awarded the statues for achievements in my life. But the thing that felt new about the dream was the fact that she did not get stuck, as she often has, in making a story in which she is the outsider trying to steal my life, my achievements, my family and my friends. She said that in this dream, although there was a sense of her being resigned to being alone for the rest of her life, she did at least bring her own friend and her own interests and curiosity.

While the patient was talking to me about her dream, I was feeling quite off-balance not knowing what to make of what was happening in the hour. Ms S seemed to be making analytic use of her dream, but it seemed to me quite possible that she was being compliant in coming up with what might have felt to her like 'the right answer' (i.e. my answer) to the dream. I felt that there was a good deal in the dream that I could comment on. For instance, the statu of the woman with grass growing in it might allude to the patient's increasing sense of her own fertility, her own ability to make things with her mind (perhaps even our imaginary baby), as well as an enhanced sense of groundedness in her own femininity. This and several other possible interpretations that went through my mind felt flat to me and so I remained silent rather than saying something for the sake of saying it. I found my mind wandering to thoughts about a patient whom I would be seeing later in the day. That patient had been in a great deal of pain and turmoil at the end of our most recent session. I felt concerned about her and eager to hear how she was feeling.

Ms S went on to describe more fully the feeling of hopelessness that she experienced at the end of her dream. She then told me that for several weeks she had been extremely frightened of driving in the rain because she could not see clearly despite the fact that she had twice changed her windscreen-wiper blades. She had

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- 984 -

been afraid that she would be killed in a 'head-on collision'. (This brought to mind for me the fact that the patient's father, before Ms S was born, had been in a very serious car accident. He had been chronically depressed up to that point, but the accident seemed to exacerbate the depression. From very early on in her life, Ms S felt that she had served as her father's confidante and [in unconscious fantasy] his therapist, his mother and his wife.) The morning of the session under discussion, the patient had been told by her car mechanic that her windscreen had opacified slightly and needed to be replaced. I began without being aware of it to think about the fact that the elder of my two sons, who was living in New York City at that time, would be coming home for a visit in a few days. I was very much looking forward to seeing him and was going over in my mind the details of the arrival time of his flight and the need to tell him that I would meet him at the baggage claim area. Despite the fact that we had for years met at the baggage claim area when he came to visit, I felt at that moment in the session a great sense of urgency to remind him. I felt put upon by him, which seemed odd to me. I realised that my disgruntlement with my son disguised my fear of not finding him or of my getting lost. I also realised that the fluorescent lighting of the airport that I was picturing was associated with my visceral memory of feelings of sadness, emptiness and fear as I had waited in the airport late one night several years earlier for a flight to New York to visit my father who was gravely ill and hospitalised.

As I refocused my attention on Ms S, my partial understanding of the reveries that were occupying me (particularly my irrational annoyance with my elder son) led me to be more consciously aware of the sourness and disguised fearfulness that I was experiencing at that moment and, in retrospect, had been feeling throughout the session. I think it was my tone of voice more than the content of my interventions that conveyed the emotional change that I was undergoing as a consequence of my increased self-awareness.

A little later in the hour, Ms S said that even though she was feeling that she had a place here in my office today and had even used the office bathroom, she had felt that when I met her in the waiting room, I seemed surprised that it was she who was there. I was quite startled by the simple straightforwardness of the patient's observation. I had the somewhat disturbing feeling that for quite some time in this session, and probably in previous sessions, the patient had been 'ahead of me': she was looking forward (through her windscreen and looking forward to telling me her dream) while I was looking backwards (to the 'bathroom incident' of a half-dozen years earlier and to the death of a friend). What had previously been for me intellectualised ideas and subliminal feelings and images, now began to take on a stark clarity and emotional immediacy. My thoughts and feelings about the trip East to visit my father became an 'analytic object' of a different sort at this juncture. I recalled crossing the street at night in the bitter January cold of New York City with my wife and sons after having visited my father in the hospital. My elder son was 17 years old at that time and was only a year away from going to college. I had been aware of the intense sadness that I had been feeling about the approach of the time when he would be leaving home, but until that moment in the session with Ms S, I had not been as fully aware that during that trip East I had been experiencing his leaving as if it were he (and I) who were dying, and not my father.

Despite the fact that it has required much time and many words to describe this reverie experience, these thoughts, feelings, images and sensations occupied only a short period of time in the session. Ms S went on to say that she had made a decision as she entered my office today not to fold up and put under her head the blanket (which I keep at the foot of the couch) as she had done for the previous month or so: 'When I put the blanket on top of the pillow [to remedy back pain], my voice comes from my throat. My voice is fuller and comes from my chest when I don't use the blanket to prop up my head. I wanted to see today what would

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- 985 -

happen if I didn't use the blanket in that way. As I'm talking about this, I'm so curious about whether you noticed the change. It's only what you think or see or feel that counts. Why do I still need that from You?' This question was followed by a silence of about a minute. I then said to the patient that I thought that she had been feeling great pride and excitement about hearing the fullness of her voice and the richness of her mind in being able to dream a mysterious and interesting dream and to think creatively about it. I added that I thought that she had noticed with disappointment that she had interrupted herself as she began to feel that I was the only one in the room who had a mind and that it was crucial that she get me to give her my thoughts. Ms S replied that she had been aware of feeling anxious as she was telling me earlier in the session that she enjoyed thinking and speaking in a way that felt creative to her. She said that even though she had been aware of what she was doing, she could not stop herself from turning to me in the way that she had. I suggested that she might be afraid that if she were to feel that she has become a person in her own right, and not simply a carrier of parts of me, it would mean not only that the analysis would come to an end, but that we would lose all connection with one another in an absolute way, almost as if one or the other of us had died. (I was thinking not only of the feeling in my reverie that my elder son's growing up was equivalent to his dying and to my feeling utterly lost, but also of the reverie

involving my experience of the absence in my life [th empty office] following J's death. Also in my mind was the patient's fear of being killed in 'head-on' collision [a fatal collision perhaps in fantasy resulting from her having her 'head on', that is, from her being able to think and feel her own thoughts and feelings].)

Ms S cried and after several minutes said that what she was feeling now was gratitude to me for having talked to her in the way that I had and for her ability to talk to me in the way that she had today. She said that she did not want to say more because she was afraid of crowding out what she was feeling with spacefilling words.

The patient and I were silent for the final few minutes of the hour. In that time I experienced a quiet feeling of love for Ms S of a sort that I had never previously experienced with her. It was a love that had a sadness about it. I became aware in the course of the silence that I felt appreciative of the unconscious effort on the part of Ms S in this session to teach me (by showing me) about the struggle in which both of us were engaged to live with the sadness and loss and pride and excitement and sheer inevitability of movement towards separateness that is inherent in growing up and becoming a person in one's own right.

The patient began the following meeting by saying, 'I've never met anyone like you before'. I laughed and Ms S joined me in this laughter. The laughter felt full of affection, as well as having a sense of comic relief, as the two of us looked at ourselves (as if from a distance) after a very long period of strenuously and earnestly toiling with (and at times against) one another. I said, 'Maybe you felt that you met me for the first time in yesterday's session. Meeting me in that way is not the same as having a meeting with me'.

In the weeks that followed, we talked about the idea/feeling that you can't leave a place you haven't been to. It was only after Ms S had met me that there was the possibility of her ever considering leaving me.

Discussion

Space does not permit a detailed discussion of the moment-to-moment movement of the analytic process in the clinical material just presented. In what follows, I will limit my focus primarily to a discussion of the ways in which I made use of overlapping states of reverie of analyst and analysand in an effort to 'catch the drift' (**Freud, 1923p. 239**) of the leading edge of anxiety in the transference—countertransference and to make use of this understanding in

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- 986 -

the formulation of transference interpretations and other interventions.

I will use the term 'reverie' (**Bion, 1962**) to refer to the analyst's (or the analysand's) daydreams, fantasies, ruminations, bodily sensation and so on, which I view as representing derivatives of unconscious intersubjective constructions that are jointly, but asymmetrically, generated by the analytic pair. These intersubjective constructions, which I have termed 'the analytic third' (**Ogden, 1994a, b, 1995, 1996a, b, 1997c, d, e**), are a principal medium through which the unconscious of the analysand is brought to life in the analytic relationship. Almost always, the analyst's reveries initially seem to him to represent his own mundane, idiosyncratic everyday concerns, fantasies, ruminations, memories, bodily sensations and so on, which have little, if anything, to do with the patient. In fact, the analyst's reveries regularly feel to him to be distractions and preoccupations ('his own stuff') that reflect the ways in which he is not being an analyst at that moment, i.e. the ways in which he is not giving focused attention to what the patient is saying and doing.

The session (and the beginning of the subsequent session) that I have presented began when I heard the bathroom door close behind Ms S. My reverie concerning the 'bathroom incident' seems in retrospect to have reflected my unconscious wish to view the patient and the analytic relationship as if Ms S, and my relationship with her, had remained timelessly suspended in that earlier period. The experience of this reverie, which included a sense of profound absence in my life resulting from J's death, left me diffusely anxious and contributed to my feelings of woodenness when I met Ms S in the waiting room.

The dream that the patient presented at the beginning of the hour (again in retrospect) seems to have involved a sense of several important ways in which Ms S had changed in the course of analysis: she no longer swims in an ice-covered lake, that is, she no longer lives in a frozen state of autistic encapsulation—'I wouldn't do that now'. Instead of being perpetually engaged in a futile effort to steal life parasitically from me in order to compensate for her own feelings of deadness, she had developed, to a significant degree, a capacity to be fertile and to make things (the living green grass) that felt real and alive to her. There was also in the dream a feeling that the patient was beginning to feel prepared to consider the possibility of the end of the analysis (suggested by her leaving me in my office at the end of the dream).

My response to the dream as Ms S was telling it to me was in part to appreciate its simple directness. However, despite the patient's capacity to be interested in and curious about her dream and her ability to make analytic use of it (for instance, in her comments about the ways in which she no longer felt single-mindedly intent on getting me magically to

transform her), the possible interpretations of the dream that occurred to me felt hackneyed and emotionally flat. As I look back on this moment in the session, I seemed to have felt anxious about acknowledging that the patient had matured psychologically in the course of the analysis and that she was trying to tell me that she was for the first time daring to imagine leaving me (albeit with sadness and disappointment).

As the patient was talking about her feelings about the dream, my own thoughts turned to a patient who clearly needed me and who was hardly at all concerned with the eventual termination of her analysis. In this displacement, I was (unconsciously) longing to return to a time in the past when Ms S needed me in a more primitive and desperate way than she currently depended upon me.

Although I was unable to hear it at the time, Ms S's fears about the opacified windscreen seemed to have reflected her ambivalence about looking ahead. At that point in the session, I began to ruminate anxiously about meeting my elder son at the airport and felt (irrationally) burdened by the task of having to remind him where we would meet. I also experienced fleetingly (more in the form of a subliminal image than a narrative) a combination of fear, sadness, loneliness and emptiness as I remembered the night that I waited for a plane

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- 987 -

at the airport to visit my father when he was very ill.

As my focused attention returned to Ms S, the combined effect of the reverie experiences that I have described led to an increasing awareness of the anger, sourness and disgruntlement that I had unconsciously been feeling towards Ms S throughout the session. I also became aware that the anger served to protect me against feelings of fearfulness and sadness.

My own increased self-awareness and partial understanding of what was occurring, was, I think, conveyed to the patient by my tone of voice more than by the content of what I said (my 'tone of meaning but without the words', **Frost, 1942**). The patient, somewhat later in the session, was able to tell me that I seemed not to have expected to see her when I met her in the waiting room. Her comment startled me and helped me to consolidate my conscious and subliminal reverie experiences. I became much more fully aware of the way in which I had been unconsciously holding on to the past relationship with the patient while she was (ambivalently) attempting to look forward to her maturity, fertility and independence. The patient's observation led to an enrichment of my own reverie experience, which in turn enhanced my ability to be more fully present with the patient. I 'recalled' a moment of understanding that had occurred years earlier, but nonetheless was in a sense occurring for the first time in the session with Ms S. I (re-) experienced that moment of recognition in which I realised that it was my father, and not my elder son or I, who was dying. My son was growing up and leaving home (leaving me), but this was for both of us a form of being alive (a form of life that was full of sadness and feelings of loss as well as a sense of pride, excitement and possibility) and not a form of deadness.

The links between these understandings and what had been occurring in the session with Ms S now felt palpably real and immediate. Ms S spoke about feeling that she was speaking with a fuller voice because she had decided not to prop up her head with my blanket (that is, not to use me to prop herself up in a way that made her voice and her sense of self sound and feel thin and insubstantial). However, Ms S then found herself slipping back into a feeling that she needed parts of me with which to make up for missing parts of herself.

Speaking from (but not about) my reverie experiences, in conjunction with the rest of what I understood about what had been happening during the hour, I spoke with Ms S at the end of the meeting about her fear that having a mind and a voice and a life of her own would result in an end to the relationship with me that would feel so absolute as to feel like one or the other of us had died. The session ended with the patient's expression of gratitude that the two of us had been able to think and talk to one another in the way that we had. Not wanting to supplant a feeling that felt real with space-filling words, Ms S was silent for the final few minutes of the hour. During that silence I felt a form of love and sadness that I had not previously experienced with Ms S.

In a sense, the session ended and became the beginning of something new in the opening moments of the following day's session when Ms S said, 'I've never met anyone like you before'. I experienced her comment as both humorous and rich with wonderful ambiguities. After we laughed together, without planning to do so I said to Ms S that I thought she must have felt that she had met me for the first time in the previous day's session. I added that meeting me in the way that she had is not the same as having a meeting with me. There had been very little playfulness in the analysis up till this point and so it was a new and welcome experience to both Ms S and to me to find ourselves taking pleasure in spontaneous play with words and feelings and ideas.

Afterwords

In this final section, I will offer some specific comments about what, to my mind and to my ear, the experience of saying and responding to 'Acquainted with the night' has to do with the experience of listening to and speaking with

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- 988 -

Ms S in the analytic session that I have presented. Before beginning that discussion, however, it is important to make explicit the context for the comparison of the use of language in poetry and in psychoanalysis that I will offer. A critical divide separates the two activities: psychoanalysis is a therapeutic activity while reading and writing poetry are aesthetic activities. An attempt to draw one-to-one correspondences between the two, represents, I believe, a form of reductionism that obscures and distorts the essence of these two quite different human events.

Analysts attempt (with varying degrees of success) to use language in the service of communicating with the patient in a way that is maximally utilisable by the patient in his (always ambivalent) efforts to achieve emotional growth. For the analyst, the attempt to achieve aliveness in his use of language is in the service of bringing feelings and ideas to life in words that will advance the analytic process. A conscious or unconscious effort on the part of the analyst to be 'poetic' (that is, to create beautiful, pithy, artistic forms with words) in his patterns of speech and choice of words in the analytic dialogue almost certainly reflects a form of narcissistic countertransference acting in. Such acting in will severely impede, if not destroy, the analytic process unless the analyst is able to recognise what he is doing, and subject his thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and behaviour to analytic scrutiny. The poet, on the other hand, is answerable only to the art that he is attempting to create. His failures are lines that lack vitality and imagination and are devoid of feeling.

In the work with Ms S, I was attempting to listen and to be attentive not only to what Ms S was talking about, but also to the effects created by the way she and I were using language. This way of attending to language determined to a large degree the forms and qualities of my ways of being and talking with Ms S, that is, my 'analytic technique' (a very dry-sounding name for a very lively thing). In the session described I attempted not simply to 'translate' what Ms S was saying by making interpretations in the following form: 'Your feeling at the end of the dream of being resigned to spending the rest of your life without a love relationship with a man represents your unconscious disappointment and anger about the fact that you feel that you and I will never have a romantic relationship'. I am aware that this interpretation is heavy-handed, but what I am attempting to focus on here is an interpretive posture that treats the patient's words and sentences, images and ideas, excessively like symbols to be seen through and presented to the patient.³ Such an approach to the language of interpretation (either of a poem or of analytic experience) presupposes that feelings and ideas are there 'behind' the repression barrier 'in the unconscious' waiting to be mined (brought to mind) and exposed to the light of day, brought into the light of conscious attention and secondary-process thinking. When I speak of 'translating' or 'decoding' symbols, I am referring to a rather mechanical form of listening to patients that involves a unidirectional movement from symbol to symbolised, manifest to latent, conscious to unconscious, as opposed to a form of listening that is responsive to the rich reverberations of sound and multi-layered meanings that lie at the heart of both poetry and psycho-analysis. Of course, all interpretation of verbal symbols and the emotional context in which they are created involves, in one form or another, a search for a meaning/content that is unspoken and perhaps unspeakable. In this sense, all interpretive listening involves to some degree 'listening through' the language. I am suggesting, however, that interpretation becomes dryly explanatory ('this means that') when the emphasis on the 'listening through

³ Searles has observed: 'Surely many a neurotic patient in analysis ... finds himself maddened on frequent occasions by his analyst's readiness to discount the significance of the patient's conscious feelings and attitudes and to react to preconscious or unconscious communications as if these emanated from the only "real" and "genuine" desires and attitudes' (1959, pp. 282-3).

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- 989 -

language' is excessive. Moreover, I believe that the unspoken and the unspeakable are present (sometimes in their absence) in the language that is spoken, in the manner in which it is spoken, in the sounds of the words and sentences, in the feelings elicited in the listener, and (in the analytic setting) in the behaviour and bodily sensations that accompany what is being said.

In the analytic session presented, I made use of a set of reveries that at first were only subliminally available to me (more sensation than thought). I treated my reveries neither as distractions from the 'real' work of analysis nor as packets of pure unconscious meaning. Rather, I treated my reverie experiences (to the degree I was able to achieve and maintain awareness of them) as an indirect (associational) method of talking to myself about what was occurring unconsciously between Ms S and me. This way of approaching reverie experience reflects a perspective that does not view the unconscious as residing behind my reveries or at the end of a chain of reverie associations, but as coming to life in the

movement of feeling, thought, imagery and language of the reverie experience itself.

It is necessary at some point for the analyst to recast his reveries into a more highly organised, verbally symbolised form of talking to himself (and eventually to the patient) about the affective meaning of the reverie experience as it pertains to and is derived from what is going on at an unconscious level in the transference–countertransference. This act of bringing one's experience into a verbally symbolised form is not a necessary part of saying poems. At times, the reader might find it useful and interesting to attempt to talk to himself about what is going on in the language of the poem (as I have done in my discussion of the Frost poem), but the reader of a poem may prefer to allow the poem to remain in the form of a predominantly sensory experience that need not and perhaps cannot be transformed into a verbally symbolised response to the poem. In fact, the impossibility of doing justice to a poem in one's efforts to paraphrase it reflects something of what goes into our distinguishing poetry from other forms of imaginative use of words (for example, in novels and short stories where plot and character development carry far greater significance than they do in lyric poetry).

Towards the end of the analytic session that I have presented, on the basis of my (always tentative) understanding of my reverie experience, I said to Ms S that I thought that at that moment growing up felt both dangerous and exciting to her. It seemed that the independence involved in being an adult felt to her as if it necessarily brought with it the end of all connection with me, a disruption that felt as absolute as the death of one or the other of us. In saying this, I was not telling Ms S what she really felt, or what lay under or at the back of what she thought she felt. Rather, I was making use of metaphorical language in an effort to draw one aspect of her experience into relation to another in a way that created something new: a way of seeing and experiencing herself that had not previously existed.⁴

Just as my listening to Ms S did not primarily involve an effort to get 'behind' what she was saying (in the sense described above), my way of listening to the Frost poem was not most fundamentally an act of 'translating' or 'decoding' symbols. For example, I was approaching the poem in a way that was cognisant that the night at times seemed to serve as a representation of the darkness of despair and at other times seemed to represent the mysteriousness of the vast otherness that surrounds us and of which we are a part. But in the reading of 'Acquainted with the night' that I presented, I was primarily engaged in an effort to listen to the sound and feel of what the language was doing as I said the lines. For example, in the final four lines of the poem, the language

⁴ Metaphor (in contrast to the process of decoding the unconscious meanings of symbols) inherently creates an unfilled space of possibilities between the two elements that are being drawn into a relationship of similarity and difference, and not into a relationship of equivalence.

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- 990 -

gracefully, celestially keeps turning in on itself in a way that seems to have no end. Even as the speaker seems to be marvelling at the vast, nonhuman otherness of the night sky, the language is doing something quite different in personifying (making human) the 'luminary clock against the sky', which speaks (proclaims) the arbitrariness of time while the language of the proclamation (the poem itself) is alive with the very human, very beautiful rhythms and cadences of 'the living sounds of speech'. The beauty and mystery of the human and the nonhuman weave in and out of one another like the sides of a Möbius strip.

It seems to me that one of the most fundamental similarities between Frost's 'Acquainted with the night' and the fragment of the analysis of Ms S is the way each achieves its emotional force through what Frost called 'feats of association' (quoted by **Pritchard, 1994** p. 9). In other words, both the poem and the analytic session generate powerful resonances and cacophonies of sound and meaning. I have discussed how in the Frost poem the final word/sound, 'night', gathers into itself, through resonances of sound and sense, all that the poem is, all of its exquisitely beautiful sounds and all of its aridity, all of its flowing, ethereal parts ('One luminary clock against the sky') and all of its disrupted parts where the ear 'stands still' in sadness and in wonder when 'an interrupted cry/Came over houses from another street'.⁵

Ms S's comment, 'I've never met anyone like you before', is no less alive in its associative richness than is the interrupted cry in the Frost poem. Her statement set in motion remarkable feats of conscious and unconscious association that in so many ways drew upon what was most alive in the current moment and in the preceding session and made of all of it something new through her use of language. (See **Boyer, 1988**, for a discussion of the relationship between unresolved transference–counter-transference feelings in one analytic session and the opening moments of the subsequent meeting.)

Italo Calvino (1986) has commented that the rhyming of words in poetry has an equivalent in prose narrative where 'there are events that rhyme'. I would add that in the analytic setting, there are conscious and unconscious feelings, thoughts and other intrapsychic and intersubjective events that rhyme, 'that echo each other' (p. 35). For example, Ms S's word/idea/sound 'met' had lively connection with ('rhymed with') her observation (in the previous session) that when I

met her in the waiting room, she felt that it was not she whom I expected to meet. Ms S's dream involved a 'meeting': a friend of hers (perhaps an aspect of herself) met me for the first time and made a comment that caused the patient to laugh in a good-natured way that felt to me closely associated with the laughter at the beginning of the following session. In addition, Ms S's comment about meeting me held an important resonance with still another 'meeting', the imaginary meeting with my son in my reverie in which he and I would be meeting at the airport as if we had never met there before. These reverberations were not sequential, but instantaneous and generated a comically poignant moment in which both Ms S and I experienced an intensified sense of being present together (but as separate people) in that moment.

⁵ The juxtaposition in this paragraph of my experience with Ms S and my experience with the Forst poem underscores for me another difference between my analytic and poetic experience. The former involves a relationship of a dozen years in which millions upon millions of events (in psychological and external reality) occurred (for example, experiences of a great variety of grades of intimacy and psychological distance, of anger and love, of hopefulness and immense frustration). An experience with this poem, even though it is a poem that I value greatly, cannot possibly capture the range and depth of experience of a twelve-year relationship. I think that it is perhaps partly because of this difference in the experiences, that my responses to the poem tended to be centred more on the universal elements of experience (which are made immediate and personal by the poem), while the focus of my analytic attention tended to be on what was most specific and unique to my experience with this patient in this analytic hour.

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- 991 -

This 'rhyming' of the word/idea 'met' in these different forms of the experience of meeting made for a rich and lively ambiguity and expressiveness. Ms S's highly compact statement suggested that she was meeting me in the sense of seeing me, knowing me as a separate person for the first time; that she was meeting me in the sense of being equal to me (able to meet the force of my presence); that she was meeting me in the sense of making a rendezvous with me, perhaps a romantic meeting. Her comment conveyed in an instant all of these feelings/meanings and more.⁶

The sound of Ms S's voice assured that the 'like you' in 'I've never met anyone like you before' conveyed tender feelings of fondness for me (of 'liking me') and not simply a comparison of me with other people whom she had met.

And then there is the word 'be', unobtrusively tucked into 'before', which brings the experience of being to the fore. Ms S was in an important sense bringing herself into being in the course of developing a voice of her own with which to speak.

I have rarely received a more loving and interesting gift than the one Ms S gave me wrapped in the words 'I've never met anyone like you before'.

Perhaps what is most fundamental to both poetry and psychoanalysis is the effort to enlarge the breadth and depth of what we are able to experience. It seems to me that both poetry and psychoanalysis at their best use language in a way that encompasses a full range of human experience from 'the most awful and the most nearly unbearable parts to the most tender, subtle, and loving parts, a distance so great'. Both poetry and psychoanalysis endeavour to 'include, connect, and make humanly understandable or humanly ununderstandable so much' (Jarrell, 1955p. 62, speaking of Frost's poetry).

The movement of sounds and cadences of loneliness and sadness and possibility in 'Acquainted with the night' and the movement of feelings of anger, fear, sadness, disappointment and love in the session presented from the analysis of Ms S, represent efforts to generate experiences in which poet and reader, analyst and analysand, might become more fully capable of living with, of remaining alive to, the full range and complexity of human experience, even in the face of 'humanly understandable' conscious and unconscious wishes to evacuate, pervert, subvert or in other ways attempt to kill the pain. Perhaps, the almost irresistible impulse to kill the pain, and in so doing kill a part of ourselves, is what is most human about us. We turn to poetry and to psychoanalysis in part with the hope that we might reclaim (or perhaps experience for the first time) forms of human aliveness that we have foreclosed to ourselves.

⁶ These 'feats of association' related to (actual and fantasised) meetings and partings give renewed vitality to the concept of 'overdetermination' (Freud, 1900p. 283), revealing it to be more verb than noun, and to have as much reference to the future as it does to the past. In the analytic fragment under discussion, it seems to me useful to view over-determination as a process in which meanings and feeling tones come into being and accrue in such a way that the experiential outcome cannot be foreseen and is forever in motion: 'like giants we are always hurling experience in front of us to pave the future with' (Frost, 1939p. 777). The over-determined, from this perspective, always has a good deal of the 'yet to be determined' about it.

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- 992 -

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- 994 -

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