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Bion, Wilfred Ruprecht (1897–1979) Wilfred Bion was chiefly responsible for ushering in the post-Kleinian development; his own ideas linking Freud and Klein revolutionised contemporary psychoanalytic thought. Born in Muttra, in the Punjab, on 8 September 1897, the eldest child and only son of Rhoda and Frederick Bion, he left India and his parents when he was eight years old to attend Bishop's Stortford College, where he remained until 1915. Commissioned as a Second Lieutenant into the Machine Gun Corps, he served with the 5th Tank Battalion, seeing considerable fighting during the terrible carnage of the First World War. Taking part in the battle of Chambrai in 1917, the first occasion tanks were significantly employed, Bion was later awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his outstanding leadership and gallantry, to which the French added their Legion of Honour.

After demobilisation he went to Queen's College, Oxford on a scholarship to read for a compressed ordinary BA in Modern History. Enjoying his time there, Bion, in addition to playing rugby and captaining the swimming team, developed an interest in philosophy (and especially the work of Kant) through his contacts with the philosopher H. J. Paton. After graduating, he spent 1921–2 at Poitiers

University studying literature at the same time as developing what was to be a lifelong interest in art. Returning to England, Bion briefly taught at his old school, before taking a medical degree at University College Hospital, there coming under the influence of Wilfred Trotter, the author of *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War*. Although he had gained the Gold Medal for Clinical Surgery during his time at UCH, Bion's interest was in psychiatry and psychoanalysis. Various posts followed his graduation in 1930, most substantially at the Institute for the Scientific Treatment of Delinquency and later the Tavistock Clinic, where he was consulted by Samuel Beckett during 1934–5. They attended Jung's Tavistock lectures together. Bion's own experience of psychotherapy at the hands of J. A. Hadfield was disappointing. However, in 1937 he met John Rickman with whom he went into analysis, before enrolling as a candidate at the Institute of Psychoanalysis the following year.

The outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 interrupted his analysis and training, Bion being commissioned a Major in the Royal Army Medical Corps. In April 1940 Bion married the actress Betty Jardine, having met her at the beginning of the previous year. The war brought Bion into a close professional relationship with Rickman, the two men serving together at the Northfield Military Hospital where they employed group methods to focus attention on everyday tasks and to resurrect morale. The approach was novel and appeared effective, though the initial confusion it entailed led to Bion's (and Rickman's) rapid transfer to other duties. Although the First Northfield Experiment, as it became known, had lasted a mere six weeks, its reverberations profoundly moulded subsequent thinking on groups, particularly through what became known as the Tavistock model. Bion's initial formulation of the experience, jointly written with Rickman, appeared as 'Intra-group tensions in therapy' in the *Lancet* in 1943. Bion's other principal achievement in military psychiatry arose from his work assessing officer candidates with the War Office Selection Boards, various sections of which he was attached to before and after Northfield. In his first such attachment, in 1942, Bion devised the 'leaderless group project', which he described in an article of the same name in 1946. The approach proved efficient, highly effective and influential in tandem with Northfield. In the project a group of usually eight candidates were given a task to be completed within a set time, during which the selectors focused on each participant's capacity to negotiate the tensions between individual and group ambition, competence and fears of failure. In February 1945 Bion's first child, a daughter, Parthenope, was born, Betty tragically dying three days later. Widowed, Bion threw himself into work. At the end of the war he returned part time to the Tavistock Clinic where he remained until 1948, further developing his ideas on groups, the fruits of which he published in a groundbreaking series of articles later collected together, along with his Northfield paper, as *Experiences in Groups*.

Bion's interests at this time however were turning more towards individual psychoanalysis, spurred on by his developing private practice, his psychoanalytic training which he had resumed in November 1945, and above all his training analysis with Klein, a return to that with Rickman being inappropriate following their close wartime association. His analytic formation was complemented by supervision from Heimann and Payne. Graduating in June 1948, Bion went on to read 'The imaginary twin' as his membership paper to the British Psychoanalytical Society in November 1950. It was the start of a profound series of papers, including 'Notes on the theory of schizophrenia', 'Differentiation of the psychotic and non-psychotic personalities', 'Attacks on linking' and 'A theory of thinking', which Bion collated along with his later commentary in *Second Thoughts*. Based substantially on his pioneering work analysing psychotic and borderline patients, Bion elaborated the processes of pathological splitting and massive projective identification resorted to in primitive attempts

to ward off anticipated unbearable psychic catastrophe. As part of this development Bion distinguished between pathological forms of *projective identification (characterised by the degree of hatred and omnipotence involved, the evacuatory intent and splitting which amounts to fragmentation) and more normal varieties, which carry primitive communicative intent. Bion was thus able to move from a consideration of the severe psychopathology of the psychoses to a view of normal mental development, both of which hinged upon the ways in which frustrating, painful and inchoate feelings are relocated through projective processes. In normal development the projections are contained prototypically within the infant's mother, made understandable by virtue of the operation of her developed psychic capacities on them, and are in due course reintrojected by the infant; such meaning-conferring cycles lead incrementally to the internalisation and growth of an apparatus for thinking or digesting thoughts. In developing these ideas Bion highlighted the crucial role of the interpersonal environment, thought by some to have been relatively neglected by Bion's Kleinian forebears, and at the same time offered a conceptual model for the analytic process.

In developing these ideas Bion was strongly supported by his second wife, a young widow, Francesca McCallum (née Purnell), whom he married in June 1951 following a whirlwind romance. With Francesca, Bion had two children, Julian, born in July 1952 and Nicola, born in June 1955, their nurturance perhaps feeding Bion's metaphors.

Bion was successively Director of the London Clinic of Psychoanalysis, from 1956 to 1962, and President of the British Psychoanalytical Society, from 1962 to 1965. During the latter term of office Bion consolidated the ideas outlined in 'A theory of thinking' in three major metapsychological works, *Learning from Experience* in 1962, *Elements of Psycho-Analysis* the following year and *Transformations* in 1965. His thoughts on technique now increasingly emphasised that the main concern of psychoanalysis is psychical reality, which consists primarily of non-sensuous ineffable emotions and phantasies rather than the sensuous phenomena of physical reality. Consequently, Bion argued that the analytic attitude should be one that eschews memory, desire and understanding in favour of the development of negative capability, reverie, or patience, until a selected fact is intuited, which may in turn act as an organising nexus for further conceptualisation. These views contribute to an understanding of the difficulty of conveying psychoanalytically relevant material outside of the confines of the analytic situation with our existing vocabulary and shed light on Bion's own literary style.

This emphasis on the unknown, or O, and the dangers of foreclosure due to clinging to establishment dogma may have contributed to Bion's acceptance of an invitation from the growing Californian Kleinian group to move there, which he did in 1968. The move to Los Angeles, while startling some of his British colleagues, was an increment to both his hosts and his own creativity during his final years. There he developed his thoughts on technique and the processes of psychic change in *Attention and Interpretation*, published in 1970, and demonstrated his ideas through extensive teaching and clinical seminars, famously in São Paulo in 1973, 1974, 1978 and 1979, Rio de Janeiro in 1974, Brasilia in 1975, and New York in 1977, transcripts of which seminars have been subsequently published. Looking back on his life led to a series of autobiographical studies and publication of his mammoth enigmatic three-volume *A Memoir of the Future*, a fictional evocative autobiography of a man of achievement. On 8 November 1979 Bion died of myeloid leukaemia in Oxford, shortly after returning to Britain, thus curtailing new plans he had to start yet another chapter of his life. His influence however remains indelibly impressed on psychoanalysis and group and organisational theory, sustained by the publication of stimulating posthumous works such as *Cogitations*, in 1992, and the climate his ideas have created.

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