

Neri C. (1981). Introduzione al numero monotematico dedicato a W.R. Bion. *Rivista di Psicoanalisi*, XXVII, 3-4, 1981, pp. 359-362 e per il testo inglese pp. 363-67 (in collaborazione con F. Corrao), bibl. di 3 titoli.

Introduction Claudio Neri

«... Should we not be mentally open to the communication of ideas? It is clear that this cannot be carried out by an individual; our lives are too short.
But the communication of these ideas from generation to generation seems important...»
W. R. BION

This issue of the review, dedicated to Bion, bears direct witness to the way in which his work has been elaborated in Italy. Bion's thought influenced Italian psycho-analysis both deeply and rapidly, even in respect to Great Britain and the United States, where he lived.

There are many reasons for that influence; some lie in certain *characteristics* of Bion's research and method, particularly consonant with Italian cultural traditions. These characteristics are:

- 1) *The historical aspect*. In Bion, consideration of the « remains of the past » is never archaeological or memorial, but historical; that is, based on a constant effort to make the past vital for the present. This, holds true whether he deals with moments and structures that can be classified in ontogenetic (biogenetic, embryogenetic, neurogenetic) terms, or with realizations or events classifiable in anthropological, or cultural terms.
- 2) *The mythical aspect* and the corresponding exploitation of « mythical thought ». Probably no analyst since Freud has been able to draw attention to myth and its cognitive function as well as Bion; supplying at the same time equally efficient stimuli for enlarging that specific field of research. We refer to the in psycho-analysis introduction of the myths of Eden and the Tower of Babel; to his differentiation between private myth and collective myth; to his broader conception of the Oedipus myth; and to the analogic correlation he sets up between myth and the scientific deductive system.
- 3) *The scientific, « Galilean » aspect*. We intend by this the priority Bion grants to scrupulous, direct, specific observation of facts; the essentiality and conceptual rigour of his speculative hypotheses; the accurate use he makes of his means or models of research; and his liking for a mathematical-type formalization of analytic thought and language.
- 4) *The mystical aspect*. We can better understand the interest aroused by this dimension of Bion's thought if we study its dual nature. On one hand, we have a level of mystical experience, which cannot be eliminated from human life and therefore emerges forcefully and persistently from time to time. On the other hand, we have a staggering level of exploration and understanding capable of diminishing the disastrous effects created when belief prevails over truth, religion over knowledge.
- 5) *The aesthetic aspect*, and the attention given to musicality, the painted image, and poetry.
- 6) Finally, the characteristic which is perhaps most interesting for Italian analysts: that referring to the *critical conception of the « exceptional individual »* and to systematic analysis of the individual = group relationship. The critical conception of the « exceptional individual » runs through all of Bion's works, from his 1943 essay on « The Northfield Experiment » to his « Memory of the Future » (1975) and « Roman Seminars » (1978).

The basic steps in the evolution of this last characteristic are: the « leader » (1948), the mystic (1970) and the artist (1978).

Actually, the idea of the « exceptional individual » is a way of presenting the analyst and his action in a dual « *setting* » or group. In his « Experiences in Groups », Bion says that the « leader » is divided between two counteropposed fields of forces represented by two different figures:

- a) the leader of the « basic assumption group »;
- b) the leader of the « work group ».

While the former is created by the intensity of the group's pathological processes and the need for their expression (he is personified by the sickest member of the group), the latter is created by the group's cognitive processes and the tendency to realize them. In fact, there is a close resemblance between the figure of the « work group leader » and the figure of the mystic or genius: both are related to the group and both seek truth.

In « Attention and Interpretation », the figure of the analyst-mystic becomes progressively clearer through analysis of the difference between a physician and a psycho-analyst. Employing the container contained model (♀ ↔ ♂), Bion demonstrates that, unlike the physician, the psycho-analyst is not merely spectator (albeit participant), but becomes those primeval forces that belong to the psychotic patient, the genius and the basic assumption group.

« The clue lies in observation of the fluctuations which make the analyst at one moment 5 and the analyzed h and at the next reverse the roles... » (1970).

The final aspect of the « useful analytical function » is presented in « Roman Seminars ». The analyst must not only be able to further the search for truth (the leader) and be at one with it (the mystic); he must also be able to communicate it efficiently (the artist).

Since the creative act consists of «putting oneself at one with 0 » to « tear » an evolution from it, it must thus be preceded by a « contraction » of what is essential, and on elimination of what is contingent (memory, desire, understanding). Only when the analyst assimilates within himself the entire « history » of analysis, concentrating it at a single point, can he eliminate its encumbrance, and turn it into the object of a useful, that is, creative, communication. While the psychoanalyst-mystic transcends or opposes tradition (« history »), the creative psycho-analyst, depending on the « inner artist », confronts tradition and assumes it again, eliminating it and at the same time reformulates it in each new act of communication.

The idea of the *inner artist* in the latest Bion gives birth to a new elaboration of the concept of truth, linked far more to « wild thoughts » than to knowledge; it also originates a new view of time: the view of « great time » that lets us link Paleolithic man to the poet and the algebraist. But just as the « exceptional individual », in the person of the analyst-mystic, is torn between revelation and subversion, between nihilism and institutionalization, so the « exceptionality », within each of us may be torn between dependence and loneliness, between calcification and mental growth.

Many Italian psycho-analysts have established a strong link with Bion's personality and with the ideal of the psycho-analyst he incarnates; this has had a positive influence on the possibility of dealing with the « forest of his thought » (Cfr. W. Benjamin, 1955).

We believe that Italian psycho-analysts have not tried to force Bion to become contingent to their research; on the contrary, they have tried to make Bion shake and stimulate them. At one point there was a risk that the gates of his thought might close, leaving us in silence, devoid of the opportunity to elaborate the necessary discrimination between what is deeply similar and what is only mimetic or echoed.

In our opinion, this danger has been avoided by this convention, (*) this issue of the review and by the English translations of the papers presented.

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

For the quotes from Bion's works, see the general bibliography, p. 758.

The dates in parentheses refer to the first edition.

The excerpt is taken from: W. R. Bion, «Four Discussions with Bion» (1978, p. 7).

The English translation of excerpts from «Roman Seminars » was made by the authors, since it was not possible to make use of the magnetic tapes on which they were recorded.

(*) « *Seminars on the Works of W. R. Bion* » organized by the Italian Psycho-analytical Society (Rome 27th and 28th of march, 1981).

Some of the quotes on p. 4 were taken and reworked from W. Benjamin, *Il compito del traduttore* (The Translator's Task), in W. Benjamin, « Angelus Novus », Einaudi, Turin (1981).

Our thanks to Dr. Stefania Nicolosi, who let us consult her graduation thesis in Psychology: «Il vertice della verità » (The Summit of Truth) (unpublished, 1981).