

## BECOMING OF USE AS AN ANALYST: IMAGINING SOMETHING THAT WAS NEVER THERE BEFORE

Every analysis that becomes generative must be an *original* experience, in both senses of the word: an experience that reaches into the origins of the emotional life of the analysand and one that creates something entirely new. If the analysis goes well enough, these efforts lead the analysand to feel the oldness and newness to be an integrated whole. Analysands who have experienced an absence of intimate emotional connection early in life especially require that new psychological capacity be developed from their germinal potential as a means by which the psychoanalytic process is brought to life. In such cases, both analyst and analysand are required to find ways to expand their receptivity to sensory experience and to cultivate their imaginative capacities in a manner that make emotional growth possible. Through this process words become embodied and better able to articulate the analysand's self-experience and to create the experience of reciprocity with the analyst and with others in ways never before experienced.

**Keywords:** countertransference, creativity, holding environment, intersubjectivity, object relations, transference, development

*The vitality of language lies in its ability to limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers. . . . It arcs toward the place where meaning may lie.*

—TONI MORRISON

**I**maginative literature is replete with stories that describe a sensory experience that inaugurates a period of self-inquiry or a new beginning.

---

Training and Supervising Analyst, Dallas Psychoanalytic Center; Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry, University of Texas Southwestern Medical School.

Because this clinical essay requires the presentation of detailed clinical material, the author obtained permission from his former analysand to publish this paper. She

For example, the protagonist of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* tastes a tea-soaked madeleine and is propelled through a 3,000-page journey into a "vast structure of recollection" (Proust 1913, p. 64). In *Sleeping Beauty*, a kiss awakens a character from a deadening sleep.

In these and other stories, powerful metaphors are created to describe avenues by which one may become more fully alive in mind and body. Some are narratives of rediscovery of emotionally distant or lost parts of a character's inner life. Some tell of revitalization from a state of numbness. In other stories, however, it is a matter of coming to experience something never known or felt before: something previously beyond the capacity of that person's imagination. In what follows I will present two of the last sort of stories. The first is by a creative writer. The second is written about an analytic experience. In addition, the analysand's written comments about this clinical report are included at the end, something the reader may come to view as yet a third story.

I will begin with a short story by Chekhov, for my experience of reading it brought to mind the subject of this paper, a psychoanalytic case that had ended some years earlier. This piece of fiction set in motion a set of feelings and reflections that led me to revisit this case and that influenced my capacity to write about it.

### A CHEKHOV SHORT STORY

Anton Chekhov's short story "The Kiss" (1887) takes place in and around a party held in a mansion for the benefit of an artillery brigade passing through a Russian town. In it a shy junior officer, Ryabovich, uncomfortably watching the festivities from a drawing room, withdraws to a dark room upstairs. There he is surprised by a woman rushing in and mistaking him for her lover.

Here, as in the music room, the windows stood wide open, there was the fragrance of poplars, lilac, and roses. . . . At that moment he was surprised by the sound of hasty footsteps and the rustle of a dress; a breathless, feminine voice whispered, "At last!" and two soft, perfumed, unmistakably feminine arms were thrown around his neck, a warm cheek was pressed to his, and there was the sound of a kiss [p. 121].

---

agreed to its publication but asked that her written response to reading the paper be included. Submitted May 10, 2019.

In the wake of this experience—"his heart was beating and his hands were trembling"—Ryabovich momentarily "shrank into himself," his usual modest self. Then, recovering from this force of habit, "he gave himself up entirely to his new and never-before-experienced sensation" (p. 121).

Something strange was happening to him. . . . His neck, round which the soft, perfumed arms had so lately been clasped, felt as though it had been anointed with oil; on his left cheek near his mustache, where the unknown lady had kissed him, there was a slight tingling, a delightful chill, as from peppermint drops, and the more he rubbed it the stronger the sensation became; all over, from head to foot he was full of a strange new feeling which continued to grow and grow. . . . He completely forgot that he was round-shouldered and colorless, that he had lynx-like whiskers and a "nondescript appearance" [p. 121].

As this experience continues to grow in importance for Ryabovich, he daydreams a future with a wife and family, something before inconceivable to him:

in his imagination he talked to her, caressed her, leaned over her shoulders; he pictured a war, separation, and reunion, a supper with his wife and children. . . . He pictured *her* and his happiness boldly, at will, and nothing inhibited his imagination now [pp. 126–127].

This new sensation never knowingly experienced before set in motion a process that led Ryabovich to imagine himself into a future that held more potential than he could previously have envisioned.

Several days following the scene in the dark room, after the regiment had broken camp and moved on, Ryabovich "was moved by an irrepressible impulse" (p. 127) to find the courage to tell his comrades about his experience of the kiss. Standing before them, he reported the facts of the event.

"A strange thing happened to me at those Von Rabbeks." . . . He described the adventure of the kiss in exact detail; after a minute he fell silent. In that minute he had told everything, and he was shocked to find that the story required so little time. He had thought it would take him till morning to tell about the kiss. Lobytko, who was a great liar and consequently believed no one, looked at him skeptically and laughed. Merzlyakov twitched his eyebrows and . . . said: "Queer! She throws herself on your neck without addressing you by name. Probably a psychotic of some sort." . . .

All this jarred on Ryabovich. He left them and went to bed, vowing never again to take anyone into his confidence [p. 128].

The experience Ryabovich reported to his fellow officers lacked the sensory details found in his actual experience of the kiss, which had engendered something entirely new and full of promise. It is unlikely that he spoke to them of the “smell of poplars, lilac and roses,” his “neck anointed with oil,” the “delightful chill” where he was touched, now emanating “from head to foot”—“a strange new feeling which continued to grow and grow,” much less how this experience opened the door long closed to his imagining himself as something more than he had believed himself to be. The essential description of the emotional atmosphere of the dark room in which the kiss takes place and the specific ways in which Ryabovich is touched—and, through his senses, brought to life by this experience—were missing. The listeners likely heard his story as a casual happening in one man’s life.

The impulse that led the fictional character Ryabovich to present his experience to his fellow soldiers may have been propelled by his need to have another person witness and validate something new and unimaginable that he himself could not sustain in his mind alone. Ryabovich was someone who had never before encountered anything sufficient to challenge his sense of himself as a man incapable of intimate experience: “he could in no way imagine himself in the position of such a man”; rather, he was a man who lived within himself as one “miserable at heart . . . a consciousness of being timid, uninteresting, round-shouldered, of having a long waist and lynxlike whiskers, [which] deeply mortified him; but with years he had *grown used to this feeling*” (pp. 119–120; emphasis added).

The kiss was something so profound as to confront a view of himself that had seemed immutable. Whether occurring in a work of fiction or in “real life,” such a germinal experience may emerge and remain viable for only an instant. For one may quite readily fall back into habitual ways of being that extinguish its nascent potential.

The psychoanalytic situation provides a potentially generative encounter with another human being that may be sufficient to awaken an analysand from a deadening repetition of habit. The ever present risk, however, is that communications from an analysand that something new and different is happening will not be heard by the analyst and not responded to in a manner that facilitates emotional growth. Then the

humiliation of reaching toward someone who does not respond may lead the patient to fall back into a psychological enclave enveloped in habitual ways of being: a state of isolation living within layers of shame and governed by self-contempt.

If an analyst is sufficiently attuned to it, a shared, enlivening transference-countertransference experience may provide entry to still vital tissue that holds the opportunity for novel experience. Otherwise, latent stem cells of development may go unnoticed. Shortly, I will present psychoanalytic case material intended to show what I mean by this. First, though, a few words about the structure of this paper.

### **A NOTE ON PSYCHOANALYTIC USES OF IMAGINATIVE LITERATURE**

*Every poem that works as a poem is original. And original has two meanings: it means a return to the origin, the first which engendered everything that followed; and it means that which has never occurred before. In poetry . . . the two senses are united in such a way that they are no longer contradictory.*

—JOHN BERGER (2001, p. 452)

I said that Chekhov's story had set in motion reflections upon a case. But what bearing does it have on a piece of writing intended to comprehend a clinical experience?

For many years, I have systematically read imaginative literature in an effort to bring vitality to creative spaces within me that I can use in the psychoanalytic situation (Griffin 2016a). I happened upon this practice during a difficult time in my life during which I discovered how acts of reading generated for me a kind of preserve in which my creative capacities were restored and cultivated (Griffin 2004, 2005). This process enhances my emotional receptivity to psychoanalytic experience, expands my capacity for empathic engagement, and sharpens my attunement to language (Griffin 2019). There is something about immersing myself in the original worlds that certain of these creative writers construct and in the consciousnesses contained within their literary forms that somehow fosters my capacity to listen more creatively—more imaginatively—to my patients, and to myself. In turn, I find that this process makes it more likely that I can better hear the unique uses and meanings of familiar words analysts speak.

I made another discovery, one completely surprising to me. The benefits of my immersion experience with imaginative literature led me to freshly read psychoanalytic writings and to reconsider theory known to me, but which I now hear in a new key (Griffin 2013). This is especially so for psychoanalytic writers whose language is truly *original*, in the dual meaning of the word: a return to the origins of psychoanalysis and the creation of something that never existed before. Take, for example, the works of the quiet revolutionary Hans Loewald, who speaks of psychoanalytic concepts as “living and enlivening entities in their authentic function . . . [that] have a potential for development and change of meaning while remaining the same words” (1978, pp. 193–194). Or take the writings of D. W. Winnicott, who uses language not “to arrive at conclusions . . . [but to] create experiences . . . inseparable from the ideas . . . he is playing with” (Ogden 2001, p. 299). In the course of writing this paper, I have had the opportunity to relisten to these and other psychoanalytic writers as I reconsider what happened in a psychoanalytic case.

I began with a piece of imaginative literature, will now move through a clinical experience, and then return to theory in an effort to bring the reader into something of the process I have described. I should say that, although Chekhov’s short story does have a theme similar to the psychoanalytic work I present—that is, bringing a deadened person to life—it does not instruct me how to understand my patient. Rather, it helps me to listen anew to old clinical material and to rethink ideas I once thought I understood.

### THE CASE OF MRS. K.

The following clinical report describes a psychoanalytic process that drew my attention early in the work to an absence of felt emotional connection between me and my analysand, Mrs. K. She had not quite come into the world of the analytic experience. As you will see, I began to react to what I felt was missing in a way that indicated I misunderstood its nature. And I very nearly engaged in a countertransference enactment that could have jeopardized the whole of the analytic work to date and destroyed its potential.

Mrs. K., a forty-seven-year-old writer, had been in intensive psychotherapy some years before she came to see me. In the first session she said

that that experience had helped her, but had not reached certain “dark feelings” that troubled her:

I chose to see you because I thought that you, as an analyst, would be able to see beneath the competency and self-assuredness that others see. I have feelings about myself that are dark, that torment me. I am afraid that I will disappoint people... that I'm not enough.

You see, I don't feel entitled to have a choice about what I do. I feel that I must take care of others. And I worry whether I'm repulsive to people—especially to men. I feel I am a burden to them.

I remained quiet as she continued.

Something will happen, and I start feeling very dark. This usually happens when I feel I have been “selfish” in some way—usually as a wife or mother. When I feel this way—very dark—I say things to myself: “You are a bad wife. A bad mother. A bad, selfish woman.” I know that this voice belongs to me, but it sounds somewhat alien to me. But the words sound very much like my father's.

Mrs. K. seemed to me an engaging, attractive person. I could see why others would find it difficult to believe that she might be so tormented inside. It was clear to me that the pain of this inner experience was excruciating and immobilizing. It seemed to exist as a primitive island in a sea of what appeared on the surface as more satisfying emotional experience.

She went on to tell me something about her parents.

My father was extremely critical. When I was young, especially six to ten years old, he told me that . . . I was not pretty and that I would likely become fat like my mother.

My father was intensely involved with me. Until I was about ten, he would have me pull my pants down and spank me. If I tried to defend myself against his accusations, he would say that my comments were just further evidence that I was guilty. I think that he used me as a lightning rod.

Her father told Mrs. K. she could not take dance lessons in elementary school because she was “awkward” and would only “embarrass” herself. Even though she had these painful and confusing experiences with her father, Mrs. K. felt grateful that he was emotionally responsive to her, in great contrast to her emotionally absent mother.

Mrs. K. recalled her mother frequently staring out the window in what sounded like dissociated states as she sat eating slices of bread.

She was emotionally not there. . . . She was so remote. . . . It makes me feel like I'm in a tar pit when I think of ever being like my mother in that way—remote and emotionally dead.

Mrs. K. said that her parents' attitude about early childcare was deeply influenced by behavioral psychologists at the medical school where her father trained.

My mother said that they were told to put your baby in her crib at 7:00 P.M. and don't go in until 7:00 the next morning—no matter how much she cries.

With a sense of shame, Mrs. K. spoke of her first marriage of fifteen years. Her ex-husband was emotionally cold and said cruel, demeaning things to her about her body when he was angry with her. Before she was able to escape this marriage, she had had periods of "despair" in which she "spiraled into the tar pit." Mrs. K. had three children with this man. My sense is that she was a good mother to these children, but, early on in the work with her, she hinted that something was missing in her felt intimacy with them.

### **AN OPENING DREAM**

During the early months of her analysis, Mrs. K. reported the following dream, one that reminded her of others with a similar theme. Significantly, this dream occurred the night following a session in which I extended the time by a few minutes.

The pieces were that I was the caretaker, maybe the mother, for these two babies—a twin boy and girl. . . . I was taking the babies for a walk with a woman friend. I think we were talking about the children's development: what a struggle it was for the baby girl. She just wouldn't grow. . . .

The baby was covered up. The woman and I ended our conversation. I pulled the cover off. The baby was very tiny, lying there looking more like a six-week-old. She wasn't interacting. I was very ashamed of her. The shame quickly turned to rage. I felt horror that I was doing that. It was not her fault. Then I woke up.

As I listened to the dream, I found myself musing about something Mrs. K. had said in the previous session about her frequent feelings of shame. When I brought this to her attention, she appeared to ignore my comment. It was as if I had said nothing. (This lack of acknowledgment



of what I said was something I had just begun to notice was happening often.) Mrs. K. continued:

The baby in the dream was not connected with me like babies usually are with a mother. When I became enraged, I started boxing it. I was so overwhelmed with shame—suffused with shame, permeated with shame. . . I had so much rage. I thought to myself, “I could kill her.” The baby was long and thin and looked so alone. Her eyes were vacant—not connected to anything. It was horrible to look at her. She was like a mummy or a corpse. The only thing alive was in the eyes.

This was a dream about shame in the face of unmet needs; about destructiveness, deadness; and about failure to thrive in the absence of connection. Near the end of the session she said

I feel that the dream was triggered by your spending a few extra minutes with me that day. I feel that it is shameful that I might “need” additional time, and I feel guilty that I might be demanding it. I shouldn’t require more. I have this embodied anxiety when I feel people spend too much time with me—that I’m taking too much time.

Although the dream was filled with feelings, I was surprised by having so little emotional response to it. It was as if Mrs. K. were a journalist reporting from some far-off land, and I was merely reading what she had written. I felt at a distance that I could not quite explain to myself. Yet I sensed that Mrs. K. wanted me to see that she felt starved by herself and by others and seemed to be hopeful about having me listen as she spoke.

Even at this *emotional* remove, I was struck by the *idea* of the horrific in the dream: starvation; a skeletal infant with vacant eyes, left alone; a murderous mother. I was reminded of Mrs. K.’s description of her experience with her mother, someone beyond her reach. At this point, however, I could not create the mother in my imagination. She remained a shadowy figure, something I considered highly meaningful.

From the beginning of this analysis, I felt that something was missing. A kind of “disconnect”: a gap between Mrs. K. and parts of her internal object world, between her and her relational world, and between the words I could use to myself to describe my experience of her and who she really was. (At the time, I could have privately said the word *unintegrated* as a way to describe this, but this concept does not fully capture what I mean.) I sensed that she felt painfully alone in the world, notwithstanding her having people significant to her in it. Mrs. K. was later to say that she

knew people were “reaching out” to her—and that they likely cared for her—“but I cannot feel it.”

Mrs. K. seemed to be trapped in an internal object world that provided little sustenance and potential for emotional growth. How could I possibly engage with her in a manner that would help her find a way out?

### THE USE OF AN ANALYST

During this beginning phase of the analysis, Mrs. K. often told “stories” about herself that included people from her early years and the present. But she seemed to hold herself back from me in the manner I have described. I felt I had not yet been admitted to her emotional world, even though I shared physical space with her in the consulting room.

Mrs. K. did not appear to need my assistance. I began to feel dismissed by her and was privately frustrated and angry about it. “Pseudo-independent behavior,” I said to myself, “a kind of defensive self-sufficiency.” As I thought and felt these words, I could hear a demeaning tone in it. *Pseudo-independent*. (At times we analysts deploy this kind of “name-calling” in the guise of technical language when we encounter something in our patients—and within ourselves—we feel threatened by.) Then, in my reverie, I recalled the voice of a supervisor, from many years ago when I was a candidate, who had once said in a contemptuous tone that my analysand was “refusing” to be involved in the transference, was “subverting” the analysis. In my frustration with Mrs. K., I almost confronted her in this same tone of voice—until I caught myself.

On the verge of a countertransference enactment, I stepped back from it and entered into a self-analytic experience wherein I could see that I had identified with my supervisor’s attitude, something that brought with it an ambience of certitude and lack of respect. In my work with this supervisor all those years ago, I myself felt the shame of inadequacy and the frustrated longing for supervision that would have met me where I was in my early training. Whether the supervisor truly felt so toward me or it was of my own imagining, I believed he must have been contemptuous of me. In my private musings, I then recalled a similar tone of contempt spoken by someone important to me in my early life, expressed at times when this person felt narcissistically wounded upon feeling unacknowledged or neglected.

After privately exploring these countertransference communications from and about Mrs. K.'s internal world, I was better able to inhabit a more self-reflective and creative analytic space. I now returned in my mind to Mrs. K.'s early dreams and to the tormenting inner voices she reported at the very beginning of the analysis. I concluded that my attitude of contempt was likely an effort to distance myself from Mrs. K.'s infantile set of feelings related to her inarticulate "babyish longings" that may accompany the dark voices within her. My own wounded narcissism initially misguided me in my understanding of what I thought was her defensive need *not* to need me. Rather than deciding that this was a so-called "resistance to the transference," I was now more patient with not knowing what was going on between us and more capable of being genuinely curious about what we might come to discover together.

It was then that I was able to bring Mrs. K.'s attention to what I perceived was happening in the consulting room. Now in a tone conveying respect and a genuine effort to reach her, to meet her where she was, I said that I had the impression that she was not fully "making use of me," not "using me" in our work together.<sup>1</sup> I told her that she seemed to be doing so much of the analytic work "alone."

Mrs. K. was at first incredulous that I would even think of making myself available to her in this manner.

Why would you do that? You would feel that I am repulsive you. This is what I mean by "embodied anxiety." That my body is repulsive. I am ugly, smelly, embarrassing to be associated with, burdensome, low-class. It would make you want to vomit if you looked at me very long—nauseated.

(I took her words very seriously. I did not feel that she was being "dramatic" or that she was saying these things to get me to "say it's not so.")

[Mrs. K. continued] You said "making use of you." That would also mean that I want to make use of you.

The language I used as efforts to reach her and intended to stimulate reflection were jarring to Mrs. K. The words were themselves something she did not know at that time how to make use of. In the following months, she and I explored this dimension of our analytic relationship. She finally

<sup>1</sup>I was using these words descriptively and not referring to the conceptual framework that Winnicott (1969) presents in his paper "The Use of an Object."

said to me, emphatically, “You don’t understand! I don’t think that I know *how* to make use of you.”

## BECOMING OF USE

This matter of *how to make use of* me and the analytic setting remained an overarching consideration throughout this analysis, both explicitly and implicitly. The question and efforts on the part of both Mrs. K. and me to address it undergoes its own development throughout the course of the analysis. The language we made use of to reach toward its meaning became increasingly embodied, alive.

As you will see, whenever Mrs. K. repeated the words I spoke to her—“make use of”—she connected it with her “embodied anxiety” about imagining that my permitting her to make use of me would draw me close to her body. It was a body that she was sure I would be repelled by and contemptuous of. Working productively within the “play” of the analytic interaction would ask that she suspend disbelief not only about my lack of contempt for her body but, as it comes up later in the analysis, about my lack of rage at being “forced” to be close to her. This would also require me to remain engaged with her—“connected to” her—in my imagination as she tried to work something out with me about her tortured bodily self.

Perhaps in every personal analysis the analyst has to repeatedly make himself *suitable* for the work, in the manner required, uniquely, with each individual analysand.<sup>2</sup> He must possess an inner world that is emotionally receptive, fertile, and sufficiently imaginative to make it possible for him to privately *feel* his way into envisioning the analysand’s inner and relational worlds. This asks more of the analyst when the force field animating transference-countertransference centrally involves the body (of the patient and of the analyst).<sup>3</sup> Winnicott (1971) asserts that, even within the psychoanalytic experience, “Playing involves the body” (p. 52). How would I be able to use my imagination intersubjectively in this way, lest it be invaded by contempt or terror or disconnected deadness? Would Mrs.

<sup>2</sup> “[P]sychotherapy is done in the overlap of the two play areas, that of the patient and that of the therapist. If the therapist cannot play, then he is not suitable for the work. If the patient cannot play, then something needs to be done to enable the patient to become able to play. . . . The reason why playing is essential is that it is in playing that the patient is being creative” (Winnicott 1971, p. 54; emphasis in the original).

<sup>3</sup>For an exploration of bodily experience of analyst and analysand as a “life force in the participating individuals,” see Balsam 2012 (p. 1).

K. be able not only to re-create old experience within the analytic experience, but also find psychological space in which to have an experience she had never knowingly had before? Language had to come to be made use of as a means by which Mrs. K. and I could engage with one another in exploring something at the core of her being.

### ENVISIONING SENSORY EXPERIENCE

In the second year of the analysis, Mrs. K. began spending a significant amount of time each week caring for her infant granddaughter. It became increasingly evident that the bodily contact and other vocal and nonvocal, sensory communications with this baby were an integral part of Mrs. K.'s becoming more emotionally available to the analytic experience.

In one session, after spending a morning with her granddaughter, Mrs. K. was able to tell me more about her experience with her mother and to find a common thread among memories/fantasies of interactions with her mother, intimate experience with her infant granddaughter, and the transference experience:

Language was a medium of connection with my mother. She read stories to me.

. . . My mother never had physical contact with me. I think she had disgust for bodies. I think she hated her own body. My body was not received.

Yesterday L. [her infant granddaughter] was rubbing up against me—playing a game with me. She was physically intimate with me.

I was thinking about what I said to you: "I know your empathy, but I can't feel it." I think I couldn't feel my way into a relationship with my mother. . . I believe I had a feeling of blankness—as if a piece of paper was there, but nothing written on it.

Mrs. K. was showing me what she meant about not knowing how to make use of the analytic experience. This was not a matter of resistance to engaging in the transference, informed by a fearful or guilt-ridden conflict about it. Nor was it a product of a narcissistic defense against needing someone. It was that she lived within the sovereignty of an internalized mother who could not provide the warmth and comfort of physical contact. Infants and toddlers require emotionally receptive, active engagement with a maternal figure. What Mrs. K. was conveying, and I was responding to, was the absence of the experience of having a substantial mother to turn to. It was this *absence*—this blankness—that came to be communicated to me through the transference-countertransference, now made even more

palpable as I witnessed (and felt in my mind) the strikingly different experience as Mrs. K. appeared to come alive in the presence of her granddaughter. This emotional state brought something new to a now increasingly enlivened analytic experience.

I was beginning to grasp how the emotional disconnectedness had initially invaded me and had prevented me from *feeling* the screams of the emotionally starving baby in Mrs. K.'s first reported dream. My unconscious response to her "shameful hunger" and to her unwitting, but desperate, search for emotional and bodily contact with a mother who was not "there" may have led to my initial contempt intended to keep her at a distance. What disturbed me most, however, I now believed, was not the intensity of Mrs. K.'s unmet longings and the violence surrounding this deprivation, but the dark void between her and the mother inhabiting her internal object world. It was the deadness that had most repelled me.

As I became more attuned to and alive to new beginnings and Mrs. K. became more enlivened by the intimacy she felt with her infant granddaughter, I began to feel more hopeful about the developmental potential of the analytic work. I began to imagine what it might feel like for Mrs. K. to hold and touch her baby granddaughter—and be touched in return. It was clear that Mrs. K. was being awakened by her experience with this child, surprised and intrigued by the freedom of bodily experience from both sides, and amazed at the pleasure she was feeling. All of this was in synergy with her analytic experience.

I am reminded of Loewald's statement that empathic engagement with an analysand has to do with much more than hearing what he or she speaks. Using the parent-child relationship as a model, he asserts that it requires the analyst to envision himself in sensory experience with the patient:

The parent ideally is in an empathic relationship of understanding the child's particular stage in development, yet ahead in his vision of the child's future and mediating this vision to the child in dealing with him. . . . The child, by internalizing aspects of the parent, also internalizes the parent's image of the child—an image that is *mediated* to the child in the thousand different ways of being handled, bodily and emotionally . . . the image of the child as seen, felt, smelled, heard, touched by the mother (1960, p. 229; emphasis added).

The parent's "vision" (and, by analogy, the analyst's) both provides empathic engagement in the present and generates a capacity to imagine potential for further emotional growth.

This view of the psychoanalytic process borrowed from the parent-child relationship of how a child may be seen—and held—in the mother’s mind is a description of close clinical engagement that involves all five senses. To become of use to analysands who have an absence of early intimate connection in their lives requires that the psychoanalyst possess an imaginative process in which a more dimensional image of the analysand may be created. It is this sort of vision held within the analyst’s mind that bridges the gap in communication created by the absence of literal physical handling (Griffin 2016b).

It is in this way that the analyst becomes suitable for the work in a manner that makes it possible for dormant, but still living, potential to be brought to life by the psychoanalytic process.

Mrs. K.’s experience with her granddaughter became increasingly interwoven with what she was now cautiously feeling in the maternal transference and with what was missing in the “real” and imagined relationship with her mother. This experience helped us transform the blankness of the page into a textured surface on which she and I could “write” as the analytic experience deepened.

### **BENEATH AND BEYOND NOTICE**

Over time, I began to have the impression that the way it *felt* for Mrs. K. to use language to think and speak about her body and listen to words spoken to her about it was undergoing a transformation. Her ability to capture and speak about the transference experience was enhanced by the new language she was learning from the intimate experience with her granddaughter. Her words now had reach such that they generated an emotional force between us.

As she and I continued to listen closely for what she encountered as she tried to learn how to engage with me in the analytic experience (e.g., her fear of speaking words that convey the fantasy of physical closeness to me; her inability to feel my empathy), I began to hold a view of her in my mind that was more textured, more sensory. This shift in my capacity to envision her and her body and to imagine in my mind what togetherness with her might feel like for me became more fully apparent to me only after a jarring countertransference illusion I will describe later. This experience communicated to me how far I had come in being able to perceive Mrs. K. as a fully embodied human being.

Mrs. K.'s awareness of how she felt together with, then apart from, her granddaughter led to her speaking of "missing" me on weekend breaks, a feeling that greatly surprised her. Her capacity to feel and articulate that she missed me announced that she felt something in her body and in her mind that indicated that she now knew that something during these breaks was *missing* in her felt intimacy with me. At the same time, I was better able to viscerally imagine in my mind who Mrs. K. *was* and, importantly, who she could potentially *become*: an image I was holding in "safe keeping," as Loewald (1960) puts it, something that generates "a tenuous reciprocal tie which represents the germ of a new object relationship" (p. 226). Forms of reciprocity were being created between us.

It now became safer for Mrs. K. to remember—or at least to now imagine—more about her early experience with her mother. In a session several years into the analysis, Mrs. K. and I had the following exchange:

MRS. K.: I don't want to know that I want you to be there—to make use of you. . . . I am having this fantasy: That I am with my mother, and, somehow, my closeness to her was a threat to her life. I imagine my mother saying, "Get off me! Don't touch me! I have to be rid of you or I'll die." I think of comforting my granddaughter. My mother would not have been able to do that. . . . A little earlier today, I felt that you wanted to get rid of me.

ANALYST: As you now know that you want to be close to me, I think you are convinced that I want to get rid of you. That you are "too much" for me.

MRS. K. (after a period of silence): I don't want to be quiet right now.

ANALYST: If you're quiet, you won't know I'm here. You'll feel too alone and be afraid that you'll die. (Here I refer to observations she and I had made about her need to constantly talk in sessions—perhaps to drown out the sense of absence.)

MRS. K.: I had to provide the energy for my mother. I felt this vast emptiness.

ANALYST: You open up your feelings to me and expect that I have to get away from you. That you are too much, too disgusting, too needy. You expect me to be repelled by you and your body. That I have to be rid of you. It's my survival or your death.

MRS. K.: There was a moment today . . . I had a feeling of falling through infinite black space. Like I would fall forever. And it must have been like that with my mother.

Coming to know Mrs. K. through this experience required me to envision what it would be like for her to live in this void and take this form of existence with her mother into her internal object world. This not only meant that I had to be respectful of the creative solutions she had



found to cope with the deep despair that emanated from this void. To more fully grasp what I was beginning to see that she needed—from me, from the psychoanalytic process—and to hold this in my mind, I had to recognize and allow (within both Mrs. K. and myself) a shameless sense of utter dependency, of a hunger for a life-giving bond with a mothering figure. Moreover, I had to permit myself to feel something of, and bear, what it might be like to have a desperate longing that was met by blankness. This realization came to me in a surprising way.

At times when Mrs. K. entered my consulting room, I would for a fleeting moment perceive her face in a way strikingly different from other times. I had a visual illusion in which her face looked more like a doll's face—as if her skin were made up of some synthetic material that looked “like” skin, and her face looked “like” it must be cold. Initially I could not make sense of these images, and for a while I reflexively disowned my experience.

What I felt during these times was as if from another planet, cold and uninhabitable. During these moments I did not want to be in the same room with Mrs. K. This was a countertransference experience that moved beyond an attitude of contempt mounted against a state of vulnerability generated by unmet needs. Here was an emotional atmosphere that brought with it inertness, deadness: a state of *not really being there*. If not invisible to me, in my near-hallucination of her, Mrs. K. was visible to me only in a form in which she was “not real”—not there as fully human and as someone I am connected with. Or, at least, her body did not seem real. For a moment, I had to put her beyond the reach of my senses. This set of feelings always disappeared in a matter of seconds, and I found myself once again with the Mrs. K. I knew. It was only many months later in the analysis, after Mrs. K. and I were working within a more embodied form of analytic relationship and after my perceptual distortion had disappeared altogether, that I was able to do more private work on this countertransference phenomenon. For at this later time I remembered that I had not only “felt” with my eyes that her face was cold, but I also “smelled” in my mind an odor or had the memory of an odor, the source of which I now recalled. It was something that I smelled standing beside my grandfather's casket when I was seven years old. (Perhaps it was of embalming fluid.) As I stood there looking at my grandfather's cold face, which did not look quite human, it was the first time that I had ever seen a dead person.

I now believe that I had entered a transference-countertransference experience that held within it something of Mrs. K.'s early and inarticulate experience of, and with, her mother. This experience for me was about death, about remoteness, about someone, like my beloved grandfather, so close in his casket, but so far away, "dissociated" from me, in cold death—someone to whom I too was dead, as he was dead to me. Absent, but present as an embalmed "mummy," to borrow Mrs. K.'s language. With this new awareness, I was able to better sense my way through my own experience with deadness as a byway to Mrs. K.'s experience of feeling the deadness of her mother's eyes and body in early childhood. I had accessed the shadowy world of an emotionally starving infant.

It seemed to me that the mother who lived within the subjectivity of Mrs. K.'s internal object world was felt to be not only one who had found her daughter *beneath* her notice (as in *contempt*), but *beyond* it (as in certain senses of the word *disdain*). Or, if seen, not emotionally *touched* by the mother's warmth. This experience within Mrs. K.'s internal object world prevented her from taking in the fact that so many people in her relational world liked her, were drawn to her. It is as if she felt invisible to them; therefore, no warmth and affection could reach her. I believe that she and I had been deeply engaged in an analytic experience that conveyed something of this internalized relationship between the infant Mrs. K. and her mother. Briefly, Mrs. K. had become inanimate—someone I could not emotionally embrace as a fully alive human being. Nothing generative can happen within the psychoanalytic process when the intersubjective space is suffused with embodied coldness.

### **BEYOND DEADNESS: IMAGINING SOMETHING THAT WAS NEVER THERE BEFORE**

André Green (1983) writes about the dead mother, a mother so "absorbed by a bereavement" that, although still alive, is emotionally absent, is dead to the child—a child who then suffers—"the psychical consequences . . . of an imago which has been constituted in the child's mind, following maternal depression, brutally transforming a living object, which was a source of vitality for the child, into a distant figure, toneless, practically inanimate . . ." (p. 142).

Mrs. K. spoke of a period in her life in which she felt "haunted" by a depression that did not seem to belong to her. She felt as though she were

carrying around her mother's "carcass." Although Mrs. K. hoped her mother's felt deadness would change as she took care of her in the mother's final years, her mother never came alive in a manner that she became emotionally engaged with Mrs. K. or expressed gratitude for her daughter's care and attention. Much of what I came to know about Mrs. K. is consistent with the features that Green describes, including my near-hallucinatory experience of her. Green (1983) writes about a form of "'blankness'—negative hallucination . . . which leaves traces in the unconscious in the form of 'psychical holes'" (p. 146) in the child's psyche, the product of experience with a mother who is "perpetually embalmed" (p. 162).

In certain ways, however, Mrs. K.'s experience departs from the clinical picture of the dead mother. Green goes further to describe the children of such a mother: "Arrested in their capacity to love, subjects who are under the empire of the dead mother can only aspire to autonomy. Sharing remains forbidden to them" (p. 156). From what I came to know about her relationships with her children, friends, and students, Mrs. K. seemed to be able to show love to others. However, though she *knew* people cared about her, she could not *feel* it. She knew I felt empathy for her, but for a long time, she told me, she could not feel it in her mind and body. Experientially knowing that she was loved and was lovable was initially beyond her reach. Although the warmth of sharing relationships seemed inaccessible to her, she was, however, able to work her way toward felt reciprocity.

Further, Mrs. K.'s mother seemed to be suffering not so much from a form of depression or bereavement—a pervasive, if perhaps temporary, state of death—as from a lifelong state of disconnectedness (Mrs. K. once described this as "a dissociated state"). My impression was that Mrs. K.'s mother was not fully "dead," in Green's sense, but *deadened* to a connection with her own body and with an embodied daughter. I view this as a form of *deadness*, as in an inanimate body: *lifeless*. This, I believe, is supported not only by Mrs. K.'s report, but also by my countertransference illusion.

The following manner in which Green characterizes the use of language in the interpersonal dynamic between analysand and analyst, however, does articulate an aspect of the early phase of Mrs. K.'s analysis:

the narrative style of the analysand is hardly associative. . . . Its role is to move the analyst, to implicate him, to call him to witness . . . like a child telling his

mother of his day at school and the thousand small dramas which he has experienced, to attract her interest and make her participate in what he has been through during her absence [p. 162].

I was only a distant listener to Mrs. K.'s stories in the beginning of the analysis and began to be moved by them only as I became better attuned to my countertransference experience. Over time, her language began to capture embodied experience and was then able to reach me directly—without it having to be mediated as unconscious communication via countertransference (including projective identification). I will return below to the development of Mrs. K.'s capacity to use language to articulate sensory experience.

### AN ENLIVENED ANALYSIS

Mrs. K. gradually became able to perceive sensuous dimensions of herself and of her relationship to her body within the transference experience that she had previously felt to be dangerous to me or repugnant. She came to accept parts of her female self that had been invisible to her mother and were thereby dissociated from a facilitating environment a mother could have afforded. All of this was brought into her analysis and served as bridges to a deeper and more dimensional analytic experience. Mrs. K. came to believe that she had a right to her own unique physical and psychological space in this world. She no longer felt invisible.

Increasingly, Mrs. K. was able to speak of her struggles with maternal absence as she was freer to experience her longings for intimacy. For a period of time, whenever she felt a stronger desire to be close to me, she entered a transitory space in which she felt trapped in the analysis: "You'll never let me go, let me finish my analysis. . . . I'm like a rabbit whose foot is caught in a snare." She came to see that such reactions were connected with her increasing awareness that she very much *wanted* to be closer to me. (Perhaps she was also identifying with a mother who she came to believe felt trapped and enraged by any threat of physical intimacy with her daughter.)

Mrs. K.'s experience with her granddaughter continued to augment the analysis and to assist the two of us in "weaving" what she came to feel as a more integrated self. Mrs. K. observed/felt her granddaughter actively wanting bodily contact:

Yesterday L.'s front was against my back, and she was rubbing against me—playing a game with me. She was physically intimate with me. She touches my ear, and she wants me to touch hers. Then she repeats it. Then she moves to another body part—eyes, nose. I'm watching the way that she was weaving us together. My mother *could have* done some of those games with me. But I'm sure that sometimes I would get no response from her. I think I wondered if I were a good-enough baby for her to want me (because she did not respond physically). My mother was so often off in her own world reading. She would have missed it when I was looking for we-ness with her—like L. does with me. My world was about "I"—with some "we" in it. I guess I'm talking about separateness and togetherness.

Unlike my response to what Mrs. K. communicated in her early dream and to her reporting stories about her life from afar, the now sensory language that she used reached me: I could "feel" it in my imagination and in my body. I could see that Mrs. K. was coming alive. And not only as a mother-with-a-baby / baby-with-a-mother ("Over the weekend, I felt hungry, and I wanted to be held").

Mrs. K. now reported womanly fantasies and dreams with a more oedipal flavor. Here are two examples:

Mrs. K: I had a dream about you last night: You and I had gone to a restaurant. I was telling you things without any fear of being judged. You were on the outside of the booth. I was on the inside. I realized that my left leg was up against your right leg. I said to myself, "This is very bad. No, it's not." I started to speak with you about it, but I woke up. My mother would be upset if my father preferred me. In certain dimensions, she didn't like me. I wonder what would be so dangerous about experiencing your empathy?

ANALYST: Feeling "touched" by me—in contact with me?

Another:

I had this fantasy. You and I met for dinner when I was on the trip. We had eaten and enjoyed a meal. I was saying to myself, "This isn't right. I have to make some changes. It would be negative. Women aren't supposed to have an appetite."

Mrs. K. went out of town to a workshop for instructors of the expressive dance form she now practiced. She was surprised at how unselfconscious she felt and how she was beginning to see herself as "graceful" and (she said tentatively) "even pretty." Some of her colleagues from the workshop had gone to a designer dress studio and told her that they had thought of her when they saw beautiful and stylish clothing there. Mrs. K. went to see the clothing and was touched that these women did indeed

seem to “see” her, for she felt that the clothing they selected “fit” who she truly was as a person, as a woman.

Six months from the termination of her analysis, Mrs. K. reported the following dream.

I have had a persistent feeling of sadness over the last few days. Over the weekend I had a dream: About you and me. You came to me while I was sleeping. You were very sweet—very caring of me. It felt like a Sleeping Beauty dream. You were going to hug me, and I was going to wake up transformed. There was no demand from you that I do anything. I didn’t need to respond to you. A gentle openness, expressiveness. The thinking part of me noticed this was different. You came to me—found me—in a very open and loving way. You didn’t want anything. I was sleeping. This implies something sexual. B. [her ex-husband] saw sex as a service to him. He had no awareness of it being a relational thing. It was different when you came to me in the dream as I was sleeping. There was something in the sweetness of awakening. It was sexual—something for the two of us. Mutual.

During the remaining few months, as she spoke of ending her analysis, Mrs. K.’s associations moved in and out of this dream.<sup>4</sup> She had discovered she was not an inanimate mummy, with no potential to be enlivened. Rather, it had been that she had not been able to access the aliveness inside her to generate new ways of viewing herself and of engaging with others.

The following is a comment Mrs. K. made in the final session, after having recently driven by her childhood home in another state:

I felt sadness. About the memory of that house. But that little girl does not exist anymore. . . . I was floating somewhere. . . . I could see my own death. . . . That young mother [her mother] is gone. . . . I was letting go of something—a loosening of identity. I did exist, but in some ways I didn’t. Now I feel grief *and* infinite freedom.

### **LANGUAGE AS A TRANSFORMATIONAL OBJECT: LIFENESS ITSELF**

Before concluding, and reflecting on what I believe made it possible for this analysis to become a generative experience for Mrs. K., let me return to

<sup>4</sup>It was only when I reviewed my case notes in the process of writing a later draft of this paper that I recalled the Sleeping Beauty dream. I had no memory of it when in the initial drafts I invoked the name of this fairy tale at the beginning of this paper.

Chekhov's striking use of language when describing Ryabovich's reflexive response after his encounter in the dark room: "He shrank *into himself*" (Chekhov 1887, p. 121; emphasis added). This self was one this character had grown accustomed to: a familiar psychological state in which he did not recognize *that* something was missing, much less *what* that was.

Mrs. K. shared much in common with Ryabovich when she began her personal analysis. She and I together had to create an analytic space that made it possible for us to discover that something was *absent* in the analytic relationship that conveyed much of the quality of what was missing in her early relationship with her mother. Only then was it possible for Mrs. K. to learn how to make use of the intimacy afforded her by the analytic experience alongside the physical and emotional closeness she shared with her granddaughter. As Mrs. K. began to expand—rather than shrink into herself—I too had to become more capable of holding in my imagination a more sensory and dimensional image of who she was until she was able to more fully do so herself. And more able also to perceive who I was *with* her. Mrs. K. then became capable of engaging in an imaginative process that provided a vision of who she could *become*. In this way she came to life.

In writing about "The Kiss," the literary critic James Wood (2015) speaks of the sensory details Chekhov provides to describe the enlivening experience of Ryabovich in the dark room as capturing a "palpable intimacy" (p. 39) that represents a "stor[y] in miniature" (p. 42). He goes on to say that these "details are not *lifelike* but irreducible: things-in-themselves, what I would like to call *liveness itself*. The detail about the peppermint, like the tingle felt by Ryabovich on his cheek, lingers for us: all we have to do is rub the spot" (Wood 2015, pp. 38–39; emphasis added).<sup>5</sup> Wood is speaking of the sensory life of language. My work with Mrs. K. centrally involved discovering and cultivating in the analytic setting a form of liveness—in *states of being* and in the *words* she newly discovered—something that was always at risk of being lost to the deadness of Mrs. K.'s internalized early relationship to her mother that threatened to invade the analysis.

Mrs. K.'s habitual way of being with me at the beginning of her analysis—without a genuine sensory connection—was much like her felt

<sup>5</sup>See Ogden (1999), who speaks of something akin to this in the world of psychoanalysis; he writes about forms of *aliveness* and *deadness* in the transference-countertransference and in the language found to articulate this intersubjective experience.

experience as a small child of being read to by her mother, a mother who never dared to touch her. This was so integral to who Mrs. K. was that she was not aware that something was missing. What she knew as she entered the analytic situation was that she had dark, tormenting voices that said she was bad and selfish (that she was a burdensome, hungry infant) and that told her she was repulsive and dangerous.<sup>6</sup> In the beginning Mrs. K. had the benefit of language by which to tell me *stories* about her life, but these words lacked sufficient *life* to reach me, to move me. As became clear, her use of words conveying intimacy was felt by her to be repellant, if not perilous.

Building on Winnicott's work on the facilitating environment (1965), Bollas (1987) writes of an "aesthetic of being" (p. 14) that is initially communicated from mother to infant, not with words, but in the manner that the mother holds the infant and responds to her. This process (called by Bollas the "transformational object"), comes to provide a sense of integrated wholeness to the infant's subjective and intersubjective experience. This way of being is communicated initially by sensory contact. Over time it "yields to the structure of language":

Until the grasp of the word, the infant's meaning resides primarily within the mother's psyche-soma. With the word, the infant has found a new transformational object. . . . When the transformational object passes from the mother to the mother's tongue, the first human aesthetic, self to mother, passes toward the second human aesthetic, the finding of the word to speak the self . . . the word's discovery of the self [p. 35].

An experience that begins within the mother's body is ultimately captured and conveyed through language. With Mrs. K. and her mother, there was a gap, an absence of something vital in physical contact that interfered with the development of the integrative function of language and its reliable capacity to speak of and explore the self in relation to others. Mrs. K. speaks of the missing "we-ness" in her relationship with her mother, which left her to fall back upon an "I-ness" that was neither fully embodied nor possessed of the capacity to engage in reciprocal warm and loving relationships.

<sup>6</sup>The origin of this "voice" resided in Mrs. K.'s early inchoate and inarticulate experience with her mother. My impression is that she had to appropriate language from later experience with her father to provide a means by which to speak with herself about how she felt.



Mrs. K.'s early experience of her mother was articulated through an accusatory voice that she felt was both part of her and apart from her—something both familiar and alien to her (not fully integrated within her personality structure). The voices that came to her from the darkness within memorialized an early experience in which Mrs. K. reached out across a chasm to a mother who was beyond her touch. These dark feelings and voices she heard within her were the breakdown products of this experience: “hallucinated” replies of a mother who, in her felt lack of responsiveness, communicated to her daughter that she was “selfish” and “bad”—an untouchable. This came to be a child's own private voice turned back on herself as a distorted echo returning from a cavernous space. All of this lived on in the “tar pit” of a dark, amorphous relationship with her early mother that remained within Mrs. K.'s internal object world.

Early in the analysis, Mrs. K. felt her connection with me to be as much as she was able to *expect*—from herself or from another. It was, however, far from the human contact *necessary* for further emotional development. Although starving in her own quiet way, Mrs. K. could not imagine a different manner of engaging with another person, and in turn with herself, that would lead her to see herself with fresh eyes and to feel herself more fully inhabiting her body in pleasurable ways. My initial countertransference response of contempt provided no space in which a completely new experience could be generated. My visual illusion later in the analysis was a nightmare of an emotional world of deadness, not of potential growth.

It was vital that Mrs. K. and I together recognize that she did not know how to make use of me as her analyst and of a process intended to offer the potential of emotional growth. This required that I initially tolerate not grasping what was happening in the analytic relationship so that she and I could work together to explore what was.

I have had time to reflect upon a question I had early in the analysis: Would the destructiveness expressed by the tormenting, accusatory voices and represented by dreams of murderous mothers and dying babies that failed to thrive so invade the transference experience that it would destroy the potential for constructive growth? I now believe that, if I had told her a “story” in which she was simply playing out the role of a pseudo-independent person enacting conflicted dependency longings, Mrs. K. may have experienced my misattunement and misunderstanding as an iatrogenic retraumatization. A gap would have been created between us

that may have remained unbridgeable. Her frustration and felt neglect of such an experience might have led her to destructive rage or hopeless resignation, a kind of giving up perhaps not unlike the one Ryabovich entered into when he vowed never again to take anyone into his confidence. It might well have led Mrs. K. to shrink into her habitual self.

Fortunately, Mrs. K. and I were able to use language to find the story that fit with her emotional understanding of her life. She was free then to pursue a path that I believe was innate to her: Mrs. K. seemed to hunger for the eros of life-giving relationships more than she was set on revenge (toward her mother or toward herself). Until (and beyond) the time her mother died, Mrs. K. continued to “provide energy” for her mother, as she would later describe it. Though she tried mightily, this artificial respiration never breathed life into her mother. But Mrs. K. never gave up. This desire for reciprocal warmth and caring came to be expressed in the analytic relationship.

Mrs. K. and I were then able to create and use language to find the story that fit with her emotional understanding of her life. We engaged in a process in which words came to possess holding and containing capacities such that they could communicate both embodied separateness and togetherness, “I-ness” and “we-ness.” Such words were no longer distant, hollow expressions of deeper longings. They now possessed depth and reach. And because this was so, using them was effective in generating emotional connectedness, rather than creating a reexperience of neglect. Without this vital work, it would have been impossible for Mrs. K. to cultivate her potential and to be able to explore her ambivalent feelings about her newfound intimacy within the transference.

It was not only our coming to better *understand* what had shaped Mrs. K.’s inner and relational worlds that made the difference. Her emotional growth required generating a sensory *experience*, as she experimented in the analysis with imagining ways of being physically close to me at the same time that she had “real” closeness to her infant granddaughter. In turn, I was able to hold a more sensory and dimensional image of her in my mind, which was mediated to her in my language and, likely, in other ways less apparent to me. Language became embodied in a manner that the way it felt for Mrs. K. to say words that spoke of her making use of me and the analytic process took on a vitality for both of us that was impossible earlier in the work. Words became transformed and transformative.

Mrs. K. and I learned together how she could make use of me as I became more capable of being made use of. This form of liveness was such that Mrs. K. was able to generate a never-before experience that brought her to life. Over the course of the analysis, the dark and troubling voices that tormented her gradually faded away. At the time of termination, Mrs. K. reported that they were no longer there.

### ON MRS. K.'S COMMENTARY

Before submitting this manuscript for publication, I contacted Mrs. K. to ask for permission to use this material from her personal analysis. I told her that I would send her what I had written, so that we could talk about it. If she did not want me to use her analytic material, I told her, I would put the manuscript aside.

Although her eight-year treatment had ended six years earlier, when I spoke with Mrs. K. by phone the analytic process picked up much as it was before. Initially I only described to her what I had written and then listened as she responded to what I said. She asked to see my paper after the third of our four conversations; after reading it, she sent me her response. The fourth conversation was not a true discussion of the commentary she wrote, but more about her experience reading my paper and writing about it. It was then that Mrs. K. gave me permission to move forward with publication. She had one request: that I include her commentary with my paper.

Below are Mrs. K.'s comments. She speaks for herself. You may draw your own impressions from what she has written.

Having read and reread her comments within the context of the final draft of this paper, however, I am struck by questions that may arise about this unusual inclusion in a psychoanalytic paper comments written by the analysand whose material is the subject of the paper. Although something like a psychoanalytic process was generated in my conversations with Mrs. K. that led to her written response, what she wrote is not a true representation of the process generated *within* the analytic situation. It was something written by her in solitude about my paper and was intended not only for the analyst but also for readers of this paper.

How is Mrs. K.'s commentary to be read? How should the analyst's act of including it in a psychoanalytic paper be considered? Is this a matter of a mutual enactment of patient and analyst? If what she wrote has a

positive tone, is this evidence of an analysand's idealization of her analyst? Or an expression of the analysand's gratitude for being understood? Are her comments appended to the paper largely to support the analyst's thesis? Or is this the result of a patient's expectation to have her comments included? That is, an act of a former analysand laying claim to the material of her personal analysis: a statement that this is not the sole possession of the analyst, but a narrative that is "co-owned."

Whatever the following commentary is and is not, it seems to me to be Mrs. K.'s story about my story of our story of the analysis.

### **MRS. K'S COMMENTARY**

As I mused about Dr. Griffin's paper, in which I am a principal player, an image came to mind. Many years ago, I was a head teacher in a university laboratory school that enrolled primarily faculty and graduate student children. A few children also came to us referred by faculty in the associated university medical school. My recent image was of a three-and-a-half-year-old girl—a beautiful, dark-haired child with huge, wondering eyes, adopted by a faculty couple. The child was lovingly and patiently planned for during the paperwork ordeal of international adoption, painful delays, and much celebration when she finally came home.

Unfortunately, a serious visual impairment, undiagnosed until she was adopted, left her almost blind and with significant hand-eye coordination deficits. Though she now had glasses and a surgical repair, she could not easily manipulate objects. It was apparent that she had missed out, through profound neglect in her shadowy infancy and toddler years, on the "sensitive periods" of eye-hand coordination development. These infant learnings are such a pleasure to observe—the baby's excitement in finally being able to sample the delicious world by grabbing it and popping it, yes, into her mouth! But for this sweet child, these experiences had been lost and needed painstaking recovery, if possible. Her round wondering eyes told us she didn't understand what it was she couldn't do. She couldn't say much either, since she did not yet speak English. Initially my teaching with her lived in the bodily or "felt sense" sense of relationship "beyond words."

I asked myself why this child—I shall call her Aya—came to mind "now," as I had not thought about her in many years, though she had fascinated me at the time. At three and a half, Aya could not easily feed

herself—she had difficulty picking up the sliced apples and the cup of juice at snack time and seemed confused about how and what other children were doing. “Now” I had read and spoken with Dr. Griffin about this paper and his writing was on my mind—including my physically present but absent mother, the dream of the starved (dying?) baby under the blanket that emerged early in analysis, and now Aya’s having missed at the very least the unfolding of her physical development, and likely much more—and of course she had been motherless. In the “now,” I had been wondering how I might write about a void, about what “wasn’t.” And yes, in my infant void was my image of my mother’s empty eyes that had gone someplace else, “gone dead.”

I am ambivalent now, and was also during my analysis, about entering fully into the maternal absence, the dim, murky void. My mother had great difficulty touching any of her four children. This was multiplied in my case by the then still-prevalent behaviorist belief that responding to my crying, my need for touch and even food, would set in motion years of a very badly behaved child. To “be with her” required that I “enter into her,” and pursue her with cries largely unanswered, to find where and who she was. Yet she was not cold, and as I grew we were able to relate through triangulations—our mutual love for books and stories, and particularly through my father. She enjoyed best, it seemed, being on the outside looking into relationships she perhaps was afraid to directly have herself. Later in my life, when I breastfed my own three children, she would gaze at us longingly but later decline to hold her grandchildren or would hold them anxiously, away from her body.

Dr. Griffin’s important description of his experience of my “doing much of the work completely on [my] own” during analysis is accurate and built on my very early relational landscape. I suspect, on some level, my overdeveloped self-agency was a fleeing from the terrifying deadness. If I took care of myself, I was “alive” and “safe.” There’s a second part to this too. This second part is that “to be needy is to be messy and if I am messy, I am ashamed and worse, it’s terrifyingly unsafe because no one will catch me if I fall or help me put myself back together.” I think I was pushing Dr. Griffin away because it felt much too dangerous, though this was not conscious. The messy, needy “me” will be abandoned for being too great a burden or, worse, be unseen and ultimately annihilated through invisibility. Strong emotion, any “loss of control,” even giggling, distressed my mother. When her anxiety became too great, which occurred easily, she dissociated.

In the first three years of my analysis with Dr. Griffin, I felt understood and connected much of the time, but at other times distant and as though I was “reporting on myself.” These may have been times that the “doll-like” face (made up for viewing in death?) came into the office. Perhaps both Dr. Griffin and I wanted to be “rid of me,” at least for a moment! I didn’t want to show any aspect of disintegration—I needed to hang on to my integrity and not “come apart.” As a child and young adult, my most terrifying dreams were of dropping through space infinitely, spinning and alone in a darkness without end, soon to be shattered, but never actually hitting the ground.


When Dr. Griffin and I spoke about this paper, he asked if I remembered the time he said I was “not making use of him.” I remembered it instantly. This session was pivotal to our work together. The words “making use” shocked me. The words themselves sounded disgusting—as if I were going to ask him to engage with me in some perverted sexual act by “making use” of him. In a subsequent session, I was able to say and Dr. Griffin was able to hear, and I knew that he heard—“I don’t know how to make use of you.” It took a few sessions to speak the word “use.” “Use” was an alien word and very dangerous. Had he prematurely interpreted his experience of me as “dismissing” him or as “pseudo-independent,” I would have felt “thrown out” of relationship and into the infinitely falling void of confused self-blame, anger, and deep sadness—perhaps finally “shattered.” Like Aya, my very early experience of a mother who couldn’t hold or see me led to a unique blindness. I was unable to know, to even recognize the bodily and emotional experience of “being held” or of “using another.” Dr. Griffin really had to hold that vision for us—of who I might become.

In a conversation with Dr. Griffin regarding this paper (which at that time I had not yet read), he spoke of the portion of his imagination focusing on the faint “odor” of something that evoked his memory standing beside his grandfather’s casket when he was seven years old. This resonated with me immediately. I recalled a period of time, especially in my late teens and early twenties, when I felt somehow compressed. At the time, I experienced this as a “depression” that felt alien—as if it were not mine but nonetheless was haunting me. During this recent conversation, I became aware and said for the first time, “I was carrying my mother’s carcass,” though at the time of the “depression” she was not deceased nor had she been ill. This led me to then speak of my mother herself as “compressed,” as if a heavy weight compacted her so that little of her inner

experience, her longings, or her love could squeeze out—a perpetual constipation of emotion.

It is only in the writing of my commentary that I have become aware that it was about three years into my analysis with Dr. Griffin that my mother passed away. My choosing to be in analysis was, in part, related to my mother's end-of-life illness. I had the expectation that through my caring for her during this time, our relationship would become intimate. It didn't. My father, who gave my mother vicarious aliveness, had passed away suddenly. Without him she wilted, and none of her children could bring her into life. It's quite possible that her passing allowed me the spaciousness to finally state the truth adamantly "I don't know how to use you." And silently "I need you to help me with this." The spoken and unspoken statements contained a foundation from which to build together in the subsequent five years of analysis. Dr. Griffin's self-analysis, imagination, and courage to dwell inside the dependent, helpless, starving, young infant that I was and that he was (and still are if we are stripped of those we love, or even of our very identities) gave me a "place" to have that tiny, blinded, baby received and known.

#### ORCID iD

Fred L. Griffin  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8868-8900>

#### REFERENCES

- BALSAM, R. (2012). *Women's Bodies in Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- BERGER, J. (2001). The hour of poetry. In *Selected Essays*, ed. G. Dyer. New York: Vintage Books, pp. 445–452.
- BOLLAS, C. (1987). The transformational object. In *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 13–29.
- CHEKHOV, A. (1887). The kiss, transl. A. Dunnigan. In *Anton Chekhov's Selected Stories*, ed. C. Popkin. New York: Norton, 2014, pp. 115–131.
- GREEN, A. (1983). The dead mother. In *On Private Madness*. London: Hogarth Press, 1986, pp. 142–173.
- GRIFFIN, F. (2004). One form of self-analysis. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 73:683–715.
- GRIFFIN, F. (2005). Clinical conversations between psychoanalysis and imaginative literature. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 74:443–463.

- GRIFFIN, F. (2013). In search of lost time in psychoanalytic space. *American Imago* 70:89–106.
- GRIFFIN, F. (2016a). *Creative Listening and the Psychoanalytic Process: Sensibility, Engagement, Envisioning*. New York: Routledge.
- GRIFFIN, F. (2016b). Listening for atmospheres of emotional experience. In *Creative Listening and the Psychoanalytic Process: Sensibility, Engagement, Envisioning*. New York: Routledge, pp. 61–87.
- GRIFFIN, F. (2019). Creative writers as our other psychoanalytic teachers: Interview with Rivka Galchen. *The American Psychoanalyst* 53(2).
- LOEWALD, H.W. (1960). On the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis. In *Papers on Psychoanalysis*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980, pp. 221–256.
- LOEWALD, H.W. (1978). Primary process, secondary process, and language. In *Papers on Psychoanalysis*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980, pp. 178–206.
- MORRISON, T. (1993). Nobel Lecture December 7, 1993. From Nobel Prize website.
- OGDEN, T.H. (1999). Analyzing forms of aliveness and deadness. In *Reverie and Interpretation: Sensing Something Human*. London: Karnac Books, 1999, pp. 23–63.
- OGDEN, T.H. (2001). Reading Winnicott. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 70:299–323.
- PROUST, M. (1913). *Swann's Way: In Search of Lost Time, Vol. 1*, transl. C.K.S. Moncrieff & T. Kilmartin; rev. transl. D.J. Enright. New York: Modern Library, 2003.
- WINNICOTT, D.W. (1965). *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*. New York: International Universities Press.
- WINNICOTT, D.W. (1969). The use of an object. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 50:711–716.
- WINNICOTT, D.W. (1971). *Playing and Reality*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- WOOD, J. (2015). Serious noticing. In *The Nearest Thing to Life*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, pp. 31–64.

8235 Douglas Avenue, Suite 822  
Dallas, TX 75225  
Email: fredgriffinmd@gmail.com