

## ONE FORM OF SELF-ANALYSIS

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*Beginning with Freud, psychoanalysts have discovered media through which they may achieve a self-analytic experience (for example, by use of dreams, fantasies, reveries, memories, and even visual images). Each of these media is a kind of "fiction" created by the analyst that provides an imaginative space where he or she may gain access to unconscious life. The author demonstrates how a generative self-analytic experience may be accomplished through the medium of psychoanalytic writing: a fictional autobiographical form of writing through which a self-analytic experience is created that has much in common with the analytic experience created by the analyst and analysand.*

### INTRODUCTION

Truth lives in fiction. Consider the creation of the transference-countertransference as it comes into being and takes on a life of its own. It is written in the presence, actually through the presence, of the analyst and patient. This "text" is a metaphor—an imaginative creation—that brings to life the shape and texture of the analysand's life story.

The writer of fiction creates a kind of landscape in the text, a place that embodies the author's imaginative rendering of experience. It has a form—a shape and mood—of its own. Here I am not referring to the theme or plot that is woven into the text; I am speaking of the manner in which meaning is created and contained in the form itself. This is what Archibald MacLeish (1926) is

describing when he writes, "A poem should not mean/but be" (p. 107). (Of course, in clinical psychoanalysis and in psychoanalytic writing, we need both meaning and being: meaning-as-being.) Through this form of being, the writer provides a psychological landscape in which the reader, through reading, creates an experience with the text not unlike the emotional form/context that the analyst provides the analyst, in which the two create a unique form of unconscious life (the transference-countertransference) that emerges from the depths of the analytic relationship. In the case of the reader, emotional experience beyond the reader's awareness—which therefore cannot yet be put into words—may be similarly accessed through imaginative entry into the three-dimensional world potentially living in the texts created by the writers. The act of reading has created an imaginative space (akin to analytic space) between the reader and the text. Some people who later enter psychoanalytic treatment may have begun a kind of analytic process through reading fiction in this way.

While psychoanalytic terminology is often inadequate to convey the substance of emotional experience, the language found in works of fiction frequently makes possible the communication of such experience, just as dreams do. Writers of works of fiction employ verbal symbolization in order to convey and create their experiences and perceptions in language. When we read these writers' stories, we enter a place where we can come to life in a new way in the symbolic medium they have created.

There are certain circumstances in people's lives wherein they do not possess sufficient capacity to symbolically represent experience. This capacity to symbolize may be *temporarily* lost as a result of ambient conditions in a person's life (for example, in emotional trauma) or through the impact of some types of transference-countertransference phenomena that collapse the analytic space in the clinical setting (for example, in certain forms of profound regression). In other instances, the loss of the capacity to symbolize may be *long-standing* (though this incapacity may be focal) as a consequence of early environmental impingement or hypersensitvity on the part of the infant or child, leading to a re-

striction of the imaginative process. This restriction of imagination may then become institutionalized as part of the patient's psychic structure. In each of these circumstances, the ability both to find words for one's experience of inner and outer worlds and to enter into self-reflection are lost or never sufficiently developed. In such cases, the capacity to conduct self-analysis privately or to engage productively in the analytic process in the analytic situation may be virtually impossible.

For some, reading works of fiction may restore or develop this capacity for verbal symbolization of emotional experience. If the writer has created a potential (or "analytic") space into which we are able to enter, as readers, we may become so engaged by participating in the symbolic form created by the writer that our own capacity for symbolization may be stimulated. These phenomena occur through unconscious resonance with the text in the presence of the imagined writer and are much like those generated in the analytic space in the analytic situation, in which a process is set in motion that stimulates the imaginative capacities of the analyst (and analyst).

Utilizing a form of writing familiar to writers and readers of imaginative works, I will demonstrate in this paper a form of psychoanalytic writing that may be used productively in the conduct of self-analysis. I intend to illustrate how the writer's form of symbolization created in the text can foster access to emotional experience beyond awareness, thereby facilitating the capacity for self-observation and the ability to use language to communicate with oneself and with others. My emphasis is on the manner in which texts are constructed—whether it be the metaphorical "texts" created in the analytic situation or the "real" ones found in the works of imaginative writers and in papers written by analysts for publication in scientific journals.

We generally distinguish creative (or imaginative) writing from psychoanalytic writing by focusing upon the word *creative*. Through the reader's own experience of reading this paper, my hope is that he or she will consider that the differentiation between these two types of writing does not lie in the degree of creativity in the form

of writing; rather, it resides predominantly in the objectives set forth by each.

### ANALYST-AS-READER / READER-AS-ANALYST: THE TRUTH IN FICTION

Literature translates information into experience. It turns facts into fictions . . . It is only when facts become fictions, become stories, become experiential. That's the only time they become real.

—Weinstein (1998)

Like an analyst at work, the reader of fiction must be attuned and receptive to the palpable form of the text in order to participate in the experience being created. Like a reader considering the possibilities of the text, the analyst must enter into creating meaning while reading the patient. When we enter into this mode of relating with our patients and with the works of fiction we read, we participate in a *form* of communication that has been structured by the patient's and by the writer's experience. This form of listening and reading, of participating, provides access to what has been unconscious, much like the kind of rendering of unconscious experience that occurs in dreaming or in reverie. Of course, we do not actually see or feel the unconscious directly. The shape of experience we perceive is like a hologram projected from "behind" the barrier where the unconscious lives. This projection is then created and animated in one's preconscious experience of it. Thus, this form of (preconscious, then conscious) experience is a metaphor (something that is *like* something else) for unconscious experience. What is created in the type of listening and reading to which I am referring is not *the* unconscious; it is shaped emotionally *like* unconscious experience.

I have been moved, startled, held, comforted by the stories I have read. I have thus been transported into that liminal space created by the writer (and by me, the reader). Certain pieces of fiction speak to me. Perhaps they even read me, as I read them. I believe this is a common occurrence. Fiction can be sought out as a

place of refuge during difficult times or as a means through which to find or create meaning, to come to know oneself. For some, this refuge or reading has been transformative. A friend of mine who has written several novels and books of short stories went so far as to say that the experience of reading had saved his life in his youth. Thus, the act of reading the works of imaginative writers and becoming engaged in the forms they create may provide a healthy, imaginative shape to the derivatives of unconscious life.

My patients have told me of similar experiences and have referred to particular works of fiction that were especially meaningful to them. As they talk with me about their reactions to their reading, it often initially seems that it was the dilemmas that were entered into and resolved, or not resolved, that engaged them. It frequently turns out, however, that the stories worked on these patients and through them in a manner that was not so apparent. In these situations, the reader-now-patient has developed a kind of relationship with the text that bears some resemblance to our analytic relationship.

When the patient runs into the limitations of such a relationship with a book, he or she may find it necessary to turn to a human being in order to continue the process. Such is the story of Mr. M.

#### MR. M

After four months of working with Mr. M, I was puzzled about why he had come for psychoanalytic treatment at that particular time in his life—actually why he had come at all. He was a 45-year-old, married, professional man. Listening to him, I heard the words with which he spoke his story, but no music through which I could feel his unhappiness. I could not find his sense of imagination, and my attempts to engage him in becoming involved with the world inside him were deflected, or so it seemed to me. I came to believe that he did not know the language in which I was asking him to speak. I wanted to think that there was more to this man, but I could not find it. While the words contained in his narrative changed from hour to hour, they were conveyed in a repeti-

ive way that provided no freedom and no room for new experience. We were locked into a kind of existence in which there was no life, no motion in the hours we spent together.

In this period of the analysis, Mr. M casually remarked that he had discovered an author while browsing in a bookstore several months before he entered treatment. Almost Lüstig, he indicated, is a Czech concentration camp survivor who uses fiction to write of his experience of the Holocaust. Mr. M was struck by the title of one of Lüstig's books, *Street of Lost Brothers* (1990a), a collection of short stories; and had begun reading the first story while still in the bookstore. The manner in which he told me about this experience caught my attention, because there was a perceptible change in his affect and a quickening of his usually monotone voice. It struck me that, unlike our experience together, Mr. M's time with Lüstig had affected him, enlivened him. I also suspected that reading this story engendered in him a desire to enter into an analytic relationship. I asked if he was aware of how important this story was to him. What did he think and feel as he responded to it? In his characteristic manner, Mr. M replied that he had no idea how he felt when reading the story or whether his reading of it had been important to him at all. "Perhaps," he added, "you should read it yourself."

Being both curious about his experience in reading fiction and desperate to find an analytic object (Green 1975) through which the two of us could enter into exploring his inner and outer worlds, I decided to seek out this author myself. Since I was invading a part of the patient's private world outside of the analytic setting, I felt that I should obtain his permission to do so. "Yeah. Sure. Why not?" he replied. I said that my doing so would affect our relationship in ways that we could explore as we came to know more about them. I decided that I would take careful notes of my experience in reading.

Before I read the story, my first thoughts had to do with how Mr. M seemed to be trapped in the concentration camp of his mind. I was not sure whether he himself felt stifled by his own being, or whether this was how I imagined life to be for him. I then

recognized that the concentration camp to which I referred was the analytic experience, where I felt tortured by a relationship that I found dead and deadening. It was an analytic relationship in which we were defined by the two-dimensional roles of "analyst" and "patient." There was no escape into a more lively, colorful world where words and described events possessed meanings, where he, I, and the people in his life were animated into complex human beings. These associations of mine were all evoked prior to my reading the story.

The first story in *Street of Lost Brothers* is entitled "Morning till Evening" (Lüstig 1990b). In it, the character Emanuel attempts to go on living after having had important people ripped from his life. Two brothers for whom he had worked disappeared one night, apparently victims of the Gestapo, and his son was murdered in a Nazi death march. While the portrayal of his wife, Emily, evokes the barrenness, the hopelessness, and the perseveration of experience created by overwhelming trauma, Emanuel himself appears to be alive as a human being who is not defined (reduced) by his present circumstances; he appears to possess a sense of past and future that has not been destroyed by the Nazis' attempt at extermination of body and soul. My personal interpretation of this story reflected the dual existence I shared with Mr. M in our sessions—both the barrenness of experience with him in the transference-countertransference and my hopefulness that our work together would enliven him. I also hoped that by my having entered (from my side) into the world of this story in which he, too, had entered, the two of us might find a common ground upon which to walk.

After having read this story, I again asked Mr. M what his experience of reading it had been like. Without much feeling, he spoke of the "horror" of the Holocaust, how it was "unfathomable that one could survive such an experience." He thought in fact that "no one could emotionally survive"; they could only be "dead men walking." He focused on the character of Emily. Emanuel was conspicuous by his absence. I asked about his reactions to Emanuel. "I don't think he is *real*. How could someone not be entirely de-

stroyed by what had happened to him? It's a mystery to me." I said, "It seems to me that he still had hope." Mr. M fell silent. This felt like a different kind of silence—one that was occurring *between* the two of us, one that was *shared* by us both. Was this hope?

In discussing his concept of the analytic third, Ogden (1994) makes the following comment: "Human beings have a need as deep as hunger and thirst to establish intersubjective constructions . . . in order to find an exit from unending, futile wanderings in their own internal object world" (p. 105). My subsequent work with Mr. M demonstrates that the short story we shared became an analytic object, an analytic third, that occupied the analytic space between us. It came to mediate his experience of hopelessness in the solitary existence of his internal object world and to provide a spark of hopefulness about the prospect of changes taking place through the medium of analytic work with another human being. It is through such conveyances that we analysts may come to understand something of our patients' experiences.

In particular, Mr. M and I began to gain access to a cataclysmic event from his very early childhood. While he had previously known some of the facts of this event, he had had no memory of the emotional experience itself (Winnicott 1974). When Mr. M was three years old, his father fell to a serious physical illness from which he nearly died, and which led to his father's long period of recovery, accompanied by a depressive state. Prior to this illness, Mr. M's father had been an energetic man who was very involved with his little boy. After the near-death experience, the father was never the same. Mr. M lost his father to this process and his mother to her total preoccupation with her husband's condition. The patient had been a lively child, but all that changed when he lost sight of the spark in his father's eye. His home became a solemn hospital devoted to the care of his father and to the ever-present subliminal terror that his father could die at any moment. At this early age, Mr. M withdrew into an inhibited and disaffected state (McDougall 1984). While this mode of defense had provided him with some degree of psychic equilibrium to this day, it was achieved

at the expense of a capacity for spontaneity and excitement which, when momentarily ignited, were almost immediately snuffed out.

Through the (re)construction of this early experience, Mr. M was able to reach back to the time just before the cataclysm and to find the spark of life that had been hidden, if not virtually extinguished, in early childhood. Whereas previously, the transference-countertransference almost exclusively took the form of the deadness and repetitiousness that were echoed by Lustig's character Emily, this spark now ignited a new kind of aliveness in our time together. It was not that Mr. M had never learned the language in which I was asking him to speak, nor that he had once possessed it only to have permanently lost it; rather, he had lost access to a sense of freedom and a language with which to speak it—a language he had once known (his mother tongue, as it were).

In works of fiction, a writer must create a place to live (Winnicott 1971) in order to communicate his or her experience. This may be because the *facts* of this experience are either too painful to put into words, or are inadequate to "evoke in one's imagination even a shadow of the fear, anxiety, and hopelessness" (Lustig 1998, p. 6) that the writer has felt. Perhaps it is to that same place where writers go to symbolize previously unsymbolized experience that we as readers go in order to find words for our own experiences. Mr. M came to life through reading Lustig's story. This resurrection could only occur because he had felt well "read" by Lustig, felt read by this story in a way that had previously never been understood—even by himself. In turn, I, the analyst-as-reader (read-as-analyst), found, as did the patient, a point of entry into the endless, circular wanderings of Mr. M's internal world.

Mr. M's experience of reading this short story appeared to have provided an avenue through which he could enter analytic treatment. It created an environment of hope that permitted him to suspend his disbelief that there could be *a way out*. As he and I found ourselves together in the analytic situation, this story also became a medium of exchange that served as *a way in* to his inner and outer worlds.

ANALYST-AS-WRITER /  
WRITER-AS-ANALYST:  
A SELF-ANALYTIC FICTIONAL FORM

If we could at least discover in ourselves or in people like ourselves an activity which was in some way akin to creative writing!

—Freud (1908, p. 143)

As I considered using the case of Mr. M in writing this paper, I was confronted with a dilemma. You see, Mr. M is not a *real* patient. Well, not entirely so. I, as an analyst, am certainly real, but not exactly Mr. M's analyst. While I could say that Mr. M is a character who is a composite of several patients, he is really mostly an imaginative construction who conveys—through a sort of fiction—my own personal experience created by a particularly difficult time in my life. I had temporarily lost much of my self-reflective capacity, and I experienced little sense of movement within myself. A creative space within me had collapsed, depriving me of a treasured line of communication with my unconscious self. I was inhabited more by a sense of repetition than by the excitement of new experience.

During this period, reading fiction became a foot in the door that restored an oscillation between my conscious, preconscious, and unconscious life. This is something that I *felt*, though this sensory experience was at the time difficult to put into words. I became intrigued with how this process had worked. This curiosity led me to a consideration of clinical models that would illuminate my experience. I undertook a search of the psychoanalytic literature (including psychoanalytic literary criticism) and writings on the subject of the therapeutic function of the act of reading. I eventually began to experiment with the writing of "psychoanalytic fiction" of the sort just presented. Through the process of reading and reflecting upon what I had written, I came to recognize that I had discovered a form of self-analysis.

So the story of Mr. M is autobiography concealed/revealed in fiction. The reader may feel tricked or even outraged that I did

not reveal from the beginning that this was a fictional account. Let me explain. This is a clinical paper on self-analysis. I wanted to demonstrate how the self-analytic experience unfolded—how I discovered a form of self-analysis through creative writing. This procedure began when I myself became engaged in the form created by an imaginative writer (the novels and short stories of Wallace Stegner) during the time of my adult emotional trauma. Before reading these works of fiction on a regular basis, I was not able to achieve a state of mind in which I could effectively use a self-analytic approach, such as in analyzing my dreams (Silber 1996).

The act of reading fiction thus served a *therapeutic* function (Dent and Seligman 1993). It restored a sense of movement and aliveness and fostered the capacity for a degree of self-reflection. However, reading alone did not serve an *analytic* function for me: I was not yet able to undertake a productive, free-associative process whereby I could access preconscious and unconscious lines of communication and advance self-understanding. I then discovered that I could employ creative writing—in the form of autobiographical fiction—to fully engage in a self-analytic process.

I had created a form that stimulated both my capacity for self-reflection and my ability to find words for my experience. I created a unique form for myself in the same manner that Lusting created a unique form for his readers that conveyed his emotional experience. In so doing, I provided a creative space into which I as a writer discovered/created myself in the act of writing. As a reader of my own writing, I was able to enter that space in my effort to put into words previously unsymbolized and unarticulated aspects of my experience.

Therefore, in this paper, I decided to write in a manner that was true to the life of my self-analytic procedure. I chose to approach the construction of this paper in a way that the text would bring the reader into an experience of reading and writing that followed the path of my own. As will shortly be evident, the act of writing this case, followed by my reflecting upon what I had written, led to still further (self-)analytic work.

My fictionalized clinical case is a kind of composite—in the spirit of composite cases we frequently find in the analytic literature—that takes into consideration material from work with my patients who have found works of fiction and poetry helpful within and outside the analytic situation. However, it is organized principally around my personal experience. Like a number of patients who have entered analytic treatment with me, I, too, moved from conducting exclusively self-analytic work into engaging in an analytic process with a real analyst: I began a second personal analysis. And my writing of this fictionalized account began with an attempt to protect my own privacy, as papers in the literature are “fictionalized” in order to protect the patient’s confidentiality.

Unlike Mr. M’s reading of Arnost Lustig, I read Wallace Stegner. Mr. M’s disaffected state was lifelong, while mine was mostly temporary. I wrote this rendition of my own story not only as a consequence of my wish to preserve my own privacy, but also because it was so difficult to write “the facts” of what I had experienced with/through reading fiction. I did not recognize for some time that in writing about the analysis of Mr. M, I was creating a form like the one that had reopened my own creative space—the form of fiction—and one that led to the creation of a self-analytic experience.

### A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

I am writing about this discovery as a contribution to the psychoanalytic literature on the subject of self-analysis. Much of what has been written in the literature has focused on the need for self-analysis in the face of countertransference phenomena (for example, Gardner 1983; Jacobs 1991; Margulies 1993; McLaughlin 1988, 1991, 1993; Poland 1988; Smith 1993, 1997). Here it is the responsibility to one’s patients that requires the analyst to undertake self-analysis (Mitchell 1993). While Smith (1997) makes explicit that the analyst’s engagement with the patient provides an ongoing stim-

ulus for self-analysis,<sup>1</sup> relatively few analysts (for example, Beiser 1984; Calder 1980; Effermann 1987; Gardner 1993; Gedo 1993; Poland 1993; Silber 1990) have written about the analyst’s personal needs as the primary impetus for the development of an approach to self-analysis.

In considering analysts as writers, a few authors (Effermann 1993; Sonnenberg 1993) have explored the relationship between what the analyst writes and his or her self-analysis. In regard to the use of creative writing as an avenue to self-analysis, Anzieu (1993) discusses Samuel Beckett’s self-analysis through creative writing. And while Wheelis, a psychoanalyst, demonstrates the use of autobiographical fictional forms in his short stories and novels (1960, 1966, 1973, 1980, 1987, 1990, 1992, 1999), it is not known whether these works were used by the author for self-analytic purposes, much less how he may have achieved the act of self-analysis through his writing of them.<sup>2</sup> I did not find instances in the analytic literature in which an analyst employs the creative writing of autobiographical fiction for self-analytic purposes.

### A UNIQUE FORM OF SELF-ANALYSIS

In considering publishing this piece in a psychoanalytic journal, I knew that I could not present such a fictional case as one that was *real*. Yet, to paraphrase MacLeish, I did not want to tell the reader *about* my experience with reading fiction or *about* the possibilities of that experience as it relates to self-analytic work; I wanted to *show* the reader the truth of it—or, more accurately, what the truth *felt like* to me as both patient and analyst (i.e., in doing self-analytic work). But I did not know how to go about doing so.

<sup>1</sup> Smith (1997) states, “In analysis we are continuously doing ‘two things at once,’ consciously or involuntarily, as we proceed with the analysis of the patient, which is our aim, and simultaneously extend our own self-understanding, which is our good fortune” (p. 29).

<sup>2</sup> In each of his works written over the past forty years, Wheelis’s personal past emerges and reemerges, the understanding of which is transformed in part by the “fiction” he is writing.

I found my solution in another paper I am writing on the subject of "the truth in fiction." In it, I explore the nature of truth found in imaginative works of fiction and in what is created in the "metaphor" of the transference-countertransference (Arlow 1979). As in my experience with self-analytic writing, it may be that many authors who write about personally traumatic events may find it virtually impossible to write factual accounts.<sup>3</sup> This is only partly because such proximity to the experience in the act of writing can lead to an unbearable repetition of the original circumstances. In addition, writing nonfiction may not allow for the creative finding/making of words that adequately convey what it was like to be the human being who inhabited that life. The discovery of *words that demonstrate* these emotional truths—that bring them to life in the writing and reading—is for many writers possible only in the form of fiction.

Through an imaginative rendering of my own story in an *analytic* fiction, I was able to demonstrate to myself (or more accurately, to discover)—and hopefully to the reader—certain elements of truth about my own conscious and unconscious experience. This approach is similar to that used by analysts who write down their associations to their dreams—fictions created by themselves during sleep—in the process of self-analysis. Silber (1996) describes his technique of writing out his associations as they occur. Furthermore, he states that through "thinking about writing this paper, I have been surprised by the emergence of powerful, distressing feelings from my childhood that I had never remembered in my analyses" (p. 498). For him, the writing of a self-analytic story "acted as a powerful stimulus to the unearthing of hitherto ward-off feelings" (p. 498). This discovery of thoughts and feelings through the act of writing reminds me of Ogden's (2002) comment about Freud's writing:

Some authors write what they think; others think what they write. The latter seem to do their thinking in the very act

<sup>3</sup> Lusting (1998) not only discusses, but also demonstrates, this point eloquently in a rare nonfictional account that he wrote of his experience of the Holocaust.

of writing<sup>5</sup>; as if thoughts arise from the conjunction of pen and paper; the work unfolding by surprise as it goes. [p. 767]

The act of writing my experience was a powerful medium for self-discovery. I found that the words I chose (often unwittingly) led to a wealth of associations in my description of Mr. M and his analysis. Examples include: "a *quickening* of his usually monotone voice," "his father *fell* to a serious physical illness," "he *lost sight* of the *spark* in his father's eye," and "his home became a *solemn hospital*." These words became nexuses between forms of experience that had arisen early in my life and those that were shaped by later (inner and outer) experience during the difficult time in my adult life. Through my associations to these words, which I had *chosen* (or, perhaps more accurately, which had chosen me) to describe my own experience, I gained access to dimensions of my own life that had formerly been predominantly unconscious. It was in the very act of writing that these unanticipated words generated a *new form* of experience for me (a more integrated experience of previously disconnected aspects of myself).

For instance, when I read that, in my words, "his father fell to a serious physical illness," the word *fell* evoked sensory impressions, associations, and memories that echoed throughout my life. This word resonated particularly strongly with a traumatic experience early in my childhood. A person very close to me in growing up did experience a fall—both physically and emotionally—which led to a fall in my estimation of this person and of my own possibilities. "Before the fall," the world seemed to offer infinite promise. I was at a crest of possibilities. Afterwards, I, too, *fell*. I was crestfallen. Before the fall, I lived in a state that retrospectively seems like a garden of innocence. Then came the time-after, the aftershock from a too-sudden fall from innocence—*after the fall*. The emotional experience contained in and around these words echoes with my adult experience of trauma.

Throughout my life, the emotional experiences found in the before, the brink of, and after the fall embody the oscillating states with which I am quite familiar. In my creative writing, I had discovered words to convey these emotional states. These words, as

they were connected to both early and adult experiences of trauma, sounded loud—a kind of hyperacusis. As I listened more closely, I could discern the softer resonance of these words with affective states at other times in my life (including the present).

In seeing and hearing the words I had created in my self-analytic fiction, I was able to perceive the music of the changing feeling states and to discern links to other words that symbolized my experience. I could hear the music of experience created by the words; I could hear and read in the words the music, "the sound of sense" (Frost 1913, p. 80), which helped me to understand something that I previously knew only as unarticulated sensory impressions.<sup>4</sup> In putting the music and the words together, I was beginning to discover a song of experience.

We may listen to these words and connections within our own minds, but seeing (and hearing) them on paper opens a creative space. I became the author who created a medium in which I, the reader, could read myself. I was then involved in a form of true analytic experience.

I made other surprising discoveries at the time of my original writing/reading of my fictional case by asking myself how I had decided to use Lustig's story, "Morning till Evening," in my fiction, in place of the works of Stegner that had been so important to me. My own adult experience was clearly one of trauma, so I knowingly chose a story in which Lustig had crafted his Holocaust experience in the art of fiction. My first discovery came in the course of writing about Lustig's story in the "analysis" of Mr. M. I found that, without intending to do so, I had chosen a text constructed by its author in a manner that conveyed the dual states of being (the barrenness of experience and hopefulness) that were present in the imaginary analysis of Mr. M.

A further discovery came only after I had finished writing the case of Mr. M. I recognized that I had unconsciously selected a

<sup>4</sup> Ogden (1997), in writing about Frost's "effort to capture in the action of language itself the living sound and experience of speech" (pp. 246-247), quotes the poet's (1913) comments about "the sound of sense": "The best place to get the abstract (pure) sound of sense is from voices behind a door that cuts off the words" (p. 80).

text that served to represent my own life—a text where words were crafted in a shape like that created by my own life's experiences in the landscape of my internal world. After reading and rereading "Morning till Evening," it became clear how evocative this story was to me in ways that I had not initially recognized, much less understood. The manner in which Lustig shaped his text provided a story that I could enter imaginatively. Because it was not my story—yet I was allowed to enter into the place created by the author in my own act of writing—I found sufficient room to allow for the play of my own feelings.

## REVELATIONS AND CONCEALMENTS

A fuller discussion of the analytic process generated by writing/reading myself in fiction may give the reader a better understanding both of how I found this form of self-analysis to be uniquely effective for me, and of what I have discovered about its limitations. In what follows, I select an aspect of my self-analytic discoveries and trace the layering of understanding that I have been able to discern from the time of my initial writing and reading of my autobiographical fiction through subsequent rereadings over time.

The form of self-analysis I am describing shares the benefits and limitations both of creative writing and of the creative telling of the "story" (the unfolding transference-countertransference experience) in the analytic situation. Others have written about the merits and deficiencies of the practice of self-analysis, including the forms of resistance encountered when one is one's own analyst (see, for example, Arlow 1990; Chessick 1990; Effermann 1993b; Freud 1936; Gardner 1993; Poland 1993; Smith 1997). I will focus here only on certain features that I believe to be intrinsic to the form of self-analysis in which I engaged.

My initial writing of the fictional case of Mr. M led me to create words that *sounded* true to me. Much like the imaginative writer seeking a unique "voice," I found words that evoked feeling states and accompanying sensory impressions that rang true to my life's experience. I created a form of self-analysis that is a way of talk-

ing with and listening to myself—much like the conversations with in oneself that are evoked by dreams (Ogden 2001). I was in the act of creating *me* through writing myself into existence. By writing a story of my life, I could read what I had dreamed up on the written page and listen to my voice as I read it.

When I read what I had written, I not only saw the narrative created by the associations that were engendered. I could also hear my voice, hear what sounded false and what sounded true. And while one inevitably finds concealment in one's writing of fiction, I could follow the linkages emotionally and trust that something true to my experience was being revealed to me. Subsequent readings of what I had written yielded new harvests of connections. These were unintended emotional linkages that were created in the imaginative ("analytic") space found in my fiction.

Let me illustrate something of the self-analytic process that I am describing. This is only a schematic of certain currents within the analytic process and is not intended to fully convey the complexity of it. The following words and phrases from my fictional case presentation were particularly generative to my self-analytic work over time: "*locked into a kind of existence in which there was no life . . . I felt tortured by a relationship that I found dead and deadening*." These words yielded emotional linkages that led to a first set of associations that appear in my discussion of the "case": "his father *fell* to a serious illness . . . The patient had been a *lively* child, but all that changed when he *lost sight* of the *spark in his father's eye* . . . Mr. M withdrew into an *inhibited and disaffected state* . . . this *mode of defense* had provided him with some degree of psychic equilibrium . . . at the expense of a capacity for spontaneity and excitement which, when *momentarily ignited*, were almost immediately *snuffed out*."

By the time I began creating a paper from my original fictional case, these associations spawned more linkages to other feeling states. I discovered a particular shape of experience—"the oscillating states with which I am quite familiar." In turn, I was able to discern a rhythm that is familiar to me, of experiences of hopefulness/aliveness and of barrenness/feeling deadened. The shape of

which I speak not only contains a set of feeling states—of a sense of aliveness/spark and of deadness/inhibition—that I found to be truly familiar to me. In addition, this form that I had created in the writing revealed to me a dynamic relationship *between* these feeling states: a sense of excitement yielding to a sense of being deadened. My experience of myself had never been (re-)presented in quite this way. It was an experience in which the familiar (from Latin, "of the family") became unfamiliar, and the unfamiliar became familiar.

My initial understanding of this material was that I had accessed through creative writing something of my responses to my own father's sudden illness when I was three years old. These internal rhythms embodied early forms of experience of which I had not been aware or was aware of but could not make use of psychologically. They revealed, I believe, a domain of experience that may have never been symbolized, much less articulated.<sup>5</sup> I was in the process of discovering *what it was like* for a little boy to have once shared in the excitement of being a male who was lively/alive with his father—a sense of excitement about the possibilities of becoming a man, possibilities found in the synergy between father and son, possibilities that were mirrored by the gleam in his father's eye—only to be lost when his father fell to a serious illness. This was an extremely valuable "discovery" for me of something that had been there all along.

I came to recognize the importance of this particular discovery for me only after several years of personal analysis (and through subsequent rereadings of what I had written). The imaginative form I had created opened up a world of experience from my very early years in a manner that allowed me to more compassionately accept the hunger that I had as a little boy for a strong father—without demigrating myself (e.g., as shameful/pitiful) for it. Through this shift in attitude toward myself, an environment of

<sup>5</sup> I was gaining access to what is variously referred to as "memories in feeling" (Klein 1957, p. 180), "fear of breakdown" (Winnicott 1974), the "unthought known" (Bollas 1987), and implicit memory that is part of the "relational procedural domain" (Stern et al. 1998, p. 903).

hope was created about my own possibilities. This fertile ground for new growth was furthered in my second personal analysis.

This more benevolent attitude toward myself became a counterpoint to another and strikingly different set of feelings that I later discovered was found in the oscillations of feeling states and self-representations that I described earlier in the discussion of my fictional case. This has to do with a sense of guilt and of punishment. This, too, was contained in the fictional account. I wrote: "I felt *tortured* by a relationship that I found *dead and deadening* . . . 'no one could emotionally survive'; they could only be 'dead men walking.'" These words and the context provided to them in Lustig's story (Lustig's own imaginative form) that I had landed upon—that of a concentration camp—refer to a profound sense of guilt that I have experienced in my life for surviving my father's apparent emotional death when I was three. It contains the question of whether "no one could" survive or whether "no one should" survive, of whether I was the victim/survivor who could survive, or whether I was the Nazi who should not survive. Was I a victim, as it were, or a perpetrator? It was only later in my personal analysis that I could more fully analyze how and why I might put myself in a concentration camp.

It is worth noting that even after many readings of my fiction, I remained unaware of a particular dynamic related to my early destructive impulses and later to my competitive feelings toward my father and the inevitable fantasied punishment to follow. It might be said that this blind spot represents a limitation of the form of self-analysis I am describing; or it might be said that my personality structure was not sufficiently developed at the time to do psychological work with that part of my unconscious emotional life. I had been able to follow certain feeling states (mostly of excitement/aliveness and disappointment/deadness) that felt emotionally true to me. But I did not follow up on the emotional cues reflected in particular forms of anxiety that arose in my reading. In my later personal analysis, I learned to listen to and to do psychological work with this guilty anxiety.

I believe that my reading of myself in my creative writing kept me one step removed from what eventually proved to be most

frightening to me: my destructive intent toward those whom I love. I am not sure whether this is a limitation of this particular form of self-analysis, or whether it represents a class of limitations in any kind of self-analysis. It is inevitable that the manner in which I "creatively" write would employ the characteristic ways that I project myself. It therefore demonstrates both defensive operations and a way that my writing opened preconscious pathways to unconsciously derived material. This limitation is in part related to the question of just how much analytic work may be done without the active participation of the separate personality system provided by the analyst in the analytic relationship.

There is one additional discovery I made about the manner in which I may avoid certain painful revelations about myself in my creative writing—one that by its nature was virtually silent to me until I was completing the last draft of this paper (which is itself a piece of autobiographical writing suitable for self-analytic purposes). I noticed that I had repeated several phrases throughout the text in a manner that was somewhat distracting, if not oppressive and deadening of new experience. This reminded me of a tendency my mother has when she is anxious: She becomes repetitive as she is telling a story or attempting to make a point. It is as if she were saying (to herself as well as to me, the listener), "Hear the story *this way*. Think about it *this way*. Feel about it *this way*." I know that when I am anxious, I share this propensity to repetitiousness and to the effort to control the thoughts and feelings of the audience (including "me" as audience to the speaking/writing "I").

I began to wonder why my autobiographical fiction had not naturally generated more associations to my early experience with my mother. My mind went to Lustig's character, Emily, whom I characterized as evoking "the barrenness, the hopelessness, and the *perseveration of experience* created by overwhelming trauma." I then recognized that I felt anxious when I thought about this character, especially as I considered Emily's (my mother's and my own anxious) repetitiveness—"perseveration." I chose to follow the path announced by my anxiety and see where it would lead.

I intend to provide only the barest description of what I found in order to demonstrate the self-analysis of the concealing/revealing aspects of my autobiographical fiction. Because my father revealed so little about his internal world—by his reticence in speaking and in his being—my mother was my informant about who he was; she was the teller of his story. Through a series of memories, images, and sensory impressions that arose as I explored this path, I came to recognize that my mother's manner of shaping my (and her own) impression of my father both concealed and revealed the inevitable anger/disappointment she likely felt toward him for his disability. (Her discourse typically proceeded along the lines of "Your father is sick. He can't really do these things. We have to be quiet. [We have to protect him.] Your father is really stronger than you think.") While this aspect of my mother's handling of her own emotional life was likely present before my father's serious illness, her anxiously protecting him from the hostile impact of his physical and interpersonal environment—including her own hostile feelings toward him—must have become more prominent thereafter.

My anxious concern about being open and aggressive (about being strong, having a strong voice) in stating my points in writing, and my unwriting wish to have the reader think of me and listen to my story in certain ways, are expressed through this form of repetition. I can only now see/hear how this manner of shaping my experience of self and others that I "learned" from my mother—this concealing/revealing voice—impacts the form in which I create experience in my writing.<sup>6</sup>

For me, a particular benefit of the form of self-analysis I am describing resides in the fact that one has the opportunity to read and reread what has been written. As I have learned more about

<sup>6</sup> Bollas (1993) discusses the impact of style of maternal handling upon the manner in which one's experience is formed and transformed in language: "Eventually, the aesthetic of handling yields to the aesthetic of language . . . . When the transformational object passes from the mother to the mother's tongue (the word), the first human aesthetic, self to mother, passes toward the second human aesthetic: the finding of the word to speak the self . . . . the forming of words to handle and transform the moods of the self that will frame the terms of that individual's personal aesthetic" (p. 43).

the analytic process generated by the form of self-analysis that I am presenting, I have discovered more about the ways I protect myself psychologically and have been better able to make use of this form of experience for purposes of psychological work.

### SOUNDS OF SILENCE

In a subsequent reading of my original case presentation of Mr. M, I was struck by these passages from the first few paragraphs:

Listening to him [Mr. M], I heard the words with which he spoke his story, but *no music* through which I could feel his unhappiness. I could not find his sense of imagination, and my attempts to engage him in becoming involved with the world inside him were deflected . . . . I came to believe that he did not know the language in which I was asking him to speak. I wanted to think that there was *more to this man*, but I could not find it . . . . We were locked into a kind of existence in which there was *no life, no motion* in the hours we spent together. [italics added]

In rereading these lines, I was drawn back to the difficult time in my adult life when I had lost much of my imaginative capacities and a sense of motion, of "music," within me. Reading the works of Stegner had engaged me in a process that seemed to restore some of my creativity, and I was able to find more of myself.

Thoughts and feelings evoked by rereading the above passage and by recalling what it was like for me during the difficult time in my adult life moved me into a state of reverie. I was drawn to the word *music*. It is the music that is missing—in the time of my adult trauma, within my early experience with my father, and during current times when I cannot sense creative motion within myself. I then read these words that I wrote a few sentences later:

The manner in which he told me about this experience [Mr. M's experience of reading Lustig's short story] caught my attention, because there was a perceptible change in his affect and a *quickening* of his usually monotone voice.

It struck me that, unlike our experience together, Mr. M's time with Lusting had affected him, enlivened him. [Italics added]

*Quicken*—the sound of the word led me to look it up. I found these definitions in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2002): "Give or restore life; to revive, animate . . . (of a woman) reach the stage of pregnancy when movements of the foetus can be felt; (of a foetus) begin to move" (p. 2436).

As I considered both the sensory experience of quickening, of the motion of new life—the experience of the parent and of the fetus—and the idea of giving/restoring life, I thought of the words of the physician and poet William Carlos Williams (1948): "The physician enjoys a wonderful opportunity actually to witness the words being born . . . No one else is present but the speaker and ourselves, *we have been the words' very parents. Nothing is more moving*" (p. 361, italics added).

I wondered what it is that goes on between a parent and child in the finding of words, words that make it possible to think about one's unique inner and outer experience: words to live by. It is not only the words (the "lyrics") of this experience that create a song of experience. It is the feelings and the intentions that are conveyed through the rhythms, the tones of voice, the sounds.

I then recognized that, in the reverie, I had been musing about the nature of the analytic relationship, in which the analyst and the analyst—whether the analyst is a self-analyst or other-as-analyst—make music together. As I emerged from these musings, I could see and hear just how much I had used the metaphor of music—of sounds, of sounding true to myself—in the case that I had created and in my original discussion of the case that followed.

These thoughts led me to remember that at times my father's voice had had a musical sound to it, especially when in my grade school years (after his "fall") he spoke my name when we were alone. I have tried for a number of years to remember how he said my name. I only know that there was something comforting, and a bit hopeful, about the way that he spoke it. But I cannot hear it—only feel its presence. Earlier in his life, my father had played musical instruments and had sung with his own father. I never heard

him play his guitar and ukulele, which are now in my possession. I also once found his tennis racket from college, with *Doc* inscribed on the handle. My mother told me that my father had wanted to be a doctor. A college friend had given him the tennis racket. Although I was thirty years old when my father died twenty-five years ago, I had never spoken to him about his musical instruments or his wish to be a doctor . . . silence between us.

I sat contemplating my father's voice and my response to it. Here was a hint of the enlivening music between my father and me that could have been generative. Or could it have been? There were also silences: of his musical instruments, of his wish to become a doctor, of my unspoken words. Those first few paragraphs of my case contained: "words . . . but no music . . . feel his unhappiness . . . attempts to engage him . . . there was more to this man . . . no motion in the hours we spent together." I became aware in this rereading of these words that I had spoken/written (without conscious awareness) both of my wishes to engage my father and of my attempts to engage myself—of reviving him (and me), of finding new movement—in order to restore my capacities to think and feel freely?

<sup>7</sup> A note on listening: I have cultivated a particular form of listening to the words/voices that I create, one that I have demonstrated in this paper but have not yet articulated. There are certain words, such as "no music" and "quickening of his . . . voice," that have a particular ring of truth to me. I have learned to trust the authenticity of the associative pathways along which they lead me when—as I sound them out—I encounter a kind of rhythm, a unifying music that connects the elements and generates still more "verse" that deepens my self-understanding. This form of listening for what sounds emotionally true in my self-analytic experience has become a reliable guide for me. For there are some words or phrases I have written that produce no such resonance; they are dull or flat and create no new life; while still others are discordant due to the anxiety that is evoked, and I must lean into the anxious words to give them another sounding in order to find what may be contained within. One aspect of this self-analytic work may be characterized as listening for what is *false* (defensive) rather than *true*. The most compelling component of this self-analytic activity, however, involves sounding out the words/voices I have created to discern what sounds/feels *true* and what sounds/feels *not true* to my emotional experience. This form of listening is a highly visceral experience—of rhythms, shapes, textures—akin to what we may sense when reading/listening to a poem that speaks to us or when standing before a painting that touches us. This is a form of knowing what is emotionally true to us, without knowing (at least initially) how we came to know what we know.

In the course of this rereading, I could see that at the time I wrote the fictional case, I was desperately seeking a place where new life for me could be created. The unhappiness emanating from my time of adult trauma had made me frightened that I would become/remain deadened; I feared for my life.<sup>8</sup> I made new life for myself in the course of writing by building upon the music found in (pro) *creative writing*.

## POSTSCRIPT TO A REVERIE: STEGNER AND THE SHAPING OF EXPERIENCE

The reverie experience that I have just described ended with my reflections upon a question that I have long pondered: Why did I choose Stegner and (later) Lusting? Was it the works themselves, or was it that these men (whom I came to know) had survived their own traumas and lived to write about it through their own forms of autobiographical fiction?<sup>9</sup> Was I seeking/creating transferences to strong men—men who were survivors of trauma—who would give me insights about myself? Or had I gravitated toward writers who could demonstrate to me *a way of doing psychological work* through the creation of their own imaginative forms?

These were men who could move around more freely within their own internal landscapes and who did not remain locked in the deadening, repetitive experience of their trauma. Their works embody psychological work-in-motion, the act of creating oneself in the expanded universe of imaginative writing. It was not simply

<sup>8</sup> I now recall that during the difficult time of my life to which I refer, I said to a friend, "I'm afraid that this will kill my passion, my soul."

<sup>9</sup> Stegner was the original author to whom I turned. He describes his father as a selfish man whose violence and "boom-or-bust temperament" tyrannized the family and created deep ambivalence in his son (Benson 1996, p. 9). Benson, Stegner's biographer, wrote, "It has been Stegner's pattern to . . . hope to bring some enjoyment and enlightenment to the reader while he tries through the process of writing and confronting old ghosts to understand who he is" (p. 16). Stegner confronted his deep struggle with the problem of forgiveness as it relates to his father in his first major novel, *The Big Rock Candy Mountain* (1943), and again thirty-five years later in its sequel, *Recapitulation* (1979).

that I was seeking a father to admire; I wished to participate in the creation of forms like the ones that they generated as they dreamed up their stories.<sup>10</sup>

## DISCUSSION

I came to recognize that I had constructed a text, a form, like the ones created by writers of works of fiction, in which I participated and through which I began to reopen a self-analytic space. I created a case where I became both patient and analyst. Writing my autobiographical fiction in the form of a case presentation fit my life's circumstances and was true to my emotional experience at the time of its writing. I am not suggesting that the successful use of an autobiographical, fictional form for self-analytic purposes requires the vehicle of a case report. Such a self-analysis can be conducted using any autobiographical fiction that is fitting to the emotional life of its writer.

In writing the case of Mr. M, I employed the freedom of poetic license as I engaged in an experiment with a *fictional autobiographical form*. This is not unlike the manner in which analysts learn what is taking place in the analytic relationship by using free-floating attention to explore other forms of autobiographical "fictions," i.e., dreams, fantasies/reveries, and visual images.<sup>11</sup> In using dreams and other autobiographical fictions, we become decentered from ourselves in such a way that we are able (at times) to enter associative pathways through which we discover derivatives of unconscious life. As in the use of dreams, I discovered in my self-analytic writing a medium where I could discover/create what I did not

<sup>10</sup> Stegner (1942) wrote the following about the problem of the autobiographical novel: "The technical problems involved in translating experience into fictional truth are the basic problems of form . . . . The transcription of life is not a transcription at all, but a *re-making*" (quoted in Benson 1996, p. 114; italics added).

<sup>11</sup> In regard to Freud's use of dreams, see Anzieu (1986), Freud (1887-1902, 1900), and Meissner (1971). For more on the use of dreams, see also Silber (1996) and Smith (1993, 1997). For the use of fantasies/reveries, see Bion (1962, 1967), Jacobs (1991), McClughlin (1988), and Ogden (1997, 2001). For the use of visual images, see Gardner (1983), Kern (1978), and Ross and Kapp (1962).

know. I had to take an indirect route like the one that must be taken in analyzing dreams—an associational route in the medium of writing and reading an analytic text within an analytic text.

In many ways, the intersubjective constructions (fictions) we create in the analytic situation are the core of the analytic work. Each construction is a "lie that tells the truth" (Gardner 1983, p. 74). Each is a composite of memories/autobiography, fantasies/fictions, and of feeling states that constitute a "text" that is "written" within the transference-countertransference. The manner in which we write our psychoanalytic papers can reflect the truth of this "fictional" analytic experience.

From this perspective, the "fictions" created in the transference-countertransference provide a medium through which the analyst and analysand can discover emotional truths of the latter's unconscious life. When the psychoanalyst uses his or her own dreams, fantasies, reveries, and visual images—personal fictions—for self-analytic purposes, he or she is accessing a medium (a self-created one) through which the analyst can listen to and see the self. In self-analytic work, it is through such personal fictions that we metaphorically rewrite our own stories over the years. The analyst's personal past emerges and reemerges, the understanding of which is transformed in part by the self-analytic fictions that are created. Each time the analyst rewrites the same "facts" of his or her personal story, new revelations (new emotional facts) are produced. The fictions that are created are not fiction (i.e., unreal); they are very real events of newly writing the self into existence.

The autobiographical analytic fiction I constructed for my self-analysis provides a medium in words—the symbolic language with which analysts are most familiar—similar to that of the psychoanalytic situation, where the patient's (and analyst's) conscious and unconscious experience is "written" and then "read," created and then discovered.

This form of self-analysis has a history in our field. In the text of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud used his own "disguised [fictional] autobiographical dreams" (Anzieu 1986, p. 354). It might be said that psychoanalysis began with the writing of a

text that served (to a considerable degree) as a form of generative self-analysis. The following passage suggests that Freud's feat of self-analysis conducted in the very process of writing *The Interpretation of Dreams* may well have been achieved in the amalgam of writing, reading what he had written, and self-reflecting:

For this book has a further subjective significance for me personally—a significance which I only grasped *after* I had completed it. It was, I found, a portion of *my own self-analysis*, my reaction to my father's death—that is to say, to the most important event, the most poignant loss, of a man's life. [Freud 1900, p. xxvi, italics added]

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have described a form of self-analysis generated in the process of writing a fictional account of an analytic experience. I have found that this form of writing and reading has assisted me, the writer/reader, in bringing into awareness formerly unconscious aspects of emotional experience. This form of self-analytic experience is based upon the kind of experience that is created in the medium with which analysts are most familiar: the two-person psychoanalytic situation. In the medium of the transference-countertransference, we discover a new writing of experience—a kind of ever-changing and self-enriching autobiographical fiction based upon "the facts"—which we can read and which leads us to new meanings and still more rewritings.

I started this project with an attempt to grapple with my story of adult trauma through remaking it, by rendering experience in the form of fictional truth. From there, I found my way to an ongoing process of expanding self-awareness, of doing psychological work, through rewritings of myself in this form of self-analysis.

For me, a measure of the effectiveness of this self-analytic process lies in the degree to which the voice(s) created in the writing sound and feel true to my experience. Another measure of the success of the self-analytic form of writing to which I refer may be found in the degree to which it is not *about* the analytic experi-

ence, but is a *form of analytic experience* in its own right. Of course, every analyst must create his/her own forms of self-analytic experience. Perhaps the form I have happened upon and described here may lead others to generate self-analytic forms of their own.

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