Neville Symington 1937-2019. Australian and international psychoanalysis mourns the passing of one of the most distinguished practitioners and publicists in their discipline. He was Fellow of the British Psychoanalytic Society, Member of the Australian Psychoanalytical Society, Honorary Member of the Israeli Psychoanalytical Society and Member of the Australian Psychological Society. Neville had continued to teach and write until his death in Sydney from a short illness at the age of 82.

He was born in Portugal and was educated at Ampleforth College, Yorkshire, where he was a boarder from age eleven. He studied philosophy and theology at St Edmunds College 1958-1964 and psychology at Brunel University 1968-1974. He was a clinical psychologist at the Tavistock Clinic from 1978, and undertook analytic training with John Klauber. He married Joan Cornwell, also a distinguished psychoanalyst, who was the love of his life. They emigrated to Sydney 1986.

His achievements in psychoanalysis in London proved seminal in his professional development. He was chairman of the Psychology Discipline at the Tavistock Clinic. He published prolifically with more than twenty books and many journal articles. His creativity was not of the printed word alone but of his personal presence in the international psychoanalytic community. His achievements came from connectedness. He spoke with outstanding clarity, expressive of inner freedom, even when imploded upon by the commotion of groups.

A year after arriving in Sydney Neville became Chairman of the Sydney Institute for Psychoanalysis and remained so until 1993. He was President of the Australian Psychoanalytical Association 1999-2002. He galvanised these organisations into developing a coherent structure. He began outreach programmes to publicise psychoanalysis with public lectures and seminars open to all. He dispelled the image of psychoanalysis as an exclusive club with anachronistic dogmas. Psychoanalysis in Australia came of age through his work while he remained a citizen of the world, giving lectures and supervision in Britain, Brazil, Israel, Poland, Portugal, Germany, India, Japan, New Zealand, USA and Denmark.

Neville received the high accolade of the Sigourney Award in 1993, along with Haydee Feimberg and Ron Britton. Neville was encouraged by this recognition. He felt that he had chosen a lonely path with his work on Narcissism: A New Theory in 1993. He wrote this book in an original way: conducting seminars and then writing, informed by the group process.

The scope of Bion’s work informed the thinking of Joan and Neville. They noticed that Bion’s central concern was the life of the mind, how thoughts emerge from what is not a thought yet. This is a contrast to many analytic writers, including the younger Neville, whose focus had been on psychopathology, determined by drives and/or environment. Neville addressed narcissism as the outcome of an unconscious choice at the deepest level of the mind. The choice is whether turn to or turn away from that which is life giving. Turning away from the life giver is Neville’s definition of narcissism. It is prototypical trauma. There is an existential choice between surrendering to trauma as to Fairbairn’s internal saboteur or to Bion’s basic assumptions, or, instead turning to emotional contact with the other.

Neville was critical of both religious and psychoanalytic dogmatism. He thought psychoanalysis had failed to address the spiritual understanding of meaning. He regarded organised religion as having failed to recognise the predicament of the person who can say “I.” The question asked by Neville is how to turn the individual into a person free of dogma. Neville said “when someone cannot think their own thoughts they are not free.”

Neville kept psychoanalysis on the move. We could never guess what he would say next. It was a quality of newness because what he said was his own free response to the moment. Throughout his life he kept moving away from the established to that which is yet to be, that which is emerging into thought. He was always a questing exile.

Neville is survived by Joan and their two sons David and Andrew.