

# JOAN SYMINGTON'S REFLECTIONS



## PROFESSIONAL REFLECTIONS

"If we can tolerate the anxiety of being out of our depth without frantically swimming to the nearest theory, we have a chance of encountering and understanding the patient's primitive self ..."

"Wilfred Bion's work led him to conclude that the mind of mankind grows not by increasing factual knowledge but through encounters with ultimate reality ... everlasting loneliness, the pain made bearable by the beauty of the universe."

"The autistic infant has a premature contact with O which results in a massive reaction of 'never again'. This 'never again' is the autistic defence. This autistic touch turns the personality into stone."

"The autistic infant may, through his particular sensitivity and in the face of his preconceptions of mental holding not being met, be devastated by a sudden awareness of his extreme fragility, mental and physical."



## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Our deep sense of security derives from our bodies, a healthy strong body makes us feel held and secure and independent. In a frail body we feel insecure and especially so when we are liable to falls. As we and our body ages so basic security disappears.

I am writing to you, not to moan but to express to a sympathetic ear what is going on. Everything is frightening but when the Madopar starts to work I feel good. It lasts about 2 and a half hours which is when I get everything done.

I think what I was trying to say is that there is, with any loss, a new life, a new start with a delicate, sensitive 'skin' that is easily bruised by something external to it. It is almost transparent but this profound sensitivity picks up the real essence of life. (I'm losing touch with it as I write) I feel I need to look after it by reminding myself of it frequently. It needs looking for, feeling for... This came when I was lying awake panicking about my life and it got me away from all that to a more real, important level where all worries are focused on this new life and new ideas come. Probably I haven't communicated the essence to you but it arose out of yesterday's thoughts and I wanted to tell you.

““These moments of exact matching (with text book descriptions) shed illumination, but only for a brief space of time ... in contrast to the odd moments in the session ('It took so long for my mother to love me') which I (found) astonishing. These experiences have a long-lasting effect.”

“In analysis we encounter the child within when we have an insight. It may cause us pain or discomfort but it also gets us in touch with our potential and brings with it an experience of truth, of awe, of strength and excitement about the world in which we live.”

“He also attacked his intelligence by remaining as a sort of parasitic foetus in the mother’s womb and, by maintaining this state of affairs, he actively blocked stimuli which would have been a spur to his development.”

“...theory is brought to life by your own experience in the session. ... Her putting together was not to make new life, but to restore life to what had been deprived of it.”

“Just as we have seen the baby develop ways of holding himself together, when the maternal holding function is lacking, so these defences can also be observed in adults. We have seen the defence of continuous movement to create a continuous layer of movement around the self, both in the baby and in his mother’s non-stop activity. The second type ... is by sticking to an object with the eyes, ears or skin (e.g.) plugged into music, staring fixedly ... or on a more long term basis, sticking to a person. Thirdly, ... a muscular carapace to form a protective shell ... (e.g.) toughness, or impermeability of character, an armour-platedness against being emotionally moved or against change.”

I suppose we're all on our own really and have to cope with and bear pain, often when it feels unbearable. We don't know where life is going. I realise that more and more. All my fears and hope about the future are not really relevant. All I know now is that I have to go through a lot of unpleasant situations to get to the 'good and the true.'

I am getting ready to do another self-portrait. A friend took some photos. It is too difficult to do it from a mirror image. There is something slightly crazy about pursuing a likeness. I guess it has something to do with getting old and dying and one's image remaining visible.

Here we are going into summer -probably. The channel-billed cuckoos (called flying walking-sticks because of their large bills) are making a terrific racket -kork, kork, kork as they fly round and round. I heard a couple of whip birds today and a koel yesterday. I don't work on Thursdays. It's good to have time stretching ahead. As one grows older time seems to pass very quickly or is it just because I postpone doing what has to be done. The juniper tree outside my window has a flame tree growing through it. It's now about 15 feet tall. Another few feet and it will break through to freedom.

The cypress tree outside my study window i.e. outside front door is starting to look ill. It is probably the long drought conditions which have been present for 6 years. I also hug the tree. It's a nice thing to do and may help one or both of us.

I've done one pastel portrait of Jane. there's a bit of a likeness. the pleasure comes from looking for hours at this innocent face as well as the challenge to get a likeness.

I have not received David’s phone call yet but in the daytime I think I could manage going to Shanghai but at night when the demons come I feel I can’t.

We normally think of the living and the dead being separate but lying here I have come to see that what is between the living and dead is almost nothing, hardly there at all.

Dogs are amazing. They have the best character traits - caring, loyalty, strength of purpose to hang in there as long as is necessary.



“Confession of all the things that cause shame and their acceptance by the analyst in an understanding way enables self-acceptance of these and consequent growth of the mind through removal of the restricting bands that the shame had created.”

“The patient needs to feel that the analyst is at his side, not that she is some superior being looking down and judging him.”

“To so many people, anxiety arises about getting the right interpretation to establish, and thus reestablish, which of the two is the analyst. Identity and therefore security depends on this.”

“Shahid says he’s no longer an analyst, he’s now himself with patients. But to be truly himself with his patients means he is truly being an analyst.”

“Making a space for something to happen. The mind may be full of ‘important’ thoughts that maintain the status quo but growth of the mind requires space and contact with the infinite.”

“Children at school have so much filling-in of their time with curricular and extracurricular activities that they don’t have enough time to discover who they are. They are not permitted to ‘waste’ time and thus develop a sense of who they are.”

“One can begin a painting by putting in the darkest tones and their shape and also the lightest tones and their shapes. So a different but still a truthful view of the object being painted is presented. In a similar way a problem to be worked on can have certain opposing dimensions delineated so one does not get overwhelmed by the complexity. For example, thinking of the most terrible outcome and the funniest outcome.”

“These two statements from two mystics, Dogen and Eckhart, refer to the same situation: that there is, at every moment, life expressing itself.”