

Beyond Containing: World War I and the Psychoanalytic Theories of Wilfred Bion

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Abstract

This article considers Bion's writings about World War I, from the returning soldier of 1919 to the psychoanalyst in his seventies. It asks how and why his memories of the war shifted over time, and explores the connections between his experiences as a tank commander in the war and his clinical work forty years later. Bion's psychoanalytic thought shared much with British contemporaries such as Donald Winnicott and John Bowlby in putting early domestic relationships and the maternal relation at the center, but it also bore traces of his war. On the Western Front during 1917-18 Bion was exposed to the kinds of psychotic states he would later observe in his patients. At the same time, concepts such as containing, bizarre objects and reverie gave Bion a psychoanalytic idiom for remembering the war in later life. Psychoanalysis, however, was not the only influence. A secure home life from the 1950s also made it possible for him to bring the war to mind. The professional discoveries of the psychoanalyst after World War II were closely linked to the emotional experiences of the World War I veteran and husband.

Keywords: Bion, World War I, memoirs, remembering, containing, bizarre objects, reverie, domesticity

After his demobilization in early 1919, and while waiting to begin a history degree at Queen's College, Oxford, Wilfred Bion wrote a memoir of his experiences as a tank commander during 1917–18. Called "Diary, France," it was dedicated to his parents "[i]n place of letters I should have written."ⁱ Between 1958 and his death in 1979 - during which Bion acquired an international reputation as a post-Kleinian clinician and theorist - he wrote a further three memoirs and other recollections of the war. These were published posthumously by his wife Francesca during the decade and a half after Bion's death.

This chapter considers Bion's writings about World War I, from the returning soldier of 1919 to the psychoanalyst in his seventies. It asks how and why his memories of the war shifted over time, and explores the connections between his experiences in the war and his psychoanalytic interests; connections that were increasingly articulated by Bion himself from his early sixties. Bion was not unusual in being preoccupied with the war in his later life: the 1960s and 1970s saw a substantial increase in the numbers of published and unpublished World War I memoirs.ⁱⁱ The rise of social history and increasing public interest in the personal testimonies of ordinary soldiers rather than military leaders contributed to this trend, as did the ageing and increased leisure of the veterans themselves, who in retirement were often drawn to remember the war.ⁱⁱⁱ

At the same time, individual factors affected the manner and timing of Bion's remembering, and I will consider two here. Bion's war and his psychoanalytic interests were closely linked. They were linked chronologically, his memoir writing from the late 1950s overlapping with his clinical work on extreme emotional disturbances. This work shared much with the ideas of British contemporaries such as Winnicott and Bowlby in putting early domestic relationships, and the maternal relation, at the center, but it also bore traces of Bion's war.^{iv} If on the one hand, like many returned soldiers, he struggled after the war to establish himself in his personal and professional life (he was well into his forties when he began to train as a psychoanalyst, and in his mid-fifties when he remarried and began to publish the essays on psychosis that would bring him international renown^v), on the other, war shaped his psychoanalytic sensibilities. Indeed, Mary Jacobus goes so far as to claim that his wartime traumas "offered a template for the psychotic states he later described in his analytic patients."^{vi} Equally, however, Bion's descriptions of psychotic states in the 1950s would themselves become the templates from which he reflected on the war and rendered his war emotional experiences into words. His war memories were, through the 1960s and 1970s, reworked through a psychoanalytic idiom.

Focusing on Bion's ideas about the maternal relation, the first part of this chapter traces the connections between Bion's war and his clinical work, from the outbreak of World War II, when the traumas of World War I were still, arguably, exerting a powerful but not always conscious impact on his thinking, to his late life, when the relations between the psychoanalyst's "I" and the veteran's "I" had become an explicit object of his thought. Bion never fully "recovered" from the war. He continued to have nightmares about it, and as we shall see, he would return to the same incidents again and again in his memoirs. At the same time, World War I helped form him as a psychoanalyst, and psychoanalysis helped him to subject his war to thought.

Psychoanalysis was not the only factor to influence Bion's memoir-writing from the 1950s. His personal circumstances—particularly his second marriage in 1951 after the tragic death of his first wife in 1945—gave Bion more domestic stability than he had experienced since leaving India for an English preparatory school half a century earlier, at the age of eight. The recovery of the ability to dream, which Bion often wrote about in his clinical capacity, was not just a professional therapeutic ambition, but was facilitated by Bion's personal relationships as a husband and father. A secure home life from the 1950s on helped make it possible for him to turn his mind to the war. His domestic situation, coupled with the therapeutic idiom of psychoanalysis, provided the conditions of Bion's rerecuperating of the war in later life. That remembering was influenced by the common imperatives of ageing, the social history of soldier memoirs, and the postwar "maternal turn" in psychoanalysis and the welfare state, but equally by Bion's particular intellectual and emotional journey as a veteran, psychoanalyst, and husband.

Bion's War

Bion was born in India in 1897 into an “empire family,” his father an engineer. After leaving for England in 1905 (he did not see his mother for the next three years) and attending Bishops Stortford College, a nonconformist public school, he went into the Tank Corps at the age of 19. He was 20 years old when he went into battle for the first time, in the disastrous attack of 3rd Ypres in September 1917 when the advancing tanks—including Bion’s own—became bogged down and broke down in the mud of no man’s land.

Tank crews were not necessarily more prone to become casualties than infantry, but tank warfare possessed its own particular terrors. Conditions inside were extremely hot and cramped, as men were seated around the engine. Sight of the battlefield was gleaned from tiny flaps, which often had to be shut down as tanks advanced, leaving only the pounding of machine gun fire on the tank’s armor to direct them. In the early models, shards of the armor plating would flake off under fire, peppering the crew.^{vii} The noise of shell-fire would be largely drowned out by the sound of the engine during an advance, but a stopped tank would quickly become a sitting target, leaving the crew exposed to shells crashing around the iron carapace.^{viii} The experience, wrote D. G. Browne in 1920, “always renders me virtually imbecile; almost incapable of coherent thought or action.”^{ix} In such a situation the tank was vulnerable to a direct hit, which could ignite the fuel and engulf it in fire. Interviewed at the age of 99, tank driver “Mac” Francis recalled that “there’s nothing worse than a tank going on fire, I tell you. Hopeless, hopeless,” as the crew were often “roasted alive.”^x

Bion was in action again at the Battle of Cambrai in November 1917, and throughout summer 1918. While guiding his company’s tanks into action at the Battle of Amiens in August 1918 (Bion was by then a section commander), one of them burst into flames, burning to death the entire crew, including his ex-second in command and valued comrade Sergeant O’Toole.^{xi} Two days later he came upon a further five of his battalion’s tanks, all facing the enemy “in a neat line,” but knocked out and “left there looking like burst toads—the roofs lifted off, the sides bulging out.”^{xii} Bion’s last action was at the Fonsomme Line in October 1918. After helping to clear out a tank that had been hit by a gas shell, he reports, “I got out of the tank and rather dreamily watched the crew rolling about outside—some coughing, some groaning and one man lying almost still enough to be dead. I felt rather numbed and couldn’t think properly.”^{xiii}

Bion was barely in his majority when the war ended. The 1919 account of his time in the Tank Corps was composed from memory but based on diaries that he had lost. Its tone is spare and factual. Bion rarely reflects on his state of mind, though the cumulative effect of his descriptions of battle is certainly disturbing to the reader. His opening paragraph hints at the memoir’s function in communicating unprocessed fragments of his war experience. He intends, Bion tells his parents, to “give you our feelings at the time I am writing of.”^{xiv}

Between 1919 and 1958 Bion appears not to have written about the war. In 1958, aged 60, he wrote an unfinished account of his experience at Amiens. There was then a gap of a decade or so before, based in Los Angeles and then in his seventies, Bion embarked on a further series of accounts, including a 1972 “Commentary” on the

1919 “Diary,” written as a dialogue between the mature psychoanalyst and the young tank commander. By his own admission this was the first time in 53 years that Bion had reread the “Diary.”^{xv} At around the same time as the “Commentary,” he composed a full-length memoir of his life up to 1919, published in 1982 as *The Long Weekend 1897–1919*.^{xvi} Narrated in the first person, this takes a more conventional form as autobiography. Roughly the first quarter of *The Long Weekend* narrates memories of India, his parents and his ayah, the misery of life in an English boarding school, and the sexual turmoil of adolescence, while the remaining three-quarters is concerned with the war. Short evocations of his war experience also appear in *All My Sins Remembered* (the unfinished sequel to *The Long Weekend*) and Bion’s novelistic trilogy, *A Memoir of the Future*, published between 1975 and 1981, which like the 1972 “Commentary” takes the form of an internal dialogue between Bion the psychoanalyst and other characters.

The 1919 “Diary,” Paulo Cesar Sandler notes, can be viewed as the raw material or “preparatory notes” of the later memoirs.^{xvii} Certain events reappear, albeit with minor variations, suggesting their salience as encrusted fragments of emotional experience that Bion was still, half a century on from the war, trying to process. As such these descriptions also suggest the significance of the war for Bion’s thinking about the mental landscape of the psychotic patient. They reveal something of the personal material that he brought to bear in understanding his patients’ emotional states.

Bion’s Early Work and the Legacy of War

After completing his history degree at Oxford, Bion studied medicine at University College Hospital London, where he first encountered psychoanalysis and apparently used an army gratuity to pay for therapy.^{xviii} Despite establishing a medical career, like many veterans Bion remained, according to his biographer Gérard Bléandou, somewhat alienated and unhappy.^{xix} He continued to suffer from nightmares of clinging to the banks of the flooded Steenbeck River. The more he tried to dig his fingers and toes into the mud, the further he slipped toward the “raging torrent.”^{xx} He underwent training as a psychotherapist at the Tavistock Clinic during the 1930s, and in 1937 he began an analysis with John Rickman. This was prematurely terminated by the outbreak of World War II, after which Bion, working with Rickman, undertook pioneering work as a military psychiatrist on group mentalities and behavior.^{xxi} His “intense attachment” to Rickman during this time, Dimitris Vonofakos and Bob Hinshelwood have recently remarked, helped Bion to lift the shadow of war and liberate his creativity.^{xxii}

It was the outbreak of World War II that brought Bion, then in his early forties, into print for the first time, with an article on civilian morale. The “rather dogmatic style” of this piece suggests that, facing the prospect of a second war, Bion was still experiencing the aftermath of the first, but it also suggests how his experience as a tank commander, dealing with anxiety among soldiers, might have contributed to his later work on maternal containing.^{xxiii} Bion’s article focused on panic and the power of “infantile emotions” to distract people from external danger.^{xxiv} In the face of such

tendencies, Bion emphasized the need for leaders to foster “the individual’s feeling for home”—particularly its “security-giving elements.” A good Air Raid Precautions scheme, for example, could help the worker “feel the care of a good parental image that feeds and clothes.”^{xxv} We see something of the subaltern officer’s concern with the role of basic domestic care in morale: in his 1919 “diary” Bion had noted the importance of warmth, food, and rest to the soldier, though he now attributed their salience less to physical than to psychological factors, such care being rooted in early attachments.^{xxvi} Bion only makes one direct reference to his own military experience. The performance of small tasks, he remarks, can help people gain confidence in the face of attack: he himself remembered “the satisfying feeling that was produced on one occasion during the last war, when the objective situation appeared desperate and the enemy commenced an attack, by the simple act of having to buckle on belt and equipment before standing to arms.”^{xxvii} This passage gives little hint of the extreme anxieties that Bion had experienced before battle, anxieties about which he had written in his “Diary” of 1919 and would remember again 20 years later.^{xxviii} Bion does not relate any other personal memories but gives a telling glimpse of his familiarity with violence: “[T]he sight of blood on civilian clothes,” he reflects, is “liable to be particularly unnerving.”^{xxix}

Although Bion’s personal experience of war appears obliquely in this essay, his military background was certainly apparent to the colleagues who worked with him at the Northfield Hospital during World War II. This brought him a certain amount of respect among civilian colleagues and the soldiers who were his patients. Eric Trist thought he looked more like a general than a psychiatrist in uniform, while Bion’s DSO and Legion d’honneur ribbons helped convey an impression of “imposing military presence” to John Sutherland.^{xxx} His status as a veteran even gave Bion the confidence to challenge Freud. In an essay of 1952, reviewing his work on groups and informed by his subsequent interest in Klein, he writes that Freud is mistaken to approximate group behavior with neurotic responses and oedipal relationships; rather, they pertain to psychotic behavior.^{xxxi} “Freud says that panic is best studied in military groups. I experienced panic with troops in action on two occasions,” he remarks, but these “do not appear in all respects to bear out Freud’s theories.”^{xxxii} Bion invoked World War I infrequently in this phase of his career, but when he did, it was principally as a leader dealing with the anxieties of other men, not his own, and of groups rather than individuals. The references to his military past gave Bion a means of establishing himself in his work with traumatized soldiers, but did not reveal his own traumatic experiences of war.

After Bion began a training analysis with Melanie Klein in 1945, which lasted for eight years, his interests became more explicitly psychoanalytic.^{xxxiii} He qualified as an associate member of the British Psychoanalytical Society in 1950 and began to work with individual patients, largely giving up his earlier work with groups. Some see this “more inward psychological journey” as a striking disjuncture from the “outward social journey” of his group work in the 1940s.^{xxxiv} In response, it could be said that his military experience in World War I and his work on groups had revealed to Bion the significance of anxiety and psychotic elements in group behavior, whose

unconscious origins he would go on to explore in his clinical work during the 1950s.^{xxxv} His psychoanalytic concerns were moving closer to home. It is this period, from the mid-1950s to Bion's death in 1979, during which Bion's psychoanalytic creativity flourished and he wrote prolifically about his war, that I shall focus on in the rest of the chapter.

Maternal Containing and the Memory of War

Bion's concept of "reverie," which first appeared in his essay of 1962, "A Theory of Thinking," reveals some of the linkages between his psychoanalytic thinking and the memory of war.^{xxxvi} Reverie for Bion referred to the mother's ability to be unconsciously attuned to the emotional state of the baby. The calm attentiveness of the mother was not unlike what Freud called the "free-floating" or "evenly suspended attention" of the analyst, whose unconscious must remain open to the material coming from the patient. For Bion, reverie was—as the name suggests—closely associated with dreaming. When the mother was in a state of reverie, said Bion, she was able to sense the infant's distress, take it in, and process it.^{xxxvii} Reverie, then, was the quality of attentiveness to the infant's emotional state.

But Bion, dealing as he was with extremely disturbed patients, was more concerned with failures in communication than in what he called the "well-balanced mother."^{xxxviii} When the mother could not be attentive, the baby was forced to take back its projective identifications. It thus faced the double burden of having to manage its own anxiety and of dealing with a mother who could not tolerate its anxiety. What ensued was a state of meaninglessness. As Bion puts it:

Normal development follows if the relationship between infant and breast permits the infant to project a feeling, say, that it is dying into the mother and to reintroject it after its sojourn in the breast has made it tolerable to the infant psyche. If the projection is not accepted by the mother the infant feels that its feeling that it is dying is stripped of such meaning as it has. It therefore reintrojects, not a fear of dying made tolerable, but a nameless dread.^{xxxix}

The most severe mental disturbances, Bion thought—such as psychotic states—were the result of failures in mothering, as the infant whose anxiety was constantly returned to it would not develop a normal capacity for thought, but would instead internalize the mother's incapacity to tolerate and process its unconscious communications.

Something of the war's impact on Bion is conveyed in the concepts of "reverie" and "nameless dread." Bion the tank commander had known well enough the feeling of impending disaster and the sense of persecution and meaninglessness that could ensue when anxieties could not be assuaged. Such traits, Bion argued, were characteristic of the psychotic personality. The schizophrenic, Bion would state in 1956, suffered an "unremitting dread of imminent annihilation."^{xl} By focusing on some of the events that Bion returned to in his memoirs from the 1950s, and tracing the shifts between the "diary" of 1919 and the later accounts, it is possible to see how the threat of actual annihilation in the war might have animated Bion's theories of

psychic disintegration, and furthermore, how those theories helped Bion to rewrite and reinterpret his war.

One of the experiences that Bion retold on successive occasions was of being in the front line around Wytschaete in Belgium, where, dispensing with their tanks, they had been ordered to assist the infantry. It was very hot under his tin-roofed shelter, and during his weeks watching the enemy lines Bion became more and more confused. He writes in 1919:

I used to lie, tired out after the night, in a kind of stupor, which served instead of sleep. It was a weird business—the heat, and the nightmares out of which one started up suddenly in a kind of horror to find the sweat pouring down one's face. It was almost impossible to distinguish dream from reality. The tat-tat-tat of the German machine guns would chime in with your dream with uncanny effect, so that when you awoke you wondered whether you were dreaming. The machine-gun made you think everything was genuine, and only by degrees you recovered yourself to fall into uneasy sleep again.

It did not take long for interest in life to die out. Soon I found myself almost hopeless. I used to lie on my back and stare at the low roof. Sometimes I stared for hours at a small piece of mud that hung from the roof by a grass and quivered to the explosion of the shells.^{xli}

The powerful and distorted reverberation of the big guns conspired in his stupor. Bion asks his parents to put themselves in his place: “Then imagine the shell-fire. And in this district every gun and every shell echoed and re-echoed, until at last the noise died away in weird booms and groans utterly unlike the original sound. The sound was quite different from anything I know. If anything was needed to complete the horror of that place, those echoes did it.”^{xlii} Bion also found his sense of vision overwhelmed; amid the crashing of shells, his gaze was locked onto the clod of mud. This memory would reappear in *A Memoir of the Future*, which describes how Captain Bion “stared at the speck of mud trembling on the straw,” and again in *All My Sins Remembered* as Bion describes treating shell-shocked soldiers during World War II.^{xliii}

Bion's account of the events at Wytschaete in *The Long Weekend*, written in the 1970s with the hindsight of his now celebrated expertise on psychosis, suggests the role that psychoanalysis came to play in locating and explicating the source of his trauma. Now he emphasized the links between his stupor, the inability to think, and the distortion of his sight:

For two more days nothing happened to break the monotony of constant, vigilant staring at no-man's land—the crater edge, the slow rise to the crest of the ridge, the grey mud so similar in all but colour to Hill 40, inspired a state which was not nightmare, not waking, not sleep. It was an animal existence in which the eyes held sway. One did not think; one did not look; one stared.^{xliv}

Perception, the psychoanalyst Bion would observe, is crucial to the mind's capacity to confirm reality and make sense of emotional experience. But in the case of the psychotic, what happens is that the reality-confirming capacity of the senses is itself attacked. Bion says of the psychotic patient that “[a]ll his sense impressions appear to

have suffered mutilation.”^{xlv} They may become (in an intimation of shrapnel) “minutely fragmented” and violently split off, encapsulating external objects, which in turn attack the self.^{xlvi} In Bion’s revised account of Wyttschaete we are made to understand how ears and eyes might become instruments of persecution.

The death of his runner in the battle of Amiens in August 1918 was another experience that Bion repeatedly brought to mind. Having led his tanks into action, Bion and Sweeting had taken cover from a heavy bombardment in a ditch beside the Amiens-Roye road when a shell burst directly above them. In the 1919 “Diary” Bion writes:

I heard a groan from Sweeting. The left side of his tunic seemed covered with blood, and as I looked, I discovered that the whole of his left side had been torn away so that the inside of the trunk lay exposed. But he was not dead.

He was quite a young boy and was terrified, as he did not quite realize what had happened. He tried to see what had happened, but I would not let him. I pretended to bandage him, but of course the field dressing was far too small and simply didn’t come near to covering the cavity. He kept on saying “I’m done for, sir! I’m done for!,” hoping against hope I would contradict him. This I did, telling him it was nothing—but his eyes were already glazing over, and it was clear that death was even then upon him. He kept trying to cough, but of course the wind only came out of his side. He kept asking me why he couldn’t cough.

He gave me his mother’s address, and I promised to write.^{xlvii}

The 1919 account conveys a picture of a young officer who, acting in what he feels are the best interests of one of his men, dissembles. He sees the gaping hole in the young soldier’s side (Sweeting himself senses the seriousness of his plight, as his question about coughing suggests), and his response is to hide the true extent of the injuries from the dying man. His reassurance, like the bandage itself, cannot conceal the catastrophic wound.

In the 1958 memoir “Amiens,” written on the eve of the 40th anniversary of the battle, this account is altered in such a way as to sharpen the aspect of failed containing. Sweeting’s wounds are more graphically described, Bion recalling the “[g]usts of steam billowing out from his broken side.”^{xlviii} Sweeting’s desperation to communicate to his mother is more forcefully impressed upon his reader, Bion repeating the dying man’s injunction, “[M]other, mother, mother,” at least four times in the text.^{xlix} Rather than conveying an attitude of trying to manage Sweeting’s distress, this and later accounts emphasize Bion’s own terror and repugnance. Bion vomits “unrestrainedly, helplessly” on seeing that Sweeting’s lung has been blown away, a physical enactment of the incapacity to take in or introject. Whereas in the 1919 “Diary” the dutiful officer Bion responds to Sweeting’s request by promising to write, in the later accounts he is desperate not to hear. “Oh, for Christ’s sake shut up,” he orders Sweeting, while in *The Long Weekend* he pleads with him to “please, please, *shut up*,” and Bion himself begins to whimper.¹

Bion came to think of Sweeting’s death as one of his “old ghosts,” and in *The Long Weekend* he goes so far as to say “then I think he died. Or perhaps it was only me.”ⁱⁱ

By the time of writing *The Long Weekend*, Sweeting’s death had come to form a

shape in Bion's memory that closely fitted his psychoanalytic ideas. In 1919 his parents are presented with a raw account of a death at close hand, and as if to reinforce the fact that it might just as easily have been Bion who was hit, he encloses a photograph of at least *two* corpses on the adjoining page, taken, he tells them, on a track just off the road where Sweeting was hit.^{lii} The visual image—a substitute, not Bion's eyewitness experience—serves to convey the horror. Bion tells his parents that he and his fellow tank commander Hauser felt "very sick" about Sweeting's death, but he appears unable to reflect any further on its impact.^{liii}

The failure of maternal containing comes to define the traumatic event in the 1958 version: Sweeting is desperate to reach his mother, and Bion, when, called upon to act in lieu of a mother, reacts by violent projections from his mind and body. Bion the psychoanalyst thought that reverie was not only a quality of the mother, but of anyone who could listen, and in that context, it is interesting to note his insistence on the reader understanding that he could not bear to take in Sweeting's distress.^{liv} In his paper of 1959, "Attacks on Linking," he would give an account of a schizophrenic patient whose mother had behaved in just this way:

I felt that the patient had witnessed in infancy a mother who dutifully responded to the infant's emotional displays. The dutiful response had in it an element of impatient "I don't know what's the matter with the child." My deduction was that in order to understand what the child wanted the mother should have treated the infant's cry as more than a demand for her presence. From the infant's point of view she should have taken into her, and thus experienced, the fear that the child was dying. It was this fear that the child could not contain. He strove to split it off together with the part of the personality in which it lay and project it into the mother. An understanding mother is able to experience the feeling of dread that this baby was striving to deal with by projective identification, and yet retain a balanced outlook. This patient had had to deal with a mother who could not tolerate experiencing such feelings and reacted either by denying them ingress, or alternatively by becoming a prey to the anxiety which resulted from introjection of the baby's bad feelings.^{lv}

Bion, having experienced *actual* deaths, the fear of which he could not contain, and which no mother had contained, came to psychoanalysis and to the infant's fantasies of dying with a heightened sensibility toward maternal containing, and particularly toward catastrophic failures of containing.

Francesca and Home Life

In mid-March 1951 Bion met Francesca for the first time at the Tavistock Clinic. Bion was then chairman of the Medical Committee, and she a researcher. He soon took to lingering in the canteen, buying a second cup of tea in the hope that he might see her.^{lvi} By the end of March he was writing passionate letters to Francesca, in April they became engaged, and within four months of meeting they were married.^{lvii} Bion was by then 54 and Francesca 29. Both had been widowed, Bion's first wife Betty Jardine, a well-known actress, dying in childbirth in February 1945 while Bion was on overseas service as an army psychiatrist, leaving him (inverting the usual war legacy of bereaved wives) a lone father. Bion's analysis with Klein, which terminated

around 1952, occupied the period roughly between Betty's death and his marriage to Francesca.

The relationship with Francesca, although it took place over 30 years after World War I, had elements of a veteran marriage. The war was present from the start: at their first dinner together, recalled Francesca in 1997, Bion had spoken about it "as if compelled to communicate haunting nightmares."^{lviii} The psychoanalytic community was quick to endorse Francesca's role in supporting Bion. "I hear you are going to nurture genius," Francesca recalls a colleague remarking to her.^{lix} Her role as a facilitator extended to helping Bion reckon with the war. It was Francesca who, after Bion's death, edited and got into press the *War Memoirs* and *The Long Weekend*, rather like those middle-class mothers who, after World War I, edited their dead sons' letters and diaries and published them as memorial books.

Much of what we know about the marriage comes from Bion's letters to Francesca, and to his three children (Parthenope, born to Betty Jardine in 1945; and two children born to Francesca, Julian in 1952 and Nicola in 1955), which she published under the title "The Other Side of Genius."^{lx} Bion wrote passionate letters to Francesca during their brief courtship and whenever they were separated. These are striking in their emphasis upon her beauty. Bion loved to conjure mind-pictures of Francesca. After returning late in the evening from a group session at the Tavistock, he writes:

My darling you looked quite breath-takingly lovely today; even now I feel the thrill as I see you in my mind's eye. How I long to have you in my arms. And then I think how much I just want to sit and watch you, my dear sweetheart. Once I start thinking like this it is goodbye to all letter writing. I go into a daze of happiness . . .^{lxi}

A few days later he writes of meeting a colleague, Ken Rice, and how Rice knew without saying anything "what a tremendous thing it was for me that such a beautiful woman loved me."^{lxii} That he should be loved by such a woman made him feel he was himself a success. He proudly mounted Francesca's photograph above the mantelpiece of his Harley Street consulting room, and delighted in showing her off at parties held within Kleinian circles.^{lxiii} That feeling of being transfixed by the beauty of a woman was not new for Bion. An engagement in the 1920s to a Miss Hall, the "extremely beautiful" sister of a school-friend, had ended in bitter disappointment when she jilted him for another man.^{lxiv} His first wife Betty Jardine—whom Bion had first seen on stage—was described by Eric Trist as "very warm, attentive, very intelligent and very attractive."^{lxv}

The feeling of being in a daze of happiness is a constant theme in his letters to Francesca. In his first letter to her on March 22, 1951, he writes of walking home with a great wind blowing hazy clouds across a moon which was never visible but made all the trees stand out a deep grey against the silvery meadows and water. And all the time I could see you, and still see you, looking more ravishingly beautiful, as you did all the evening when I was with you, than any one could believe possible.^{lxvi}

Bion expressed his happiness in the terms of dreaming: after proposing to Francesca at the end of April, he writes, "[I]f this is a dream it is the longest and most marvellous dream I have ever had; if it is not a dream then I don't know how to contain myself."^{lxvii}

Why did the love of a beautiful woman matter so much to Bion? For soldiers during the war, wives and sweethearts were often felt to be crucial to survival. The memory of the loved one, and the prospect of returning to them, some felt, would sustain them through danger. When the shells were “coming over and are falling unpleasantly near” him, the newly married battery gunner Billy Wightman would think of his wife’s clothing, face, and the smell of her perfume. “I want to live so as to come back to you, my darling,” he wrote.^{lxviii} The promise of love gave men a reason to survive, but dreams of beauty also gave respite. Bion’s euphoric imaginings of Francesca, 33 years after the war, had a counterpoint in the visions of the war, which, he intimates in *All My Sins Remembered*, continued to haunt him.^{lxix} In love, he found himself enjoying his sleep, and in his psychoanalytic writings he came to recommend the importance of sleep for the analyst, whose capacity for reverie depended on freeing his mind from the pressure of immediate thoughts and being able to “dream the session” without falling asleep.^{lxx}

Bion experienced falling in love as the sloughing off of old defenses, and he described this in terms that evoked the carapace of the tank. He told Francesca that his work was “coming alive; the dull numb mechanical routine into which I have fallen is bursting wide open and it is all you my darling, my darling Francesca.”^{lxxi} This description resonates with an earlier flowering of a very different kind, the blowing up of Lieutenant Cartwright’s tank at Amiens. In his 1958 memoir Bion describes how “[s]uddenly its sides seemed to open like a flower, a sheet of flame shot above it, and there lay the tank with its sides bulged open and its roof gone. The bodies of the crew were flung over the buckled walls, like the guts of some fantastic animal hanging out of a vast gaping wound.”^{lxxii} The feeling of love bursting open ancient defenses is made more explicit in Bion’s letter a few days later: “I just feel very happy; so inexpressibly happy. Even my crusted and hardened armour plate of fossilized worry seems to be shaling off each time I see you.”^{lxxiii} The concept of reverie seems connected to his growing ability to dream, under the influence of his love for the beautiful Francesca. “Darling, as soon as I start writing this I find I get lost in reverie,” he told her in May 1951.^{lxxiv}

Bion wanted the love of a beautiful woman, but he also wanted a homemaker and mother. In agreeing to marry him, Francesca had relieved Bion of the burden of being a sole parent, and freed him up to become a father. She had “given Parthenope back to me and made me feel what it is like to have a child,” he writes in April 1951.^{lxxv} Because Bion was busy with his clients, and so that Francesca would get to know her new stepdaughter better, they decided that instead of going on a honeymoon (this would be delayed until 1958), she would take Parthenope on holiday to the south coast.^{lxxvi}

The couple put great energy into establishing a new home. Soon after the wedding Bion sold the cottage he had bought after Betty’s death, and he and Francesca moved into a substantial house, Redcourt in Croydon. Bion was excited by the prospect of redecorating the house, writing enthusiastically to Francesca of his paint gun and whitewashing pump.^{lxxvii} Having been without a partner for many years (he had often been separated from Betty during the war), the thought of being looked after gave

Bion great pleasure. In April he writes, “You cannot imagine how good I feel when you say you will fetch me a cup of tea. Darling, I love your doing things for me. I am just not used to it, that’s all.”^{lxxviii} Like other World War I soldiers who had suffered the privations of the Western Front, Bion knew how to care for himself in domestic matters, but was deeply desirous of home comforts.^{lxxix}

Francesca occupied the role of homemaker and supported Bion’s professional career for the remainder of their married life. While he took the children for their annual holidays, she supervised the alterations to his consulting rooms at their second home, Wells Rise in London, and she did the house-hunting when they moved to America.^{lxxx} In old age he continued to be touched by Francesca’s attentiveness in domestic matters. After her departure for Los Angeles in May 1969, Bion, who had stayed on in London, writes: “It seemed very queer to come back to an empty house but nice to see the message in red on the blotter. And the table set!”^{lxxxii}

This was the kind of attentiveness that young soldiers in World War I, separated from their homes, had looked forward to in their parcels (called, significantly), “home comforts.” They wanted loved ones to intuit their needs, for socks and underwear to arrive just as their supply was exhausted, and for their favorite foods to arrive when they were needful. “I need not tell you what I want because you always know best and anticipate me,” wrote Graham Greenwell in a manner that expressed his gratitude, but also set a certain standard of expectation.^{lxxxii} “Mummy is a veritable witch,” wrote Ged Garvin to his father, “the towel came just right . . .”^{lxxxiii}

Like these soldiers, Bion regarded empathetic anticipation as a sign of maternal love. Indeed, this is the essence of his idea of maternal reverie. For the infant to flourish, he felt, the mother had to possess the capacity to remain unconsciously attuned to its needs, attending to them before it was even fully aware of them. Bion writes that a mother who is capable of reverie “can discern a state of mind in her infant before the infant can be conscious of it, as for example when the baby shows signs of needing food before it is properly aware of it.”^{lxxxiv} Reverie requires the mother to possess a “psychological receptor organ” capable of taking in the projective identifications of the infant whether they are “good or bad.”^{lxxxv} Looking back in the 1990s on her relationship with Bion, Francesca at one point describes herself as his “receptor and confidante.” Her comment conveys a sense of how, in attending to his domestic wants and creating a home for him, she helped shield him from the demands of public life and supported his capacity to be creative.^{lxxxvi} There are significant parallels between young soldiers’ ideals of maternal care, Bion’s concept of reverie, and Francesca’s role in the marriage to Bion.

In summer 1958, seven years after they were married, Bion and Francesca finally celebrated their honeymoon with a week’s holiday in Paris. As they passed through Amiens, almost 40 years to the day since the battle, Bion began to compose his memoir. His commentary reveals the importance of Francesca in supporting his creativity as a psychoanalyst and in helping him to reckon with the war. The pockmarked ground over which they traveled, wrote Bion—in a telling association with the mental marks of trauma—was barely more disguised with weed and

willowherb than it had been at the end of the war. But rather than becoming bogged down in the memory of that landscape, Bion fixed on Francesca's beauty:

As the train sped through the complex of lines, I said to Francesca that it seemed strange that it was almost forty years ago to the day when I had last been here, and in such very different circumstances. It was a dream for her to be sitting opposite to me—a girl so beautiful, so loving, so near to a dream that I had always thought could never, never, never come to pass for me.^{lxxxvii}

Secure in his psychoanalytic home and his home with Francesca and absorbed in a reverie of her beauty, Bion was able to return to the psychic landscape of Amiens in 1918, to Sweeting's death, the blown-up tank of Cartwright, the nauseous feeling of "impending disaster," and his difficulties sleeping. "[O]ne gets the most appalling dreams," the character Bion tells his comrade Asser in the 1958 memoirs, and "when you wake up you don't know whether it wouldn't have been better to go on sleeping."^{lxxxviii} In Francesca, we might say, Bion had found a means of recovering his capacity to dream, a capacity that, he would argue in *Learning from Experience*, was necessary in order to think.

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Moving between Bion's 1919 account of the war and his later psychoanalytic concepts, I have tried to show the affinities between the landscape of trench warfare experienced by Bion in his youth—its splintering projectiles, whose violent explosions batter the senses; the human and mechanical carapaces blown open—and the emotional landscape of the psychotic described by Bion in later life. Others have remarked on the element of "tankishness" in his clinical writings, but this tendency extended beyond the vocabulary of psychoanalysis to his most intimate personal correspondence.^{lxxxix}

Such affinities lead me to wonder about the connections in Bion's life among war, love, and psychoanalytic understanding. While World War I may have had an influence on Bion's ideas about psychotic states, equally, his psychoanalytic sensibilities informed his efforts to reappraise the war.^{xc} Lacking the capacity of reverie, the violent events of trench warfare—epitomized in the nightmare of slipping into the Steenbeck—had remained lodged within Bion's mind into middle-age, almost as if they were physical wounds. When he began to reread the war in the late 1950s he was in the middle of his discoveries about the maternal relation; the clinical developments seem related to his increased capacity to remember the war, but at that point in his life the autobiographical and the psychoanalytic modes, though they run in tandem, remained separate.

His psychoanalytic writings of that time keep a firm lid on historical events. Bion steadfastly maintains the *internal* reality as his object of interest. Early in the essay "Development of Schizophrenic Thought," for example, he states, "In this paper I ignore the environment."^{xc} The theories appear to be derived exclusively from the clinical setting, even though—or perhaps precisely because—external events had intruded so violently upon Bion's mind 40 years earlier. Concepts such as containing, nameless dread, and bizarre objects gave a form to terrifying sensations that Bion had known from trench warfare, but which he now claimed as universal psychic

processes. Most psychoanalytically informed commentaries on trauma—including those on Bion himself—endorse such notions of the primacy of early experience, traumatic events being seen to expose and exacerbate earlier psychic injuries. His Amiens memory, remarks Kay Souter, is “a sort of literary equivalent of a screen memory,” which “compresses all Bion’s childhood terrors” of malevolent male violence.^{xcii} For Meg Harris Williams the associations are more maternal, the prehistoric allusions in Bion’s descriptions of blown-up tanks revealing a very early fear of “false mothers of the kind which trap and consume their children.”^{xciii} No doubt Bion’s view of the maternal relation was colored by his childhood experiences. However the war itself was also a source of deep disturbance, and he called upon all his psychoanalytic resources to help detoxify his memory of it; creating, in the process, a model of the mind in which the ultimate source of disturbance lay within early relationships and not the traumas of later life.^{xciv}

As Bion grew older, he seemed both more compelled and more able to bring the war and psychoanalysis into a relationship. As we have seen, in *The Long Weekend* he rewrote events like the death of Sweeting and the blowing up of Cartwright’s tank in a way that exemplified his psychoanalytic concerns and concepts. No doubt by then Bion had his psychoanalytic readership in mind, and although *The Long Weekend* does not engage in explicit psychoanalytic interpretation, it seems to encourage the reader in this direction, as the numerous Bionian commentaries on it attest. In later texts, such as *A Memoir of the Future* and the 1972 “Commentary,” Bion uses the technique of internal dialogue (e.g., between the characters “Captain,” or the psychoanalyst “P. A.” and others) to juxtapose fragments of war memory and psychoanalytic insight. Tellingly, in *the Memoir of the Future* it is the character “P. A.” who witnesses Sweeting’s thoracic wall being blown out.^{xcv}

It was not just his psychoanalytic understanding that supported Bion’s remembering of the war in later life, but his personal and family relationships. Bion was not unusual among World War I veterans in his sometimes fraught attempts to secure a home and family, and perhaps not unusual either in seeking feminine beauty as an antidote to his nightmares. His thoughts about maternal containing and his depiction of the war as a catastrophic failure of containing—symbolized in the dying Sweeting pleading for his mother—resonate with the views of other veterans, who were frequently resentful of women and yet needed their help to recuperate.^{xcvi} Bion’s acute sensitivity toward maternal failure marks him out as a member of the war generation.

Today Bion’s ideas remain influential in psychoanalytically inclined therapeutic circles. Within trauma theory, for example, the concept of containing is part of the standard vocabulary.^{xcvii} In tracing the provenance of such concepts, work on the history of psychoanalysis in Britain has tended to emphasize the impact of World War II in the postwar “maternal turn.”^{xcviii} Such influences are certainly important but there are older legacies at work in Bion. His theoretical formulations reflect the emergence of the welfare state and its maternalist discourse, but they also drew upon the emotional landscape of World War I. The last eyewitnesses of World War I may be dead, but the ubiquity of concepts like containing show how its influence

continues to be felt by subsequent generations; and in this sense we remain children of World War I.

Notes

I would like to thank Timothy Ashplant, Bob Hinshelwood, Sean Nixon, Sally Alexander, Barbara Taylor and audiences at Monash University and Newcastle University in Australia for their thoughts on this chapter.

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- i. 1. Wilfred R. Bion, *War Memoirs 1917–19* (London: Karnac, 1997), 3.
 - ii. 2. Dan Todman, *The Great War. Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon, 2005), 192–193.
 - iii. 3. Michael Roper, “Re-remembering the Soldier Hero: The Composure and Re-composure of Masculinity in Memories of the Great War,” *History Workshop Journal* 50 (Spring 2000), 181–205.
 - iv. 4. In postwar Britain, writes Eli Zaretsky, “the relation to the mother came to dominate analytic theory.” *Secrets of the Soul. A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Vintage, 2005), 251.
 - v. 5. In 1962 these essays were republished in Wilfred R. Bion, *Second Thoughts. Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac, 1991).
 - vi. 6. Mary Jacobus, *The Poetics of Psychoanalysis: In the Wake of Klein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 179. Kay Souter also concludes that Bion’s psychoanalytic approach was “connected to his personal history in a profound way.” Souter, “The War Memoirs: Some Origins of the Thought of W. R. Bion,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* (2009), 90, 976. See also Paulo Cesar Sandler, “Bion’s War Memoirs: A Psychoanalytical Commentary,” in Robert Lipgar and Malcolm Pines, eds., *Building on Bion: Roots, Origins and Context of Bion’s Contributions to Theory and Practice* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1993), 59–87; and Margaret H. Williams, “The Tiger and ‘O’”: <http://human-nature.com/free-associations/MegH-WTiger&O.html>, 1–21 (accessed August 25, 2009).

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- vii. 7. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 48; John Foley, *The Boilerplate War* (Slough: Frederick Muller, 1963), 71.
- viii. 8. David Fletcher, ed., *Tanks and Trenches. First Hand Accounts of Tank Warfare in the First World War* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1994), 88; Bion, *War Memoirs*, 48, 52.
- ix. 9. D. G. Browne, *The Tank in Action* (London: Blackwood, 1920), 158.
- x. 10. Quoted in Patrick Wright, *Tank. The Progress of a Monstrous War Machine* (London: Penguin, 2000), 121. Browne writes that “the terrific explosion in the restricted space, the whirlwind of flying white-hot metal, and the inevitable fire which follows, leave the crew with a poor hope of escaping” (Browne, *Tank in Action*, 172).
- xi. 11. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 6, 128.
- xii. 12. *Ibid.*, 133. On his fear of a direct hit, see *ibid.*, 137.
- xiii. 13. *Ibid.*, 185.
- xiv. 14. *Ibid.*, 5.
- xv. 15. *Ibid.*, 199.
- xvi. 16. Bion’s partly completed volume dealing with his life after the war, *All My Sins Remembered. Another Part of a Life* (London: Karnac, 1991), seems to have been drafted around 1978. This, coupled with Bion’s work in the mid-1970s on *A Memoir of the Future* (London: Karnac 1990), suggests that *The Long Weekend 1897–1919. Part of Life* (London: 1986) is likely to have been written in the early 1970s.
- xvii. 17. Sandler, “Bion’s War Memoirs,” 59.
- xviii. 18. Gérard Bléandonu, *Wilfred Bion. His Life and Works 1897–1979* (London: Free Association Press, 1994), 41.
- xix. 19. *Ibid.*, 35, 38.
- xx. 20. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 207–208; *The Long Weekend*, 211.
- xxi. 21. Tom Harrison, *Bion, Rickman, Foulkes and the Northfield Experiments. Advancing on a Different Front* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2000), 20.

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- xxii. 22. Dimitris Vonofakos and Bob Hinshelwood, “Wilfred Bion’s Letters to John Rickman (1939–1951),” *Psychoanalysis and History*. Volume 14, 2012, 53-94.
- xxiii. 23. Bléandonu, *Wilfred Bion*, 52.
- xxiv. 24. Bion, “The ‘war of nerves’: Civilian Reaction, Morale and Prophylaxis,” in Emanuel Miller, ed., *The War of Nerves. The Neuroses in War* (London: 1940), 181.
- xxv. 25. *Ibid.*, 191.
- xxvi. 26. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 59–60, 67. On subaltern officers and domestic care in World War I, see Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle. Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 119-203.
- xxvii. 27. Bion, “war of nerves,” 189.
- xxviii. 28. Bion’s 1919 description of the eve of the Battle of Amiens, with his tanks in position on the roadside, waiting for the bombardment to begin, strikingly evokes his later psychoanalytic concerns: “The strain had a very curious effect; I felt that all anxiety had become too much; I felt just like a small child that has had a tearful day and wants to be put to bed by its mother; I felt curiously eased by lying down on the bank by the side of the road, just as if I was lying peacefully in someone’s arms” (Bion, *War Memoirs*, 122).
- xxix. 29. *Ibid.*, 185.
- xxx. 30. Eric Trist, “Working with Bion in the 1940s,” in Malcolm Pines, ed., *Bion and Group Psychotherapy* (London: Routledge, 1992), 6; J. D. Sutherland, “Bion-Re-visited,” in Pines, ed., *Bion and Group Psychotherapy*, 48.
- xxxi. 31. Wilfred R. Bion, “Group Dynamics,” in Bion, *Experiences in Groups and Other Papers* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1961), 181.
- xxxii.32. *Ibid.*, 179.
- xxxiii. 33. The impact of this second analysis on both his personal and professional life in this period was no doubt far-reaching, although difficult to assess given the absence of documentation. Robert M. Young, “Bion and Experiences in Groups”:

<http://human-nature.com/rmyoung/papers/pap148h.html>, 3 (accessed on May 7, 2007).

xxxiv. 34. See, e.g., Trist, "Working with Bion," 5.

xxxv. 35. Isabel Menzies-Lyth emphasizes the importance of psychotic elements in Bion's work on both groups and individuals. Menzies-Lyth, "Bion's Contribution to Thinking about Groups," in James Grotstein, ed., *Do I dare disturb the universe? A Memorial to Wilfred R. Bion* (London: Karnac, 1983), 664.

xxxvi. 36. Bion, *Second Thoughts*, 110–119.

xxxvii. 37. Wilfred R. Bion, *Learning from Experience* (London: Karnac, 1991), 36.

xxxviii. 38. Bion, *Second Thoughts*, 114.

xxxix. 39. *Ibid.*, 116.

xl. 40. *Ibid.*, 37.

xli. 41. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 93–94. Sandler sees this as an instance of what Bion would later describe as the "psychotic personality," in which animate and inanimate are confused. Sandler, "Bion's *War Memoirs*," 74.

xlii. 42. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 93.

xliii. 43. Bion, *Memoir of the Future*, 53; *All My Sins Remembered*, 59–60.

xliv. 44. Bion, *Long Weekend*, 210.

xlv. 45. Bion, *Second Thoughts*, 39.

xlvi. 46. Bion gives the example of a gramophone. To the psychotic patient whose perception of sight has been spit off through processes of violent projective identification, the eye seems to encapsulate the gramophone, which, at once controlled and controlling, then seems to watch the patient. If the sensation of hearing is involved, the gramophone appears to be listening to the patient. The external object, the gramophone, is, to the psychotic, indistinguishable from the fragmented, split off, and now persecutory sensory organ. *Ibid.*, 40.

xlvii. 47. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 124–127. Mary Jacobus links Bion's account of the blown-up tanks at Amiens to Sweeting's death, seeing both as instances of a failed maternal container. Jacobus, *Poetics of Psychoanalysis*, 180–181.

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- xlvi. 48. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 255.
- xlix. 49. *Ibid.*, 255, 256, 289.
- l. 50. *Ibid.*, 255; Bion, *Long Weekend*, 248–249.
- li. 51. Bion, *Long Weekend*, 249, 264.
- lii. 52. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 126.
- liii. 53. *Ibid.*, 127.
- liv. 54. Robert Hinshelwood, *A Dictionary of Kleinian Thought* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 248.
- lv. 55. Bion, *Second Thoughts*, 104.
- lvi. 56. Wilfred R. Bion, *The Other Side of Genius* (London: Karnac, 1991), 86.
- lvii. 57. *Ibid.*, 239. “This sounds rather like rushing from impulse to action without any intervening thought,” commented Francesca in 1994; “be that as it may, the partnership endured.” Francesca Bion, “The Days of Our Lives,” The Institute of Psychoanalysis, <http://www.psychoanalysis.org.uk/days.htm>, 3 (accessed on December 10, 2010).
- lviii. 58. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 2.
- lix. 59. Bion, *Other Side of Genius*, 239.
- lx. 60. Francesca Bion had the letters published largely because she felt the “unrelieved gloom” of the war memoirs had presented a “false picture of the man who came to derive great happiness and reward from his marriage, family and work” (*ibid.*, 6).
- lxi. 61. *Ibid.*, 81.
- lxii. 62. *Ibid.*, 84
- lxiii. 63. *Ibid.*, 87.
- lxiv. 64. Bléandonu perceptively notes that in Bion’s account of Miss Hall, apart from beauty, “[n]one of her other characteristics is mentioned; we learn only that he was fascinated by such beauty” (Bléandonu, *Wilfred Bion*, 40).
- lxv. 65. *Ibid.*, 53.
- lxvi. 66. Bion, *Other Side of Genius*, 73.

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- lxvii. 67. Ibid., 95. In helping Bion to dream, comments Janet Sayers, Francesca's love allowed his psychoanalytic creativity to blossom. Janet Sayers, "Darling Francesca: Bion, Love-Letters and Madness," *Journal of European Studies* 32 (2002), 195–207. Sayers however does not ask why the capacity to dream might have meant so much to Bion; the war is largely absent from her account.
- lxviii. 68. W. O. Wightman to wife, May 20, 1918; July 14, 1918. Papers of W. O. Wightman, Imperial War Museum document collection, 01/45/1. See Michael Roper, 'Nostalgia as an emotional experience in the Great War', *The Historical Journal*, Volume 54, no. 2, 421-451.
- lxix. 69. Bion, *A ricordo di tutti i miei peccati*, Roma: Astrolabio, *All My Sins*, 16, 38.
- lxx. 70. "I must find a way of explaining to M. K. that I need sleep and then use it for writing!" Bion remarks to Francesca from the International Psycho-analytical Congress in 1953. Bion, *Other Side of Genius*, 114. See also Wilfred Bion, "How to Keep Awake," in *Cogitations* (London: Karnac, 1992), 120.
- lxxi. 71. Bion, L'altra faccia del genio. *A ricordo di tutti i miei peccati*, Roma: Astrolabio *Other Side of Genius*, 84.
- lxxii. 72. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 254. In the 1919 memoir Cartwright's tank was already alight when Bion came upon it, but in the 1958 account Bion watches it burst into flames. The *mental* impact of the experience, we might conjecture, reveals itself in the later accounts when Bion makes himself a witness to the moment of catastrophe. See also his spoken account on the sixtieth anniversary of Amiens (August 8, 1978), which recalls how the bodies of the crew "poured out of the tank as if they were the entrails of some mysterious beast of a primitive kind" (Bion, *Cogitations*, 368).
- lxxiii. 73. Bion, L'altra faccia del genio. *A ricordo di tutti i miei peccati*, Roma: Astrolabio *Other Side of Genius*, 93.
- lxxiv. 74. Ibid., 96.
- lxxv. 75. Ibid., 85.
- lxxvi. 76. Ibid., 95.

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- lxxvii. 77. Ibid., 85.
- lxxviii. 78. Ibid., 87.
- lxxix. 79. “Most ex-servicemen,” remarks Bion in 1940, “have learned the knack, in no mere academic school, of obtaining for themselves some sort of creature comforts in the most adverse circumstances” (Bion, “*War of nerves*,” 195).
- lxxx. 80. Bion, *Other Side of Genius*, 142, 145.
- lxxxii. 81. Ibid., 156.
- lxxxii. 82. Graham Greenwell, *An Infant in Arms. War Letters of a Company Officer* (London: Allen Lane, 1972), 15.
- lxxxiii. 83. Mark Pottle and John G. G. Ledingham, eds., *We Hope to Get Word Tomorrow. The Garvin Family Letters, 1914–1916* (London: Frontline Books, 2009), 47.
- lxxxiv. 84. Bion, *Learning from Experience*, 34.
- lxxxv. 85. Ibid., 36.
- lxxxvi. 86. Francesca Bion, (I giorni della nostra vita) “*Days of Our Lives*,” 10.
- lxxxvii. 87. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 215–216.
- lxxxviii. 88. Ibid., 236–237.
- lxxxix. 89. Souter, “*The War Memoirs*,” 796.
- xc. 90. Ibid., 801.
- xcii. 91. Bion, *Second Thoughts*, 37.
- xcii. 92. Souter, “*The War Memoirs*,” 802.
- xciii. 93. Williams, “*The Tiger and ‘O’*,” 12. Similarly, in her review of *The Long Weekend*, Margot Waddell describes Bion’s account of his time in tanks as a “representation of much earlier meanings,” such as “primitive sexual anxieties, of birth and death” (Waddell, “*Essay Review of The Long Weekend 1897–1919: Part of a Life*,” *Free Associations*: <http://human-nature.com/free-associations/longweekend.html>, 9 [accessed October 7, 2010]).
- xciv. 94. Mary Jacobus points toward this kind of analysis, commenting that Bion’s later theories “may serve as models or containers for the anxiety of annihilation

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- aroused by traumatic experience and memory” (Jacobus, *Poetics of Psychoanalysis*, 193).
- xcv. 95. Bion, *Memoir of the Future*, 256.
- xcvi. 96. On the role of women in supporting the recovery of veterans after World War I, see Roper, *The Secret Battle*, chapter 7, 276-314..
- xcvii. 97. “The earthquake, the train-crash, the fire, the rape, the kidnapping, all represent a massive failure of the maternal container,” remarks Caroline Garland. See “Issues in Treatment: A Case of Rape,” in C. Garland, ed., *Understanding Trauma. A Psychoanalytical Approach* (London: Karnac, 1998), 108.
- xcviii. 98. See Denise Riley, *The War in the Nursery. Theories of the Child and Mother* (London: Virago, 1983), esp. chapter 4; Juliet Mitchell, *Psicoanalisi e femminismo*. Torino: Einaudi. *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin, 1975), 227–231.
- xcviii. 99. Wilfred R. Bion, *War Memoirs 1917–19* (London: Karnac, 1997), 3.
- xcviii. 99. Dan Todman, *The Great War. Myth and Memory* (London: Hambleton, 2005), 192–193.
- xcviii. 99. Michael Roper, “Re-remembering the Soldier Hero: The Composure and Re-composure of Masculinity in Memories of the Great War,” *History Workshop Journal* 50 (Spring 2000), 181–205.
- xcviii. 99. In postwar Britain, writes Eli Zaretsky, “the relation to the mother came to dominate analytic theory.” *Secrets of the Soul. A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Vintage, 2005), 251.
- xcviii. 99. In 1962 these essays were republished in Wilfred R. Bion, *Second Thoughts. Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac, 1991).
- xcviii. 99. Mary Jacobus, *The Poetics of Psychoanalysis: In the Wake of Klein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 179. Kay Souter also concludes that Bion’s psychoanalytic approach was “connected to his personal history in a profound way.” Souter, “The War Memoirs: Some Origins of the Thought of W. R. Bion,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* (2009), 90, 976. See also Paulo

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- Cesar Sandler, "Bion's War Memoirs: A Psychoanalytical Commentary," in Robert Lipgar and Malcolm Pines, eds., *Building on Bion: Roots, Origins and Context of Bion's Contributions to Theory and Practice* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1993), 59–87; and Margaret H. Williams, "The Tiger and 'O'": <http://human-nature.com/free-associations/MegH-WTiger&O.html>, 1–21 (accessed August 25, 2009).
- xcviii. Bion, *Memorie di guerra, War Memoirs*, 48; John Foley, *The Boilerplate War* (Slough: Frederick Muller, 1963), 71.
- xcviii. David Fletcher, ed., *Tanks and Trenches. First Hand Accounts of Tank Warfare in the First World War* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1994), 88; Bion, *War Memoirs*, 48, 52.
- xcviii. D. G. Browne, *The Tank in Action* (London: Blackwood, 1920), 158.
- xcviii. Quoted in Patrick Wright, *Tank. The Progress of a Monstrous War Machine* (London: Penguin, 2000), 121. Browne writes that "the terrific explosion in the restricted space, the whirlwind of flying white-hot metal, and the inevitable fire which follows, leave the crew with a poor hope of escaping" (Browne, *Tank in Action*, 172).
- xcviii. Bion, *Memorie di guerra. War Memoirs*, 6, 128.
- xcviii. *Ibid.*, 133. On his fear of a direct hit, see *ibid.*, 137.
- xcviii. *Ibid.*, 185.
- xcviii. *Ibid.*, 5.
- xcviii. *Ibid.*, 199.
- xcviii. Bion's partly completed volume dealing with his life after the war, *All My Sins Remembered. Another Part of a Life* (London: Karnac, 1991), seems to have been drafted around 1978. This, coupled with Bion's work in the mid-1970s on *Memoria del futuro*. Milano: Cortina. *A Memoir of the Future* (London: Karnac 1990), suggests that *The Long Weekend 1897–1919. Part of Life* (London: 1986) is likely to have been written in the early 1970s.
- xcviii. Sandler, "Bion's War Memoirs," 59.

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- xcviii. Gérard Bléandonu, Wilfred Bion, *Vita e opere*. Roma: Borla. *Wilfred Bion. His Life and Works 1897–1979* (London: Free Association Press, 1994), 41.
- xcviii. *Ibid.*, 35, 38.
- xcviii. Bion, Memorie di guerra. *War Memoirs*, 207–208; *The Long Weekend*, 211.
- xcviii. Tom Harrison, *Bion, Rickman, Foulkes and the Northfield Experiments. Advancing on a Different Front* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2000), 20.
- xcviii. Dimitris Vonofakos and Bob Hinshelwood, “Wilfred Bion’s Letters to John Rickman (1939–1951),” *Psychoanalysis and History*. Volume 14, 2012, 53-94.
- xcviii. Bléandonu, *Wilfred Bion*, 52.
- xcviii. Bion, “The ‘war of nerves’: Civilian Reaction, Morale and Prophylaxis,” in Emanuel Miller, ed., *The War of Nerves. The Neuroses in War* (London: 1940), 181.
- xcviii. *Ibid.*, 191.
- xcviii. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 59–60, 67. On subaltern officers and domestic care in World War I, see Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle. Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 119-203.
- xcviii. Bion, “*War of nerves*,” 189.
- xcviii. Bion’s 1919 description of the eve of the Battle of Amiens, with his tanks in position on the roadside, waiting for the bombardment to begin, strikingly evokes his later psychoanalytic concerns: “The strain had a very curious effect; I felt that all anxiety had become too much; I felt just like a small child that has had a tearful day and wants to be put to bed by its mother; I felt curiously eased by lying down on the bank by the side of the road, just as if I was lying peacefully in someone’s arms” (Bion, *War Memoirs*, 122).
- xcviii. *Ibid.*, 185.
- xcviii. Eric Trist, “Working with Bion in the 1940s,” in Malcolm Pines, ed., *Bion and Group Psychotherapy* (London: Routledge, 1992), 6; J. D. Sutherland, “Bion-Revisited,” in Pines, ed., *Bion and Group Psychotherapy*, 48.

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- xcviii. Wilfred R. Bion, "Group Dynamics," in Bion, *Experiences in Groups and Other Papers* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1961), 181.
- xcviii. *Ibid.*, 179.
- xcviii. The impact of this second analysis on both his personal and professional life in this period was no doubt far-reaching, although difficult to assess given the absence of documentation. Robert M. Young, "Bion and Experiences in Groups": <http://human-nature.com/rmyoung/papers/pap148h.html>, 3 (accessed on May 7, 2007).
- xcviii. See, e.g., Trist, "Working with Bion," 5.
- xcviii. Isabel Menzies-Lyth emphasizes the importance of psychotic elements in Bion's work on both groups and individuals. Menzies-Lyth, "Bion's Contribution to Thinking about Groups," in James Grotstein, ed., *Do I dare disturb the universe? A Memorial to Wilfred R. Bion* (London: Karnac, 1983), 664.
- xcviii. Bion, *Second Thoughts*, 110–119.
- xcviii. Wilfred R. Bion, *Learning from Experience* (London: Karnac, 1991), 36.
- xcviii. Bion, *Second Thoughts*, 114.
- xcviii. *Ibid.*, 116.
- xcviii. *Ibid.*, 37.
- xcviii. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 93–94. Sandler sees this as an instance of what Bion would later describe as the "psychotic personality," in which animate and inanimate are confused. Sandler, "Bion's *War Memoirs*," 74.
- xcviii. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 93.
- xcviii. Bion, *Memoir of the Future*, 53; *All My Sins Remembered*, 59–60.
- xcviii. Bion, *Long Weekend*, 210.
- xcviii. Bion, *Second Thoughts*, 39.
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- hearing is involved, the gramophone appears to be listening to the patient. The external object, the gramophone, is, to the psychotic, indistinguishable from the fragmented, split off, and now persecutory sensory organ. *Ibid.*, 40.
- xcviii. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 124–127. Mary Jacobus links Bion’s account of the blown-up tanks at Amiens to Sweeting’s death, seeing both as instances of a failed maternal container. Jacobus, *Poetics of Psychoanalysis*, 180–181.
- xcviii. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 255.
- xcviii. *Ibid.*, 255, 256, 289.
- xcviii. *Ibid.*, 255; Bion, *Long Weekend*, 248–249.
- xcviii. Bion, *Long Weekend*, 249, 264.
- xcviii. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 126.
- xcviii. *Ibid.*, 127.
- xcviii. Robert Hinshelwood, *A Dictionary of Kleinian Thought* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 248.
- xcviii. Bion, *Second Thoughts*, 104.
- xcviii. Wilfred R. Bion, *The Other Side of Genius* (London: Karnac, 1991), 86.
- xcviii. *Ibid.*, 239. “This sounds rather like rushing from impulse to action without any intervening thought,” commented Francesca in 1994; “be that as it may, the partnership endured.” Francesca Bion, “The Days of Our Lives,” *The Institute of Psychoanalysis*, <http://www.psychoanalysis.org.uk/days.htm>, 3 (accessed on December 10, 2010).
- xcviii. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 2.
- xcviii. Bion, *Other Side of Genius*, 239.
- xcviii. Francesca Bion had the letters published largely because she felt the “unrelieved gloom” of the war memoirs had presented a “false picture of the man who came to derive great happiness and reward from his marriage, family and work” (*ibid.*, 6).
- xcviii. *Ibid.*, 81.
- xcviii. *Ibid.*, 84

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xcviii. Bléandonu perceptively notes that in Bion's account of Miss Hall, apart from beauty, "[n]one of her other characteristics is mentioned; we learn only that he was fascinated by such beauty" (Bléandonu, *Wilfred Bion*, 40).

xcviii. Ibid., 53.

xcviii. Bion, *Other Side of Genius*, 73.

xcviii. Ibid., 95. In helping Bion to dream, comments Janet Sayers, Francesca's love allowed his psychoanalytic creativity to blossom. Janet Sayers, "Darling Francesca: Bion, Love-Letters and Madness," *Journal of European Studies* 32 (2002), 195–207. Sayers however does not ask why the capacity to dream might have meant so much to Bion; the war is largely absent from her account.

xcviii. W. O. Wightman to wife, May 20, 1918; July 14, 1918. Papers of W. O. Wightman, Imperial War Museum document collection, 01/45/1. See Michael Roper, 'Nostalgia as an emotional experience in the Great War', *The Historical Journal*, Volume 54, no. 2, 421-451.

xcviii. Bion, *All My Sins*, 16, 38.

xcviii. "I must find a way of explaining to M. K. that I need sleep and then use it for writing!" Bion remarks to Francesca from the International Psycho-analytical Congress in 1953. Bion, *Other Side of Genius*, 114. See also Wilfred Bion, "How to Keep Awake," in *Cogitations* (London: Karnac, 1992), 120.

xcviii. Bion, *Other Side of Genius*, 84.

xcviii. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 254. In the 1919 memoir Cartwright's tank was already alight when Bion came upon it, but in the 1958 account Bion watches it burst into flames. The *mental* impact of the experience, we might conjecture, reveals itself in the later accounts when Bion makes himself a witness to the moment of catastrophe. See also his spoken account on the sixtieth anniversary of Amiens (August 8, 1978), which recalls how the bodies of the crew "poured out of the tank as if they were the entrails of some mysterious beast of a primitive kind" (Bion, *Cogitations*, 368).

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- xcviii. Bion, *Other Side of Genius*, 93.
- xcviii. Ibid., 96.
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- xcviii. “Most ex-servicemen,” remarks Bion in 1940, “have learned the knack, in no mere academic school, of obtaining for themselves some sort of creature comforts in the most adverse circumstances” (Bion, “war of nerves,” 195).
- xcviii. Bion, *Other Side of Genius*, 142, 145.
- xcviii. Ibid., 156.
- xcviii. Graham Greenwell, *An Infant in Arms. War Letters of a Company Officer* (London: Allen Lane, 1972), 15.
- xcviii. Mark Pottle and John G. G. Ledingham, eds., *We Hope to Get Word Tomorrow. The Garvin Family Letters, 1914–1916* (London: Frontline Books, 2009), 47.
- xcviii. Bion, *Learning from Experience*, 34.
- xcviii. Ibid., 36.
- xcviii. Francesca Bion, “Days of Our Lives,” 10.
- xcviii. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 215–216.
- xcviii. Ibid., 236–237.
- xcviii. Souter, “The War Memoirs,” 796.
- xcviii. Ibid., 801.
- xcviii. Bion, *Second Thoughts*, 37.
- xcviii. Souter, “The War Memoirs,” 802.
- xcviii. Williams, “The Tiger and ‘O,’” 12. Similarly, in her review of *The Long Weekend*, Margot Waddell describes Bion’s account of his time in tanks as a “representation of much earlier meanings,” such as “primitive sexual anxieties, of birth and death” (Waddell, “Essay Review of *The Long Weekend* 1897–1919: Part

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- xcviii. Mary Jacobus points toward this kind of analysis, commenting that Bion’s later theories “may serve as models or containers for the anxiety of annihilation aroused by traumatic experience and memory” (Jacobus, *Poetics of Psychoanalysis*, 193).
- xcviii. Bion, *Memoir of the Future*, 256.
- xcviii. On the role of women in supporting the recovery of veterans after World War I, see Roper, *The Secret Battle*, chapter 7, 276-314..
- xcviii. “The earthquake, the train-crash, the fire, the rape, the kidnapping, all represent a massive failure of the maternal container,” remarks Caroline Garland. See “Issues in Treatment: A Case of Rape,” in C. Garland, ed., *Understanding Trauma. A Psychoanalytical Approach* (London: Karnac, 1998), 108.
- xcviii. See Denise Riley, *The War in the Nursery. Theories of the Child and Mother* (London: Virago, 1983), esp. chapter 4; Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin, 1975), 227–231.
- xcviii. Wilfred R. Bion, *War Memoirs 1917–19* (London: Karnac, 1997), 3.
- xcviii. Dan Todman, *The Great War. Myth and Memory* (London: Hambleton, 2005), 192–193.
- xcviii. Michael Roper, “Re-remembering the Soldier Hero: The Composure and Re-composure of Masculinity in Memories of the Great War,” *History Workshop Journal* 50 (Spring 2000), 181–205.
- xcviii. In postwar Britain, writes Eli Zaretsky, “the relation to the mother came to dominate analytic theory.” *Secrets of the Soul. A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Vintage, 2005), 251.
- xcviii. In 1962 these essays were republished in Wilfred R. Bion, *Second Thoughts. Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac, 1991).
- xcviii. Mary Jacobus, *The Poetics of Psychoanalysis: In the Wake of Klein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 179. Kay Souter also concludes that Bion’s

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- psychoanalytic approach was “connected to his personal history in a profound way.” Souter, “The War Memoirs: Some Origins of the Thought of W. R. Bion,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* (2009), 90, 976. See also Paulo Cesar Sandler, “Bion’s War Memoirs: A Psychoanalytical Commentary,” in Robert Lipgar and Malcolm Pines, eds., *Building on Bion: Roots, Origins and Context of Bion’s Contributions to Theory and Practice* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1993), 59–87; and Margaret H. Williams, “The Tiger and ‘O’”: <http://human-nature.com/free-associations/MegH-WTiger&O.html>, 1–21 (accessed August 25, 2009).
- xcviii. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 48; John Foley, *The Boilerplate War* (Slough: Frederick Muller, 1963), 71.
- xcviii. David Fletcher, ed., *Tanks and Trenches. First Hand Accounts of Tank Warfare in the First World War* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1994), 88; Bion, *War Memoirs*, 48, 52.
- xcviii. D. G. Browne, *The Tank in Action* (London: Blackwood, 1920), 158.
- xcviii. Quoted in Patrick Wright, *Tank. The Progress of a Monstrous War Machine* (London: Penguin, 2000), 121. Browne writes that “the terrific explosion in the restricted space, the whirlwind of flying white-hot metal, and the inevitable fire which follows, leave the crew with a poor hope of escaping” (Browne, *Tank in Action*, 172).
- xcviii. Bion, *War Memoirs*, 6, 128.
- xcviii. *Ibid.*, 133. On his fear of a direct hit, see *ibid.*, 137.
- xcviii. *Ibid.*, 185.
- xcviii. *Ibid.*, 5.
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