

## Listening and Interpretation (in Child and Adolescent Psychoanalysis)

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There exists a Japanese literary theory (see Barry Goffold) known as *Shosetsu*. It's a form of an autobiographical narrative that authorizes the author to grow apart, every now and then, from the truth of events. Transposing this literary theory into the analyst's account of a cure -I make reference to the use of clinical vignettes, so typical of our presentations - allows to evoke and convey something essential about our clinical experiences, always protecting the confidentiality inherent to any cure.

So with a brief *Shosetsu*, I would like to introduce the subject matter of this work: "*Listening and interpretation*" (in psychoanalysis with children).

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*Bruno is a nine years-old little boy, the younger of two siblings. His parents, still quite young, had to confide their elder daughter to the care of a psychoanalyst, due to recurrent actings out through her adolescent years. The parents declare themselves satisfied with the results of this work with the psychoanalyst. And their young daughter continues her studies at a boarding school.*

*As Bruno, a lively little boy, starts to cause trouble mainly in class (he is irritable, distracted, failing in all the subjects), his parents, surprised by this sudden change, feel the need to talk to someone about this, since the child has become somewhat reserved towards them, that's to say, he avoids them.*

*"It's almost impossible to grab hold of him" says the father "I even tried to play console games with him to see if we would manage to talk a bit".*

*The mother, a nice woman who works in a big library, tells the analyst that she has been thinking about a series of family duels occurred in the past two years and of which "Bruno might as well seem to have suffered". The father, a liberal professional, ran out of theories to explain himself the changes of attitude of his son; rather, he thinks it'd be appropriate to restrict Bruno's frequent visits to his maternal grandmother's house. "He is everything she has now, especially after the death of her son, taken away by AIDS", he says. He was his wife's eldest brother, to whom the old lady had devoted most of her time*

*throughout his disease. The analyst also realizes that, for quite a while now, Bruno can't help stumbling here and there. "Nothing serious, actually" the parents say, as the child would start walking on his own at an early age. They also point out that Bruno has always been very independent, except from his big sister: some sort of a "tomboy"...*

*The analyst has the impression that this parental couple is too focused on their children's education. However, these kids take them by surprise, somehow causing a compelled solidarity in adversity. It's clear, the parents feel overwhelmed. They look worried. According to the portrait they make of Bruno, they seem to be talking of a child who has somehow betrayed their confidence. "No matter what he does, he is absent-minded...We were not up to this (Bruno's bad schooling); and certainly not now", the father remarks, staring at his wife. "My wife has just accepted a position as Head of the library and her job keeps her too busy. As for myself, says the father, I'm looking for another partner to work with me at my office. As you know, our position as consultants is not the same now as it was before. These are hard times. We must fight hard so as not to be swallowed up by the competition! The analyst perceives this couple: their worries and their attitude are promising of a good working alliance regarding the analysis of this child described as evitative, entrenched in the typical thoughts of the end of latency.*

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Much to his annoyance, aware of the sacrifice he may have to make, Bruno attends his sessions on a regular basis, as he is already involved in other after-school activities such as swimming and, particularly, attending an introductory course of Japanese Language. Both weekly sessions had been negotiated between him and his parents, according to the framework proposed by the analyst after the first consultation with Bruno.

*As soon as this first session begins, Bruno's questions arise, such as: "What can be done here? What will we do now? How long does this take?" And also: "How old are you? Do you live here?" Questions he poses to the analyst without looking at him, standing close to the window, exploring though, out of the corner of the eye, every single corner of the office of this Mister who happens to be older than his parents.*

*"By coming here, Bruno lets me know he has a million questions in mind today", the analyst remarks in a low voice, without looking at him directly. With an irritating tone, Bruno says: "Shut your trap!" Taken by surprise (just like the parents), the analyst remains silent and after a while, he resumes in the same tone of voice: "It must not be nice for this child to listen to a stranger talking about him in such terms...even if what he says will remain here, between us".*

*Bruno shrugs his shoulders and asks: "Is there at least a toilet here?" Asking if it is urgent, the analyst points out the door. This response falls flat and, always without looking at*

*the analyst, Bruno notices the toy box placed at his disposal on a low table. He keeps his hands in his pockets as he smiles to himself; then he mutters some scarcely audible phrases and without asking for permission, he stretches on the couch just lying next to the analyst's armchair. He realizes that from such position, Bruno is able to look at him from the corner of the eye. So to speak, they don't lose sight of each other. A tense silence accompanies this physical proximity between them. At that moment, aware of the prevailing anxiety, the analyst decides to say: "Like every child who comes to see me, Bruno will also be able to say and to do whatever he wants here, as long as he doesn't hurt himself, or myself -and after a brief pause, he adds: "That goes for me too".*

*Bruno sits up straight on the couch, the head between his hands. He sweeps his eyes over the parquet floor. He's doing some sort of exploration of this 'room-inwardness', thinks the analyst who, likewise, finds himself staring at the parquet floor. He tells himself: "I'm following him. Where is he taking me?"*

*Then, the analyst observes the layout –somehow irregular- of the parquet planks. Later, and maybe to get rid of the stressful collage caused by the irregular profile of the planks, the image of a painting crosses his mind. The painting illustrates a group of workers focused in laying the parquet flooring of an apartment. The workers sweat, they work hard, they don't talk to each other... There must be a man staring at them from the back of the room. Apparently, he attempts to make sure that everything goes smoothly. Why this image? -wonders the analyst. It is a beautiful realist painting that evokes the hardships of labor. These workers kneeling down on the parquet surface, were they two or three? They do their work scrupulously in spite of their rather uncomfortable position.*

*Leaving aside these considerations concerning the situation represented in the painting, the analyst tells Bruno: "The parquet floor is not regular at all, is it? There are some small cracks..." Looking at it, Bruno replies, in a disenchanted but firm tone: "Shut up!" He stands up and goes to the toilet.*

*At that point, the analyst thinks about Bruno's need to avoid his glance, to ignore his words, to evacuate the anxiety caused by this evocation of the cracks in the parquet. Then he imagines the toilet, wondering if he will manage to reach the switch, if there is toilet paper left. It looks as if, accompanying him from a distance, the analyst would indicate him what it takes to make proper use of that isolated place (the toilet- cabinet).*

*The analyst will abandon his thoughtful attitude with a shy smile on his lips. He envisions himself as a mom somehow phobic towards cleaning, but also as a father who, able to name things from a distance, tells little Bruno about his knowledge of the place (which may occur in his body-psyche space).*

*Bruno remains in the toilet for quite a while. The analyst takes his time to daydream about this restless, gloomy, aversive little boy... In which fantasies-cracks is he hiding? Where has he fallen, to feel so anxious and upset at the same time?*

*This image of the cracks arisen out of the analyst's associations during the first session, along with the resurgence of an image evoking a group of men working together in a room, gives him the feeling of having received something concerning the little patient. To accompany him, to uphold him, to help Bruno confront the cracks in which his phobias are lodged, all this seems to become then a perspective for the cure of this youngster.*

*Fears, phobias... that turn into nightmares in the middle of the night and wake him up frightened, are precisely those that Bruno will entrust him in the following sessions.*

*A series of scarecrows drawn on paper will mark the beginning of each session; scarecrows which, according to Bruno's explicit indication, the analyst must store in the box. Afterwards, through a series of drawings describing the theme of episodic battles, Bruno will be able to evaluate the ability to protect (together with the analyst) his space invaded by enemies who cut, wound, tear to pieces the bodies of the soldiers who are present at the scene. Under such circumstances, little-soldier Bruno can't help but entrench himself in underground galleries; but they're too dark and frightening. Fortunately, the remaining soldiers are sent to the front line by will of sinister and invisible chiefs. Thereby, in the frame of the session, it's possible to become "doctors without frontiers". They will go to heal the wounded of Rwanda. The analyst will be assigned a tent. It is placed next to that of Bruno's, who assists the survivors. In those exciting mises-en-scène, Bruno-doctor-without-frontiers will always be in an urgency. He must go away on mission trips to increasingly distant places. In order to find them, one must first be very good in geography, he remarks. Such is not always the case of the analyst: a somewhat distracted pupil. Rescuing in order to avoid being accused of sadistically attacking the object, thinks the analyst. A long period of the cure process will be centered on this urgency of going away on a mission trip, to treat the wounds of the victims as a result of three cruel battles. This intense operation will last a dozen of sessions, with subsequent retakes...*

*It is later in the cure that Bruno will manage to tell the analyst the story of the apple; the one he secretly hides under his pillow. The apple appeases his night fears when the shadows pass through the walls of his bedroom. He will be able to talk clearly about this anxiety: during the night, alone in his bed, his bedroom next to his sister's, now gone-expelled-exiled at the boarding school. How to tell the analyst as well about the fear for this drop of blood he saw once dripping from his penis while he would pee at the school's toilet? How to remain in one piece, faced with so many menaces if this moon, of which he says he thinks about when it's time to go to sleep, looks so pale and distant, hidden behind the clouds? In order to carry out his project, he will have to build -throughout the cure process- a space craft to attain the moon.*

*And just as well, in view of his success as an engineer, he will feel relieved enough to offer the analyst -at a moderate price- a seat for a flight: "just one, not more!"*

*Later, the time will come to carry out another big project: that of designing a sword (in Lego), that won't brake at the entrance of the tunnel. He dug the tunnel in a rock made in play dough of "caca brown" color, he'd say. But this "damn sword" breaks easily and that pisses him off. Bruno, then, must rush to the toilet.*

*And there is this analyst, who does nothing but watch him carry out ... and spoil his project! Bruno holds his temper and turns his back to the analyst so as to continue on his own, until he makes sure that the damn sword will no longer break at the entrance of the tunnel. This takes some time. Then, he'd rather go back to his project. It refers to battles among tanks of Japanese production. Japanese...? - It's marked on his cannon, "in Japanese characters" - he points out. The analyst can do nothing but trust him since he doesn't read Japanese! "You're pretty hopeless, aren't you...?" Bruno utters. Once again, the battle among tanks becomes rude. But what seems to be for Bruno even more awkward than his explosive flatulencies over the city of Hiroshima, is that his sword comes out unscathed from the tunnel. He blushes and stares at the analyst...*

*"These comings and goings here will make you feel safer whenever you go there... and come back with your sword intact."-will then say the analyst.*

*Bruno remains silent for a moment: he's thinking. With a loud sigh, he dares to tell the analyst: "But you, how come you talk?"*

*Suddenly, a personage that Bruno had mentioned almost at the beginning of his cure crosses the analyst's mind. It was a new domestic maid of Asian origin who started working at the house not long ago. He was replacing the domestic maid who had left... nobody knows where. Perhaps she had left to Bruno's sister boarding school.*

*So well, this new domestic maid, he was a "dumb" he says, "he didn't even understand French" (like his analyst?). By that time, this would concern and annoy Bruno. Retaking what once had been in Bruno's transference, the analyst relates it to what Bruno is asking him now, and answers: "How come I talk? In a dialect, one would say; it's something that has been created here, between us. It came to us to try to talk about what deep inside you is, sometimes, a frightening-dark-thought".*

*To the last session, Bruno would bring along all the projects produced in four years of analysis. To the analyst, he had only been able to confide the series of scarecrows drawn on paper.*

*If from the first session little Bruno would dare to ask this Mister Psychoanalyst what they were doing together, at the end of this shared road -so called psychoanalytic cure- , he will be able to raise the question: "But you, how come you talk?". That's to say: about what and how does one talk during these weekly encounters? As these encounters take place between two persons, in a so called 'analysis room'.*

*Viewed from the outside, the analytic session is nothing but a situation whereby an adult and a child talk and play in a room. It would indeed be said that they do nothing but tell each other stories...; healing stories, anyway.*

It's to a greater or lesser extent at the same time that anxiety, inhibition, depression reduce the ease of growing up and of living with a certain feeling of security and confidence.

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After this *Shosetsu*, this evocation of an ordinary cure, I would now like to make reference to the *après coups* of a theorization and to the inevitable contrarities that such theorization entails in relation to the clinical account. Just as well, I aim to tackle certain aspects relative to the functional couple constituted by listening and interpretation in child psychoanalysis. Listening and interpretation considered as two intrinsic attributes of the psychoanalyst's function in the session.

It turns out that in our discipline, strong concepts -such as listening and interpretation- bear the inconvenience of concealing certain facts that in the bottom line of the analytic situation, present themselves under diverse forms.

From a descriptive point of view, theorization based on clinical practice imposes us thus a forced transition into plural form: that's to say, we must develop *psychoanalytical listenings and interpretations*.

Since listening and interpretation operate in everyday life settings, what interests us here is to define in the best possible way, the circumstances and characteristics that specify them in terms of psychoanalytic functions. That's to say: how do they become analytically operative in the cure?

The work of any analytic cure, and such related to children, consists in offering a frame of inter-psyquic encounter that aims to promote the transformation of psyquic contents or in other words: pathogenic. These intrapsychic contents are frequently affected by a rather dense *pre* or *parasymbolic* emotional state, which gives way to a variety of symptomatic manifestations, from the most distinctively specified to the most diffuse ones. The transformation of these psychic contents into a secondary symbolization, organized in verbal thought, renders them thereby available to the self-reflexive ego and to the narrative-self. In other words, this process of psychic transformation sustained by the analytic work is at the service of the transition from experience into thought -bound and affected representations- which gives sense and upholds the feeling of continuity of existence.

Particularly in small patients, what is under scrutiny in the psychoanalytic cure is their psychic development. And this operates by means of the resumption of primary symbolization and its expansion so as to give way to a more secure secondary symbolization. In that analytic work, the pre-conscious tissue becomes correlated with the symbolizing qualities offered by the object (the analyst in the session).

I consider this work essential for the formation of the ego's reflexive function and of verbal thought. Hereby, I make particular reference to the dynamic between container-contained of the Bionian model, as related to the Freudian first topic.

It is known that *the frame of the analytic encounter*, based on the explicit and implicit rules bound to the dispositive, organizes a field of observation and of listening of transferential (and counter-transferential) manifestations which usually lie at the heart of social interaction in everyday life. The dispositive of the analytic encounter aims to put said everyday reality on hold, thereby encouraging the emergence of the other scene: that of psychic reality, or so called inner reality. Transference -also conjugated in its plural form (since it is sustained by the frame, by the object-analyst, by expressive activities, in particular, the word) - is the driving force (towards the other in itself) of this psychic reality, which to a great extent is prone to remain or become unconscious.

Therefore, *frame, transference(s), interpretation(s)* operate in a sort of functional solidarity aiming to generate and uphold the analytic process and its therapeutic relapses.

The diversification of our practices involved in the analysis of the adult, of the child or the group, does not change the fundamentals that organize what may be defined as "the making of psychoanalysis". Hence, the analytical approach is only one. On the contrary, its modalities, paradigms and theorizations are plural. They all derive from the method introduced by Freud.

Keeping this in mind, we cannot deny that the type of frame, of patient with his/her own psychic organization and his/her age, is beyond the scope of what may be expected of the application of the analytic method. Basically, "the making of psychoanalysis" remains subject to the affiliation to a method (that's to say, to a way of proceeding), to its objects (the unconscious dynamic and its manifestations) and to an offer: the availability of a frame of encounters and a method of proceedings in order to carry out the analysis of the psychic functioning and to promote transformations.

The guarantor of the offer (frame and method) is the analyst, with his/her expertise and his/her ethics. Among the competences activated in the analyst in the session, his/her *psychic receptivity* or, in other words, his/her readiness to listen to the patient's transferential manifestations, is essential to enable this unconscious reality (expressed in terms of transference neurosis or transference psychosis) to find new ways (beyond repetition): that's to say, to achieve a more functional state of transformation, preventing pathogenic effects caused by the excess of anxiety and depression. (It points to achieve a functional oscillation between pSP<->pD).

The analytic listening would be then this particular receptivity of the analyst in the session, to the forms and the contents of transference. In certain psychoanalytic jargons, such would be the ability to receive-contain the patient's projective identifications addressed to the object-analyst. In any case, it concerns a, particular psychical disposition -not given by

nature- suitable for receiving, reuniting and recognizing (without confusing him) the patient's emotional state and the ongoing phantasmatic configuration: such of that day and of that moment of the session.

The emotional state (with all those qualities which range from love to hatred) and the ongoing phantasmatic configuration are both addressed -for the transference and in the transference- to the object-analyst, representing the absent object (that's to say, lacking) of the drive's search. This transference direction, handled by the various defense mechanisms of the patient, presentifies itself in the psychoanalytical session via characters, stories, scenes (from the most anecdotic to the most imaginary ones). The analyst must listen to this as a derivative of the patient's unconscious scene, as it is active at that moment.

The gestual and verbal derivatives, are the indicator, and not the immediate revealer, not only of the patient's psychic history re-updated in the transference (conflicts, traumas occurred in his/her past) but also of the patient's perception of the ongoing analytic relationship. And so it is that in the *hic et nunc* of the analytic situation, transference convokes, at the same time, the past and the present of the object relation: in sum, the absence (there and then) and the presence (here and now).

In psychoanalysis with children, we must listen to the infantile with its unconscious a-temporality and to the child who addresses himself, in and through the transference, to this old-new object: the analyst. The reconstruction of the patient's psychic history and the co-construction à deux of the future history, share the space of the analytic session...*between* listening and interpretation.

Regarding the natural condition of the child and the development of his means of expression, the infra-verbal (namely, body language) assumes as much importance as what the little patient manages to verbalize. This specific feature of working with children makes the analyst's listening achieve its "way of working" through different ways of expression (through mere bodily or verbal ones). It's an operational conjuncture which places the analyst, his/her receptivity and the increasing counter-transference effects, in a delicate balance, since the drive -in the child- may be present in a quasi direct way. Corporality, actions, words in psychoanalysis with children, alternate themselves to tinge what the analyst's receptivity may grasp there in terms of transference.

*Let's go back to Bruno. He is sent by his parents to visit a Mister, to talk with. He is not able to understand what's going on with him and with all this he finds himself alone in a room facing a stranger. Punishment and danger merge within him. He can do nothing but remain alert. With his hands in his pockets, he looks outside the window, though he can't help turning his eyes towards the inside of the room. He is silent, but he also wants to know what he can do there (what is allowed and what is forbidden). He knows that his sister has already seen a 'psy' lady; that happened before she left to the boarding school. Should the same*



*thing ever happen to him? One has to bite the bullet before the imminence of such danger. So he loses his temper as this Mister talks about him. The alert increases; will there be retaliation? ...*

As tension grows in Bruno, the analyst chooses to use a self-reflexive tone of discourse. He aims to let him know that he's able to understand the fears of his little patient. He talks to him about the rules to follow in order to be together, here: valid rules for both of them. Thereby, the analyst sets a limit, organizes the frame. He already knows that Bruno must be granted time to make them his own. It's a time that Bruno needs to 'nestle' himself in the scene. First, however, it's up to the analyst to make room in his mind for "little" Bruno. He doesn't know him yet, but he is already aware of little Bruno's tension, mistrust. In fact, he's afraid and tries not to look at or listen to the analyst.

A shared glance, focused on the parquet floor, is what arouses in the analyst a first image of them working in a pair. This couple is constituted in terms of an emergence that brings together the projective identifications circulating in the room. This image allows him to contain the components of this incipient analytic relationship. A story related to cracks, to small deposits of dirt, to threatening distances. A story that irritates and frightens Bruno: an external room that reminds of him his own internal room. Then « Shut up! »... (Since that fills my head). It becomes necessary to hold the head in the hands, thinks the analyst. But, which hands? : those of a mom -a pale moon, covered by clouds- or those of a dad who could be a good partner to help him build a space craft and attain the moon? The analyst is not up to date with those projects yet. There is no alternative but to follow little Bruno closely, even when he hides himself from his sight to go to the toilet, to evacuate /verify his worries.

The analyst's receptivity is now in the confluence of a shift towards a pre-established nonknowledge (to the uniqueness of the ongoing analytic relationship) and a certain confidence in the means to attain knowledge (something of the truth entailed by the patient). On the one hand, it's an active receptivity made up of a temporary renunciation to the established analytic knowledge (theories) and on the other hand, a faith in the potentialities of the method: upon which the analyst based his personal and professional experience.

The effect of such receptivity makes itself present first of all on the level of countertransference which, reconquered by the analyst through the sway between regression and progression of his psychic functioning in the session, will enable him to orient himself in the ongoing relationship.

Because of this inner work of the analyst -a thought related to such of a dream and upheld by a "binocular" vision- the act of the analytic interpretation finds its source and its legitimacy.

The interpretation is performed under different forms and situations, whose opportunity is typical of the appreciation of the analyst implied in the analytic situation. However, probing deeper into the relational logic in which this analytic act inscribes itself, it could be affirmed that it is the couple analyst-patient which authorizes one of them, the analyst, to formulate an interpretation. To formulate this analytic word that separates and joins otherwise what the transference has triggered in the session. A word that bears processuality and for that same reason it becomes introjectable and usable for the perlaboration work in charge of the patient.

Certainly, the interpretation activity may assume multiple forms (ranging from interventions aiming to bind affects to words, remarks either in a reflexive or in an allusive form, to the interpretation of contents related to censure or to the transference relationship). It would be desirable that the interpretation technique continues to be a 'handcrafted' co-construction between analyst and patient.

Obviously, a constitutive dissymmetry lays the foundations for the analytic relationship and a diachronic temporality is there at work. Nevertheless, in child psychoanalysis, the generational gap pre-exists. To tell the truth, every analysis is related to the manifestations of the child, with the configurations of the originary phantasms, of the primitive scene, of the conflicts and anxieties (of separation and castration) accompanying them, of a poorly integrated primary process (split or repressed) which obstructs a well accomplished secondary process by the passing through the oedipal scene with its structural effects. The same applies then for child psychoanalysis. However, what psychoanalysis with children demands of us is to *play* the interpretation quite close to the "created-found" object whereby the ego constitutes its internal objects. Objects constructed in the encounter, always failed, between the drive demands and the response obtained from the objects available in the relational environment.

It is by reason of the drives-objects hazardous encounters that the interpreting word will be neither subject to decodification, to translation, nor enclose itself in a linear causality. It seeks to re-signify first and foremost, the fake connections that our psychic causality may cause. Through his word, the analyst may promote new opportunities to the *transit* of affections and representations of the patient's internal world, new links, to sum up.

In contemporary psychoanalysis, there is a debate between those who consider the analytic interpretation as operative only when it aims for the lifting of the repressed or the re-integration of the split, and those who consider the analytic relationship as the field of discovery and apprenticeship of the use of psychological thinking tools. Actually, in contemporary analysis, the question concerns the place accorded either to the representational or the affective dimension: to the contents or to the psychological processes. Psychoanalysis with children certainly occupies the first place in these researches and debates. Its contribution is of utmost importance.

*Towards the end of the cure, Bruno questions his analyst shortly after he would make reference to the relief of the little patient to realize that his sword could keep its consistency at the moment of penetrating the tunnel. This interpretation relative to the anxiety of castration, grasped by Bruno in a more relaxed emotional climate, authorizes him to put into question the analyst's way of saying things. Hence, Bruno was also exploring something of what was going on between him and this old Mister. Throughout this exchange, the Mister had answered him that it was about a sort of "dialect", built between them to talk to one another. Or rather, to put into words -that's to say, to look together from a distance -these thoughts of Bruno which filled his head rendering him tense, distracted, evitative. From then on, this sort of interpretative dialect had become familiar to Bruno, to such a point that he was no longer afraid of this sort of stranger domestic-maid: "dumb and who doesn't even know how to speak French".*

*In the following session, Bruno announced that "we will make again two or three blows...and then I will never come back here".*

Bruno could have still asked one last question to his analyst of the old times.

-*"But this story of the analytic "dialect", who did he learn it from?"*

Good question! I believe that there is quite a lot of it going on among the psychoanalysts I've heard and read about. Let's say: Klein, Winnicott, Bion, Racker, Diatkine, Anzieu, Guinard, Ferro...and many others.

All of them have granted us the permission to "forget them", every time that a child is taken into analysis. That is, to forget them during a session so as to remain ourselves attached to the illusion of exploring the extent to which we are healing through *the analytic word*.

**Key words:** listening, interpretation, session's "dialect", co-construction.