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**Early View**



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**Book Review**

**Creative listening and the psychoanalytic process: Sensibility, engagement and envisioning by Fred L. Griffin Routledge, New York, 2016; 194 pp, $44.95**

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**First published:**6 March 2017[Full publication history](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1745-8315.12646/full#publication-history)

**DOI:**10.1111/1745-8315.12646  [View/save citation](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/enhanced/exportCitation/doi/10.1111/1745-8315.12646)

Psychoanalysis and literature share the medium of language and proceed through the shaping, interrupting and deepening of narrative, but that is not all they share. As Ogden has articulated, psychoanalysis and literature both require of their protagonist couples – analysand-analyst, and writer-reader – imagination, which is the basis for a live attunement and receptivity from which spring “spontaneously invented or newly discovered metaphors” (Ogden, [**1997**](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1745-8315.12646/full#ijp12646-bib-0001)). Fred Griffin's creative, interesting book, *Creative Listening and the Psychoanalytic Process: Sensibility, Engagement and Envisioning,* depicts good psychoanalytic listening as a generative, active process. When analysts are threatened by emotional currents in our lives or in the consulting room, or otherwise find ourselves in a darkness that collapses or obscures analytic space, we may turn, he writes, to more content-driven models or reductive genetic interpretations, in an effort to regain the footing of certainty. The constructs that arise when working this way translate analysands into two-dimensional ideas “now inhabiting emotionally sterile environments of theory that hold little vitality or potential for emotional growth” (p. 4). Instead, Griffin works towards a psychoanalytic listening that actively engages imaginatively and creatively. This active engagement involves analysts not only *following* associations but also *leading* the analysand, through apprehending “palpable shapes of experience that we can hold in our minds … and … creating passages from outside to inside these psychic spaces” (p. 63). Such acts of listening are not just preliminary to the formulation of insight, but are themselves a center of therapeutic action.

Griffin's goal in this book is to teach a method for developing or regaining a capacity for creative listening, one he uses in his clinical work and teaching. The method involves plumbing the depths of literary writings in order to enter into the writers’ way of conjuring the affective-sensory worlds of their characters. The aim is to deepen the way we process our experience as analysts and assist us in restoring (or achieving) a productive self-analytic space, which underlies the capacity to comprehend what is happening in the transference-countertransference and thus in the analysand's unconscious life.

As Griffin is a teacher and supervisor, the book, which includes several previously published papers, sometimes reads like a lesson. However, rather than achieving its aim primarily by being a transparent vessel for the content Griffin wishes to teach, I think it is the book's own *form* that captures in vivo the way Griffin's mind works when reading literature with the ear of an analyst, and bringing his reading to bear upon his listening.

Griffin begins the journey into literature by describing his own process of writing during a barren time of trauma in his adult life, which halted his capacity for self-reflection. He was helped out of this deadened land through reading works by Wallace Stegner, and eventually writing his own autobiographically inflected fiction. He utilized this approach in order to restimulate his self-reflection and the self-analytic function. Quoting from a story he wrote during his frozen period, Griffin now writes that when he read in his own fictional writing the words “his father fell to a serious physical illness” (p. 38), the word *fell* evoked associations that reverberated meaningfully for him, linking Griffin to memories of a monumental physical and emotional fall suffered by someone close to him when he was a child, and to his subsequent “after the fall” experience of a too-sudden “fall from innocence,” now echoing through his experience of his adult trauma. (While mentioning it several times, Griffin does not tell us what this trauma was, which in itself also exemplifies something useful: utilizing the self in a fully intimate way that discloses and mines subjectivity in detail does not necessitate disclosure of another kind, and is no less present and generative.) Writing his fiction was akin to a free associative process, seeing his words on paper opened a space akin to analytic space, and Griffin then pursued resonant, sensorially rich words he “found” in the writing, opening a dialogue between his writing and reading selves. Through this process, he found thus far unarticulated experiential snippets that captured the sensation of *falling*, including its startling dimension. He was then able to weave such bits together to articulate the resonant experience of the loss of footing of sudden change.

In a chapter titled ‘The Clinical Material of *To the Lighthouse’*, Griffin states that this novel, written by Woolf in order to express her deep emotion about her mother, is unrivaled among works of fiction in “capturing the interplay of subjectivity and intersubjectivity that informs contemporary psychoanalysis” (p. 55). Quoting extensively from the novel, he demonstrates how the manner in which he engages with analysands is influenced by *the way his mind works* – rather than by his ideas about the plot or content – when immersed in a very close reading of this text. Griffin works to teach analysts to listen to patients the way Woolf wrote this novel. In it, the consciousness of characters is portrayed vividly as being shaped by sensory experiences, viscerally alive moments and shifting feeling states, and also as incorporating characters’ perspectives on and from past, present and future in seamless interpenetration. Lovers of this novel will likely be moved by Griffin's awed homage to it and his capturing of this quality of dizzying yet coherent multiplicity. Griffin suggests that we should listen to analysands this way: by aiming to grasp and incorporate sensory, inchoate experience and shifting feeling states from a multiplicity of perspectives from past, present and future. This kind of listening is orchestrated by the analyst's imagination. The articulation of what we make out of this multidimensional, textural grasping and incorporating is akin to building a bridge to heretofore inaccessible psychic spaces and leading the analysand to explore them when we sense that she is ready or on the cusp of being so.

Griffin views contemporary psychoanalysis as being about the effort to follow moment-to-moment shifts in emotional tone and corresponding self and other representations and he views such psychoanalytic constructs as positions, the model of container/contained, and projective identification as being most useful and generative for thinking the way certain pieces of imaginative literature are written – with an eye towards synchronicity and the timelessness of psychic life. He provides clinical vignettes to illustrate how his “embodied envisioning” and active “somatosensory listening” (p. 75), enhanced through immersion in Woolf's text, enabled him to help a patient differentiate an amalgam of feelings that had been stuck in his pained gut like a mass into separate emotional-mind and physical elements, creating passageways between what the patient felt in his body and what he came to identify as feeling in his mind. Engagement with creative writers allows Griffin convincingly to extend Freud's concept of receptive listening to a concept of the mind of the analyst as a fertile and generative space of activity.

To this dialogue with Woolf, Griffin invites Loewald and his characterization of the nature of the psychoanalytic process as propelled by “*the momentum of an active imaginative process* that creates the next step” (Loewald, 1975, p. 365, italics Griffin's, p. 83). The writing here exemplifies creative listening as it moves between literary, artistic/imagistic and psychoanalytic/theoretical texts. Listening creatively involves being attuned to developmental potential, he writes, just as “Mrs. Ramsay [the larger than life and then suddenly lost mother in Woolf's novel] views the other characters in the novel in past, present, and future tenses, and through the powers of her imagination sees the potential within each of them” (p. 81). Holding a Loewaldian developmental metaphor in mind for the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis, Griffin now invokes a sculpture, Michelangelo's *Awakening Slave,* which has both fully formed parts and aspects that “remain in undifferentiated stone in an embryonic state – awaiting opportunities to be brought to life” (p. 81). Now Griffin brings Loewald's writing in more explicitly, in the form of a quote, thus shifting from an associative, imagistic way of moving to theory that can at this point be used generatively to cohere, rather than in a flattening manner.

In a chapter on listening for inarticulate experience, a close reading of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* is brought into dialogue with material from Griffin's work with a former patient, Mrs. P. Griffin demonstrates how Faulkner's text assisted him in ‘relistening’ to the inarticulate experience he failed to listen for during that analysis, a failure he believes led to premature termination. The perspectives brought together here combine notes from the beginning of the case and from later years, with an initial experience of reading *The Sound and the Fury* after the case ended but without making any connection to it, and a realization gained now, while rereading Faulkner for the purpose of completing this book. Griffin shifts between these perspectives to weave together understandings of the analysis and of his own changed subjectivity. Only now, in the rereading for the purpose of writing, was Griffin struck by the *permanence* of the state of consciousness of grief in Faulkner's character of Benjy, an intellectually impaired, inarticulate person with a mind that cannot register time and contextualize sensations and feelings into a narrative of then and now. Griffin's new visceral understanding of this state brought to mind, afresh, Mrs. P., which led him to new understanding about the stalemated transference-countertransference. It is neither the plot of the novel, nor the character of Benjy that proved generative, but rather the grasp of the *workings* of a mind trying to survive while living in wordless sorrow.

Griffin addresses the dimension of time in a number of ways. His relistening to Faulkner's text, and, retrospectively to Mrs. P., captures the back and forth movement of the acquisition of meaning. As mentioned, following Loewald, Griffin also emphasizes future, leading from rudimentary cusp to fleshed out shape. “Too often we embrace a historical view or a theoretical formulation of our analysands and superimpose a template upon them that prevents us from sensing new and unexpected shifts that signal a critical moment of change in form or function,” he writes. Creative listening “can prepare the analyst to apprehend edges of newly emergent potential for emotional growth that appear alongside the repetitive/fixed set of internal object relations that directs the patient's life” (p. 72). In another exchange between a literary text and clinical material, Griffin addresses the relationship to time as a central theme. A non-linear process of reading Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* in dialogue with reflections upon clinical material yields a fresh take on the “form of memory” experienced by a patient evocatively depicted as one who “saw himself as a boy who had become older, not one who had grown into a man” (p. 150). Immersion in the novel enables Griffin “to come to see the self in time” (p. 166), which illuminates the patient's internal stasis, his inability to see two different images of himself that are separated by time.

Griffin also utilizes Proust's novel to engage with another text. Proust's narrator spends his life addressing his “double-sidedness” before he is able to “write himself into a more coherent whole” (p. 180). Griffin's associations to this novel help fill in a missing piece in the exploration of Ernest Jones’ bifurcated self, as it is presented in the biography *Freud's Wizard: Ernest Jones and the Transformations of Psychoanalysis* (2007), by Brenda Maddox. Here, constructions generated in the reading of Proust are used more traditionally, to understand the person of Jones, as well as the reason for Maddox's depiction of him as an enigma, rather than to engage in a process of interplay between subjectivity and intersubjectivity. And actually, there is a bit of slippage from the main theme here, as the subjectivity of Jones is available only second-hand, through fixed content written by Maddox, rather than a fluid process of engagement with Jones. One could say Griffin is using Proust's text to engage intersubjectively with Maddox's text and thereby fathom its lacks. But as Griffin's focus is ultimately Jones's inner world, not only Maddox's depiction, this chapter, while displaying how literature can be used to plumb the depths of a person, does not really capture Griffin's subjective-intersubjective use of literary immersion in listening for psychic spaces and modes that are hidden in plain sight in the *process* of the transference-countertransference.

Griffin's nuanced depiction of fertile exchanges between modernist literary texts and analytic material is evocative and convincing. It is interesting to consider the types of novels discussed, and to ask whether or how, for another reader-analyst, other kinds of novels – ones written in another language, inscribed in another cultural context, or capturing a postmodern fragmentation, for example, might generate and illuminate other types of engagements with different clinical material. Griffin states that exchanges between literary texts and case material were in the past typically used unidirectionally, to explicate literary characters and writers. The mutually enriching engagement Griffin offers reflects the changed way we now envision the analytic interaction. I think any lover of literature who reads Griffin's book will find herself reaching back, maybe with a sense of longing, for her favorite literary texts. Such a reader will be primed to listen to these texts with an ear for the language and music of experience, and to return to her consulting room a freshly tuned instrument, receptive and ready to play.