

William Shakespeare as Psychotherapist

PAUL D. COOMBE

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to explore how Shakespeare drew on contemporary life to assist society to manage profound loss, uncertainty and anxiety. This was achieved through providing a forum, both in the “here and now”, via the plays and other works, and through creating a body of work for future generations to mine. This evolved over time to penetrate and fertilize the global community. In these ways Shakespeare helps us all to metabolize anxiety and despair and continue to move forward in the struggle of life. The paper includes a detailed discussion of the interpretations and applications of the works and their relevance to professionals who work within the space in which suffering and despair inhabit. Copyright © 2012 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: psychoanalytic therapy, group therapy, psychoanalysis, literature

INTRODUCTION

This paper is written to share some ideas and reflections in relation to William Shakespeare and his profound poetic works. It is limited by the space that such a presentation allows, by the great breadth and kaleidoscopic nature of the works and the impossibility of doing justice to them here. Nevertheless, there are some things that can be said about Shakespeare that may be of interest to this readership and that have relevance to a preoccupation with individuals and groups from a psychoanalytic perspective. These ideas are not necessarily ground-breaking or even original but hopefully they will offer an opportunity to enlarge the awareness of others in some proportion to the belated development of mine.

In approaching Shakespeare it is helpful to be aware that there are numerous discourses through which one can apply a hermeneutical understanding. At the very least these discourses include: historical, literary, psychoanalytical, group-analytical, artistic, religious, theatrical, cultural, linguistic and philosophical (Dobson & Wells, 2002).

At least in the Western world who could reasonably claim to not be familiar with some of Shakespeare's works either formally or casually? For example: "to be or not to be: that is the question:/whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer/the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,/or to take arms against a sea of troubles,/and by opposing end them? . . ." (Hamlet); "If music be the food of love, play on; . . ." (Twelfth Night); and "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears; . . ." (Julius Caesar).

It is, nevertheless, important to remind ourselves that other cultures no doubt have their own William Shakespeare. For example, Voltaire for the French, Pushkin for the Russians, Goethe for the Germans (although each of these borrowed heavily from Shakespeare) and I am sure that the reader can offer others. It may be, however, that the English language has some advantages over others both in terms of the abundance of words and the capacity of the language for subtle description of human experience. According to Wikipedia and other sources the English language has more words than any other with reliable estimates up to one million compared with say German possessing some 200,000. It is also the case that English grows by the accretion of new words from other languages and by other means each year. Some other nations have Academies to control the growth of language quite severely. This, I think arguably, gave Shakespeare a clear advantage over other national poets.

HISTORY

He was born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire, 93 miles north of London. His parents were yeoman who owned a small farm in the Forest of Arden north of the River Avon and Stratford. He was raised in a rural and town setting which is echoed clearly in so many of his poetic works. The Forest of Arden and the market town Stratford would have been in the immediate background of his life. Stratford at the time had a population of about a thousand people. Stratford was home to a medieval church, Holy Trinity, which still stands today and was an important community institution.

Relatively very little is known of William's life especially his early life. We are deprived of the material that is so important for a psychoanalyst to develop an understanding of the personality development of an individual and to put their life into psychological context. We must content ourselves with the knowledge of certain facts and information recorded in public documents but even these largely attest to his later life. We, of course, have the wonderful treasure-trove of his works more of which will be said later.

It is of relevance that in the summer of 1564 the plague struck Stratford and was responsible for the death of 200 people including children, some of whom lived in Henley Street, where the family lived. William was the third of eight children the first two daughters dying a few months after birth. Of the next five children another died while young. We do not hear again of him again until 1582 when he married!

In terms of William's experiences of religion little is *directly* known. However, much is known in terms of what children and others experienced via Holy Trinity Church. It seems clear that religious doctrine and formality would have been very strongly in the background of his life. What is also known is that he was baptized, married and buried in Holy Trinity Church, as were his children.

In terms of his education other than spiritual or religious, again little is *directly* known. Nevertheless, it seems he attended the local Grammar school and would have been strongly educated in grammar, logic and rhetoric as well as Latin. The students studied the Classics such as Cicero, Erasmus, Ovid, Virgil as well as already and continuing to be strongly schooled in the religious texts.

So what can we conclude from these details? Of course it is important to remember that any opinion must be subjective as we do not have access to the facts of his early life such as the quality of his relationships. However, I will venture some ideas. He was born into a family that was relatively well off although certainly not of the nobility. While we know more of his father than his mother we do know she gave birth to two daughters who died soon after birth in quick succession and that William would have been conceived quite shortly after their death. We know that women who give birth to a child soon after the death of another are particularly at risk of depression and at the very least the newborn child will have to bear an extreme burden of projected hope versus despair. Can we allow ourselves to imagine how the birth of a healthy boy after such grief and surrounded by the plague might have been? He was the first child of the couple to be born and survive beyond early infancy and also the first son. I think we can suggest that he would have had *particular* significance for both his parents, a precious child. Clinical experience suggests that commonly in such circumstances the child becomes the focus of excessive concern and over-protection by especially the mother. Are these the seeds of an early marriage and subsequent flight to London away from his new and young family reflecting an ambivalent dependency? We cannot say but again clinical experience would suggest this as not an uncommon outcome. His entire childhood was spent within a strong and cohesive English town where he would have been exposed to all manner of people. Nature, both flora and fauna abounded. While he would have experienced loss it seems he was spared the sort of deprivation that stunts psychological growth. There is every reason to suggest that he came from a very fertile ground intellectually and experientially.

By 1582 he has come to know Anne Hathaway who lived about a mile west over farm paddocks and down footpaths from his home. Having slept with the farmer's eldest daughter they married in November 1582, soon after it became clear she had become pregnant. Anne was eight years older than William, 26 years at marriage and unusually old for the times to be unmarried it seems. On May 26, 1583 the first child and first grandchild was christened Susanna and on February 2, 1585 twins Hamnet and Judith were christened. Soon after William left alone for London! But he did return over the years.

From 1582 until 1592 there is virtually no known documentary record of Shakespeare and this decade has come to be known as the “Lost Years”. Before 1592, however, he would have had the opportunity to watch plays performed in Stratford or further afield in Coventry. In 1592, at 28 years of age one of his plays, *Henry VI Part I*, is playing in London at the Rose Theatre near what is now Southwark Cathedral on the south bank of the Thames.

The era in which Shakespeare was raised and lived is relevant to this paper. Mention has been made of the existence of traveling players and it seems plays were a very popular form of entertainment of the times. Classical plays were performed at schools and as part of religious festivals. There were so-called medieval “Miracle Plays” or “Mystery Plays” enacted on Holy Days amongst many others (Kermode, 2004). It is known (Schoenbaum, 1975) that in 1587 five companies passed through Stratford and it has been speculated that William joined one of these. London at the time held a population of some 200,000. It was growing rapidly and plays were often performed in the fringe areas of the city where less control could be gained over the various activities of the citizens.

It is important to know something of the political and religious context of his life. These were extraordinary times and must have provoked a profound sense of uncertainty in the general population. A summary of events that is of particular relevance to Shakespeare follows (Kermode, 2004; Trevelyan, 1988). Henry VIII came to the throne of England in 1509 and initiated a profoundly tumultuous period. It is believed that some 80,000 people died on the gallows during his reign. Many of his difficulties had to do with his desire for a male heir and his seeking of a divorce from his first wife to whom he had a daughter, Elizabeth. This precipitated a rift with the Pope in Rome. In 1558 Elizabeth became Queen and began a rich and influential reign that would last 45 years until her death in 1603 during which, however, she had neither children nor married.

This century saw the Reformation sweep through England and change dramatically the spiritual life of its inhabitants. The Reformation, in a practical sense, meant that monasteries were closed across the country, that paintings and stained glass windows, considered the more idolatrous aspects of religion, were removed. Theology and liturgy were transformed. There was profound upheaval which was reflected in the daily lives of the population and was strengthened by the introduction of the printing press by Gutenberg in Germany in 1455 and Caxton’s introduction of the same in England in the 1470s. These changes allowed a rather rapid substitution of a secular form of dramatic entertainment and commentary on life, for the catholic or religious underpinnings. The routing of the Great Spanish Armada in 1588 despite its superiority in terms of numbers of ships was a significant victory for Elizabeth and began a long tradition of the Naval British Empire. In 1599 the English forces in Ireland led by the Earl of Essex were heavily defeated and this was a blow not only for Elizabeth but also for England. These events resonated within and beyond England. Elizabeth died in 1603 and James Stuart VI of Scotland became James I of England. James was a

very different and more reclusive monarch but he did foster the dramatic arts and the Jacobean court witnessed many performances of Shakespeare's plays.

The group of players Shakespeare came to be a member of was called the Chamberlains Men later becoming the Kings Men. This group of actors toured around the English countryside performing. Shakespeare came to be famous and popular in the 1590s and as a result became quite well-off purchasing property in London as well as Stratford. At least early on in his career he was an actor as well as playwright.

So this is the backdrop to his work which was prodigious. He lived to be 52 years old, a short life by our standards and in this short time was extraordinarily creative.

Very little is known of his romantic life except by inference from his works including his sonnets. It seems more than reasonable to say that he was no stranger to love nor indeed the pain of loss of love amongst the other vicissitudes of love and life. For example there are some 154 Sonnets written between perhaps 1592 and 1606. These have stimulated a great deal of interest because they convey an uncommon depth of feeling and undoubted familiarity with love. Sonnet XVIII: "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate . . ." is a most memorable example amongst many.

Traditionally we have become accustomed to Shakespeare's works being divided into Comedies, Histories and Tragedies with the important addition of the Sonnets. This has proven to be useful despite their being some overlap of the categories. Arguably though it is the group of tragedies for which he is best known and in particular *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Julius Caesar*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth* although we may all have our own preferred selection.

INTERPRETATIONS AND APPLICATIONS OF THE WORKS

A. C. Bradley was Professor of Poetry at Oxford University and his book *Shakespearean Tragedy* first published in 1904 is a classic and has been reprinted many times (Bradley, 1992). Bradley attempted to define what is specific about Shakespearean tragedy. A condensation of Bradley's thesis is that the works essentially revolve around the calamity that befalls the "hero" who is special or famous and their character. The character, according to Bradley, has a flaw or vulnerability which is to move in one direction only: "a fatal tendency to identify the whole being with one interest, object, passion, or habit of mind". Bradley identifies a key aspect in the works as a development in the role of conflict with the earlier works identifying conflict *between* characters or groups and the later works where the fulcrum or tension is the *internal* conflict within the hero and others. Early works include *Richard II* and *III* for example as opposed to *Hamlet*, *Othello*, etc. By the end of the play we are struck by the "waste" according to Bradley in the tragic losses that have unfolded because the hero has contributed profoundly to his own downfall. Now I think that what makes the works so important and gripping if we can penetrate the textual style

of the times is the hero in all of us. We can all readily identify with this character, the secret desire to be a hero for our mother or father, a great person. Further we can all identify in some smaller or larger measure how we can approach a pinnacle with all the attendant risks that Shakespeare depicts so clearly. Of course, this is the omnipotent infant and the Oedipal child straining for entry into the adult world. Somewhere in all of us, some more than others, is the threat of being wrenched apart by our impossible desires: the inward struggle. Human vulnerability is front and center in the works. Bradley was, it seems, unaware of Freud's work although they were contemporaries with Bradley's death occurring in 1935 and Freud's in 1939. At least Bradley makes no reference to Freud in his book. But he is working right in the area of psychoanalysis when he examines from a literary viewpoint the role of conflict and the sabotaging aspect of human personality and what he refers to as "character".

Of relevance here is the book *Psychoanalytic Ideas and Shakespeare* edited by I. Wise and M. Mills (Wise & Mills, 2006; Coombe, 2007). The editors introduce the book by commenting on the familiar linking of Shakespeare's works with the field of psychoanalytic work and theory. Mills says in relation to the beginning of an analysis: It is "as if they are presenting their own play or opening up a new novel to be shared." Reference is also made to Joyce McDougal's classic work, *Theatres of the Mind: Illusion and Truth on the Analytic Stage* (McDougal, 1986, p. 4) and quoted as it is here: In our psyche are "... parts of ourselves that frequently operate in complete contradiction to one another, causing conflict and mental pain ... these hidden players and their roles. ... our inner characters are constantly seeking a stage on which to play out their tragedies and comedies ... our secret theatre ... it is this inner world with its repeating repertory that determines most of what happens to us in the external world." McDougal's ideas bring to mind Shakespeare's play "As You Like It": "All the world's a stage,/and all the men and women merely players:/they have their exits and their entrances;/and one man in his time plays many parts,/his acts being seven ages ...". This book is of interest because it brings together the contributions of several authors to elucidate the hidden and unconscious meaning of several of Shakespeare's plays and in particular his tragedies but of course they are relevant to us all. It includes a fascinating chapter by Gerald Wooster and Peter Buckroyd examining the potential development of creativity out of loss reflected in the works (Wooster & Buckroyd, 2006).

Through examination and reflection it is possible to see that Shakespeare arrived on the scene as a genius at a particular time in history when profound changes were occurring in society. It was a time when a religious and arguably constrictive, if though securing, network was deconstructed through the Reformation. Perhaps an hiatus was left for the secular world to fill. Certainly it seems a great need for this particular form of entertainment and the vicarious examination of life's difficulties was uncovered.

My thesis is that as people, as humans, by our very nature we have a social need to congregate, to share experience, although sometimes, it is denied or

recoiled from. We know that the presence of another is necessary for the physical and psychological survival of the infant. We also know that growing up in the context of others contributes to personality development. In addition we know that our lives are influenced strongly by our experience but in particular our ability *to make use of experience* via thinking, reflection and fantasy. The public that Shakespeare entertained must have known a great deal about suffering and, of course, about love and its loss. The death rate from plague and other infections, the threat of sentence of death or imprisonment, public executions, massive neonatal mortality rate, wars and so on, informed them that life was precarious. The Shakespearean oeuvre provided opportunities for the public contemporaneously to engage with, to reflect upon and to express something deeply personal and relevant to themselves and their lives. We know that up to 3000 individuals at a time from a vast cross-section of society were able to participate in these performances as an audience and they were very popular.

Today, we still have formal drama but there are competing distractions: films, television, sport, the Commonwealth and Olympic Games, computers, virtual experiences, electronic games, DVDs, music on iPods, the Internet amongst others. But many of these are impersonal, solitary or narrow in one form or other. And of more relevance they generally do not help us solve our personal conflicts or difficulties although they can distract. This is where the analytic psychotherapies enter the picture as valuable therapeutic agencies for society. However, a form of psychotherapy can be said to have been offered via drama and in particular the Shakespearian oeuvre. With the help of other literary contributors I will develop further why the works of Shakespeare were and are of particular use to humanity.

There is, of course, entertainment and distraction involved in the dramatic arts but there is much more. There is containment of a Bionian nature (Bion, 1959). We know that we identify and projectively identify with certain characters or themes according to our own idiosyncratic life experience. Whilst containment can occur via other visual media there is something peculiar to the "in the flesh" play that arguably surpasses these others. The experience of almost being able to touch, to hear the breathing of actors, and sometimes the smell, all foster the experience of immediacy and life. In Shakespeare's times the population must have been, as already mentioned in the biographical sketch and the account of the times, subject to massive anxiety and uncertainty. Life must have seemed, and was, precarious for the masses with an ever-present risk of death or disease or loss. There were the profound changes to spiritual life, the other great container for many in one form or other, religion. The threat of war and invasion by the Spanish was present throughout Elizabeth's reign. The insecurities bred by the anxieties of succession especially as Elizabeth became an old lady and clearly more fractious and vulnerable would be a powerful source of anxiety. So in this setting Shakespeare begins to write and create dramas: Henry VI, Richard II, Henry V, Henry IV and Richard III. These portray, in historical form, matters to do with succession and the deposing of monarchs.

These anxieties of the present were projected into the distant past. Henry V was written and performed in 1599 the year when England had sent forces to Ireland to quell rebellion, led by the flamboyant and unpredictable Earl of Essex. Unfortunately for England Essex failed but the play seems to have given expression to the public's anxiety about depletion of forces and the threat of being vanquished in one form or other but ultimately overcoming in triumph. Shapiro (2005) has written convincingly of how in the year 1599, as an example, contemporary events of the time were influential in the creation of several major Shakespearean works.

Some of the plays are comedic in nature and the humorous aspect is often a means of dealing with the pain of certain aspects of life. Frequently the narcissistic or grandiose fellow is poked fun at as in "Twelfth Night" in the character of Malvolio or the character of Falstaff in some of the Royal history plays. There is a frequent theme of the arrival at a just and fair conclusion as a balancing point or a character receiving their comeuppance. There are countless such themes and sub-plots in his work expressed in a richly poetic form of English. These themes and sub-plots allow and allowed an audience, via dissemination throughout the English-speaking world, a level of vicarious experience: a form of containment.

Anyone who has visited a gallery with a European medieval collection of art will be struck by the overwhelming preoccupation with Christian religious themes. Shakespeare's works however, at least for the English public, introduced a more secular genre that was exploited by William Blake amongst many other artists and writers. But more importantly, after Shakespeare, the general public found a new source of experience to enrich their imagination

Many would consider that Shakespeare's greatest tragedy perhaps even history's greatest play is Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. Shakespeare wrote this play in approximately 1601. It was Shakespeare who contributed some original aspects to the story and, in entirety, the Renaissance style and literary or poetic nature of the final play. The story is essentially a tale of familial murder, adultery, incest, suicide and, of course, madness. Hamlet is the Prince of Denmark, a young man whose father, King Hamlet, had died reportedly due to a snake bite. Hamlet's uncle, Claudius, brother of the late king, assumes the throne and marries Gertrude, Hamlet's mother. All of this occurs within the unseemly time of less than one month. The ghost of the dead King appears on several occasions on the battlements of the Royal Castle, Elsinore, and tells Hamlet what has occurred and how his father died. This includes the revelation that Claudius poured poison into the sleeping King's ear which rapidly overpowered him and also that his mother had been seduced by Claudius. The ghost advises Hamlet to seek revenge and kill the new King but spare his mother. Hamlet swears to follow this course and tells his companions he intends to feign madness to achieve his ends. Woven into the story is the love between Hamlet and Ophelia but she falls into madness and suicide, adding to Hamlet's despair.

(In 1851 John Everett Millais, one of the so-called “Pre-Raphaelites”, produced a wonderful and iconic painting of Ophelia which is in the Tate Britain Gallery, London.)

The crucial psychological fulcrum of the play would seem to be Hamlet’s struggle to do what he conflictually wants to do, indeed is destined to do, that is, to kill King Claudius. He cannot freely do this and instead falls into a series of tragic events but eventually kills the King and his mother dies poisoned as he finally perishes himself. Freud wrote about a number of Shakespeare’s plays but Hamlet is referred to in some detail in his wonderful and original monograph: *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900). Ernest Jones (1948) also elaborated on Freud’s views. Freud compared the play Hamlet with Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex. He pointed out Hamlet involved the same theme but was presented in a much more repressed form. In Oedipus Rex, of course, it is all played out without disguise: Oedipus kills his father and takes his mother as a wife although the play necessarily includes his lack of awareness of these facts at the time and he later learns of the horrifying reality. In Hamlet the repression is that it is not Hamlet who kills his father and marries his mother but the uncle. Further, Hamlet cannot, until the very end, kill Claudius. He struggles and is pained by what feels he needs to do but cannot. Freud’s suggestion was that it is his unconscious guilt that gets in the way of his revenge. Freud said: “Thus the loathing which should drive him on to revenge is replaced in him by self-reproaches, by scruples of conscience, which remind him that he himself is literally no better than the sinner whom he is to punish.”

It is of some interest that some writers (Murray, 1914/1974, pp. 1–24; Showerman, 2004, pp. 89–107) consider that the Greek Orestes myth or Oresteia of Aeschylus, rather than the Oedipus myth of Sophocles, is a more accurate representation of what is within the play Hamlet. According to Homer, Orestes was the son of Agamemnon, the father, and Clytemnestra, his mother. Agamemnon returned from the Trojan wars with a mistress and as a result his wife subsequently killed him and married *her* lover. Some years later Orestes sought revenge by killing his mother and her lover. Orestes has become a prototype for those committing a crime under mitigating circumstances. Shakespeare’s works in general enable a more abstract representation than the Greek myths in terms of giving expression to the unconscious I think.

Stephen Greenblatt, Professor of Humanities at Harvard University (2004), has written, as have others, of the play Hamlet marking a major turning point, and having profound significance for, Shakespeare. He links the death of Hamnet, his son, in 1596, with the development of the play as does Hildebrand (2004) and each of these, Greenblatt from a literary background and Hildebrand from a psychoanalytic background, links the names “Hamlet” and “Hamnet”. An interesting piece of data reported by Greenblatt is that in writing Hamlet, Shakespeare used over 600 new words many of these not only the first time he had used such words in his plays but also new to the English language as

recorded in writing. Some of these words include: fanged, besmirched, pander, unnerved, and so on.

Harold Bloom is Sterling Professor of Humanities at Yale University and it is his contention that Shakespeare “invented the human” (Bloom, 1999), a somewhat startling claim one would think at first hearing. Bloom spends nearly 800 pages arguing this case and unpacks all of the works. He is not a friend of Freud but he nonetheless demonstrates and possesses a love of the evocation of characters and the human condition in literature. In Shakespeare characters develop as Bloom says or individuate within a play whether this be by over-hearing themselves or via relating and reflection. The dominant characters, for example, Falstaff, Hamlet, Iago, Lear, Macbeth, amongst others, he says, are all examples of how character, consciousness and meaning are developed. He sees this as the first instance in literature of such evocation and creativity compared with what went before. His argument, when first encountered, seems preposterous, but on closer examination and study seems to have more than a little merit. His further suggestions include that this creativity set standards and was a significant impetus in the development of Western literature and awareness of what it is to be human. He cites Dr Samuel Johnson in the 1700s as the first critic to claim Shakespeare was the first to create evocations of human change through will rather than, for example, via illness or decay.

Michael Jacobs (2008), quotes Ernst Kris (1948) as saying that: “... art moves two parts of us—the id and the ego”. The id is given expression via the dramatic components of any play, for example, passion, murder and envy but the form that the play takes via its literary content and nature: its poetic character, allows a more pleasing expression for us of the id. The auditory and sensual pleasure the works bring forth can be seen as an appeal to the ego versus the id and also superego demands. In poetry and drama an important aspect is *rhythm* and *rhyme*. Indeed there are certain rules which classically some consider must be adhered to in some form or other. Rhythm is produced in different languages in different ways. It is said that in English an important way for rhythm to be expressed is via unstressed and stressed syllables. An *iambic pentameter* is a line of five successive pairs of unstressed and stressed syllables: da *dum*, da *dum*, da *dum*, da *dum*, da *dum*. Such iambic pentameters are frequent in English poetry and were especially common in Shakespeare’s works. Sometimes some variation is included so that a stressed syllable may occur before an unstressed one, e.g.: “To *BE*/or *NOT*/to *BE*/*THAT* is/the *QUES*-tion. It is by these and other means that auditory beauty is woven through much of the works: it is pleasing to the ear.

Frank Kermode occupies three university chairs: he is Professor of Modern English at University College London, Professor of English Literature at Cambridge and Professor of Poetry at Harvard. Similarly to Harold Bloom and others Kermode has commented on how something very special was happening with Shakespeare’s writing style within Hamlet. He comments that no one quite like Hamlet ever existed before him and: “To take him as the herald of a new

age is neither idolatrous nor hyperbolic" (Kermode, 2000, p. 125) And in fact Kermode is using his terminology to claim, in synchrony with and at about the same time as Bloom, that a new era of the person or human was proclaimed with the writing of Hamlet. Kermode in his book *Shakespeare's Language* (2000) describes how Hamlet is dominated by a particular literary style, that of the frequent use of doubles. He describes, in particular, one form of double being "hendiadys" which is a technical grammatical term for "one through two", e.g. the term "house and home" (from Henry IV, Part II). Another example of doubling includes the "play within the play" itself of Hamlet. There are the two characters of Cornelius and Voltermand and also Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in both cases neither seeming to serve any purpose other than being doubles. Kermode suggests that these forms of doubling and other literary tools introduce mystery and tension. Wooster and Buckroyd (2006), however, introduce a valuable work by Albert Rothenberg (1979), which examines and explores the nature and origin of the creative process. This is a masterly and complex work. Here a psychological and psychoanalytical interpretation is given to the literary technique of doubling and in particular so-called janusian thinking (one becomes two) and the homospatial thinking (two become one) of Shakespeare which seems to stimulate and propagate creative fantasy and thinking. In summary Rothenberg contends that creativity requires the transformation of a task or area of focus into separated components and then at some stage the re-unification of parts into some integrated whole. Hildebrand (2004, p. 98) quoting Kott (1967, p. 72) describes how "Shakespeare's dramas . . . are a basic system of mirrors both concave and convex which reflect, magnify and parody the same situation." Themes are creatively worked and re-worked in different contexts with ever deepening meaning. Space does not allow for development of these concepts but reference to the original works would reward the interested reader.

It is important to consider what it is about Shakespeare's works that has made them so popular and a reservoir for other artists to draw from. Apart from the pure beauty and skill of the writer there are other factors. The works draw on human experience sometimes of a tragic nature and sometimes of a sweet and pleasing nature but at all times the essence of what it is to be human. He demonstrates a profound capacity for insight into the human condition and personality. The works draw heavily upon conscious and unconscious wells. More importantly, though, they allow exploration of unconscious themes with repression only lightly lifted as in the example of Hamlet. Others have pointed out that it is this partial lifting of repression that makes art so attractive to those of us who can enter such a world. We are not required to understand this to enjoy the experience.

The release from repression of the unconscious is an important aspect of the appeal of artistic processes. Freud wrote of the various ways that the unconscious can find expression or come to be liberated or known to a greater or lesser degree in his early works whether it be dreaming (Freud, 1900), jokes (Freud, 1905a) or parapraxes (Freud, 1901) or relief from neurosis via the psychoanalytic process

(Freud, 1916–1917). Jacques Derrida (1992) described how literature necessarily involves a “lifting of repression”. He says in reference to literature: “. . . there is not efficient deconstruction without the greatest possible pleasure.” And: “. . . no deconstruction without pleasure and no pleasure without deconstruction.” I think that what is achieved via the literary experience is some move toward integration: an integration of the unconscious with the conscious, the past into the present, with an eye to the future.

Freud early on emphasized how sublimation (1905b) as a defense mechanism allowed sexual and aggressive instincts to be expressed via socially acceptable modes. He described (Freud, 1900) how dreams allowed the symbolic expression of unconscious conflicts. This essentially means something standing for something else or representation and emphasis was placed on how words were verbal symbols. Inherent in Klein’s early work in 1929 was the demonstration of the importance of play and how a child’s deepest concerns were revealed in play symbolically and provided *relief* for the child as opposed to the real experience with, for example, the parents (Klein, 1988). These matters are clearly of relevance in considering the significance of certain dramatic works to human societies.

Freeman-Sharpe (1946) demonstrated a particular way of using psychoanalytical thinking to forensically analyze King Lear and The Tempest. In fact she not only attempted to analytically dissect the plays but also, for good measure, claimed to have uncovered aspects of Shakespeare’s personal developmental history as revealed in the characters in some of his plays! In reading her paper one could not fail to admire in many ways how the exacting application of psychoanalytical skills can reveal what has hitherto remained hidden. However, her paper suffers from the zeitgeist of psychoanalysis at the time promising to reveal and offer so much: too much. Nowadays it seems a more sober reassessment of what is possible has occurred and is continuing. Freeman Sharpe seemed to claim that the various inhabitants of the plays are directly reflections of Shakespeare’s own psyche or frankly projections. Of course this cannot be tested directly but perhaps indirectly by inference from clinical work with patients. In this way *some* validity may be claimed but it is “drawing a long bow” indeed to make such claims in a wholesale or general fashion.

Winnicott (1951) wrote of the arrival at a theoretical understanding of the individual in health as having a limiting membrane and hence an inside and outside, hence an inner world as well as an outer world: “My claim is that if there is a need for this double statement, there is need for a triple one; there is the third part of the life of a human being, a part that we cannot ignore, an intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contribute.” We know that he gave the name *transitional objects and phenomena* to the articles and experiences that are recruited by the infant to negotiate the path from a purely inner reality to relating to the external world: the path from “me to not-me”. The term *potential space* was later used and includes the area of experience in which illusion, omnipotence and play occupy. He spoke of how in

later development the arts, religion and culture occupy this area of experience for us. So when we look at a painting in a gallery if we are free enough and have reached a certain level of development, we can fantasize *into* the painting, we can wonder and dream in a sense. We can also, hopefully, walk away and reclaim ourselves. Winnicott (1971/1985) described how it is in the area of *overlap* of potential spaces *between* individuals that creative play can occur. He is referring to therapist and child, mother and child and so on but it links his ideas with the relevance of Shakespeare's works to us all.

The "Social Unconscious" is a term that Hopper (2006), Dalal (2001), Brown (2001), and Volkan (2001) have developed, amongst others, that has value. It is useful to consider how the works tapped into the contemporary social unconscious of the times. The earlier historical account in this paper can be interpreted as a reservoir of unconscious and conscious anxieties harbored by a society. Volkan writes of the trans-generational transmission of shared *unconscious* mental representations of traumatic historical events as well as "chosen glories", e.g. Henry V.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Some concluding comments about working with groups and individuals will be made with the foregoing in mind. When working at the Cassel Hospital, London some 20 years ago I became acutely aware of how the groups and structures constituted by the psychoanalytic therapeutic community offered patients unique opportunities for repair and recovery. The work contained and allowed the development and freeing up of quite severely disturbed individuals from the constraints of their psychopathology over time. This has been referred to in particular in relation to the intensive psychoanalytic psychotherapy of a mother who presented with Munchausen's Syndrome by proxy at the hospital: essentially the application of forms of group and individual analytic psychotherapy (Coombe, 1995, 1996; Day & Flynn, 2004). The mother seemed to need to inhabit a space in which her inner life could be experienced "outwardly" within the wider hospital community, objectified and re-interpreted. The outward experience of oneself and one's inner life is an important aspect of the inhabiting of an analytic group space. Shakespearean tragedies, of course, can be played out in our patients' lives and in our own lives in reality and in all our lives at an unconscious level. Analytic therapy potentially can provide a sophisticated psychological space for the careful exposure and examination of unconscious processes and the re-working of them not entirely dissimilar to the less intimate opportunities offered medieval audiences 400 years ago. Just as the mother may provide a space in which the infant's experience can inhabit her mind and evolve so did Shakespeare's works and their performance allow the audience containment of their experiences. So also does individual analytic and analytic group therapy allow containment of our patients' experiences and new possibilities.

Finally I want to quote the words of William Shakespeare's friend and contemporary, Ben Jonson, who contributed a poem entitled "To The Memory of My Beloved, The Author, William Shakespeare", introducing the first folio of 1623, which included much praise. Jonson is recorded as writing in admiration and some jealousy that Shakespeare never needed to blot his words, that is, erase or review his lines. Jonson wrote in his poem: "He was not of an age but for all time." And concluded with: "The Sweet Swan of Avon."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first and foremost like to thank my wife, Rosemary Nilsson, for her ongoing support, encouragement and availability for discussion in relation to this paper. I would also like to thank Dr. Jenny Randles for allowing me to present an early draft of this paper to the Section of Psychotherapy, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists. Also, presentations at meetings of the Australian Association of Group Psychotherapists and Victorian Association of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapists and at the 14th Group-Analytic Society (London) Symposium in Dublin, August 2008 allowed the development of my thoughts.

AUTHOR NOTES

Dr. Paul D. Coombe, Psychiatrist and Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist in private practice. Formerly Consultant Child Psychiatrist at the Royal Childrens' Hospital, Melbourne and Overseas Senior Registrar at the Cassel Hospital, London.

REFERENCES

- Bion, W. R. (1959). Attacks on linking. *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 30, 308–315 [also in Bion, W. R. (1967) *Second thoughts* (pp. 93–109). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1967].
- Bloom, H. (1999). *Shakespeare: The invention of the human*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Bradley, A. C. (1992). *Shakespearean tragedy* (3rd edition). London: MacMillan.
- Brown, D. (2001). A contribution to the understanding of the social unconscious. *Group Analysis*, 34, 29.
- Coombe, P. D. (1995). The inpatient psychotherapy of a mother and child at the Cassel Hospital: A case of Munchhausen Syndrome by proxy. *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 12(2), 195–207.
- Coombe, P. D. (1996). The Cassel Hospital, London. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 30, 672–680.
- Coombe, P. D. (2007). Book review. *Australasian Journal of Psychotherapy*, 26(2), 76–78.
- Dalal, F. (2001). The social unconscious – a post-Foulkesian perspective. *Group Analysis*, 34(4), 539–555.
- Day, L., & Flynn, D. (Eds). (2004). *The internal and external worlds of children and adolescents*. London: Karnac.
- Derrida, J. (1992). *Acts of literature*, D. Attridge (Ed.). London: Routledge.
- Dobson, M., & Wells, S. (Eds). (2002). *The Oxford companion to Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Freeman-Sharpe, E. (1946). From King Lear to the Tempest. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 2, 19–30.
- Freud, S. (1900). *The interpretation of dreams*. London: Pelican Library, Penguin.
- Freud, S. (1901). *The psychopathology of everyday life*. London: Pelican Library, Penguin.
- Freud, S. (1905a). *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious*. London: Pelican Library, Penguin.
- Freud, S. (1905b). *Three essays on the theory of sexuality*. London: Pelican Library, Penguin.
- Freud, S. (1916–1917). *Introductory lectures on psychoanalysis*. London: Pelican Library, Penguin.
- Greenblatt, S. (2004). The death of Hamnet and the making of Hamlet. *New York Review of Books*, October 21. New York: Rea Hederman; 42–47.
- Hildebrand, P. (2004). The other side of the wall. A psychoanalytic study of creativity in later life. In I. Wise, & M. Mills (Eds), *Psychoanalytic ideas and Shakespeare* (pp. 89–109). London: Karnac.
- Hopper, E. (2006). Theoretical and conceptual notes concerning transference and counter-transference processes in groups and by groups, and the social unconscious: part 1 etc. *Group Analysis*, 39(4), 549–560.
- Jacobs, M. (2008). *Shakespeare on the couch*. London: Karnac Books.
- Jones, E. (1948). The death of Hamlet's father. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 29, 174–176.
- Kermode, F. (2000). *Shakespeare's language*. London: Allen Lane/Penguin Press.
- Kermode, F. (2004). *The age of Shakespeare*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Klein, M. (1988). Personification in the play of children. In *Love, guilt and reparation and other works 1921–1945*. London: Virago Press.
- Kott, J. (1967). *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*. London: Methuen; p. 72.
- Kris, E. (1948). Prince Hal's conflict. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 17, 487–506.
- McDougal, J. (1986). *Theatres of the mind: Illusion and truth on the psychoanalytic stage*. London: Free Association Books.
- Murray, G. (1914). *Hamlet and Orestes: A study in traditional types, lecture to British Academy as the Annual Shakespeare Lecture* (pp. 1–24). [reprinted as Folcroft Library Edition, 1974].
- Rothenberg, A. (1979). *The emerging goddess: The creative process in art, science, and other fields*. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Schoenbaum, S. (1975). *William Shakespeare: A documentary life*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Shapiro, J. (2005). *1599: A year in the life of William Shakespeare*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Showerman, E. (2004). Orestes and Hamlet: From myth to masterpiece. *The Oxfordian*, VII, 89–107.
- Trevelyan, G. M. (1988). *History of England*. London: Longman.
- Volkan, V. (2001). Transgenerational transmissions and chosen traumas: An aspect of large group identity. *Group Analysis*, 34(1), 79–97.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1951). Transitional objects and transitional phenomena. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, XXXIV (pp. 89–97). [also in *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis* London: The Hogarth Press, 1982].
- Winnicott, D. W. (1985). *Playing and reality*. London: Pelican. (Original work published 1971.)
- Wise, I., & Mills, M. (Eds). (2006). *Psychoanalytic ideas and Shakespeare*. London: Karnac.
- Wooster, G., & Buckroyd, P. (2006). Grief, loss and creativity: Whither the phoenix. In I. Wise, & M. Mills (Eds), *Psychoanalytic ideas and Shakespeare* (pp. 25–41). London: Karnac.

Paul D. Coombe, MB, BS, MPM
20 Stirling Street, Kew 3101, Australia
pdcoombe@bigpond.net.au