

lack, at the heart of being. Relationships, in this view, are necessarily ironized, because although they are essential to survival, the persistence of desire prefigures defeat. Desire implies a lack that no object can appease. Worrying, in this kind of arena, looks silly. It seems to lack metaphysical ambition. But from an object-relations point of view we could say that worrying prepares the self, at best in collaboration with responsive others. And we could also say that potentially, through refusing the benefit of others, worrying impoverishes the self by attacking the possibility of its imaginative modification. As a medium of exchange, then, worrying regulates intimacy, and it is often an appropriate response to ordinary demands that begin to feel excessive. But from a modernized Freudian view, worrying—as a reflex response to demand—never puts the self or the objects of its interest into question, and that is precisely its function in psychic life. It domesticates self-doubt.

If we adapt Wittgenstein's famous question "Is belief an experience?" to the matter in hand and ask "Is worrying an experience?" we are left more empty-handed than we may want to be.⁵ If we were anthropologists who had discovered a tribe that engaged in a pervasive activity they called worrying, how would we go about getting a sense of what they meant? I seem to know when I'm worried—I recognize the signs—but this in itself can preclude my finding out what I'm doing when I worry. The tendentious comparison with dreaming reveals, I think, how worrying sets limits to the kind of curiosity we can have about it. We can think about thinking, but perhaps we don't worry enough about worrying. If worrying is, say, a defense against dreaming, if the worry is the contrived, conscious alternative to the dream, at the opposite end of some imaginary spectrum, then there may also be something, paradoxically, that they have in common. They both incorporate reality to defeat interpretation, and they do not always succeed.

Adam Phillips

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Returning the Dream: In Memoriam Masud Khan

No bird soars too high, if he soars with his own wings.

William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell"

Always, in the patient as in the analyst, there is a repertoire of fantasies of what, it is assumed, the object can do for the subject; or what, in Winnicott's language, the object can eventually be used for. But the fantasies—where the subject, of course, is fluent in the work of wishing—are mostly unconscious. And yet object-relations theory provides us with something we could never find in Freud: a veritable catalogue of objects, a series of texts that constitute a *dramatis personae* of facilitators and saboteurs. Belief in the object—and here we must exclude Klein—tends to displace Freud's doubts about the subject. "Childhood love is boundless," he writes in his elegy for desire, "It demands exclusive possession, it is not content with less than all. But it has a second characteristic: it has, in point of fact, no aim and is incapable of obtaining complete satisfaction; and principally for that reason it is doomed to end in disappointment."¹ It is this notorious second characteristic that puts childhood love beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the repetition compulsion and beyond the object.

For Freud, then, excess and aimlessness; and for Winnicott, holding and the developmental process. There is, in Winnicott's work, as in Khan's, a promising sense of the object's potential. A latent teleology of the Self displaces an unavoidable division in the subject. It is the quality of mothering, and not the unconscious *per se*, that is the source of strangeness, that can promote obstacles to intimacy. But in Winnicott's work the

early intimacy of the mother and her infant is always there in service of—cocooning, as it were—an essentially strange and solitary True Self; strange by virtue of having no wish to be known. “At the centre of each person,” he writes, “is an incommunicado element and this is sacred and most worthy of preservation.”² Interestingly, Winnicott uses an un-English word, *incommunicado*, for his most sacred idea. But there is, as we know, in Winnicott’s work, a negative theology of the Self. In the context of psychoanalysis as a hermeneutics it is difficult not to hear this “permanently noncommunicating” element, like the fabled “silence of God,” as offering us a powerful message; but of what and for whom, of course, it is impossible to say. Winnicott makes this impossibility of knowing quite clear. There is an excess here, not of childhood love, but of silence: an always occulted aim, but not aimlessness. It is the acknowledgment of what cannot be known, but only protected—“preserved,” as Winnicott puts it—that defines nurture for Winnicott. The aim of intimacy is to sponsor the solitary unknowability of the True Self.

It is only the impingement of the mother, in Winnicott’s view, that compels the infant and the child to use the various strategies of self-estrangement that he calls the False Self. The False Self manages the imposed illusion of the mother—or sometimes the analyst’s theoretical preoccupations—those demands that are extrinsic to development, while the True Self lives in seclusion awaiting the good object. The object, in Winnicott as in Khan, has a benign potential for noninterference. So in Khan’s case histories we find, whatever the symptomatology, a remarkable phenomenological subtlety moving inevitably, it seems, toward a reconstruction of a failure of the holding environment. There is no sense, as there is in Freud, that the constitution of the human subject entails a holding environment that is a failure; that the world is never good enough for us. A feeling of being strange in a malign sense, of being radically other to oneself, could be symptomatic only of what Khan calls, à propos of Artaud, “the sickness of the self-system.”³ After all, what is the transitional object if not the impossibility—or the refusal—of the Uncanny?

In its twilight, the British Empire produced a theory of good-enough mothering as the antithesis, the guilty critique, of what was always a bad-enough imperialism. Throughout Khan’s work there is a continual and passionate critique of the overinterpretative analyst as maternal saboteur, as the one who appropriates or colonizes the patient, demanding “exclusive possession.” His return to Freud involved a certain reserve about the analyst as interpreter. “I believe that today, once again,” he writes, “we have to start, as Freud did in 1895, by giving a true phenomenological account of our clinical encounter with our patients, without paralysing the ambiguities of the therapeutic exchange by coercing them into the strait-jacket of our metapsychological preconceptions.”⁴ Much of Khan’s work seeks to clarify the nature of the demand in the analyst’s interpretation. Each psychoanalytic theorist, as we know, makes a new kind of demand on the patient. And it is this which the patient will either have to manage or be able to use. (It can, of course, be the very obscurity of the demand that is mutative for the patient.)

So there is also, in Khan’s work, by the same token, an insistent preoccupation with, and attempt at, redescribing the analytic situation based on Winnicott’s model of the mother-infant relationship. The analyst’s project becomes—and this is one of Winnicott’s distinctive contributions, elaborated by Khan—the establishing of a reliable setting to facilitate and sponsor an innate developmental process. Unobtrusively attentive, the analyst is careful, in Khan’s words, not to “initiate a reactive as-if dialogue between the analyst and the patient, from which the person of the patient can stay absent forever.”⁵ But if it is possible for a person to engage in a dialogue in which he can stay absent for ever, there is also one place in which he is always present, in his dreams. “For whom is the dream dreamed?” is a quite different question from “For whom is the dialogue spoken?” “The use of dreams in analysis,” Freud wrote, “is something very remote from their original aim.”⁶ One could not, presumably, say the same thing about the use of language.

For Khan, unlike Winnicott, as a complement to the analogy of the analytic setting with the mother-infant relationship, there is also—articulated in three papers that constitute a series (1962, 1972, 1976)⁷—a description of the analytic setting as comparable, optimally, to the preconditions for dreaming. “Freud intuitively recreated,” Khan writes, “a physical and psychic ambience in the analytic setting which corresponds significantly to that intrapsychic state in the dreamer which is conducive to a ‘good dream.’”⁸ But how does an intrapsychic model work for what is essentially an intersubjective experience, and where does this place the analyst? What kind of sense can we make of the so-called one-body relationship—of “the infant-in-care alone with himself”—as a paradigm for the interpretative practice that is psychoanalysis? It is, as we shall see, part of Khan’s intention to return the dream to the dreamer, to ensure its fullness of meaning—its “eloquence,” in J.-B. Pontalis’ term⁹—through minimal translation.

For Freud, the problem posed by the object was that it could only frustrate; for Khan, the problem posed by the object is that it always demands.

One’s real life is so often the life that one does not lead.

Oscar Wilde, *L’Envoi to Rose-Leaf and Apple-Leaf*

It is in relation to the dream that Khan begins to describe the kind of object, or object-relation, that increasingly preoccupies him (object-relations is, so to speak, novelistic in its continual invention of new “characters”). And it is the inverse of this particular object-relation that he finds in perversion; because in perversion there is the refusal, the terror, of strangeness—strangeness as signifying difference—in the subtle simulation of intimacy. The pervert, in Khan’s version, parodies—or rather, attacks—solitary states of unknowing and imaginative elaboration through compulsive-action with an accomplice; and this is done to mask psychic pain. The accomplice is, by definition, the antitype of this new kind of object, one of whose functions is to hold psychic pain, but simply by acknowledging it, and not to collude in its denial—one collusion being the

assumption that it is interpretable, that it can be made into something else. So another function of this new object in the analytic situation is to set those limits to knowing that “provide coverage for the patient’s self-experience in the clinical situation”¹⁰—and by “coverage” here Khan means ego-support—with the analyst functioning as what he calls an “auxiliary ego.” The pervert, however—or rather, someone who uses at any given moment a perverse solution—denies that there is anything new to know. This can, of course, have its heuristic advantages, since every denial makes possible another kind of acknowledgment (just as each insight is the product of a specific blindness). But there is, as Khan intimates, a complicated relationship between what in psychoanalysis is called perversion and the notion, so dear to the British School, of “not-knowing.” Indeed one could describe the work of Winnicott, Khan, and Marion Milner as the attempt to find a viable alternative to perversion, a new model for theory. Because perversions are always prefigurings; or, to put it another way, we could say that we are being perverse whenever we think we know beforehand exactly what we desire. To know beforehand is to assume that otherness, whether it be a person, a medium, an environment, is redundant; that it has nothing to offer us, that it brings nothing—or just rage and disappointment—to the occasion. For Khan, I think, the so-called pervert, in his apparent knowingness, was an implicit parody of a certain kind of analyst.

Derived from Winnicott’s formative paper, “The Capacity to Be Alone” (1958)—in which, it should be noted, there is no mention of the self and in which it is announced in silence, as it were, that there is a constitutive difference between the notion of presence and the idea of the self—this new object, in the guise of the analyst, allows himself to be used by the patient in a way that increasingly, for Khan, begins to define the analytic encounter. The mother, in the scenario Winnicott describes in his paper, does not correspond to an interpreter but is, as it were, a presence available for comment, should it be required: a “witness,” to use Khan’s ambiguous term, holding the situation through her known potential for availability, not through

her vigilance or intent curiosity. Only then can the infant be alone in the presence of someone. Like a more relaxed version of the censor in the dream-work, the mother's presence makes possible the crystallization of the infant's desire without rupture—of sleep in the case of the dreamer, and of ego-function in the case of the child. The mother cannot create desire, conjure it into being; she can only provide the conditions in which it is possible. She can allow what Winnicott calls, *vis-à-vis* the spatula game, "the full course of an experience." Desire, like the dream, cannot be arranged, but (unlike the Proustian epiphany) the setting for its possibility can be provided. What can be understood, what constitutes the object of knowledge—and this is the paradox that Khan will present us with—are the preconditions, the form, the setting, but not the product, not the reported dream. As with the transitional object, there is a sense in which it does not matter what the dream happens to be; what is significant is that it has happened—that it could be dreamed—and then how it is used. From "Dream Psychology and the Evolution of the Psychoanalytic Situation" (1962), through "The Use and Abuse of Dream in Psychic Experience" (1972), to "Beyond the Dreaming Experience" (1976), we see a curious process intimated in the repeated use of that extraordinary English word—with, it should be added, a history that is always occluded in its use in British psychoanalysis—*experience*. There is, as we read Khan's writing on dreams, a gradual attenuation of the idea of the dream as text, and therefore of the analyst's role in relation to the dream as primarily interpretative; indeed, a growing sense in Khan's work that to speak is always to be spoken for.

The dream as text, and therefore as available for interpretation, is replaced by the dream as experience, formative by virtue of being unknowable. The dream becomes a virtual synecdoche for the True Self of the patient, who is not an object to be deciphered. Dreams become bulletins of the developmental process signifying the silent metabolism of the Self. It is only when the developmental process is felt to go wrong that the idea of a developmental process is useful. "We should no longer say,"

Vincent Descombes writes, *vis-à-vis* the problem of what he calls "the escape of meaning" in hermeneutics, "I have understood, but have I understood correctly or am I mistaken / deceived? But rather, I have understood, but was it possible to understand?"¹¹ What could be more pertinent to that tantalizing hermeneutic object, the dream?

If the dream, as Freud showed, is the way we tell ourselves secrets at night about our desire, it also represents the impenetrable privacy of the Self. "A person in his dreaming experience," Khan writes, "can actualise aspects of the self that perhaps never become overtly available to his introspection or his dreams."¹² The dreamer, we can say, is present in experience but absent in knowledge. And it is the so-called dreaming experience of the patient, like the waking ego of the patient, from which the analyst is excluded. We may wonder, from a different point of view, where this dreaming experience resides if not in language. After all, representations are always outside. Clearly, there cannot be a private language; but there can be a sense, Khan implies, conveyed in language, of a person's irreducible privacy. The dreaming experience comes to signify that which is beyond description in the total *vécu* of the patient.

If, as Khan claims with his extravagant virtuosity, "The dreaming subject is the entire subject,"¹³ then pathology is whatever in the person's history has sabotaged—and here we find the use of reconstruction and therefore the use of the analyst—the person's potential for dreaming experience. A person has to be in the dream of himself before he can dream. The analyst's aim is to facilitate and establish, through holding, the dream-space in the patient where experience can unfold. As the interpreter, he simply helps build the stage, as it were, for a good dream. As interpreter of the dream-text itself, he is a latecomer in the process that brings with it its own guarantee. Freud, as Khan notes, had intimated something of this in his cryptic remark, "those dreams best fulfil their function about which one knows nothing after waking."¹⁴ It was the dream, Freud said, not only the interpreted dream, that was the royal road to the unconscious.

I am there from where no news even of myself reaches me.

Persian aphorism

In his first paper on the subject of the dream, Khan makes it clear that the capacity for the "good dream," akin to the capacity to use the analytic transference, depends ultimately on the patient's experience in infancy of states of sufficient satisfaction. Freud, he writes, "makes it quite explicit that wish-fulfilment in dreams is only possible if the mnemonic images of the previous satisfaction of needs are available for cathexis,"¹⁵ and he links this with Winnicott's account of infant care. In "The Use and Abuse of Dream in Psychic Experience," there is an emerging sense of the dream capacity as facilitated by environmental provision, and dream-space seen as the intrapsychic equivalent of transitional space where a person "actualises certain types of experiences."¹⁶ The dream-space contains, for the purpose of personal elaboration, what might otherwise be acted out—or rather, evacuated—in what Khan calls "social space." But Khan is careful to differentiate the experiences actualized in the dream-space from the dream as "symbolic mental creation" (he will conclude the final paper in the series by stating unequivocally, "There is a dreaming experience to which the dream text holds no clue").¹⁷ The analyst's interpretation does not so much translate unconscious content as show the patient, with the help of associations, what he has used the dream-space for.

Transitional phenomena—unlike the "impersonal object" that Khan suggests the pervert "puts . . . between his desire and his accomplice" and that alienates the pervert from himself and the object of desire¹⁸—are integral to the process of personalization. The aim of any interpretation is to facilitate the personalization of the dream. And the dream, like all transitional phenomena, is conveying the patient to an unknowable destination. Like the mother who plays in the transitional space—a space, Khan insists, always vulnerable to preemptive intrusion—the analyst is there to sustain the experience. A clinical preoccupation with "how to let oneself be used, become the servant of a process"¹⁹ implies that interpretation might become a sophisticated form of interruption, the way the analyst insists on being important.

In "Beyond the Dreaming Experience" (1976), which should perhaps be titled "Beyond the Interpreting Experience," there is, as a consequence, a disillusionment with the very object that Freud placed at the beginning of the psychoanalytic enterprise—the remembered dream or dream-text. It is not now "the component parts of the dream-text," those parts Freud encouraged us to dissect, but "the whole dream as an experiential entity "that has become the focus of interest, because the "dreaming experience," in Khan's view, bears no necessary relation to the dream-text. "The dreaming experience," he writes, "is an entirety that actualises the self in an unknowable way . . . dreaming itself is beyond interpretation."²⁰ The statement, in absolute terms, invites intuitive assent, but we may also want to ask, how does he know? Or perhaps a more psychoanalytic question, strictly speaking, would be, what is the wish that is satisfied by believing this to be true?

This disillusionment with the dream-text—and, by implication, with the analyst as controller of the hermeneutic—signifies Khan's distrust of psychoanalysis as epistemology, as a theater of the epistemophilic instinct that Klein was so impressed by. For what is the developmental process if not a limit set to—or a defiance of—the Other's claim to knowledge about the Self, that elusiveness staged as an essence, but always incommunicado? And whose version of self-knowledge, despite psychoanalysis, does not sound glib? Khan's work, with its generous skepticism, is an acknowledgment—necessarily ironized in a secular culture—that we did not invent ourselves, that we have only described ourselves.

Toward the end of his life Khan was increasingly preoccupied by "a person's relation with himself"²¹—that is, the process of personalization—and with the possible meaning of Freud's most recondite concept of primary repression. He was preoccupied, in other words, with that which was beyond the object's knowledge, but not beyond the object's acknowledgment.

"Maybe," John Wisdom wrote, "we look for too simple a likeness to what we dreamed."²² Maybe, Khan suggests, we do not always need a likeness.