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DONALD W. WINNICOTT'S THEORY, LITERATURE, AND MIGRATION

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Abstract: When Donald W. Winnicott conceived his psychoanalytical concepts and theories, initially meant to address problems associated with the relationship between a mother and her child, the British paediatrician was aware they could be meaningful for understanding cultural issues too. One of the key questions when dealing with literature as a form of culture is to what extent the representation of the self in it is true or false. Winnicott's theory of transitional objects – items used to provide psychological comfort – can operate as a significant critical tool when trying to answer such questions. This paper firstly explores the reception of Winnicott's theory of transitional objects and phenomena and other associated concepts in literary criticism. It moves further to demonstrate it is especially relevant when literature travels or deals with international migration. Last but not least, it presents several possible limitations for the field of literary criticism, taking into consideration contemporary theories about the location of culture.

Keywords: Donald W. Winnicott; transitional objects and phenomena; literary criticism; literature; migration.

In the early 1990s, American psychoanalyst, literary critic and cultural historian Peter L. Rudnytsky called attention to the relevance of Donald W. Winnicott's theory of transitional objects and phenomena for the domain of literature and the arts. Neglected for some time in literary circles, Winnicott's understanding of creativity and potential

space has gradually been used in literary criticism ever since. The starting point in Rudnytsky's *Transitional Objects and Potential Spaces* (1993) is Winnicott's article "The Location of Cultural Experience" (1967), in which the British pediatrician emphasises his view that artistic creation is rooted in the transitional objects of a child's play and the intermediate potential space between reality and fantasy which objects and play represent (Winnicott 128).

In an earlier article, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena" (1953), Winnicott explains that, when a mother leaves her baby alone, the baby starts playing with objects in order to deal with the sense of frustration caused by the mother's absence. In this way, an illusory intermediate space is created between the child and the mother or parent. This is how children's mental activity develops. Winnicott describes this phenomenon in detail and names it in different ways throughout his works. His aim is to identify and to conceptualise the moment when the baby makes sense of what he calls the first "not-me" possession (mother's body, blanket, pacifier, teddy bear, doll or other toys, music etc.), because that moment represents a significant stage in discovering that there is a world outside the self, a boundary between the *me* and the *not-me*. If this moment is happy, then the child will want to reiterate it, will develop a healthy ability of discovering similar boundaries and will internalise knowledge about the world, building an inner reality, a potential space, step by step: memories, fantasy, dreams, the integration of past, present and future. If this moment is happy or not depends on both internal and external factors. Winnicott points out that it is not the object that is transitional. The object only represents the infant's transition from the state of being merged with the mother to a state of being in relation to the mother as something outside and separate (Winnicott 1-8). More than half a century later, it was shown that this theory was the result of his psychoanalytical training and the fruitful collaboration with his future second wife, Clare Britton, when assisting evacuated children together during the Second World War: "While Donald certainly acquainted Clare with the fundamentals of object relations theory, Clare brought her own creative powers to the work in Oxfordshire, using aspects of this theory in a practice setting quite different from the analytic consulting room" (Kanter 468).

When the British pediatrician attempts to explain the way he uses the concept of culture in connection with psychoanalysis, he is rather cautious: "I am thinking of the

inherited tradition. I am thinking of something that is in the common pool of humanity, into which individuals and groups of people may contribute, and from which we may all draw *if we have somewhere to put what we find*" (Winnicott 133). (italics in original) The author implies that the human capacity to process knowledge depends on the level of awareness regarding the potential space created in the mind at a very early age and the practice of maintaining it through ongoing cultural experience. Moreover, he projects the dyad of the child and the mother figure in the domain of cultural production, setting the new and the old in contrast: "The interplay between originality and the acceptance of tradition as the basis for inventiveness seems to me to be just one more example, and a very exciting one, of the interplay between separateness and union" (Winnicott 134).

Rudnytsky's previously mentioned collection of papers, which received significant reviews at the time, includes articles by various other authors on the psychoanalytical framework (symbol formation, the place of literature in the mind), literary objects (in plays, poetry and prose) and cultural fields (religion, gender issues and education). What is noteworthy is that Rudnytsky's insistence on the importance of Winnicott's theory of transitional objects and potential spaces for literature and culture occurred at a time when cultural theorists like Homi K. Bhabha (1994) were concerned with the postcolonial processes caused by cultural differences (of race, ethnicity, gender, class, geopolitical conditions etc.) and with the location of culture as an in-between space where new language and hybrid identities emerge, not least with "the third space of enunciation (...) that carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (Bhabha 38). It also occurred when Tim Berners-Lee and his colleagues developed HTML and URL, which led to the first versions of the World Wide Web, the virtually endless space of the internet, which has become a potential space *par excellence*.

In such contexts of tumultuous debate and action in relation to the third space as both real and imagined, as both framework and content, Winnicott's five-fold thesis offers a model of individual cultural development based on the universal relationship between a child and the mother figure:

1. The place where cultural experience is located is in the potential space between the individual and the environment (originally the object). The same can be said of playing.

Cultural experience begins with creative living first manifested in play. 2. For every individual the use of this space is determined by life experiences that take place at the early stages of the individual's existence. 3. From the beginning the baby has maximally intense experiences in the potential space between the subjective object and the object objectively perceived, between me-extensions and the not-me. This potential space is at the interplay between there being nothing but me and there being objects and phenomena outside omnipotent control. 4. Every baby has his or her own favourable or unfavourable experience here. Dependence is maximal. The potential space happens only in relation to a feeling of confidence on the part of the baby, that is, confidence related to the dependability of the mother-figure or environmental elements, confidence being the evidence of dependability that is becoming introjected. 5. In order to study the play and then the cultural life of the individual one must study the fate of the potential space between anyone baby and the human (and therefore fallible) mother figure who is essentially adaptive because of love (Winnicott 135).

His thesis implies that everyone can have access to the potential space for play and development. We may ask if his thesis is universal enough to be applied to other chronotopes and contexts. I tend to give an affirmative answer, because his study is based on the ubiquitous relationship between a child and the mother figure, between the created and the creator more generally. A negative answer would apply when considering the specific conditions of that relationship, especially when the relationship is bad and can hardly be repaired. In that case, however, Winnicott's answer is to always look for solutions, to be inventive when there is no solution available, to believe in life and in the power of tenderness.

Since the early 1990s, Winnicott's works have been the subject of significant publishing efforts aimed at (a) making his concepts more popular to various types of readership, (b) testing their relevance in relation to different contexts or (c) interpreting them for a wide range of purposes: *Language of Winnicott: A Dictionary of Winnicott's Use of Words* (1996) by Jan Abram, a glossary of terms with extensive definitions; *Winnicott: His Life and Work* (2003), a biography by F. R. Rodman; *Attachment, Play and Authenticity: A Winnicott Primer* (2008) by Steven Tuber, a reader containing his theories; *Reading Winnicott* (2011) edited by Lesley Caldwell, Angela Davis, *Donald Winnicott Today* (2013) edited by Jan Abram, *Playing and Reality Revisited: A New*

Look at Winnicott's Classic Work (2015) edited by Gennaro Saragnano and Christian Seulin, *Donald W. Winnicott and the History of the Present* edited by Angela Joyce (2018), all collections of academic articles; *Are you my Mother?* by Alison Bechdel, a graphic memoir inspired by psychoanalysis; *Tea with Winnicott* (2016) by Brett Kahr, an imaginary posthumous interview with Winnicott; *A Beholder's Share* (2017) by Dodi Goldman, a collection of essays; and many others. Such a wide range of re-readings and re-writings demonstrate his enormous influence within and outside children psychoanalysis and his establishment as one of the fathers of British psychoanalysis.

Winnicott and Literary Criticism

One reviewer of *Transitional Objects and Potential Spaces* by P. L. Rudnytsky believes that “the independent object relations theory can claim to offer the first satisfactory psychoanalytic account of aesthetics” (Knox 617), specifying that, although Freud and Klein approached the topic before, “neither treated the work of art as a derivative of forces that are in themselves aesthetic” (Knox 617). Psychoanalysis and aesthetics have been entangled from the very incipience of the former and thus it seems necessary to reevaluate the nature and the relevance of their relationship from time to time. Starting from the too rigid interpretation of D. H. Lawrence’s novel *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928), another reviewer of Rudnytsky’s collection made an interesting observation when highlighting the need to reassess how Winnicott’s psychoanalytical thinking is used in relation to literary criticism:

In his clinical practice, as in his writing, Winnicott was, by all accounts, the most sensitive and empathic of psychoanalysts, often working with narcissistic or schizoid patients. Is it too much to ask that if his concepts are to be applied to literature, the critic should approach the task with some portion of the sensitivity that informed Winnicott’s work? Empathy, of course, does not mean sympathy or approval; it is a mode of perception by vicariously experiencing the internal world of the other. I do not think that psychoanalytic insight, particularly from an object relations perspective, is to be achieved without some effort at this kind of emotional understanding. We do not play “gotcha!”; we are trying to understand author and text. (Cowan 428-429)

How many times have we been asked to take into consideration a theorist's character in using his theory to interpret literary texts? Inviting critics to be more sensitive and empathic hints at a significant shift at the heart of modern artistic sensibility. Cowan aptly reminds us that D. H. Lawrence was interested in psychoanalysis and wrote essays on the subject, which, unfortunately, were met with laughter in his epoch, because he was not a specialist, but which, fortunately, can better explain his work. Almost a century later, critics find it meaningful to compare Lawrence's and Winnicott's psychoanalytical views and to demonstrate "how Lawrence argues the subtle developmental patterns of the growing infant almost in the same way as Winnicott does years later while explaining his concepts of transitional objects and potential spaces" (Chatterji 215).

To show how Winnicott's ideas can cast light on older literature from another culture, the following example involves nineteenth-century literature in French. *Un coeur simple* (1877) by Gustave Flaubert and *Bruges-la-morte* (1892) by Georges Rodenbach are compared to bring into question certain differences between a transitional object and a fetish: "when a transitional object fails, it does so because the object is not used to communicate with and connect to the outside world, but rather becomes the hermetic focus of the subject's thoughts, keeping them mired in past trauma rather than present or future well-being" (Cooke 414). The theory of transitional objects is used here to analyse whether particular objects represented in literature are successful or fail to help the main characters maintain a proper balance between their private and public life, and whether the objects maintain their communicative and psychological functions or not: parrot Loulou operates as a successful transitional object in Flaubert, whereas a dead wife's golden braid proves to be a failed one in Rodenbach.

To give a more recent example, Toni Morrison's acclaimed novel *Beloved* (1987) offers critics the occasion to study transitional phenomena in relation to individual and collective trauma in the socio-historical context of the nineteenth-century American South. In this context, it has been highlighted that, unlike previous psychoanalysts:

Winnicott (...) provides a rare example in the psychoanalytic literature of addressing the mother's hatred, including her ambivalence both about being an object of the infant's appetite and about eventually having to give up this privileged but complicated position.

The anxiety of destruction that underlies the idealization of breastfeeding emerges in *Beloved* from the intricate coupling of Sethe's breastfeeding with its seeming opposite, the act of infanticide. Sethe's return to nursing and weaning Beloved does not erase the scars of their shared trauma. But the ritualized separations and reunions that breastfeeding entails has allowed Sethe a meaningful opportunity to mourn and to begin to repair (Stone 308).

As previously mentioned, in Winnicott's view, a mother's body functions as a transitional object, a situation which represents a transitional phenomenon from being merged with the mother to becoming more independent. Inspired by the life of Margaret Garner, known for killing her daughter rather than allowing the child to be returned to slavery, novelist Toni Morrison rewrites the tragic history by offering a literary explanation for a mother's hate aimed at her own baby at a time when legislation against slavery in the United States began to emerge and the defendants of the slavery system were still in power in many places. Morrison's book operates as a cultural transitional object which has helped communities across the world deal with collective trauma caused by institutionalised racism and better understand how to individually navigate the unpredictable sea of emotions which such a process brings about.

When it comes to poetry, Winnicott's work seems to be an even more useful instrument of interpretation. A first example from the 1990s provides an analysis of potential spaces in George Herbert's poetry and their relevance for artistic productions. It dwells on Winnicottian ideas to delineate the developmental stages of human subjectivity:

The quality and durability of potential space contribute to the child's formation of boundaries and to his or her capacities to be alone (at first with the aid of the transitional object), to be intimate with others (as with the transitional object and the mother it represents), to play, and later to participate in cultural phenomena like theater, art, and literature (capacities contingent on the survival of the *as if* attitude first available in potential space) (Guernsey 197).

Therefore, a space of potential, like that of poetry, is meant to cultivate one's relationship with otherness, neither to simply possess it nor to glorify it only, but to play

with it like a child plays with his or her mother, to broaden understanding and to nurture both self and other. The same as in the early childhood, when the rapport between what remains silent or invisible and what becomes explicit makes the young grow with an awareness of the boundary between reality and fantasy, throughout time this boundary becomes a mentally inhabitable site in itself where cultural experience can flourish. However, Winnicott specifies that this transitional phenomenon is successful when the mother figure is “good enough” (3). If it is unsuccessful, therapy will be necessary. This may be one of the reasons for which some poets and literary critics have demonstrated how poetry can be healing. For instance, several critics of John Keats’s work have noticed the resonances between the poet’s and the psychoanalyst’s conceptions of the creative process: the resonance between Keats’s “negative capability” and Winnicott’s ideas of creative play (Hopkins 85); or the resonance between poetic apostrophe and pre-verbal Winnicottian transitional objects and phenomena (Sun 60). When reading “Ode to a Nightingale” and “Ode on a Grecian Urn” through a Winnicottian lens, it is believed that “the poem serves somewhat like the scene of a transference” (Sun 65).

In a pedagogy-oriented article about “Canto 23” from the *Divine Comedy* by Dante, the concept of transitional phenomena is employed to explain the relay structure of guides that help the pilgrim conclude his spiritual journey, but also to describe the cognitive activity of reading as an act of imagination and cooperation:

A vertical reading of ‘Cantos 23’ demonstrates that gazing too intently at bodies and faces, indeed, at the amazing pageantry of motion and metamorphoses, though dangerous, is absolutely necessary to expand our cognitive abilities. The cantos collectively suggest — hundreds of years before scientists proved the reality of neuroplasticity — that we can indeed use sensory experience to fundamentally change habitual patterns in how we think about and understand the world. (...) Within the framework that Winnicott provides, students might engage in wider questions about why we need poetry and imagination and why fractures in community and ruptures in kinship lead to painful exile. Furthermore, because of Winnicott’s emphasis on case histories, playing, and creativity, students can review Dante’s poem with a sense of play and of reading as a fundamentally creative and collaborative act (Park 498-501).

The cited fragment suggests that contemporary readers, as the figure of the pilgrim in Dante's work, may experience otherness and learn through poetry how to use one's imagination in order to develop healthy relationships with the diversity of the world generated by cultural difference.

Wallace Stevens's poetry has been a site for trying Winnicott's ideas for some time. For example, his poem "Local Objects", which paradoxically contains no concrete objects except a missing foyer, functions as a meditation on the relationship between an individual and the surrounding things that have a significance for him or her. Two critics make an interesting ethical comparison between the poet's and the pediatrician's worldviews:

As in Stevens, so too in Winnicott: "the objects of insight" are the most valued "local objects," neither material objects equipped already with prefabricated names, nor intimate objects of home, for which, perhaps, no name is absolutely required. Instead, they are delightful provocations for the spirit without a foyer—without an entrance hall out to the world's beauty, nor one into the grandeur of the subject's throne-room—to create the fresh name that always occurs in poetry's ever-transitional space, the fresh name for the modern imaginative reality of playing repeatedly with one's own death. (Masucci Mackenzie and O'Hara 246)

Another reader takes over the concept of "not communicating" (in other words, an individual's need for isolation and secrets) and affirms that "by focusing on what is gradual, precarious, and transitional, Winnicott's account of the self offers a rich conceptual vocabulary for describing the changes of Stevens' psychic negotiations of the real world." (Steen 16). The critic identifies a series of strategies in Stevens's poetry that made his lines question the meaning of communication and the lack of it: "he depicts unknown, internal space as a necessary site of poetic attention; mirrors and amplifies the frustrations of communication; accesses otherwise hidden sources of knowledge or memory; and establishes necessary preconditions for crossing the threshold from privacy into social engagement" (Steen 18). This approach, which echoes the previously mentioned study on Flaubert and Rodenbach, implies that a Winnicottian perspective

on reading poetry might be suitable for cultivating harmonious and enduring relationships with both inner and outer reality, with both inner and outer illusion.

The Winnicottian concept of “unintegration”, explored in connection with Tom Raworth’s poetry, is described as an “addition to an important mechanism in Freud’s account of the neuroses and their relationship to understanding” (Scozzaro 35). Considered as an infant’s natural need for relaxation and quietness, for being and creativity as constitutive of developmental achievements, the concept of “unintegration” refers to a stage in very early childhood development when the child cannot yet distinguish between self and environment as a holding space. Raworth’s poems provide a literary ground “for a form fit to imagine beforeness” (Scozzaro 36), “beforeness” being a temporal perspective upon “unintegration”, the interval in which babies still depend on their nurturers to a great extent. In contrast with previous psychoanalytical approaches to Raworth’s poetry, Scozzaro’s contribution is “to demonstrate that the object relations theory offered by Winnicott is a rich framework for analysing poetry that remains quietly sceptical of the theories of inner life and its neuroses as conceptualised by traditional Freudianism” (52). By close reading the poems anew, the critic reveals the figure of a father and poet interested in harnessing a stable relationship between early signs of consciousness represented by transitional objects used by children and an adult’s consciousness represented by the literary text the poet creates.

As a matter of fact, literary historians have shown that it was not only Winnicott who inspired readers of poetry. Winnicott himself was often inspired by poetry. It is no surprise that the chapter “The Location of Cultural Experience” begins with a quotation from Rabindranath Tagore, which the pediatrician engages with, commenting at length on its psychoanalytic meaning: “On the seashore of endless worlds, children play.” (128) The quotation differs a little from the existing translations of Chapter 60 in “Gitanjali” (Tagore 77), and it is not clear if it was the pediatrician’s intention to replace the word “meet” with the word “play” or not, which creates a further playful limbo effect. In *Playing and Reality*, his patients are interested in, read, recite and quote poetry by Christina Rossetti (78) or Gerard Manley Hopkins (83, 85, 182), and Winnicott engages with the poetry of John Donne (xvi) or Shakespeare’s sonnets (113). His enthusiasm for poetry is not transitory, however. As one critic remarks, drawing on multiple sources

such as letters, essays and poetry, Winnicott's source of hope in the face of disaster was, among others, Eliot's late Christian poetry:

The use of faith as reliving, where faith becomes imagination in the face of primitive anxiety, is set out along therapeutic lines as regression to dependence. Winnicott therefore includes the affirmation of resurrection as part of the ontology of disaster and hope, an affirmation that extends to exaltation, a euphoric sense of being, on the model of biblical modes of imagining. While remaining fully aware of the deep paradoxes of being, Winnicott engages the biblical presence, most notably in Eliot, as an authentic inspiration for clinical thinking. (Groarke 427-428)

The relationship between literature and psychoanalysis has been a topic of discussion since psychoanalysis was established as a theoretical and empirical science. Regarding Winnicott's theory in particular, it has been argued that: "after his politics of language in interpretation, we can forge a more nuanced psychoanalytic theory of relationship to the text" (Coles 75). In her study on the status of poetry in his work, Coles asks why Winnicott's theories of psychoanalytical interpretation are sometimes based on poetic language. She explains that literary interpretation as well as psychoanalytical interpretation have many aspects in common, but they differ essentially because the position of a poet and the position of a patient rarely overlap: poetry is an object meant to be interpreted in whatever way possible, which mediates between creator and interpreters; whereas the practice of direct mutual analysis may happen only in the consulting room. Moreover, she mentions the intrinsic capacity of poetry to cultivate incompleteness by being both charming and disconcerting. Eventually, the critic emphasises Winnicott's insistence on the tension existing in the relation between the interpreter and the object of interpretation, and the need to seek and maintain a healthy balance:

Out of the contradiction between Winnicott's aesthetics and his thinking on early human creativity, I would like to suggest the following: that perhaps the highest order of value of the work of art – and of our desire for it – is those qualities we "find" and did not "create", qualities that surprise, unbalance and resist our sense of what the work means, that

remain unassimilable, difficult and “not-me”. This twist in Winnicott’s thought invites us to consider the beguiling sovereignties of “me” and “not-me” in the interface between two discourses, challenging interpretation to be led by the resistances and contradictions of its object (Coles 78).

This implies that, in the same way as the language used during therapeutic sessions is a language that helps individuals live with themselves and with others, literary language – poetry – may operate as a mediator not only between an individual and a community, but also between an individual and a culture, between a community and a culture, between communities and between cultures.

To make a step outside literature defined as text only, it is worth mentioning that Winnicott’s ideas, among others, were a source of inspiration for the graphic memoir *Are You My Mother?* (2012) by American writer Alison Bechdel. Lisa Dietrich discussed the methods employed by the author for enacting potential spaces and the healing value of the memoir, and proposed the concept of “‘graphic analysis’, a long and difficult therapeutic and creative process of doing and undoing the self in words and images” (183). Madelon Sprengnether identified in it musings over the concept of the “false self” as the protagonist vacillates between being responsive to her mother or trying to be herself, and “an understanding that mothers may ‘hate’ their babies (with reference to Winnicott), just as children may ‘hate’ their mothers” (408). Her conclusion that “mothers must stop idealising themselves” (411) and her suggestion for the publication of “stories by mothers who are not ideal, yet also (in Winnicott’s resonant term) good enough” (411) are very much in line with Winnicott’s creative ideas.

In recent years, critics have tried to reinterpret Winnicott’s view on culture, which appears to be conceived as an ongoing process or a changing structure rather than as a fixed, clearly determined domain: “Winnicott never developed a complete cultural theory but by *mapping a path* from primary creativity, through transitional phenomena and play, to art and religion, he suggested a way of thinking that others could develop in their own way” (Wright 63) (my italics). Linking it to several forms of culture (poetry, theatre, painting etc.), critics have tried to better understand and explain the nature of this path. For example, the concept of transitional space has been employed to emphasize the existence of “a continuum from the child’s creation of the transitional

object to mature creativity as the maternal environment gives way to the wider cultural environment” (Robinson 82) and “the role of reality as a frame good for creative living and of the internal and environmental holding of that frame” (Robinson 84). From an artist’s point of view, the various frames that separate reality from illusion – the frame of a painting, the mounting of a sculpture, the stage, the layout of a webpage, the screen of a computer or a phone, the features of a book, the structure of a story, the form of a poem etc. – are seen as developments of the initial frame represented by a mother’s body, within which the creative content can emerge. From a cultural consumer’s point of view, literary objects and artistic items are meant to help individuals develop a creative type of living within the wider social space. As another scholar put it: “An art object impels the artist and the viewer to find a fit between the aspects of originality – desire – and those that are traditional in the work, thus contemplating the artwork equals glimpsing the core of the personality of both the artist and the viewer” (Alphandary 412).

Uses and Limitations of D. W. Winnicott’s Concepts

It is my suggestion that Winnicott’s psychoanalytical concepts become even more culturally relevant when literature migrates and/or deals with migration. If a book is considered a cultural transitional object, which may help a writer or a reader experience a transition from knowing nothing about a literary subject to mastering it and using it creatively, then it may be a relevant one.

When literature migrates from culture A to culture B through translation, a cultural potential space is created in-between. The environment of culture B becomes more diverse and the individual reader can have access to literature otherwise unavailable because of the language barrier. Choosing a book from another culture, in translation or in original, depends, however, on early life experiences, education and environment. On the one hand, when reading a translated book by an author from another culture, a reader may or may not be aware it is a translation, a fact which depends on one’s upbringing and the characteristics of the education system. On the other hand, reading a book by an author from another culture in original implies that the reader has had a long experience of learning the author’s language. The potential space created by the presence of literature from culture A in one’s life is favourable if

readers from culture B find it meaningful in order to develop themselves in their given environment. If cultural environment B encourages reading through all the means possible, including works from other cultures, then reading will be a satisfying activity and will most probably become a significant factor for the reader to become a better writer. Some of the worst scenarios, however, would be that there is no valuable literature in culture A to travel to culture B, there are no translators able to recreate that literature in case it exists, readers of culture B are not encouraged to read books from other cultures, readers from culture B do not learn the language of culture A, the potential intercultural space is too weak or its history is not sufficiently activated.

When literature engages with the theme of migration, we may take into consideration both local literature and foreign literature, as they both contribute to the potential space between a nation and its diaspora. Psychoanalysts see a distinction between a patient's and an artist's approach to anxiety, which can be applied in the context of turbulent migration too: "I have often seen patients who have lost their way or who have never experienced a sense that life is worth living (...) this is rarely a problem for the artists (...) because artists are almost invariably involved with projects that are produced in the transitional mental space" (Wilson 145). Writers, therefore, are those literary artists who may tap into complicated emotions caused by migration and may create books seen as transitional objects that may help readers better cope with the tension between leaving one's home country and trying to adapt to a new socio-cultural environment. The literature of migration written either by local or foreign writers is meant to create a cultural local environment with a view to other socio-cultural surroundings: either about citizens who travel and find a home abroad or about foreign citizens who travel and take root in the country. Reading local or foreign literature of migration may be included in the national curriculum or not, depending on the education national strategy, but individually one should be free to read such works if publishing houses are stimulated enough to bring them on the market. A child whose parents work abroad may find solace in reading about a similar family situation and, in general, the stories about other people's journeys to other places are inspiring and eye-opening. The experience of reading a book about migration may be favourable or not, depending on the factors that determine someone's transition from dissatisfaction to enjoyment: the availability of such books in local institutions such as publishing houses,

libraries, immigration and refugee agencies etc.; reading habits and reading skills; the capacity to choose or to recommend a suitable book; the reading environment such as family, education institutions, libraries, media, book clubs etc. Someone who does not read or does not have access to literature about migration, who grows up in an environment that sees migration as a threat and does not seek to maintain a fair relationship with the reality of migration, will not be able to cultivate strong and favourable connections with foreign cultures and, eventually, will miss the creative potential of the intermediate third space.

Last but not least, the theory of transitional objects and phenomena, plus the concepts associated with it, presents several limitations for the field of literary criticism, taking into consideration contemporary theories about the location of culture. Winnicott himself included some of these limitations in his work. For example, not all objects are transitional. They become transitional if they help the individual distinguish between reality and illusion, if they prove successful for a certain cultural experience, if they help the individual get over negative feelings and use them creatively. A book constitutes a special case of transitional object and the key questions about it are to what extent it helps its writer establish a desirable relationship between his or her private and public environment, and to what extent it supports its readership to navigate between the reality and the fiction it represents.

Moreover, Winnicott's theory emerged as a result of therapeutic practice mainly, it has a strong socio-psychological root, hence it would be an error of interpretation to forget about its psychoanalytical foundation, the social context of the family and its dialogic format, and to use it in the domain of literary and artistic hermeneutics without referring to the historical circumstances of its emergence: the traumatic collective experience of the Second World War. It is no surprise that his works were reconsidered in the early 1990s, after the Cold War, the revolutions of the 1989 and the invention of the internet, because they have proved their applicability whenever psychological transitions pose significant problems.

Another serious limitation occurs when there are no clear distinctions between an adult readership and a young and very young readership. Adults are not children, children are not adults and the transition from childhood to adulthood is not a joke. Knowledge acquisition, play and creativity have different dimensions and coordinates at

different ages, in different socio-economic contexts. Forced transitions using inadequate objects, without any preliminary ethical deliberations, prove to be dangerous for the physical and mental health of individuals, communities and cultures. Too difficult books, containing unsuitable topics might put off children and adolescents, and it is the task of writers and literary critics to create literary works that are both captivating and intriguing.

When a person, or a body in general (an institution, a community or a country), plays the role of the parent in a transitional process, that body risks being overwhelmed by negative perceptions and reactions, either their own or of that who plays the role of the infant, or beneficiary, when that body does not adapt to the needs of the beneficiary. Instead of scapegoating that body, there should be initiatives to build enough mechanisms within that body which may transform hostility and antagonism into dialogue through creative practices such as literature and the arts. Without these mechanisms, the potential space in which cultural transitional phenomena occur remains highly variable and the rapport between the infant figure (modernity) and the parent figure (tradition) may lack balance when recontextualised, if trust and love are lost on the way.

With its focus on experience and development, Winnicott's theory of transitional objects and phenomena is – as its name suggests – part of the philosophical tradition of the *panta rhei* (“everything flows”) or the issue of becoming. However, his insistence on the permanence of the potential space as a real site and a frame for facilitating individual creativity and cultural growth also situates it in the philosophical tradition of being. My hope is that Winnicott's balanced perspective on culture, as a tension between being and becoming or as a play between reality and illusion, will find new ground in other cultures concerned with developing their potential spaces.

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