

On Being an Orphan: An Untold Story

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On Being an Orphan: An Untold Story

This is the story of the Tavistock Institute as an orphan. Take 'orphan' as an identifier, as a metaphor and as a lived experience. Take it as an individual experience, as a group phenomenon and as an organisational culture. Think about what being an orphan might mean to you personally, professionally perhaps; what characteristics an orphan might have and what behaviours an orphan might display. This story is a three-dimensional trip through the history of the Institute's seven decades: the personal dimension of the employees, the work that they have carried out and events that have happened to the Institute as a whole.

Yes, the Tavistock Institute as an orphan. I am going to tell you that throughout its 70 years history, the Tavistock Institute itself has been full of and alive with experiences of orphanhood and abandonment. That the Institute's identity as an organisational misfit – a refuge – is rooted in a lived experience of profound internal loneliness that comes from having had an early experience of being orphaned or abandoned, perhaps rejected, and put in one type of care or another. I am going to tell you that the orphan identity is co-created and that it is because of these experiences and because of this identity that the Tavistock Institute and its employees have made it their unfailing mission over 70 years and beyond to look after the institutions and people whose roles are to look after children, those who were orphaned or otherwise abandoned. I am also going to tell you a story which is not sad but of course it is emotional.

“If you couldn’t be loved, the next best thing was to be left alone.”

L M MONTGOMERY, ANNE OF GREEN GABLES

The Novel is a literary genre which typically represents the efforts of an ordinary individual to navigate their way through the trials of life. The orphan is essentially a novelist’s character, and in this talk-novella, our protagonist is the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (TIHR), an independent, autonomous, defiant and self-sufficient social science organisation, an orphan through and through to its core.

Orphans have a special place in the history of the novel, especially in the 19th century, more than half a century before our Tavistock story begins. Although orphaning your main character was fictionally useful, there is a real social history behind these fictional orphans and it is into this real social history that the Tavistock Institute enters and begins its work.

The most famous character in recent fiction – Harry Potter – is an orphan. The child wizard’s adventures are based on the death of his parents and the responsibilities that he must therefore assume.

“The women laughed and wept; the crowd stamped their feet enthusiastically, for at that moment Quasimodo was really beautiful. He was handsome — this orphan, this foundling, this outcast.”

VICTOR HUGO, THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME

The literary orphan is above all a character out of place, forced to make his or her own home in the world.

In children’s fiction (Little Goody Two-Shoes, Annie, Protagonists of The Secret Garden, Anne of Green Gables, Tom Sawyer and Ballet Shoes, to name a few) the orphan will eventually find the happiness to compensate for having been deprived of parents and their stories begin because they find themselves without parents, unleashed to discover the world.

We can find a similar motif in almost all of Walt Disney’s animations. From Bambi to Simba (Lion King) to Arlo (the good dinosaur) and at least 15 other Disney characters, from ‘Princess and the Frog’ to ‘Lilo and Stitch’ to ‘Frozen’, and including the animation of old classics like ‘Cinderella’, ‘Snow White’, ‘The Hunchback of Notre Dame’ and so on. Interpretations of why that is, include a narrative that Walt Disney blamed himself for the death of his mother in a fire caused in a new home he purchased for his parents, and since then he developed characters who were orphans cum great explorers, leaders or world changers.

“I was an infant when my parents died. They both were ornithologists. I’ve tried so often to evoke them that today I have a thousand parents. Sadly they dissolve in their own virtues and recede, but certain words, chance words I hear or read, such as a ‘bad heart’ always to him refer, and ‘cancer of the pancreas’ to her.”

VLADIMIR NABUKOV, PALE FIRE

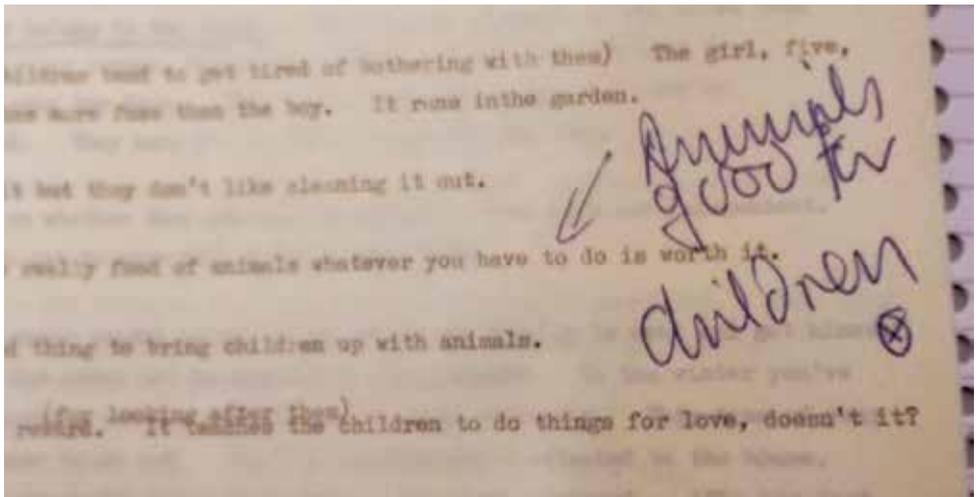
The literary orphan, like the systemic psychoanalyst/social scientist/the social anthropologist – the Tavistockian – is a mirror to the qualities of others. The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations identity is co-created through and by the work carried out in it as much as by the life journeys of its employees. True to one of its core areas of study – the relationship between the individual and their group, organisation and wider context – this story too is both an individual and a systemic one. The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations is both Dickens and his *Oliver Twist*, and vice versa- both *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Nicolas Nickleby* and their Dickenses; *Heathcliff*, *Jane Eyre* and their Brontës.

The fictional orphan is set loose from established conventions to face a world of endless possibilities and dangers. The orphan leads the reader through a maze of experiences, encountering life’s threats and grasping its opportunities. Browsing through the archives of the Tavistock Institute, I had a similar feeling. I had travelled from Eric Miller’s field notes of the Malabar in India

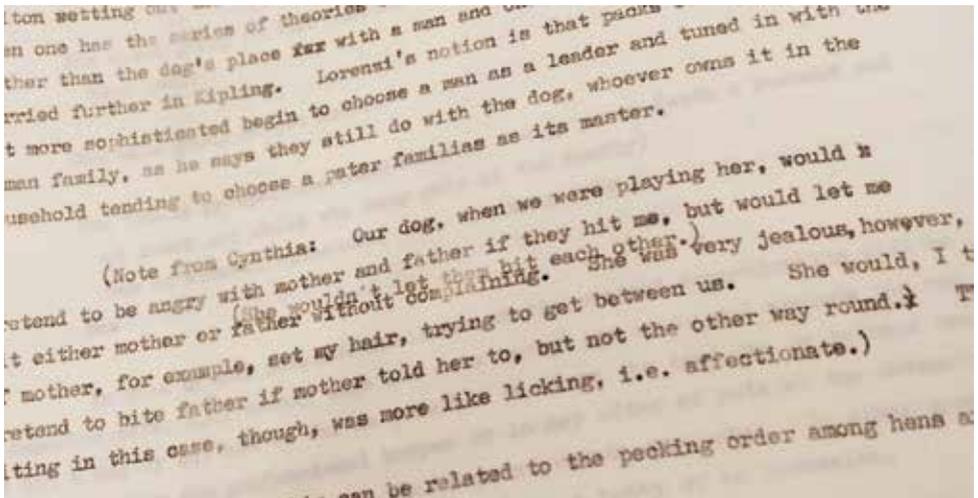


John Hill, Eric Miller, Isabel Menzies, 2nd July 1964.

Preliminary notes on the relationship between Man and Dog:



"Animals good for children!"



"Our dog when we were playing her, would pretend to be angry with mother and father if they hit me but would let me hit either father or mother without complaining. She was very jealous, however, if mother, for example, set my hair, trying to get between us.

Note also how this can be related to the pecking order among hens and the natural authority among packs of animals.

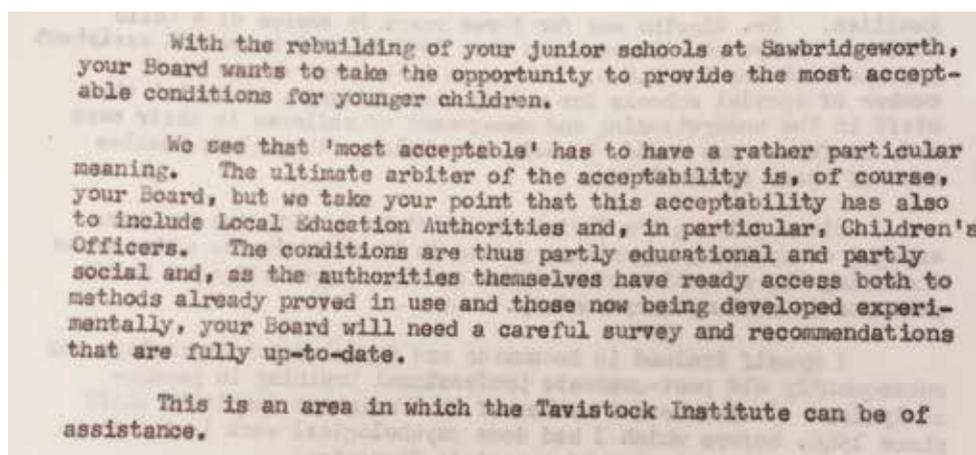
One can then begin to relate it too to the extent to which the family owns the dog, as opposed to those families where ones gets the impression that the dog owns the family, such as my parents-in-law. One can then note the extent to which the pet becomes a child and may then be a special kind of child in that it contains all the greedy projects from the infantile part of self and the animal then becomes very petted and given a place of greater domination than would an actual real life child".

Tracking the Institute's work in the area of children in care, there are many worth noting. Many more than I can do justice to in this space. Institute staff worked in schools (boarding, care homes, juvenile boarding) in every decade. Not all work has been released and some of it must still be kept confidential, however here is some data:

1958-1966: Isabel Menzies in collaboration with the World Health Organisation, to assess the work of child guidance clinics in Soissons, France and make recommendations about future developments in mental health work with children.

1962-1963: Isabel Menzies and Robin Higgins studied the Royal Wanstead School, a residential educational institution for vulnerable young people facing abuse, neglect or trauma at home.

In the picture is an extract from Isabel's letter to the Royal Wanstead school headmaster, outlining briefly the method of investigation proposed in order to help the school achieve its desired change:



"With the rebuilding of your junior schools at Sawbridgeworth, your Board wants to take the opportunity to provide the most acceptable conditions for younger children.

We see that the 'most acceptable' has to have a rather particular meaning. The ultimate arbiter of the acceptability is, of course, your Board, but we take your point that this acceptability has also to include Local Education Authorities and, in particular, Children's Officers. The conditions are thus partly educational and partly social and, as the authorities themselves have already access both to methods already proved in use and those now being developed experimentally, your Board will need a careful survey and recommendations that are fully up-to-date.

This is an area in which the Tavistock Institute can be of assistance".

The 70s saw Institute staff work on several projects: **Balderton Mental Hospital working with kids with learning disabilities**; the Brent Social Services Pilot Project, a local community study which sought to understand the ways in which decisions on social policy were made at the local level; starting in 1972 and continuing to 1980 was the work at Fairhaven, **a hostel for 'educationally sub-normal' boys aged 16-19 in Blackheath, London.**

In the 80s we find work on the **Youth Training Scheme**, work with **young people leaving care**, and work on **youth unemployment** which is not yet available as it is too history-near and bounded by confidentiality.

Back to 1964, Eric Miller and Robin Higgins worked with the Richmond Child Guidance Clinic with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of the Clinic in dealing with referrals and re-conceptualising treatment as a social process to best relate to the needs of children. It turned out to be an early experiment in family therapy.

Eric Miller writes in his field notes, starting from his reaction to the child he interviewed. He hasn't taken to this child who was:

"an undersized, rather shifty looking boy"

But he felt he was

"subjected to excessive criticism and nagging from the parents, and this feeling must have shown through".

He writes further:

"no man is an island, the patient is a symptom of a disturbed social system... The Educational Psychologist doesn't simply collect information. The questions they ask and the way in which they are asked will affect teachers' understanding of the problem, their image of the clinic, their perception of the course of action open to them etc... It is important to ask questions which display concern for the child not simply as an individual but as a person in a complex environment".

The systemic psychoanalytic approach of the Tavistock Institute is evident in these notes as in the letter Isabel wrote to the Head of the school.

Dickenstock: The 'social problem' novel, or The Tavistock Institute Working Note

Those field notes are captivating. Reading these working notes you can follow the thought process of the Tavistockian researcher and consultant and see pretty accurately how they then reach the analysis and conclusions they offer. They are full of stories and full of orphans, just like Dickens's novels are. Through his characters Dickens explores both heroic self-forming and feelings of abandonment, often combined. And Dodger in *Oliver Twist* can be easily imagined in the child above as described by Eric Miller.

Dickens wrote *Oliver Twist* right after the success of the *Pickwick Papers*, and it was there that he started to develop a new literary genre, which was later called the social problem novel. Dickens had published *Oliver Twist* in the magazine *Bentley's Miscellany*, of which he was the editor. The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations published its work through Tavistock Publications and through its journal *Human Relations*.

“..he was enveloped in the old calico robes which had grown yellow in the same service, he was badged and ticketed, and fell into his place at once – a parish child – the orphan of a workhouse – the humble, half-starved drudge – to be chuffed and buffeted through the world – despised by all, and pitied by none.”

OLIVER TWIST, CH. 1

Dickens's story of the foundling boy was a 'novel with a purpose' specifically targeting the Poor Law Act of 1834¹ and the cruelties of the workhouse system. It was not merely a bestseller, it 'changed hearts' and even government thinking. Dickens realised, with *Oliver Twist*, that the novel, in his hands, could make the world a better place.

His mother dying as she gave birth, Oliver is born without even a name in a workhouse. Because his parentage was unknown and could not be discovered, Oliver's name was given to him by the Parish Beadle (a minor official who carries out various civil, educational, or ceremonial duties), Mr Bumble, who explained that he had an alphabetical list of names ready for any child born in the parish in similar circumstances:

“We name our fondlings in alphabetical order. The last was a S, – Swubble, I named him. This was a T, – Twist, I named him. The next one comes will be Unwin, and the next Vilkins. I have got names ready made to the end of the alphabet, and all the way through it again, when we come to Z”.

Mr Bumble's slip - referring to 'fondlings' instead of 'foundlings' might suggest that the children are well cared for, but, as we know from the novel, in Oliver's case, they were not.

¹The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. In 1834 the Poor Law Amendment Act was passed by Parliament. This was designed to reduce the cost of looking after the poor as it stopped money going to poor people except in exceptional circumstances. Now if people wanted help they had to go into a workhouse to get it.



The Foundling Hospital in Bloomsbury London, 1750

In fact, at the Foundling Hospital the same kind of naming custom was observed. The 'Hospital' (offering hospitality) was a very famous London institution, founded in the 1740s by an old sea-captain called Thomas Coram, as a home for deserted children. Coram had been very distressed by knowledge of the large numbers of unwanted children that were found on doorsteps or under bushes, sometimes dead from exposure because found too late. His idea was for a charitable institution that would take in these unwanted children and care for them until they were of an age to fend for themselves. All children taken in as foundlings - even those whose names were known - were given entirely new identities at the outset. The Hospital provided shelter, food, clothing, medical care, education, and work-placements so its children were well-equipped to cope out in the world.

That great institution occupied a large tract of land very close to Doughty Street, where Dickens and his young family were living while he was finishing *Oliver Twist*. The Hospital was an impressive building, and it served as a model for the care of foundlings in other places. The site of the Hospital is now a park, Coram's Fields, to the south of the British Library.²

Around 270 years after Thomas Coram founded the foundling hospital, and around 170 years after Dickens wrote *Oliver Twist*, Tavistock Institute colleagues are working for the Department for Education studying the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme projects which includes **Coram-i**'s programme: Improving permanency in foster placements. **Coram-i** still operates in the name of its founder to help today's vulnerable children and our Tavistockians are right there with them.

After *Oliver Twist*, Dickens set his mind to *Nicholas Nickleby*. In this novel, Dickens' reforming target is the notorious Yorkshire boarding school industry - places even more inhumane, we are to understand, than the public workhouse described in *Oliver Twist*.

² The first presentation of this paper was at the Conway Hall, a few minutes' walk from Coram's Fields.

...AMES WHO HAVE BEEN FOR SOME TIME UNDER THE CARE...

EDUCATION.—At Mr. CLARKSON'S Old-established CLASSICAL, COMMERCIAL and MATHEMATICAL ACADEMY, Bowes-hall, near Greta Bridge, Yorkshire, BOYS are Boarded, provided with books, &c. and expeditiously instructed in every branch of a useful and polite Education, necessary to qualify them for any situation in life, at 20 guineas a year: the French Language is taught in its greatest purity, by a native of France, at 10s. 6d. per quarter. Mr. C. pledges himself that the strictest attention is paid to the health, moral conduct and intellectual improvement of his Pupils; and in order to expedite their Education as much as possible, he teaches assiduously in the School himself, and does not allow any vacations. For cards, and reference to parents of boys educated at this establishment, apply to Mr. Smith, 26, Lombard-street, who is Mr. C.'s agent, and will give information respecting the conveyance from London to Bowes-hall.

"Note: 'no vacations allowed'".

The children are sent to these schools never to come out. This is before trains were available so it would have taken days if not weeks to arrive to these schools.

Nicholas Nickleby was instrumental in destroying the Yorkshire School industry. Bowes Hall went out of business in 1840, as did other establishments of its kind. It is estimated that there were less than a thousand children victimised by the industry in 1839. By contrast, it was not until 1842 (a couple of years after the publication of *Nickleby*) that Parliament finally got round to passing the 'Mines Bill', prohibiting the employment of women and children under the age of ten underground. There were many thousands of them in the coalmines of Yorkshire.

170 years later, the Tavistock Institute continues the work to promote children and young people's wellbeing and mental good health, less in institutions and more in examining and evaluating community and local government partnerships. For example in the late 90s we find TIHR staff evaluating Leadership in residential child care as well as the evaluation of 'Cracked' which was undertaken for the Wellcome Trust to assess the impact in different secondary schools of a theatre-in-education intervention addressing mental illness in secondary school children.

From the late 2000s to date, TIHR has evaluated the multi-site pilot of participatory approaches to the design and delivery of mental health services for vulnerable young people called Right Here (2008-2011); the Department of Education's Child Poverty Pilots (2011); TIHR staff have worked with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) on their pilot to deliver forensic mental health interventions to young people at risk of violent offending (2013). In 2014 we worked with Nottingham Council's 'Fostering Futures' team, building their research and delivery capabilities. 2015 has seen us work with the London Borough of Havering: Evaluation of the relaunch of a children in care council.

Brontëstock: Adoption and the Orphan Governess

“It would ha’ been a blessing if Goddy-mighty had took thee too, wi’ thy mother and father, poor useless boy!”

THOMAS HARDY, GREAT AUNT TO JUDE, IN JUDE THE OBSCURE

In Britain adoption was legally unregulated until the 1920s, so it was easy and commonly informal. The governess in literature is in between, superior to any servant, yet not a member of the family. In novels, the job naturally belongs to an orphan, who has no certain class identity. Similarly the Tavistock Institute is an 'in-between'; not an academic institute yet scholarly; not a university yet applied research; not a management consultancy outfit yet a praxis consultancy. An independent organisation that has the role of educator: a governor/governess.

Jane Fairfax (in Jane Austen's *Emma*) is an orphan that has to become a governess, and she calls this occupation a kind of slavery. {I think my colleagues would agree that consulting, and evaluating and researching sometimes too feel like a form of slavery... we are often enslaved to policies and agendas to which we do not necessarily ascribe and might struggle to free ourselves to challenge those from within the role, although being the Tavistock Institute we mostly do... and sometimes at a cost, or at least at a risk, to our own revenue}.

The most famous female orphan of English Victorian literature is Jane Eyre. Like many orphans at the time, Jane, whose parents died when she was very young, has to be taken in by relatives. She is hardly cared for by her unloving aunt and is tormented by her cousins. She is then sent off to the appalling Lowood School, where most of the pupils are similarly abandoned. On her own in the world, Jane is eventually compelled to be a governess.

Lucy Snowe, the heroine and narrator of Brontë's final novel, *Villette*, also appears to be an orphan (though she is notoriously evasive about the particulars of her early life). She is forced to survive first of all as paid 'companion' to an irritable old lady, and then as a junior teacher in a girls' school in Villette (a fictional version of Brussels). 'I suppose you are nobody's daughter', comments her spoilt pupil Ginevra – and she is right (ch.14). Brontë's explorations of female self-consciousness, featuring heroines who sometimes shocked contemporaries with their defiance and self-reliance, required her to orphan those heroines.

Since 2015 the Tavistock Institute has been working with the Department for Education on evaluating their Adoption Support Fund. Much has changed since Brontë's times but the experience of utter loneliness and rejection at the heart of adoption remains. As do the defiance and self-reliance required in order to make a difference and an intervention with an impact which is more than just descriptive or critical, but learningful and constructive.

Colleagues who have worked on the Adoption Support fund project have shared how they discovered their own dynamics of adoption and child rearing within their team and how, through supervision and team discussions, they worked through those to benefit the client. Tavistock's staff work ethic is rooted in its capacity to examine their own self-process and use it to make meaning of the situation they are studying. Back to the archives, for an illustration of the roots of this rigour:

TIHR work with The Cotswold Community – late 60s to early 80s

The Cotswold Community project was undertaken in a series of stages between the late 1960s and the early 1980s. It was a therapeutic residential community for boys between the ages of 9 and 16 who were diagnosed as emotionally unintegrated, and therefore displayed often disruptive and delinquent behaviour. The role of the Tavistock Institute was as a consultancy body to oversee and advise on the transformation of the management structure from a traditional hierarchical authority towards delegation of authority to the grass roots staff who dealt with the residents on a day to day basis.

In the very first phase of the work, in January 1968, we find Ken Rice visiting the school community for the first time and he writes in his notes (which read like an action-novel...):

"I am dictating this paragraph because somewhere inside me there's a feeling that all was not what it seemed"

He reflects on the change needed in the whole system:

"The schools are run in a very authoritarian manner with a powerful hierarchy supporting it but above the headmaster there is complete confusion as to whom the headmaster is really responsible. This confusion enables almost anybody to be scapegoated if something really blows up".

"I found myself being in sympathy with a staff caught in the system which was in effect designed by the community to cope with its own projections about delinquency, perversion, and anything else that one can think of.. It is the existence of what is so often denied that raises anxiety level to intolerable proportions. In effect if you take out the hysteria of the reports of what was really going on in the school, it is really not very much worse than what exists in a number of public schools and in terms of bullying is even less than the current film being shown of Tom Brown's school days".

During one of his first school visits, where Rice learns about the domestic details, including meal times, rooms, etc. he notes that it seems the importance of child care is now recognised (having had at least four cases of potential homosexual relationships/rapes that resulted in sacking staff including eventually the then head teacher) and the needs to have people who are sensitive to the needs of the children has also been recognised (although the Chaplain confides in Rice that ***"the past three years have damaged my sensitivity towards people and thus has pacified my ministry both to staff and boys"***), but he writes in his note that despite these recognitions:

"Nobody appears to have done a damn thing about their salary levels and in consequence the staff they get are usually driven into this job largely because they can't get anything else".

After meeting the boys he writes:

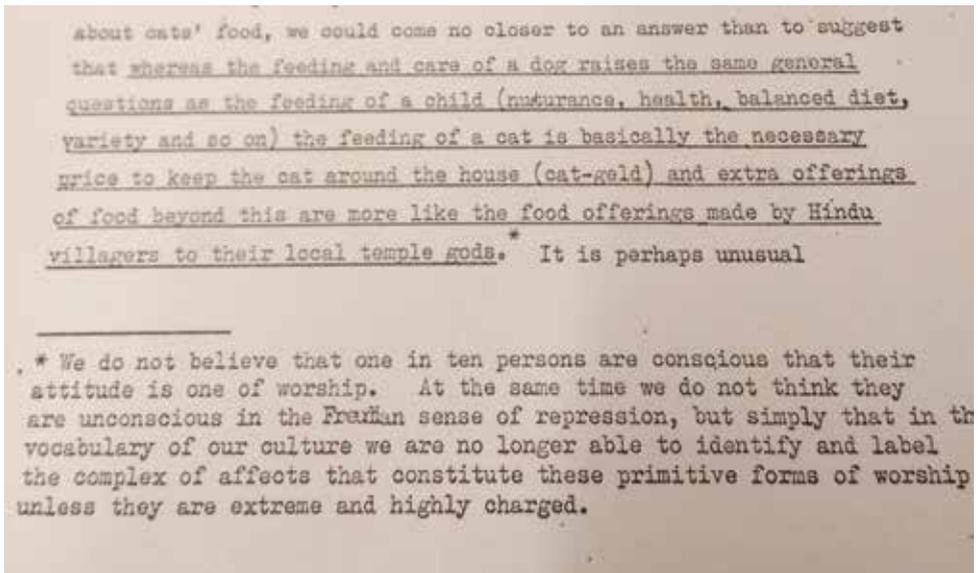
“Two out of the seven boys were of the most disturbed and as you might expect, the most intelligent at the meeting. The boys had perhaps not surprisingly good ideas about what should be done”.

Rice’s feelings and views are perfectly clear, wouldn’t you say so?

Even when not working directly in the area of children in care, Tavistock staff always have in mind the conscious, unconscious and systemic issues of attitudes to children. Examining the notes from the Pets project is particularly revealing and enjoyable.

Pet Ownership and Pet Food

Advertising Projects:



“About cats’ food, we could come no closer to an answer than to suggest that whereas the feeding and care of a dog raises the same general questions as the feelings of a child (nurturance, health, balanced diet, variety and so on) the feeding of a cat is basically the necessary price to keep the cat around the house (cat-gelt) and extra offerings of food beyond this are more likely the food offerings made by Hindu villagers to their local temple gods.*”

*We do not believe that one in ten persons are conscious that their attitude is one of worship. At the same time we do not think they are unconscious of the Freudian sense of repression, but simply that in the vocabulary of our culture we are no longer able to identify and label the complex of affects that constitute these primitive forms of worship unless they are extreme and highly charged”.

common household pet as is the cat evokes quite primitive forms of worship. Our reasons may become clearer in the following notes. For the moment, however, let us note that if the above conclusion is approximately true then there is room in the cat food market for a premium priced food; it will be more in keeping with the nature of the offering if the food is fish from the ocean rather than the flesh of mammals and the product should be clearly connected in the advertising with the qualities for which cats are worshipped, not with the notions of special loving care that one would use for premium dog foods. The catch in this is that historically cats have been worshipped for diverse and contradictory reasons. Our own judgment (and it is little more than a personal judgment) is that one should avoid any hint of the animal's savagery. The emphasis should be on those aspects that are central to Egyptian and Celtic mythology - a benign presence, independent enough to leave at any time but indicating by its continued presence that this is a good home for the likes of it; more specifically a home in which the group and organised social sides of man's existence are reasonably reconciled and the former (which the cat symbolises) is not forcibly suppressed as simply evil.

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Each person must in himself manage some relation between these aspects of his existence. Whatever his 'solution' it will be subjected to further stress when he has to create in his own children a similar capacity to be partly blind and yet not completely and neurotically blind to the biological side of his social nature. We are suggesting that this may be a major reason for attachment to cats. If within a family, there is a willingness to live with this side of their nature, then their home will be incomplete without a cat. To quote Mark Twain "A house without a cat, and a well-fed, well-petted and properly revered cat, may be a perfect house, perhaps, but how can it prove its title?" (our italics). If they are unable to live with this side of themselves, then they will not be able to tolerate the presence of cats. Our sense of the degree to which the cat takes on meaning in relation to group life was greatly

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way outlined above is that the pet comes to stand for a helpless, abandoned, lost and dependent part of the self, a part of the self that was actually experienced in infancy and to some extent is retained in adult life. The part of the self that then feels abandoned and lost is thus looked after in the animal. The relationship, however, is one of considerable subtlety and it is necessary here to ~~try~~ draw together several of the threads from previous sections.

31. To begin with, as well as being abandoned and helpless and afraid, the animal, as noted above, must also be robust and able fundamentally to survive, in the same way as the infant, while feeling lost and in danger of death, nevertheless by and large survives. The attitude of pet owners that formed our groups seemed to be compounded of willingness to look after the animal but in a certain robust kind of way that did not support over-indulgence. It was as though the infant's fear that it would die if left to itself was both appreciated but not allowed to become dominant. Such an attitude is like that of a child that feels lonely and afraid in the dark but knows that its parents are near at hand and is therefore comforted and its anxiety modified. Consider for

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So, this is the Work of the TIHR. And who are the people, those Tavistockians?

What do the Tavistockian, the Jew and (the) Heathcliff have in common?

Answer: The enigmatic orphan identity.

When we try to explain to people what the Tavistock Institute is, it is always a mouthful, never quite succinct, never feels quite accurate. Eric Miller (in *From Dependency to Autonomy*, 1993) describes the difficulty so well:

"...my own professional identity does not itself fit within any neat disciplinary boundary. Faced with forms asking for 'profession or occupation' I am never sure what to enter. 'Social anthropologist'? That's something I was but am no longer. 'Organisational consultant'? But that's only part of what I do. 'Social science practitioner'? Rather a mouthful, and it still doesn't seem right. This comes of spending most of my working life at the Tavistock institute of Human Relations".

"It is well-known what an orphan's life is: Although he is little and has not yet a man's wisdom, he will follow every trail, try every task."

ALEXANDER AFANASYEV³

The pursuit to change the world, make it a better place, is not alien to the Tavistock Institute. In fact, it is its core mission and sometimes an irritant to itself and to people dealing with it. Tavistock institute staff have not once been called arrogant and self-righteous on the one hand, or dreamers who pitch above their weight on the other. Small but mighty. Of course, many conspiracy theories have grown around the institute's 'master mind' and 'mind control' capacity – the oscillation between omnipotence to helplessness is both a friend and an enemy to the orphan and to the Tavistockian.

The Tavistock Institute emerged out of the Tavistock Clinic, in parallel to the founding of the NHS. Eric Miller (*ibid.*) describes its inception days:

"It is an institute that defines itself as multidisciplinary.... 'no therapy without research; no research without therapy'. So action research was to be central to the Tavistock Institute's mission: to advance the social sciences through involvement in practical human problems and concerns. And action research, by its nature, is problem-centred not disciplinary-centred. Furthermore, for more than forty years it has struggled to occupy a space between academic social science on the one side and a commercial consultancy practice on the other".

³Alexander Nikolayevich Afanasyev (Russian: Александр Николаевич Афанасьев) was a Russian folklorist who recorded and published over 600 Russian folktales and fairytales, by far the largest folktale collection by any one man in the world. His first collection was published in eight volumes from 1855–67, earning him the reputation of a Russian counterpart to the Brothers Grimm.

“Well, everybody does it that way, Huck.”

“Tom, I am not everybody.”

THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER, MARK TWAIN

The Institute has succeeded in maintaining the stance of a problem-centred organisation and developed a reasonably distinctive identity, it has always seemed precarious. Partly because the Institute has always resisted the commercialising of its thought and practice, not always to its advantage one might add, and partly because precariousness also applies to those who joined it (Miller, 1993) and to the time of the Institute's inception. The Institute emerged post-WWII, a precarious time no doubt. Most of the Tavistock Institute founders, Wilfred Bion, Pierre Turquet, Harold Bridger and Eric Trist had served in the military as senior medics and officers during which they helped develop the War Office Selection Boards⁴ at Northfield Military Hospital. The Tavistock Clinic's psychoanalyst John Bowlby, father of attachment theory, also joined the group as a military doctor volunteer in 1940 and was a member of the group's research and training unit in Hampstead, which was established by the War Office in 1944. There was even a job there for the only woman at the Tavistock Institute at the time, Isabel Menzies.

1946-47 were also years that saw the independence of India and Israel, two milestones in the beginning of exposing the breaking and the failings of the Great British Empire.

The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations was born an orphan and has had to adopt itself. Indeed, as a founding start-up it received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. It had a home with the Tavistock Clinic where its siblings the clinicians were busy organising themselves into the new structure of the NHS.

The late 40s are the first of three periods where I could not find records of work with organisations whose primary task was the care for children and young people. This also gives data to my hypothesis – whenever the institute experienced orphanhood and abandonment in itself, it withdrew from engaging with organisations who worked in the sector of the care for vulnerable and at risk children and young people. Was that a conscious decision? Most probably an unconscious and systemic dynamic. The rationale would always be that work emerged elsewhere and staff were required in other areas, which of course was also true. But as I pursued my research and discovered the other two periods where the Tavistock was not at work in the area of child care, I have been convinced by this, but I will return to this shortly.

⁴More about the WOSBs can be found in the work of the historians Dr Alice White from her PhD entitled 'From the Science of Selection to Psychologising Civvy Street: The Tavistock Group, 1939-1948' and the work of Daniel Monninger who works on a PhD on the history of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations and its influence on the field of work and on conceptions of working people.

The Jew:

How enigmatic is this identity. I have recently listened to a talk by the acclaimed Israeli author A.B. Joshua (as part of the OFEK 30th anniversary event in Tel Aviv early in September). He draws attention to the most informative act of identity formation in the Jewish account of its history (whether a myth or a reality is irrelevant), the receipt of the Torah and the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. I was very taken by this particular point in his thesis. He says that the Jewish identity formation is embedded in three crucial words in God's request to Abram: ***"Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you"***.

Three powerful entities are broken in the course of a single verse – land, homeland, father – and in return Abram is given a land that is not a homeland but a sacred land, a promised land, a territory that will be under the supervision of grace and God.

A.B. Joshua suggests that the identity of the Jew as an immigrant, a wanderer and a refugee was founded there. His argument takes us later into a separate discussion. However, for me, it was a critical point of learning to think of the big Jewish enigma as being about the problem of having to leave the homeland and go to live in – and occupy – a land which is given to the Jew **conditionally**. The problem of a people whose becoming of a nation was about being removed from their homeland, motherland, into a promised-land; quite the opposite of most world's nations. The uprooting and reduction of the foundation of homeland in Israeli-Jewish identity becomes clearer still in the difficult vision that is presented in the desert even before the actual entry to Israel. Moses warns the people: If after the settlement of the people in Israel, they violate the commandments of God, whether in religious terms or moral terms, they shall be severely punished by their enemies, who are nothing more than the agents of God. And the culmination of calamity that will come down on the people is its expulsion from its land and its dispersion among the nations.

However – and this is the fundamental innovation – even outside their homeland the identity and existence of Israel will continue to be defined as a people of God. While in the case of other nations the expulsion or loss of homeland also entails the loss of nationality, the children of Israel were promised national existence outside the homeland, for the homeland is not a prerequisite for national existence only an additional condition, sometimes merely theoretical. The option of exile as a legitimate option within the structure of Jewish identity was given before the people had experienced a single moment of independence within their homeland.

I would suggest therefore, following his argument, that the Jewish identity is that of an abandoned child, deprived from a mother's unconditional love which would be offered by a motherland, father's home, and is dependent on being adopted into a loving home, only if they can fit in and do what is expected of them. There is wisdom in this identity – as one learns to adapt, to survive, to become part of and also to lead – and we have seen the Jews do exactly that during the course of their history.

Similarly, I suggest that The Tavistock Institute's unconscious narrative is also that of an orphan and so it has had to be abandoned at least three times in its history in order to be where it is today. The first time was its actual inception, as the NHS was formed it developed its own boundary around its social science applied research identity.

“Perhaps there are those who are able to go about their lives unfettered by such concerns. But for those like us, our fate is to face the world as orphans, chasing through long years the shadows of vanished parents. There is nothing for it but to try and see through our missions to the end, as best we can, for until we do so, we will be permitted no calm.”

KAZUO ISHIGURO, WHEN WE WERE ORPHANS

Then again in the early 90s when it moved from Swiss Cottage to Tabernacle St and then in 2006 when its Tabernacle home (building) was sold. In both of these two periods, as well as in the late 40s, I could not find records of work of the TIHR in the area of child and young person well-being.

When it moved physically from its joint base with the Clinic and the Trust, to Tabernacle Street where it still lives, that experience has gone down in the history of the Tavistock as a great experience of abandonment and separation. Staff of both places would describe the experience as a split, a betrayal and an abandonment when the Institute left its home of 50 years at Swiss Cottage and moved to the other side of London. A rational worker would probably think that the reactions to that move are somewhat melodramatic and excessive, and so they probably have been. What is more interesting though is to understand them within this proposed framework of the orphan. The feelings gave rise to anger, to defiance and to creative action at the Tavistock Institute. Even though it is the Institute that had moved and had to start again, its people did not require sympathy. They kept heads high and carried on with their work mission. I remind you of Dickens' description of the infant Oliver: *“despised by all and pitied by none”*.

When the building was sold in 2006 the Institute felt as though it had been torn apart from within. It was different to the 1994 move, where the group, although feeling spat out and rejected, was nevertheless a group. This time there was a real sense of being stripped off. However, ten years on we are celebrating the release of the first phase of the catalogued archives. This wouldn't have happened yet – in all likelihood – if the building wasn't sold, if the boxes of precious notes and reports were not put into storage for years, to rot, and the current Institute management hadn't decided to take it all out of storage and have a good sift through it once and for all. All of the Tavi work would have probably still been stocked on the second floor of Tabernacle 30 gathering dust and moths. So, in organisational life as in the novel, the orphan can defy their traumatic experience, raise its head, look forward and find a creative new way to follow its quest.

How does this link to Heathcliff?

Heathcliff is one of the greatest enigmas in all of English literature. When we ask what seems like a simple question of *Wuthering Heights* – why is Heathcliff so appallingly vengeful to those such as Hareton Earnshaw who have done him no harm? – we can find explanations in the terrible misfortunes of his life: he is an orphan; he is brutalised by Hindley; he is relegated to the status of a servant; Catherine marries Edgar. But the novel matches these kinds of social or psychological explanations by quite other ones: by the suggestion that he may be diabolical, a vampire or a ghost. The novel gives us both kinds of understanding together; neither is allowed to trump the other. Heathcliff is the dominant, overbearing presence, both outsider and insider, starving orphan and cruel landlord. Like the book itself, he is both remarkably self-disciplined and completely wild. What is most remarkable in Brontë's description of him is the combination of two apparently contradictory qualities. (*Resonances to the Tavistock Institute, perhaps?*)

Many of my colleagues, including myself, carry an identity of an orphan or an abandoned child. In writing this, I have recounted what I know from my colleagues about their lives, I also tested my thinking with some of them. The fourth floor of Tabernacle 30 is full of orphans and abandoned children. One was sent away as a child to be looked after by the aunt, reasons not altogether clear even now; a number of Tavistockians were sent to boarding school at tender ages and for a number this has been a traumatic experience. These include, for example, John Bowlby who was sent to boarding school age seven when the First World War came in 1914. He later maintained that the war and the supposed danger of air raids on London was just an excuse, being *"merely the traditional first step in the time-honoured barbarism required to produce English gentlemen"*. Bion, too, was sent to boarding school in England from India where he was born, and that was described in his biography (Bléandonu, 1999):

"He was a victim of Victorian imperialistic manners, which privileged austere education over the affective needs of the eight-year-old boy he was in 1906, when he was sent to a boarding school in England from where he never returned to his paternal home... The burden of losing one's home at such a tender age... no wonder Bion became a specialist in the psychology of emptiness and the presence of absences".

Another told me of growing up in a house where father was drunk and mother regularly beaten up, with the children having to bring themselves up pretty much by themselves, and leaving home at the first opportunity, aged 16, which most of us today would consider a rather tender age; another grew up with one or two parents dysfunctional for their own struggle with mental health; another was adopted at birth and others have lost one or both parents at ages where their identities were still forming, challenging them to create circumstances for themselves beyond simply surviving.

My colleagues also shared disappointment in institutions around those times of trouble, that were supposed to provide help and support but haven't. I myself am one such person with one such story. I was in the middle of my military service in Israel when my mother died after a short but aggressive illness and with a father in a different country, and the military did all it could to release me from service, which was the least supportive act an organisation could do for an orphan.

Miller suggested TIHR employees were all professional refugees. He certainly described himself as one; people who didn't quite fit either the domain of commerce or that of academia, types of inevitable misfits. Gordon Lawrence also writes how he was advised to go to the Tavistock Institute as he didn't seem to fit anywhere else.

“‘There are orphanages’, he exclaims to himself, ‘for children who have lost their parents – oh! Why, why, why, are there no harbours of refuge for grown men who have not yet lost them.’”

SAMUEL BUTLER, THE WAY OF ALL FLESH

I suppose this is partly why I have developed this hypothesis that the TIHR staff were always so determined to work with organisations such as the military, the hospitals, the care homes, the boarding schools. They wanted to ensure that their staff are as competent and skilled as possible in providing the care they set out to offer. To educate professionals on the needs of children and to influence policy makers to ensure appropriate governance. The TIHR staff do what they preach and a number of them have adopted or fostered children themselves and as they are out there in the world helping others, they truly speak and intervene from experience.

So, my friends, the untold story of the Tavistock orphan is now told, and what better than to end this talk-novella with the fine words of Lewis Carroll, from ‘All in a Golden Afternoon’ – the poem that formed the preface of the book, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland:

Thus grew the tale of Tabiland:
Thus slowly, one by one,
Its quaint events were hammered out –
And now the tale is done.

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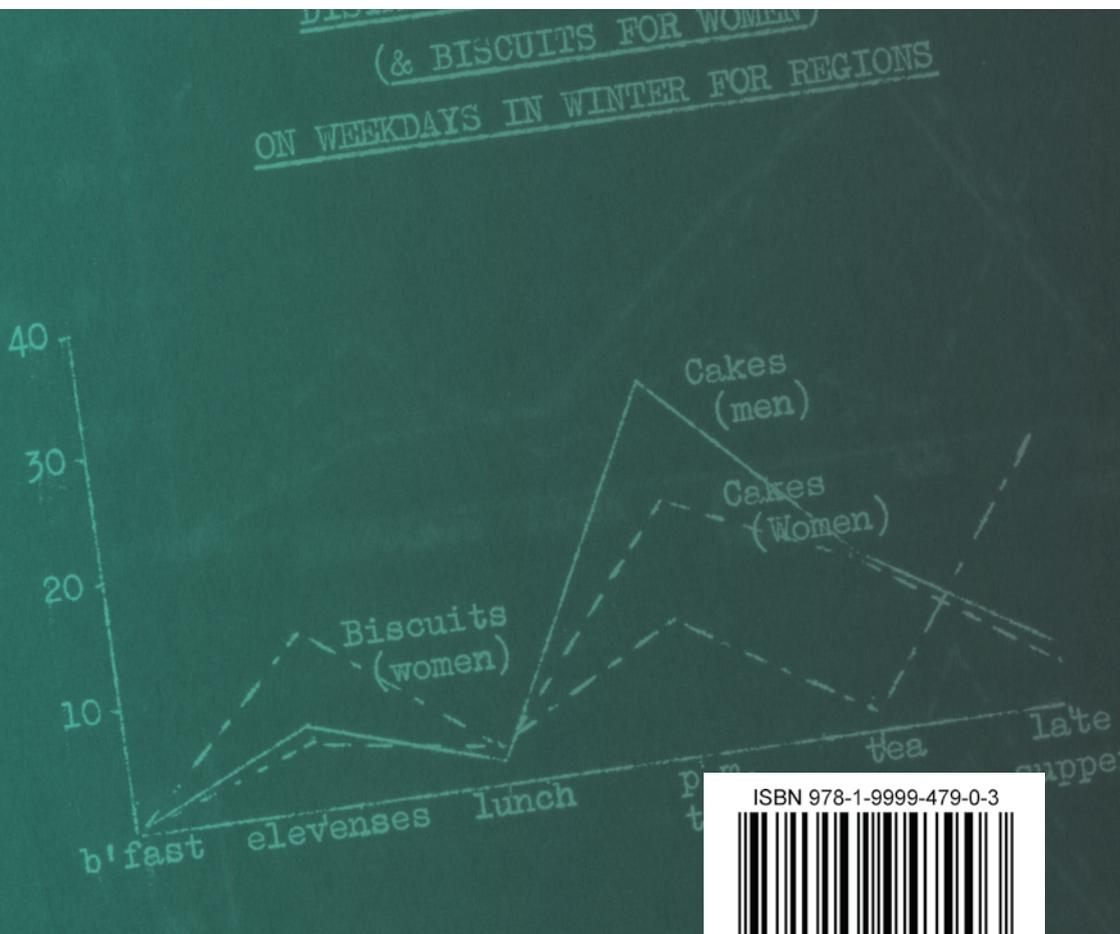
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The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (TIHR) archive is available for researchers to discover, explore, and interpret at Wellcome Library. These papers – the registered document series (SA/TIH/B/1) – provide a framework for the research and outputs of the Institute from 1945 to 2005, containing key reports and findings from seminal social studies from the post-war period to the early 21st century.

This monograph marks the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations' 70th anniversary celebrations in 2017 and the launch of the Tavistock Institute's Archive project with the Wellcome Library. The paper is creative testimony to the continuing intellectual contribution of the Tavistock Institute to improving human relations.



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