

Q and A

Sean G. Meggeson

soma synthesis

(Toronto: lippykookpoetry, 2025)

1. What are the context and background of this collection of poems?

soma synthesis grew out of a time when I was immersed in difficult and meaningful clinical work as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist. A client's lifetime of trauma was touching upon my own trauma. This experience in psychoanalytic psychotherapy is not uncommon; it's called *countertransference*, and it occurs when the analyst's own struggles, conflicts, thoughts, and emotions are evoked in relation to the patient's. Getting in touch with countertransference is sometimes considered a *sine qua non* in creating movement toward an integrative treatment. And it's not easy! Countertransference is very real in terms of the pain it often asks the analyst to process, and in this instance it felt important to let myself feel it fully.

As a way to understand and process my countertransference, I started writing free associative lines in relation to my own inner conflicts. The lines slowly formed into something that looked and felt like a poem: associative, kind of lyrical and mysteriously saying/unsaying. But it also read and felt like a certain type of poem—weird, chaotic and fragmented. Yet, it felt integrative! At one point, the poem was well over fifty pages, and the last thing I was concerned about was a linear narrative. In fact, I became kind of inimical to it, fed up with verbs begging for subjects and objects *all* the time, fed up with someone needing to hear a 'coherent' message as if they could carry it around in their coat pocket like currency.

I kept being more and more curious about the effect this lack of narrative had on me. The irony is that in clinical work with trauma one of the goals is to co-facilitate a clear narrative with the patient to help reduce the chaos trauma brings about on the psyche. However, I began to realize for myself that while narrative-forming is certainly helpful sometimes, there is *also* something very powerful and healing about embracing the fragmentation of narrative. About existing and growing within the unknowing/knowing of fragments.

Fragments in a dialogue, a dialectic, an ever-shifting mosaic of multiplicity that could parallel the multiplicity of self...

Fragments challenge interpretation. In generic psychoanalysis, interpretation is supposed to cure, perhaps in the same way meaning generally gives one certainty (as if that ever is static!), but I began to realize that interpretation and a poetics of bourgeois hermeneutics could also deprive one of something extremely valuable—maybe even existential and spirit-oriented—contained within a poetics of fragmentation.

2. What are some elements of your writing process that were involved in its creation?

In *soma synthesis*, I reference the well-known (at least in psychoanalytic circles) phrase by the UK psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion: "The analyst should work without memory or desire." This stance helped me find a creative zone within the genesis of the poem. Working without memory or desire (even if that's ever completely possible!) steers the poet toward the places poets need to be: unknowing, anxiety, liminality, discovery and wonder. I don't think it's a coincidence that

another famous psychoanalyst, D.W. Winnicott, argued the analyst needs to be like a poet and sometimes occupy Keats' zone of negative capability.

Also, somewhere in the early articulation of the poem, I kept focusing on Pier Paolo Pasolini as a kind of inspirational touchstone of existential liberation. One could write volumes about Pasolini, but the inspiration he provided me was less in the specific details of anything he created or stood for (though I deeply admire his writing, poetry, films, anti-capitalism, his death and sartorial presentation, all of which I do reference in *soma*). He is an artist and a human subject whom I believe represents something both challenging and inspirational about the paradox of the human subject as a creative agent both trapped and liberated by existence. Of course, there is a dialectic found within this paradox, and I found myself writing more and more into this mysterious dialectic. Maybe toward a synthesis—not as teleology, not as hermeneutic knowing, but as a life stance, a being-in-the-world marked by spontaneity and possibility.

3. What approach informed your revising of this work and readying it for publication?

Part of my process in letting the poem exist, breathe and become occurred at night when I would quietly recite/write/recite parts of the poem while taking a bath. I could feel the words within and also outside of my body this way. In this process, there was both linguistic sonic grounding and dissociation.

As the initial, messy writing phase came to an end, I happened to come across the League of Canadian Poets Spoken Word Award, I decided to edit down the poem to just under ten minutes of spoken word and enter the contest. I wanted the challenge of presenting the poem to the world whereby a reader/listener could experience the text in an engaging way. The editing/spoken word process was one of the most exciting creative experiences I've ever had. Winning the Spoken Word Award was quite literally stunning, like a blow to the head is stunning—I didn't think this poem would ever win an award for anything. I am forever grateful to the award's judge, Adeena Karasick, for helping me understand *soma synthesis* in ways I perhaps myself didn't know until I had the gift of being seen by another. (No one needs an award, but they do need to be seen by another.)

The first half of *soma synthesis* is basically the ten minutes I edited down for the spoken word performance. The second half of the book is comprised of the other material in the remaining forty pages from the original genesis.

4. What are some of the key traits that distinguish this collection of poems from your previous writings?

My previous chapbook, *Cosmic Crasher* (Buttonhook, 2024), is comprised of much more conventional poems that seek to impart a specific message, tone, affect, etc. In this sense, those poems are nothing like *soma synthesis*, the poems of which are challengingly experimental, surreal, dada, avant-garde, expressionistic, etc.

5. What do you hope to see resonate with readers in this poetry collection?

I recently received what I consider an ideal review on Goodreads: “Not my normal genre, but I liked it a lot.” That’s the entire review. For me, a response like that to my work is a ‘creative goal unlocked’. And honestly, I didn’t think about the reader that much (if at all) in the initial writing of *soma synthesis*. A very positive experience for me. However, like the example of my Goodreads reviewer, I do hope readers of *soma synthesis* take away *something* important for them, if only the realization that self-expression and self-liberation go hand-in-hand.

(December 2025)