

An introduction to the work and thinking of Donald Meltzer

Talks by Meg Harris Williams

FIRST SESSION

Background

I will begin with some introductory words about Meltzer, his life and his attitude to psychoanalysis. I shall then elaborate on this by going through his main concepts consecutively – not necessarily chronologically but in a way that I hope weaves them together into a coherent web, a picture of his own picture.

Meltzer wrote many books and papers. However he never claimed to be a creative writer, and though there are occasional very poetic passages, the books themselves are basically records of ‘work in progress’ as he always insisted. He was ‘imaginative’, he said, not in his writing but only in the consulting room.

Similarly the function of psychoanalysis, he said, was to ‘strike fire’ in the mind of his patient (echoing a remark also made by Bion). It is a view in a way opposite to that of many previous analysts, including perhaps Freud himself. Psychoanalysis is required to stir emotionality, not to diminish it. The enemy is not passion but its negative, anti-emotionality or retreat from aesthetic conflict.

Although Meltzer spent many years working with difficult schizophrenic and autistic patients, he slowly but surely came to view normal development as more complex and rewarding of study. Psychopathology might appear complicated but this was actually a superficial impression, in the same way that (according to Bion) lies are invented by the personality, whereas truth cannot be fabricated and has to be discovered. It is the truth of normal development that is astonishing and difficult to comprehend, and when we attain a better grasp of what happens in normal development, it is much easier to see at what point pathology gets stuck or deviates into either mindlessness or anti-thought. Meltzer saw this as a slight change in emphasis from Mrs Klein’s view, which was that normal development is easy and natural, unfolding like a flower, given a sufficiently nurturing environment. Thanks to Bion’s ideas, it became more relevant to focus on the difficulty of normal development, and to differentiate this from simple adaptation to family or cultural expectations. The business of psychoanalysis was not to cure symptoms or to make the patient respectable, but to introduce the patient to himself so that he could digest the truth about himself, which would then enable his mind to grow.

This was what led to the need - strongly felt by both Bion and Meltzer - to expand

the aesthetic dimension of psychoanalysis and to make links with art and literature. Art and literature had centuries of experience in fostering the vital spark of development and presenting it as an example or role-model in precisely the way that (it came to be realised) was necessary to the therapeutic quality of the relation between analyst and analysand. This was very different from the original Freudian conception of psychopathography – which Freud himself had warned was limited in its explanatory power. The kind of links that needed to be made with art and literature were vital ones, rather than those of colonisation and explanation.

In this context, the hallmark of Meltzer's view of psychoanalysis was perhaps the observation (made in his first book) that towards 'weaning', the psychoanalytic process comes to be experienced as an aesthetic process. Once psychoanalysis is identified as an aesthetic experience *in itself*, artistic disciplines come to have a new relevance for psychoanalysis, founded on a parallel requirement for both analyst and analysand to have 'faith' in the process as aesthetic object (*The Psychoanalytical Process*, p. 92).

Meltzer himself was not a literary person; though after coming to live in our literary family he became addicted to books. However, he had long been addicted to art, and knew a great deal about the philosophy of aesthetics. He dated this interest back to the time when, aged eight, his wealthy parents took six months away from home and work in New York, and took him on a Grand Tour of Europe to see the art and culture, even commissioning and buying paintings en route.

One book he did remember as a significant influence from his childhood was *Winnie the Pooh* which, he said, turned him into an Anglophile. After Winnie the Pooh came Melanie Klein. Certainly he felt that Melanie Klein introduced him to himself.

After studying medicine and practising child psychiatry in the States, the opportunity came up at the end of the war to travel to Europe again and he determined to seek analysis with her. He told the authorities he would 'kill somebody' if he didn't get the chance to go to England and end up on her couch. His analysis with her he described as a 'wild ride'. (He was a great horse lover.) I shall quote from a letter he wrote to a friend who asked him for his recollections:

She was even in her 70's a handsome woman, fond of big hats and dressing well. She lived alone with a maid and a visiting secretary and her cat in a fair sized first floor flat in Hampstead, on a hill with views. With me, a patient, she was very formal but not cold, attentive and observing and talking quite a lot, always to the point and full of her observations. At time of collapse, catastrophe or misery she seemed very strong and fearless. I knew from public situations that she could be aggressive and contemptuous but she was neither with me in the sessions. She seemed immune to seduction or flattery but could be very ambiguous about personal feeling for the analysand. The result was that through years of analysis I never really felt that she liked me nor should. She played the piano and had a grand in the waiting room which it took me some years to see. Her cat occasionally came in to the consulting room which annoyed me. She was punctilious about punctuality, about her bills and holiday dates. Her memory seemed remarkable to the end. (*A Meltzer Reader*, p. 131)

When Klein died he was in fact still in analysis with her, but despite being urged

by some senior members of the psychoanalytic community to continue analysis with somebody else, he never did, and never regretted it. Perhaps this was the beginning of his divergence from the British society; and also the beginning of his view (like Bion's) that essentially, what the analysand learns from the analyst is an introjected process of self-analysis, which if genuine, should be sufficiently established to continue. One can never be cured of being oneself.

Later on Meltzer split formally from the British Society, owing to his views on the psychoanalytic training. He believed there was a danger of converting psychoanalysis into an institution for thought control and tyranny, and he never hesitated to make his views known. He was himself always passionately interested in teaching, since he believed that psychoanalysis would only continue to live through its practitioners, rather than through books and theories. Martha Harris (who had been a supervisee of both Klein and Bion) arranged for him to teach psychoanalytic theory to the psychotherapy students at the Tavistock Clinic, in lectures which became *The Kleinian Development* (1978). The teaching ambience of the Tavistock at that era was very much one of striving towards 'learning from experience' as in Bion's special definition; and contrasted with what Meltzer felt to be the rigidity of the Kleinian group. My mother's educational principles were to aim to be 'enabling and inspiring' rather than dogmatising, and from that time they pursued these principles in work with many psychoanalytic groups in different countries. (Meltzer was already teaching regularly in South America, and my mother in Italy.)

Probably the main psychoanalytic influences on Meltzer's thinking apart from Klein and Bion were my mother, Esther Bick, and Roger Money-Kyrle. He was interested in Hanna Segal's early work on symbols and symbolic equations, but felt it did not really develop further after that. Money-Kyrle he respected for his non-judgmental attitude and for his philosophical knowledge and integrity. Bick and Harris together brought 'the infant' into his own child-centred work and opened up a field of observation which led directly to the theory of the aesthetic conflict, at the heart of his mature view of personality development.

Meltzer's Concepts

I would now like to talk about some of the key Meltzerian concepts, discussing each in turn. Some might be called concepts, some theories; either way, they are terms which he found useful and could not do without, being addenda or extensions to the standard Kleinian terminology of phantasy, splitting, identification and part-objects. They are all essential features of his model of the mind.

Like Bion, Meltzer saw psychoanalysis as an art-science in its very early stages, that must concentrate on learning to observe and describe the mental events that take place in the sessions. He always warned however that theory should not be confused with explanation. His view was that theory is necessary in order to make observation

possible. Familiar phenomena can be demarcated from unfamiliar phenomena which are observable outside the theoretical frame. Then, it becomes possible to expand existing theory a little bit further each time, to allow for the new observations.

The pre-formed transference and the gathering of the transference

Meltzer distinguished the true transference (a *present* relationship) from the preconceptions brought by the analysand, which he termed the pre-formed transference. Because his practice grew out of working with children – who have no preformed transference since they have not read any psychoanalytic literature – it became very evident to him that a problem existed with adult patients that was not there with the children, namely that the analyst could easily slip into conducting something that was *just like* an analysis, but was actually not a true transference relationship at all. Perhaps the patient could not help having preconceptions; but it was the analyst's job to help them evaporate.

On the same lines, he made it a principle not to select patients, but to accept any person who requested analysis, if he had a vacancy. Again he thought the analyst could easily be seduced into accepting only 'typical' patients, and this would block the possibilities of having a new experience. However, he did insist that a patient must bring dreams, otherwise he could not work with them. Dreams for him were the only guarantee of authenticity, making a real transference possible, as distinct from a pseudo-transference. He would terminate the relationship if he felt a patient was refusing to co-operate by not bringing dreams.

He describes the preformed transference in his first book, *The Psychoanalytic Process* (1967), in which he states his own special view of the 'natural history' of the process. Bion also describes the 'evolution' of the analysis, but not with the same detailing of its characteristic stages, something that reminds one of Meltzer's love of trees and the way their growth becomes marked in the formation of trunk, bark and limbs.

An expanded view of identification

1. Projective and intrusive identification.

These two types of identification mark a distinction between communicative projective identification (essential to development) and pathological attempts to control the mother/object. It is a distinction that became clear to Meltzer in the context of studying Bion's work, and is expounded in *Studies in Extended Metapsychology*. Using Bion's little formula $Ps \leftrightarrow D$, which describes the continual oscillation in mental orientation, Meltzer showed how Klein's original view of the developmental *phases* of paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions needed to be revised, and seen instead as a *field* in which opposing attitudes continually seek to be dominant and whose status is constantly exchanged.

The picture that emerges at the end of this, is that in the baby's dialogue with its mother, communicative projective identification and introjective identification are complementary movements that need to work together. Intrusive identification on the other hand is a feature of the paranoid-schizoid position and represents the baby's tyrannical control.

Yet at any moment, any human being has a complex mentality which includes both inquiring and paranoid attitudes. This was another result of revising 'phase' into 'field'. Essentially it is *internal* mother-baby relationships that are being observed: that perpetually exist and that continually revise themselves through the conflict between developmental and anti-developmental forces.

2. Adhesive identification

Another refinement Meltzer made to Mrs Klein's view of identification processes was that of adhesive identification. It was a concept worked out with Esther Bick, who had observed second-skin formations in babies who failed to achieve a trusting dependence on their mother. Autistic children however demonstrated another means of escape, as became evident in his work supervising clinical cases in *Explorations in Autism* (1975). In that book Meltzer describes how such children separate their senses, experiencing only one at a time, and similarly 'dismantle' their object, as distinct from attacking or intruding into it. None of these are normal Ps<—>D mentalities. Yet the artistic predisposition of many of these children alerted Meltzer to the geography of the internal mother and the different qualities of her own internal spaces. This would lead to the recognition of the powerful impact of full sensory experience that resulted in the 'apprehension of beauty', and in the various ways of reacting against it.

Aesthetic conflict

Meltzer's view of the traditional Kleinian dichotomy between envy and gratitude, paranoid and depressive states, was gradually reconfiguring itself as a result of puzzling over clinical material, Bion's thinking, baby observation, and now also acquaintance with the English poets. The term derives from the 'hateful siege of contraries' that is experienced by Milton's Satan at his first sight of the beauty of the world and his envy at the possibility that God created it for some baby other than himself. Instead of life and death instincts therefore, there is the tension between love and hate of the mother or object, beginning from the moment of birth. It follows that it is the present not the absent object that arouses the conflict that the infant mind must find some means of digesting. This is in line with what the poets demonstrate, and is the key to seeing normal development as more complex than pathology. The 'new idea' at any stage in life is always a re-experiencing of the beauty of the world which for the baby appears first in its mother, and is reciprocated by her.

Meltzer describes this original setting for the aesthetic conflict as follows:

No event of adult life is so calculated to arouse our awe of the beauty and our wonder at the intricate workings of what we call Nature (since we hesitate nowadays to cite first causes) as the events of procreation. No flower or bird of gorgeous plumage imposes upon us the mystery of the aesthetic experience like the sight of a young mother with her baby and the breast. We enter such a nursery as we would a cathedral or the great forests of the Pacific coast, noiselessly, bareheaded. Winnicott's stirring little radio talks of many years ago on The Ordinary Devoted Mother and her Baby could just as well have spoken of the 'ordinary beautiful devoted mother and her ordinary beautiful baby'. He was right to use that word 'ordinary', with its overtones of regularity and custom, rather than the statistical 'average'. The aesthetic experience of the mother with her baby is ordinary, regular, customary, for it has millennia behind it, since man first saw the world 'as' beautiful. And we know this goes back at least to the last glaciation. (*The Apprehension of Beauty* 1988, p. 16)

It goes back to the beginnings of *homo sapiens*, who survived the ice age, and to the beginnings of human mentality, and presents a more hopeful view of evolution than some theories, since it suggests that man's experience of beauty is perhaps not as useless as might appear, and in fact may be closely connected with the growth of wisdom – with the capacity to metaphorically, as well as literally, survive the Ice Age. The first experience of beatification, that Meltzer calls 'the dazzle of the sunrise', precedes the paranoid-schizoid recoil from aesthetic conflict, and though it is shortlived, and may be 'forgotten', it can never be erased from the human mind. When Bion puts the question: 'wisdom or oblivion? – take your choice', the answer is that it is the apprehension of beauty that shows the way forward.

(As an example of the application of this theory, Romana Negri has shown the progress of premature infants can be directly related to sensing they are experienced as beautiful and how this encourages their own consensuality and from that, their psychic vitality, long before it is possible to speak of integration.)

Following the initial impact of the mother's exterior beauty, it is the desire to know the mother's interior qualities that awakens the epistemophilic instinct and starts the conflict of identifications. The K-link (the desire to know) - says Meltzer using Bion's terminology - 'rescues the relationship from impasse'; and the aesthetic reciprocity that emanates from the mother – initially the external mother but really the internal mother - provides the mental container for the baby's engagement and exploration of the world.

The new (aesthetic) view of the internal war now hinges not on pleasure versus pain, or even envy versus gratitude, but on emotionality (stirred by beauty) versus anti-emotionality (the recoil from beauty). In Meltzer's words (based on his reading of Bion), the mental and the protomental now 'compete for the soul of the child'.

This also affects the view of the psychoanalytic method and the analyst's attitude to the task. In *The Apprehension of Beauty* Meltzer can make clear what he intimated earlier in *The Psychoanalytical Process*, namely, that analysts too have to sustain 'aesthetic conflict in their love affair with the psychoanalytical method' (*The Apprehension of Beauty*, p.22). The theory of aesthetic conflict allows for a new understanding of the particular types of frustration that belong to the countertransference (of which more will be said later).

For as Bion also says, it is the *analyst*, not the patient, who is in the position of being the newborn baby at the start of every session. It is the analyst who each time has to creep out of his glaciated cave and glimpse the sunrise. And Meltzer, especially in his later talks and writings, stresses the religious dimension of the analyst's reliance on internal objects. As in a passage that he wrote for a book on babies by the Psychoanalytic Group of Barcelona, this sunrise is really the sense of an 'extraneous intelligence':

This is an attempt to formulate a metapsychology of the neonate: its aloneness between feeds, ignorance of the mother's mentality, schooled only by the rhythm of her services, unable to form symbols and have meaningful dreams, bound to sensation, at best anecdotal in recollection, not even linear, on the verge of chaos. It is not surprising if it comes out sounding like Genesis. In the beginning was the feed. What we are relying on is the galvanizing of intelligence by attention to the polarity, for it is not in the beginning was the formless infinite, but the placenta as the primary feeding object. We might call this the experience of *surprise* and rewrite our genesis as a process starting with birth and panic relieved by surprise, not only surprise at finding the breast but surprise at an extraneous intelligence, the beginning of revealed religion. All the functions described are the fruits of identification with the extraneous intelligence. In the beginning object relations and identification are simultaneous.

And this is perhaps the main difference between Meltzer and the attachment theorists. Where they stress the literal, external mother, Meltzer – following Klein, and along with most philosophers of aesthetics – stresses the internal or psychic reality for which external features and conditions are simply a stimulus. The extraneous intelligence, or godhead, is actually internal, though it is experienced as coming from beyond the self. In the earliest days of psyche-soma or the body-ego, the placenta or breast is literally the feeding object, but the significance attached to this comes from within and represents 'the beginning of revealed religion'.

In the next session I shall begin with more about Meltzer's interpretation of Mrs Klein's 'combined object' and go back over some of the same ground by way of some of his other concepts, concluding by focussing on symbol formation and dreams.

SECOND SESSION

The morning's session concluded with the infant's surprise at discovering an extraneous intelligence and his essential religiosity, and how this is significant not just for thinking about actual infants, but also modifies Meltzer's picture of the psychoanalytic method.

The combined object

This does not seem to be a concept commonly used by Kleinians, even though there is no doubt Melanie Klein formulated it and, as Meltzer said, 'discovered' it, through her

work with Richard. When it first swam into her ken (as Keats would say) it appeared as a rather dark, overwhelming entity or phantasy, almost with sinister implications. It had, in fact, the aesthetic impact of a new idea for Mrs Klein herself. In its most primitive form it consists of the breast-and-nipple, the container and the means of access; and this merges into the idea of the mother and father in sexual conjunction which in phantasy can have a whole spectrum of meanings. Meltzer however adopted the idea of the combined object as internal godhead. Fortified in a sense both by Bion's concept of catastrophic change, and by the concept of the aesthetic conflict, which allows for darkness and ambiguity within the mystery of the aesthetic object, he saw the combined object as a necessary and beneficial developmental force, at the heart of the baby's development and of the psychoanalytic experience.

One of the aspects of the combined object is the **toilet-breast**, a concept formulated by Meltzer very early on (see 1967), yet again one which does not seem to have been adopted by later Kleinians. It was certainly very important to Meltzer. The significance of the breast, like the placenta, lies not only in its capacity as a feeding object, but also as a cleansing object; waste disposal is as important as the intake of nutrition, and part of a whole process of mental digestion. As Bion always says, we need to look at – and from – both ends of the alimentary canal.

This leads us to the consideration of Meltzer's view of sexuality.

Sexuality

In accordance with Freud, he saw sexuality as the key to everything – not merely in the limited sense of physical action, but in the wider sense of the combinations, projections and introjections that constitute personality development. In *Sexual States of Mind* (1973, his second book) he differentiates adult from infantile sexuality, infantile polymorphous from infantile perverse sexuality, and perversity from psychosexual exploration - especially in the case of adolescents. Sexuality is not a mere drive or appetite, but structures identity. And the key to its meaning lies not in physical action, but in the unconscious phantasy that lies behind it. This relates intimately to the concept of the combined object; since the key phantasy behind any state of mind is a primal scene of a particular type. The nature of the phantasy of the primal scene which is as it were 'behind the scenes', is what governs the phantasy as a whole. In this sense the combined object, or the infant's view of it, is at the heart of the meaning of his experience.

Meltzer's love of art also contributed to his revision of the psychoanalytic attitude to sexuality. He warned against making simplistic judgements regarding what is art and what is pornography, since he was aware that it is not the surface content that constitutes the meaning of a work of art; rather, it is the formal structure, of which the iconography is just one element. Hence the often-observed fact that a beautiful work may have an ugly subject. The real or deep subject is not the surface or literal

one, but is presented through the aesthetic qualities of the work. In poetry criticism this is known as 'deep grammar'; and in aesthetics, it may be known as 'presentational form', as distinct from 'discursive form'. In a parallel way, the meaning of the sexual conjunction of the internal combined object is hidden, not transparent. Yet this is the key to the difference between intrusive identification (like pornography) and communicative identification.

This takes us back to the geography of the mother's body, especially of the internal mother's body, which is fully described in *The Claustroom*.

The Claustroom

The book *The Claustroom* (1992) pairs with *The Apprehension of Beauty* and takes stock of its implications; many things are clarified through hindsight, and a more complete picture emerges of how psychopathology fits back in to the new aesthetic model, as its negative or defence mechanism.

The Claustroom is concerned with intrusive identification; it is a concept that requires a qualitative distinction between intrusive and communicative types of projective identification, not just 'massive' projective identification as in previously established Kleinian theory.

A wellknown and fairly early paper on anal masturbation was another important element in building up to the picture in which the aesthetic conflict becomes the organizing emotional constellation behind all forms of sexuality. It became the starting-point for *The Claustroom*., the work in which Meltzer expands and elaborates the concept of intrusive identification into three areas of the internal mother's body: head-breast, genital and rectal. The source of all pathologies and perversions, addictions, omnipotence, narcissism, and fearfulness, derives from inhabiting one or other of these claustral chambers of the internal mother's body. Each has its own selfish pleasures; yet entry into any of them represents a failure to tolerate the aesthetic conflict.

Of these three chambers, the genital intrusion has most effect on family life, whereas the most political areas are the head-breast and the rectal claustra. Living in the genital chamber results in greed, possessiveness and miserliness. Living in the rectal chamber results in **tyranny** – a sadomasochistic situation which causes harm to the internal babies, likely to be reinforced by harm to external babies in the shape of other people in society.

Living in the head-breast results in **pseudo-maturity**. This chamber is intolerant of ignorance – it is a substitute for awareness of the Socratean or Bionic space of absence of memory and desire. Meltzer first described this in a paper on the 'delusion of clarity of insight'. It is a particular danger for the psychoanalyst, and results in the inability to trust in the process as aesthetic object. Although it has similarities with what is sometimes called an 'as if' personality, it is actually more tyrannical, since its

political aim is to manipulate other people. Living in this chamber is liable to block the capacity to view each session as a new situation. It is an impediment to observation and to feeling the countertransference. The tiny changes that carry the stirrings of mental life go undetected in these glaring headlights – the opposite of what Bion calls a ‘beam of darkness’.

Although all these forms of psychopathology are wellknown and may be dealt with under the traditional heading simply of projective identification, it is the concept of retreat from aesthetic conflict that illuminates the illusory quality of the superficial vitality of the Claustrium. [something that Bion also constantly stressed - vitality being a necessary requirement for conducting an analysis.] Meltzer also maintained that the door to the Claustrium was ‘always open’; and the way out is through engaging with the aesthetic conflict. This is equivalent to ‘lighting fire’ in the patient’s mind and is the analyst’s prime task – not the moralistic goal propounded by establishment Kleinian theory, which falls prey to adaptation and respectability. Meltzer wrote that he had not come across any patient who had never had any glimpse of ‘the dazzle of the sunrise’.

A wonderful illustration of this contrast may be found Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, which sets the mania of Edmund against the apparent passivity of Edgar. They represent false and true aspects of the personality, aesthetic versus claustrophobic. Edmund believes he is outrageous and dynamic because he is illegitimate – which he interprets as being born of a passionate combined object; but his hollowness is revealed. Edgar appears to be mad and helpless but he is the vital force: he fuels the steady progression of the old men, Lear and Gloucester towards their death. Lear is associated with the great fire of rage; Gloucester with the little fire of eyesight. Their death is really a form of rebirth - Bion’s catastrophic change into a new state of being - expressed by Edgar becoming the new king.

Dream Life and symbol formation

The great symbolic structure of *King Lear* suggests our route back from the Model of the Mind to Meltzer’s views on dream life and symbol formation. Dreams and symbolmaking lie at the heart of his picture of mental vitality. In line with Freud’s own definition of psychoanalysis, Meltzer once said that the only talent he ever discovered in himself was that of reading dreams. ‘The dream is my landscape’ he once wrote in a letter. It is where his interest in psychoanalysis began, continued and culminates.

Meltzer was much interested in the philosophy of symbol-making, particularly the tradition of Wittgenstein, Cassirer, Whitehead and Langer. This is the tradition that is particularly concerned with the distinction between ‘presentational forms’ and ‘discursive forms’, showing and saying - the limitations of conscious meaning versus the richness of unconscious meaning. It was in the context of this tradition that, in *Dream Life* (1983), he said he was trying to ‘formulate an aesthetic theory of dreams’ (p. 29) that departed from Freud’s day-residue theory of dreams, and that would

bring psychoanalysis more in line with traditional art forms – both their methodology and their focus on dream-symbols.

Individual dreams may vary greatly in their aesthetic quality. However they always contain infinitely more meaning than the patient, or the analyst, can verbalise. Of this aesthetic containing power Meltzer wrote:

It can be seen that a number of central *formal* structures are being drawn up into juxtapositions to create a space scintillating with potentiated meaning. Sometimes words and visual forms are seen to interact... At other times spaces are being created as containers of meaning. At other times the movements from one type of space to another, and the emotional difficulties of making such moves, are made apparent. (*Dream Life* 148).

Dreams are authentic manifestations of the drama of part-objects that is the stuff of psychoanalysis, with aspects of the internal combined object acting as protagonists in a 'theatre of phantasy' – a key phrase expressing Meltzer's spatial view of mental life. (He felt in fact that some analysts had lost touch with Melanie Klein's own stress on the psychic reality of the part-object figures of the inner world and with the psychic space or spaces which they inhabit).

A special feature of Meltzer's theory of dreams is his view of dream-life as a continuum, in which meaning is continuously generated by internal objects, rather than invented by the self. Psychoanalysis, he wrote in his book of that name, offers a 'privileged sampling' of this most creative level of an individual's mental functioning. Indeed, this is the only functioning that is truly mental; everything else is either protomental (in Bion's term) or discursive – that is, it 'says' rather than 'shows' things, and what can be 'said' is inevitably much less complex than what can be 'shown' in dreams or other symbolic modes such as art forms. Dream-life is the place in which mental growth occurs: 'growth goes on in the quiet chrysalis of dream-life' (p. 177). It occurs (or is stunted) whether or not we are privileged to observe it, and whether or not we can find a reasonably correct interpretation for the dream. In dreams, mental life *happens* and – as Keats would say – 'the creative creates itself'.

Dream life is itself a presentational form, and we need to receive its manifestations in a congruent way, through the language of communication rather than the jargon of explanatory diagnosis. For this reason Meltzer preferred to speak of 'dream exploration' rather than 'dream analysis'. His view was that the patient (or rather his unconscious) is the creative force and this may be borrowed to enrich and enhance the creativity of the analysis, helping it to progress to the point at which both partners are responding to it as an aesthetic object in itself. Dreams, he said, 'come to the rescue' of the analyst's own poverty of symbol-formation. They facilitate the evolution of a private language between the analyst and the analysand, based on a longterm narrative of the patient's dream-life. This is what Bion calls 'the language of achievement'.

I feel certain that the exploration is the more important, the more artistic aspect of the work. The patient's growing identification with the analyst's exploratory method is a far more important basis for the gradual development of self-analytic capacity

than any striving towards formulation (*Dream Life*, p. 147).

The analyst ‘strives to match the poetic diction’ of the dream (here Meltzer borrows Ella Sharpe’s literary phrase). It is an aesthetic preoccupation that bears out what he sees as happening between transference and countertransference, namely, ‘the fitting of the analyst’s attention to the patient’s co-operativeness’ (*Studies in Extended Metapsychology*). Correspondingly, the patient becomes sensitive to the analyst’s own mode of inquiry and receptiveness, and this develops the self-analytic capacity on which all hope of a real and durable analysis rests.

This takes us to a special concept of Meltzer’s, very much equivalent to Bion’s concept of ‘reverie’, namely the counter-transference dream.

The countertransference dream

This is the state of mind necessary for analytic work when it is a mutual communication, taking place in the present, even when its content appears to be recalling the past. Meltzer is careful to differentiate the dream from ‘the ambush of countertransference activities’. Although he worked with this concept throughout his psychoanalytic practice, his most poetic description of it was written very late:

The state of observation is essentially a resting state. It is also a state of heightened vigilance. I compare it with waiting in the dark for the deer, grazing at night, seen by their flashing white tails. This nocturnal vigilance is on the alert for movement of the quarry, part-object minimal movements that with patience can be seen to form a pattern of incipient meaning “cast before”. This catching of the incipient meaning cast before is a function of receptive imagination – open to the possible, unconcerned with probability. Being rich with suspense, it is necessarily fatiguing, and fraught with anxiety. It is a trial of strength – and faith – that gives substance to terms such as resistance or retreat. However, it is a poetry generator.

In short, the countertransference is an emotional experience that must be caught in your dreams. Now the patient must attend to the analyst to interpret. How does he know what he is talking about? He doesn’t – he is “counter-dreaming”; he has, in fact, abandoned “thinking” (science) for intuition (art, poetry): the verbal tradition of Homer.

(written for Meg Harris Williams, in *The Vale of Soulmaking*, 2005, p. 182)

The ‘foundation of truthfulness lies in the quality of observation’, as he wrote in *The Apprehension of Beauty* (p. 203). Accurate observation depends on acquiring the state of mind that he calls the countertransference dream, in which a conversation is set up between the internal objects of analyst and analysand. (*Dream Life*, p. 46). Or as he puts it elsewhere:

If it were not for the transference from internal objects we would be absolutely helpless to assist our patients... it enables us to seem to perform functions for the patient that are essential to the development of their thinking.

Moreover this type of relationship applies not only within the analytic session, but also in a less intense way to supervision. Meltzer always greatly enjoyed supervising clinical material – and was always interested only in the material, not in the therapist’s

interpretation of it. He described it as playing in the orchestra, not conducting a masterclass. It is the clinical material that allows the supervisor to participate in the remembered session and bring it alive in the present:

It is very much in the spirit of psychoanalysis that this is meant to be a feeding situation - and not force feeding, but a feeding situation in which what you have to offer is laid before the student or the supervisee for him to select what suits him. I think it must be left really to the richness and the power of your ideas about the clinical material to make it palatable to the person who is being supervised, and you must try to avoid any kind of imposition of your ideas. ...For this reason, it is very important to stick to the clinical material, and not to wander into theoretical situations.

(‘Meltzer on supervision’, an interview by Robert and Mirta Oelsner, 2005).

Another reason Meltzer cites for focussing on clinical material rather than on interpretations and theories is that it is ‘non-threatening’ to the supervisee, because it is so easy to ‘doctor the material, to make your interpretations seem correct and adequate’. This is the equivalent of the preformed transference in analysis: it is a barrier to experience.

Finally I would like to end with a few words from one of Meltzer’s last public lectures to a large number of people; this was given in Barcelona in (I think) 2002. When asked what was the title of his talk, he said ‘I don’t know – I haven’t given the talk yet’. He found the title towards the end of the talk, when he was talking about one of his heroes at that time, namely General Kutuzov in *War and Peace* and the military tactics that he used to draw the enemy forces into the frozen wilderness where they perished. He likened this to the way the ‘enemy’ to real analytic experience is vanquished – by (apparently) doing nothing at all. By which he meant, leaving to the internal objects to do the ‘doing’. He said:

Well that’s it. The enemy is retreating – not from your wisdom but from their folly, from their having attempted to capture a frozen space and getting themselves frozen in the process. That’s the kind of game you’ve been playing. Now the survival in this kind of game depends on what is called good luck. Good luck. And when you translate ‘good luck’, it means, trust in your good objects. Good luck for the survival that you never could have planned, and that happened in spite of all your cleverness and ingenuity.

And at this point, he realised what the title of his talk was. He said “There’s the name of this talk: Good Luck!

HANDOUT to accompany talks:

Books by Donald Meltzer

1967 **The Psychoanalytical Process**

The process has a 'natural history', starting with the gathering of the transference, then progresses through the sorting of geographical and of zonal confusions to the threshold of the depressive position, and is completed by the weaning process.

1973 **Sexual States of Mind**

Sexuality manifests itself in childish, adult, or perverse states of mind, according to the unconscious underlying phantasy of the primal scene.

1975 **Explorations in Autism** (with John Bremner, Shirley Hoxter, Doreen Weddell, Isca Wittenberg). Child cases supervised by Meltzer movingly demonstrate attempts to mitigate the intense emotional impact of objects in mental space. Relevant not only to autism but to our understanding of psychic conflict in general.

1978 **The Kleinian Development** (3 vols: *Freud's clinical development*; *Richard week-by-week*; *The clinical significance of the work of Bion*). Lectures on psychoanalytic history originally given to students at the Tavistock. Meltzer sees this line of thinking as inherently logical, but sees a split in Freud between theoretician and clinician. Klein adds a theological model; Bion an epistemological one.

1983 **Dream Life: a re-examination of the psychoanalytical theory and technique.**

Dreams are not just puzzles to be decoded, the result of past trauma or wish-fulfilment, but the psyche's attempt to orient itself towards reality (internal and external).

1986 **Studies in Extended Metapsychology: clinical applications** of Bion's ideas.

Emphasizes the essential distinction between thinking and non-thinking mentalities, in groups and within the individual. Discusses a variety of clinical cases by colleagues from early childhood on.

1988 **The Apprehension of Beauty: the role of aesthetic conflict in development, art and violence** (with Meg Harris Williams).

The aesthetic conflict originates at birth in response to the enigma of the mother's moods and actions. The book pursues the implications of the psychoanalytic process as aesthetic object (first mooted in *The Psychoanalytical Process*) and introduces a conception of psychoanalysis as an art form with analogies to literary criticism.

1990 **The Clastrum: an investigation of claustrophobic phenomena.**

Instead of life and death instincts at work, Meltzer sees 3 distinct narcissistic worlds in relation to phantasies of living in a compartmentalised internal mother.

1994 (written 1976 with Martha Harris). **A psychoanalytical model of the child-in-the-family-in-the-community.** Bion's 'learning from experience' applied to family and educational situations.

Some Meltzerian concepts

Pre-formed transference and gathering of the transference. Distinguishing the true transference (a present relationship) from the preconceptions brought by the analysand - can block communication or seduce the analyst. (*The Psychoanalytical Process.*)

The toilet-breast. An essential function of the breast as earliest object. (*The Psychoanalytical Process.*)

Projective and intrusive identification. Distinguishes communicative projective identification (essential to development) from pathological attempts to control the mother/object. (*Studies in Extended Metapsychology.*)

Adhesive identification. Bick's concept illuminated by work with autistic children who 'dismantle' their object; distinct from attacking or intruding into the object. (*Explorations in Autism.*)

Aesthetic conflict. A concept drawn from poetry; seen as the key to mental development. Instead of innate life and death instincts is the tension between love and hate of the mother/object, beginning at birth. (*The Apprehension of Beauty.*)

Combined object. Observed and formulated by Mrs Klein, who saw it as a rather dark, overwhelming concept; adapted by Meltzer in association with Bion's 'catastrophic change' to represent a necessary and beneficial developmental force. (*The Kleinian Development.*)

Sexuality. In accordance with Freud, the key to everything; but Meltzer differentiates perversity from psychosexual exploration, especially in the case of adolescents, and sees unconscious phantasy – not action – as the key to its meaning. (*Sexual States of Mind.*)

The Clastrum. An expansion and elaboration of intrusive identification into 3 areas of the internal mother's body: genital, rectal and head-breast. (*The Clastrum.*)

Pseudo-maturity. The result of living in the head-breast chamber of the Clastrum, intolerant of ignorance.

Tyranny. Sadomasochistic result of living in the rectal chamber of the Clastrum.

Dream-life and symbol formation. Meltzer's view of stages in thinking (enhanced by Bion's Grid) is founded firmly on Klein's drama of part-objects (mother's or father's body) acting as protagonists in a 'theatre of phantasy'. (*Dream Life and Studies in Extended Metapsychology*).

The counter-transference dream. Meltzer's equivalent to Bion's 'reverie' – the state of mind necessary for psychoanalytical work when it is a mutual communication, taking place in the present. It is based on mother-baby communication. Note in Meg Harris Williams (2005), *The Vale of Soulmaking*.