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# CHILD PSYCHOANALYSIS APPLIED

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# THIRD SPACE

Editorial *Martin Galbavý*

*Dear reader,*

You now have in your hands the first issue of a new periodical called *Child Psychoanalysis Applied*. It has been conceived by a group of psychoanalytic psychotherapists with great zest to create a shared space for dialogue. The underpinning for this dialogue ought to be psychoanalysis as the inspiring matter that gives incentive to growth but does not predetermine the final shape and leaves space for enthusiasm, for newness. It is Winnicott's transitional space which creates a space for contact of two minds where neither of them knows what will be created but hopes that the creative process in itself is worthwhile. We hope to become such a place for you (and for ourselves). Our common belief is that psychoanalysis as a tool for discovery of the world still has a lot to offer even more than 100 years after its conception. We are all inspired by it daily and we hope to share this process of inspiration

with you. We do not mean just our psychoanalytic colleagues but also social workers, teachers, educators, students, parents and anyone else who wishes to be involved in the process of shared inspiration. So please take this inaugural issue as an invitation to an adventure where we see ourselves as fellow travellers rather than guides. We will see where this journey will take us.

Whilst preparing this first issue, we could not anticipate what stormy times lie ahead. Nevertheless the first article is about a very current theme of aggression and hatred. In his article called *Aggression and Violent Behaviour in the Unconscious Phantasy and Psychoanalytic Therapy of Children* Peter Pöthe addresses childhood aggression, which he understands as a mechanism of defence, as an attempt to regulate and protect the child from deep depression or psychotic collapse. We can also view childhood aggression from the

perspective of object relations and stress theory. Psychotherapists at the beginning of their journey might be especially inspired by a passage that addresses possible inauthentic behaviour of a therapist that may serve to prevent the emergence of aggressive situations in sessions.

The second article by Karel Flaška is called An Example of Effective Anxiety Containment in Online Adolescent Therapy. This contribution goes back to recent Covid times when many therapeutic sessions were conducted online. Is online space well suited to psychoanalytic psychotherapy or is it just making a virtue out of necessity? As readers you will be able to contemplate this. And as a bonus you will have an opportunity to see a fragment of psychoanalytic work with dreams.

The third contribution is a case study, which you might have heard at the 27th Psychoanalytic Symposium in Opočno, which took place in September last year. The case study was presented by Markéta Kavale. She called it "Hansel's Christmas". And because the symposium was dedicated to orality, the case study is about food, turkey, white meat and dark chocolate. I will not reveal any more but I warmly recommend reading this case study. It is a poetic story that plays beautifully with language and offers an amazing insight into the heart of therapeutic work with a child and family.

The last contribution is a review of an amazing book called „Šedík a Bubi“ (Grey and Bubi), by Ester and Milan Starý. The book is about a kitten called Grey, who experiences the adventure of growing up. The author beautifully describes the process of separation in authentic language. The depressive position according to Melanie Klein is portrayed through the dilemma of Grey's friend Bubi. I recommend that you read the review or the book itself.

I sincerely hope that you will enjoy reading the contributions at least as much as we enjoyed writing them and that yours and our phantasies will meet in the imaginatively conceived third space. Let us be surprised by all that might come about.

And to our journal I wish that it becomes a good object that will accompany you as long as you will need it. And to our journal I wish that it becomes a good object that will accompany you as long as you will need it.

*Yours sincerely*

*Martin Galbavý  
Editor-In-Chief*



# ***AGGRESSION AND VIOLENT BEHAVIOR IN THE PHANTASY AND PSYCHOANALYTIC THERAPY OF CHILDREN***

Article *Peter Pöthe*

Aggressive behavior of children is a sensitive topic for many families all over modern society. Unfortunately it is mostly viewed as a "pathological" or even "criminal" phenomenon which could not be tolerated and understood. Children are commonly treated as "subjects" of an adult authority who demands to be obeyed and heard. The main goal of the common, sometimes exclusive interest of "adult society" is the external positive and negative regulation of unwanted actions of potentially troubled children and adolescents. Almost every parent and teacher wants to have a nice, calm and cooperative child. The image of a happy child in the arms of a happy mother has become a standard model for a major part of society and even the professional community.

The model of an idealized "harmonious" parenthood and motherhood went so far that some child

psychologists advocate and provide different types of "holding therapies" that are basically based on denial of aggressive and hateful feelings in the parent-child relationship. There are several reasons for denial and pathologizing of mutual negative emotions. One of them is the unique emotional experience of parenting. The parent unconsciously transfers his own attachment memories to a next generation and applies psychological defenses used by previous generations. The parent's own aggression and hatred can be split off and projected onto the child who then becomes the source of his/hers unbearable persecutory fantasy. The following physical and psychological restraint of the child may then serve as the parents protection against his anxiety of destroying his own parent. Other ways of warding off unbearable phantasies and emotions is a creation of a "protective bubble" which contains only idealized parent-child

objects, while the “bad” objects are completely projected to the outside space to the other parent. However, this borderline structure can burst any time. The child can (should) turn angry, frustrated or hateful at any frustrating occasion, that is a natural part of his life and growth. The negative emotions and phantasies lead to new cycles of splitting and projection, sometimes resulting in iatrogenic psychiatric interventions and medication. Fortunately, this may not be the only course of “dealing with a problematic child”. Fortunately, there are also parents who maintain a safe contact with their feelings and memories which allows them to acknowledge and recognise the natural origin and the regulatory function of aggression and hatred in the parent-child relationship. As there are also few professionals, who know that children could be violent in order to protect themselves from serious mental problems like depression or psychotic collapse.

Writings of many psychoanalytic scholars reveal that hatred, destructive phantasies and envy can be related to understandable internal conflicts and emotional traumas. Theoretical discoveries of Ferenczi, Klein, Winnicott, Bion, or Bowlby can be compared and often confirmed by modern neuroimaging scans and models. Thanks to neuroscientists like Le Douarin, Perry, Schore, Panksepp, or Solms we find

more accurate data on affective motivation and drives than Freud and his early followers could have ever dreamed of. The research of Jaak Panksepp shows that internal conflicts between love and hate are actually taking place in the prehistoric subcortical regions of the brain which had evolved over 500 millions years. We also know that “instincts” or “drives” are products of complex affective systems that form the essence of cognitive and affective consciousness (Solms, 2016).

The mind as the main target of psychoanalytic intervention contains not only cognitive and conscious “data” but also unconscious affective “material”. It is the affective character of our experience which forms fantasies and phantasies (unconscious fantasies) about things which are happening throughout our lives. They play role as programs which predict what is going to happen in the immediate and distant future. The most potent phantasies are those which occur in the situation of immediate danger, that is the objective or subjective situation of existential threat.

### ***Aggression in children from the perspective of stress theory.***

Flight, fight and freeze are three basic responses to imminent threat in all animals, including humans. Their trigger is the subjective perception (fantasy) of an acute danger.

This perception of danger comes from external (objective) reality as well as from internal (subjective) reality. Past experiences are coded as implicit memories activation of which may lead to sudden, unexpected stress, often in a form of panic anxiety. The initial reactions to stress are happening unconsciously and without cognitive reflection. acute stress response can be regulated by brain structures located in the prefrontal lobe and neocortex. Lack of conscious and cognitive regulation leads to a state of chronic stress and uncontrolled defensive actions which involve negative emotions, like anger, rage and fear. A dysregulated stress response can be triggered not only by an actual event, but also by a memory of it. Seemingly un-harmful events, thoughts or images can start a dysregulated rescue action accompanied by intense emotional response. This state of mind can go completely undetected and beyond awareness.

One of the most dangerous situations of early childhood is the loss of a parent. Panic reactions after the departure of the primary caretaker was discovered by Jaak Panksepp among mammals and even among certain birds. The repeated remembering or reliving of these traumatic memories can lead to a condition of chronic flashbacks and states of panic. The brain can dysfunction as a car where the

driver is pressing the gas and the brake pedal at the same time. This metaphor of Allan Schore reflects the simultaneous activation of the sympathetic and parasympathetic neurovegetative systems. If we consider the sympathetic reaction responsible for flight and fight, we can see the parasympathetic activation as the biological basis of the freeze response, which can be understood in humans as dissociation. Little humans (children) cannot Fly nor Fight with a big threat therefore the withdrawal into a dissociative state of imagination and emotional detachment. This condition is often seen in children who are misdiagnosed with ADHD as they most probably suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Developmental trauma. The state of chronic stress can explain why they often feel "distracted" and maintain a weak contact with external reality or why they suffer from poor memory.

It is commonly recognised that traumatized children can suddenly become aggressive and violent. Is this behavior a manifestation of the "Fight" response? Do children respond to stress also by "Fly" or "Freeze" responses that are manifested by emotional withdrawal or dissociation? If the answer is yes, we can understand why aggressive children can be helped by uncovering and regulating their traumatic and traumatizing fantasies and memories.

***Aggression from a perspective of object relation psychoanalytic theories.***

Psychoanalysts who are oriented in Kleinian and post Kleinian theories believe that our self and our relationships are formed mainly by unconscious "phantasies" that originate in the first and most potent affective experiences in life. This means that the child may become violent not only because of some external threat, but due to his unconscious expectations and phantasies formed in early childhood. Melanie Klein discovered that the mother - child dyad contains not only pure love but also a fierce battle between love and hate. The infant internalizes the loving mother and identifies with her and uses as an internal good object, or he/she destroys the frustrating mother with hatred and anger and creates a persecuting internal object that is further projected. In the mind (phantasy) of the baby there are two mothers that act in an opposite way. One is the source of universal goodness, the other causes intense pain and sadness. The two (splitted) objects can be unified under a condition that the child receives more love and care than rejection and hate. This means that the mother must be more satisfying and loving than frustrating and rejecting. This kind of the mother (or other significant caregiver) is able

to receive the child's destructive projections through a process of containment. Instead of becoming a real threat (persecuting object) she helps her child to re-integrate the splitted and projected part objects. The integration and reintegration processes lead to ambivalence where the mother as a whole object that is good and bad at the same time. This period of development brings out real concern for the mother whose damaged parts can be "repaired. This crucial mental achievement is called by a term "depressive position" by Melanie Klein and "capacity for concern" by Donald Winnicott. In this "complex" way the child can relate not only to her/his main caretaker but also to other characters (objects) in life and to her/his own self.

The process of containment and integration of "aggressive" emotions and phantasies is obviously not an easy one. There are many circumstances which interfere with mothers containing capacity which leaves the child stuck in a "paranoid-schizoid position" characterized by splitting and constant projection. This may lead to a weak psychological resilience with low capacity for self regulation of negative emotions related to stress. Constant stress and mental traumatization has a further harmful effect on the personality and on the brain itself especially in the areas of emotional understanding.

The following example shows how the experience of being born to a rejecting biological mother and early emotional deprivation and traumatising can complicate the child's development and emotional coping in his family.

*Therapeutic vignette: "Šimon".*

*Therapy was indicated for a four years old boy after recurrent attacks on children in a kindergarten. His adoptive parents got divorced two years ago. Šimon lived in a shared custody arrangement one week with his mother and one week with father. The father was single. Mother lived in a new relationship where she gave birth to twins, one a half years old boy and a girl. His parents took him for adoption after he had to spend six months in an old style institution for toddlers. They had received no information about the boys Šimon's biological mother, her delivery or pregnancy. She had left him in hospital right after delivery. He was brought up in a family of three until he was two years old. After his second birthday the parents got separated. He has been living in shared custody since then.*

*The main reason for his visit to the therapist was "violence against other children". His aggressiveness had allegedly begun six months before the first visit after he kicked and pulled the hair of a little girl from his class in the kindergarten. It happened after she refused to share a toy with him. This happened almost regularly, approximately two or*

*three times a week. Nothing seemed to work on him. Sanctions or detentions had no desired effect. He was getting increasingly excluded from games and activities... This was Šimon's opinion too. He seemed to be convinced that children constantly in his class were provoking him, lying to the teachers and making him look bad. The parents tend to agree with him. At both homes he appeared just like "a kind and sensitive boy".*

*They saw his behavior at the pre-school in sharp contrast with the behavior at home. There he showed "almost unusual" sensitivity to his younger siblings so the parents were ready to blame the teachers for his misbehavior. Nevertheless this was not always true. During the second interview the mother "remembered" catching Šimon at "violent actions". This was supposed to happen in the period of two-three months after his brother and sister were born. His stepfather witnessed him "at least once" squeezing his little brother's cheeks in the cradle. His mother and stepfather felt "alarmed" and punished by hitting his bottom, which was a common way of disciplining children in the family. They both believed that only a "strict approach" would work on him and eventually, they believed, it really did. On the other side Šimon's father had witnessed him being more dependent on his mother after she returned from the delivery clinic. He was reluctant to fall asleep without calling her and was crying when his father was taking him to his home.*

*After two initial meetings with the parents and Simon it was agreed that he would join individual psychoanalytically oriented therapy. The objectives of therapy appeared to be the following:*

- 1. Uncovery of the boy's phantasies and emotions which trigger his violent reactions both outside and inside family. The therapist hypothesized that envy and fear of rejection could have been directly related to his present family situation and to the loss of the biological mother due to rejection after being born.*
- 2. Providing an experience of affective regulation of aggressive effects within a secure "transference" relationship.*
- 3. Providing emotional and educational support for parents and*
- 4. Providing containment for parents' possible guilt and the boy's destructive phantasies.*

*Simon's therapy sessions had revealed strong existential fears connected with fantasies and memories of loss of the loved object. These fantasies were felt and thought by the therapist in situations where Simon detected other children (clients) presence in the room, and at times of canceled sessions due to illness or holidays. His aggressive acts, mostly in a form of destruction of all the toys in the room, was emotionally contained and regulated through offering a secure relationship and*

*interpretations of the most threatening phantasies and of the omnipotent-manic defenses against them.*

### ***Aggression and envy in a triadic relationship.***

Children tend to lose their omnipotent and manic illusions about themselves almost from the beginning of their lives. Harsh encounters with external (objective) reality leaves them wounded and fragile which leads to intense fears of dependence and incompetence. Every stressful situation may trigger phantasies of being annihilated and painfully aware of limits, hopelessness and shame. All these emotions can be contained by someone who is close and safe enough to internalize, neutralize and project them back to the child in the form of feeling of importance, purpose and security. The ongoing process of stress regulation in secure attachment relationships gives a chance to develop neuronal circuits in the prefrontal lobe of the young brain that become a basis for emotional self-regulation and high psychological resilience.

One of the biggest clashes with reality is usually the arrival of the third person to the mother-child dyad. This could be a father (mother's partner) and also a sibling who is a product of a "treacherous" action of the parental couple. The emotions which are triggered by this "drama" are linked to fantasies

about losing one's power, identity, control and love. They involve fear, anger, envy or hatred. One way of dealing with envy, as unpleasant feeling, is an direct attack on the object or on its qualities which are envied. If the phantasy of the threatened dyadic child is the total destruction of the invader may be so threatening that it may be denied and projectively identified in the person. This mechanism could explain why the envious and jealous child could lead to fear of the father's attack and to Freud's "castration anxiety" (Freud, 1909). The mechanism of projective identification could be also responsible for nightmares, night terrors, or fears of ghosts and monsters which are haunting the child from inside because of his phantasies related to jealousy and envy.

According to Klein (1975) one of the other ways how the infant can deal with envy is greed. Instead of destroying the envied object or fear from its retaliation the envied person becomes idealized and "robbed" of his qualities by identification. This could be observed in children who sometimes reject and human one minute degrade their sibling and idealize in the other. The child either destroys or wears the siblings clothes and takes his/her toys without limits. Unfortunately greed cannot resolve envy because it does not lead to the internalization of a good object. Only the internalization and

identification with the internal good object enables the child to feel valuable and desired. This experience may allow him to trade aggression for gratitude which is the best solution of envy (Klein, 1975).

#### *Therapeutic vignette: "Alžběta"*

*Eight years old Alžběta's parents had contacted the therapist for her "rage fits" which were occurring almost every other day. During "fits", the girl was hitting herself on the head, scratching her arms, was yelling "horrible" and threatened to jump out of the window. Helpless parent never got an answer from her about what was going on. When they could not calm her down she was sent into her room from where she was supposed to return only "after she was normal". Similar rageful states had been occurring in her in the past for several years, but they were directed against her little "unproblematic" sister. The two years younger sibling seemed to be a star of the wide family. In contrast to Alžbětka who was said to be "almost invisible" her sister was singing in a choir and dancing on stage making her father proud. She was also liked by teachers who praised her reading at school where Alžběta was mostly struggling academically and also socially. When she was "hysterical" at school the teachers believed she was only "attracting attention". After first interviews it was agreed to start psychoanalytic psychotherapy along with regular consultations with parents. During therapy a wide range of*

*narcissistic injuries had been revealed along with defenses (self-regulations) like dissociation or denial. Alžběta clearly felt ashamed and deprived of good external and internal objects. The main object of her envy was her sister who was idealized on one hand, and hated and devalued on the other. The little girl's aggressive and destructive phantasies had been safely revealed and contained through play and her self-esteem was partly reestablished through integration and identification. The therapeutic relationship helped to grow towards a depressive position where she could use thinking and symbolizing instead of splitting and projecting.*

### **Aggression in therapy**

Obviously not all children react to narcissistic injuries with an "attack". A long term psychological stress could be regulated by regression to pre-oedipal dependence on the mother. The onset of transient physical weakness, enuresis, encopresis, loss of hygienic and social practices may invoke high levels of care and attention which may pull back the mother into a dyadic relationship. If the parent is a narcissist, the regression of the child can lead to a re-creation of narcissism that is a false phantasy of exclusive harmony. The child - mother dyad can protect itself by the avoidance and denial of any triadic relationships. A regressive dependence can be re-created with each consecutive child

with an exclusion of the third object, that is the father. In these situations the controlling and possessive mother clearly stands against the child's needs to grow and integrate aggressive and hateful emotions. This could lead to emotional vulnerability, psychosomatic illnesses and separation anxiety. The aggressive parts of the child are repressed or they can be dealt with in psychoanalytic therapy.

One of the big challenges in psychoanalytic therapy of aggressive children is the empirical fact that children seldom show aggressive behavior during a therapeutic session. This phenomenon is probably related to the limited frequency of the sessions. However the absence of aggressive behavior does not mean that the child does not feel frustrated and angry in the therapeutic relationship. Unless the therapist (narcissistically) identifies with an idealizing projection of the child or his/her parents, he/she would inevitably frustrate the child by giving him necessary boundaries and failing to maintain constant empathy. Announcing the end of the session, cancellations for holidays or illness, occasional forgetting the facts of the child's life are opportunities to elicit, acknowledge and contain possible hateful and destructive fantasies. If the main enemy of the omnipotent narcissistic illusion is a real contact with objective reality it may be enough if the therapist

does not deny it. Practically it means that the session starts and ends at the planned time and place, that the length of the session will not depend on the child's mood or desire and the child has to submit to rules imposed by an external authority. As we know from Winnicott's famous article (DW Winnicott, 1949) mutual feelings of hatred and destructive fantasies should not be avoided in therapy. They naturally occur in the transference and countertransference and they are sometimes denied and projected by both parties onto objects outside the therapeutic space. This shared defense may lead to the missed opportunity to achieve and experience regulation of negative affects of the child in the frame of a therapeutic relationship.

The following therapeutic example shows how the safe regulation process may happen during a session.

#### *Therapeutic vignette "Adam"*

*Seven years old boy called Adam was taking part in individual psychoanalytic psychotherapy for cerebral palsy, impulsivity, lacking concentration, low social and emotional competence. The beginning of his life brought him severe trauma and brain damage. He had to be resuscitated just after he was born. The parents were told he would hardly survive or will be severely mentally handicapped at best. His mother was severely depressed blaming herself for premature labor. She had intense exercises*

*with him and underwent several series of hard physical and mental rehabilitations. The joined and constant effort of both parents had allowed Adam to become an extraordinarily intelligent but motorically and emotionally challenged boy who most of all struggled with lack of empathy and impulse control. His first months of psychotherapy had shown intense, almost exclusive interest in fantasy, game and movie characters who were richly endowed with various superpowers. He was drowning self-invented pokemon and Minecraft figures who were rather dangerous and invincible. One of his favorite characters was a square head figure with a diamond sword and diamond shield. His superpower was that he managed to not see with open eyes. This picture reminded the therapist of Adam's instant ability to dissociate and withdraw into his inner world which nothing could penetrate through. These attributes were interpreted to the child from the perspective of his experience being confronted with everyday dangerous attacks on his self worth and existence due to his physical and social disabilities and complex and developmental trauma. Dissociation and flight into fantasy, that is denial, splitting and projection was surely one the strongest psychological defenses, that is emotional regulation modes, he was using.*

*The other Adam's significant defense against feeling weak, dependent and defected was aggression. He used to attack his classmates physically and verbally anytime he felt excluded, rejected*

*or threatened by their social superiority. After a few months of therapy he could demonstrate his aggressiveness through violent screaming, kicking and scratching whenever the therapist refused to fulfill his wish to watch gaming videos or refused to declare his victory when he lost in a card game. The extraordinary pinching screaming was uncovered as Adam's main "superpower" that enabled him to feel powerful and controlling in the session. The therapist was trying to survive and contain the little boy's hateful and envious feelings which were interpreted from the perspective of his emotional pain and annihilation fear. The "scream superpower" metaphor was eventually internalized as a safe way of self-understanding and self-regulation. Hence the internalized image of his omnipotent control could regulate his destructive phantasies. The "fits" eventually had partly subsided in the transference and at home as well. Unfortunately the progress could not be continued at school due to "covid long lockdown" that had sent him to new regression. Nevertheless Adam is still continuing his therapy.*

### **Conclusion**

Violence and aggression are perceived as one of the most concerning features of child's behavior by

Czech society and families. Signs of aggression are hardly tolerated therefore they often elicit strict and unempathic reaction by adult authority. Consulting a child psychotherapist can make an important difference in acknowledging the real emotions and needs of a the "problematic child". The goal of psychoanalytic and developmentally oriented psychotherapy is uncovering potentially threatening phantasies and their original sources and finding everyday and historical, often traumatic, events which stand behind the child's unique emotional experience. A containing therapeutic relationship should be safe enough to achieve access to emotions associated with envy and annihilation fears and also may help the child and parents to achieve functional (safe) ways of self-regulation. The experience of a containing therapeutic relationship should lead to a re-integration of the "raw elements" of the child's mind that can be internalized and identified as good objects (Bion, 1962). At the end this sometimes painful experience the child does not need to dangerously acted out his emotional conflicts or regress to dependence and illness. A similar process can be achieved also with cooperating and caring parents.

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# ***AN EXAMPLE OF EFFECTIVE ANXIETY CONTAINMENT IN ONLINE ADOLESCENT THERAPY***

*The importance of dream interpretation during the Covid-19 pandemic*

Article ***Karel Flaška***

## ***Introduction***

The aim of this article is to show the possibilities of effective therapeutic action within the online space, which under certain objective conditions (Covid-19 pandemic) can even become the only space (apart from a phone call) where the client can reach his therapist. When Bolognini (2020, in Monzo & Micotti, 2020) likens online therapy in the pandemic to a "forced evacuation to a temporary camp during an earthquake for indefinite time", he opens up the perspective of therapeutic work, so to speak, in the epicenter of traumatic experience, where external danger affects the therapist just as much as the client. In such a situation, the way the therapist takes care of himself, his own balance and his own anxieties becomes of a crucial importance. In his article, Shulman (2020) recalls the concepts of Alvarez's "live company" (1992, *ibid*), Reid's "observational

state of mind" (1999, *ibid*) or D. Winnicott's "alive, healthy and awake analyst" (1962) as models of ideal analysts' mental states, which we should try to maintain at all costs, which is a really great challenge in such an extreme situation like the Covid-19 pandemic. The common global denominator of this unprecedented situation is the Great Loss, against which mankind defends itself by invoking the protective Great Mother, who is increasingly proving herself, in the face of still ongoing seismic waves, to be overprotective and necessarily insufficient in this overprotectiveness. Sooner or later, anxiety will emerge in the survivings and survivors, if not existential anxiety then certainly anxiety about "not-being-alive". At best, they will contribute to the creative renewal of the world - at worst, to increasing numbers of our clients. Like me, Catherine Webster (2020) looks at the topic through the lens of loss, comparing

her own pandemic experience with the concepts of melancholy (Freud, 1917, *ibid*) or burnout syndrome (Freudenberger, 1974, *ibid*), which are in essence connected by the dynamics of mourning, though mourning whose object remains unconscious, unnameable - it cannot be mourned or revived, and without it one feels lonely and worthless. She sees as an effective prevention against the encapsulation of such conditions not only the skill of self-analysis acquired through training, but also the awareness of interdependence and the possibility of sharing vulnerability and uncertainty. It seems to me that the online framework of forced therapeutic exile symbolically combines both the declaration of dependence (the source by which we maintain the bridge) and the fragility and vulnerability (instability of this bridge - as if impending online outages had echoed the threat of new restrictions potentially breaking our personal and work contacts and projects, including therapy), and finally a reminder of the real explosiveness of proximity (the reality of coronavirus). These online framework characteristics are necessarily connected with the potential for the development of both positive and negative transference towards it. Therefore, it is important to think about what the online setting really is so that we can successfully observe these transferences in therapy and use them for the benefit of the client.

### ***Specifics of online therapy***

Some authors (e.g. Dettbarn, 2013) put online space as an effective tool for psychoanalytic therapy into question. Monzo and Micotti (2020) summarize the most important contributions to 21st century online therapy that discuss (among others) following shortcomings of online setting: a) asynchronous communication; b) impossibility of direct eye contact; c) insufficient activation of mirror neurons; d) a reduced number of sensory channels; e) little space to capture nonverbal communication; f) distribution of control and dominance in favor of the client. On the contrary, Scharff (2013) provides evidence that changing the usual setting can bring new material that will deepen the process itself, or at least reveal new horizons. In his earlier work Scharf (2012 and 2010, in Monzo and Micotti, 2020) states that attunement via voice channel facilitates a more vivid countertransference experience and thus easier accessibility and recovery of the dissociated contents of mind. According to Caparrotta (2013, *ibid*) online therapy can be beneficial where it serves to maintain the continuity of an ongoing therapy or where the client has a problem with the therapist's physical proximity. However, he admits that online setting can be misused in a perverse or obsessive defensive way. In Donald Kalsched (2011) terms we can say

that the patient may incorporate the online setting in the service of the so-called “protective-persecution defensive system”. Finally, Scharff (2013) offers some way out of the psychoanalysis of the online framework itself, emphasizing that the process of psychoanalysis itself is important, not its medium. I fully agree with this opinion and I would like to support it with my own case vignette, which in many ways echoes the findings of authors such as Sehon (2015, in Monzo and Micotti, 2020), who wrote about an adolescent, whom online setting enabled to talk about his dreams, to freely associate and deepen his interest in therapeutic work, and in whose teletherapy it was possible to observe transference-countertransference dynamics comparable to in-person sessions. So let’s take a look at one story, which shows how unexpectedly, an imaginary emergency station built on modest foundations “better than nothing” can become a relatively solid “something more than just anything”, by which I mean a full-fledged transformative relationship experience that is still ongoing.

I *acting out*  
glassary p. 27

### ***Case study vignette***

The fragment from long-term therapeutic work that I present here took place during one of several online sessions during the Covid-19 pandemic, when it was not possible to carry out face-to-face sessions

for several months. The client was a young adolescent with mild symptoms of autistic spectrum disorder, who was brought to me by his parents because of his strong fears of an outbreak of world war, difficulties in peer relationships accompanied by a more isolated lifestyle and an overall fragile personality structure. From the point of view of therapeutic diagnostics, it was a problem of getting stuck in a symbiotic relationship with the mother and a failed separation burdened mainly by annihilation anxieties (anxiety about destruction of the self - author’s note).

During the first phase of therapy, which lasted about one and a half years at a lower frequency of sessions (every two weeks), I was exposed to relatively excessive, almost neverending speaking and playing, which I accepted without interpretation, as a free association itself (so called “language action”, see Bush, 2014), or in other words as a behavior aimed to stage a certain drama between us. At the same time, I tried not to act out<sup>1</sup> in this drama. I managed this thanks to a careful analysis of my rather unpleasant countertransference emotional states (e.g. especially feelings of helplessness, worthlessness, but also sadness and loneliness). To try desperately and excessively to ingratiate, to penetrate the client’s defensive way of communication would mean to act out. On the client’s side, it could be

2 *negative parent complex*  
*glossary p. 27*

3 *primary guilt*  
*glossary p. 27*

seen as an attack on his fragile independence, which he needed to carefully maintain in relation to me to feel safe. Gradually, it became more and more clear to me how the client's original fear of the outbreak of collective destructiveness (then it reflected real societal tension), is underpinned by the "negative mother complex"<sup>2</sup> (in jungian terms), underneath which we can find a more in-depth operating archetypal image of The Great Mother (for more see Neumann, 1991). In classical terminology, we could talk about the problem of an archaic superego, which is extremely polarized and lacks the kinder outlines of its later developmental stage. Without a doubt, the client got stuck on his way to separation from his mother due to the deeply unconscious experience of the so-called primary guilt<sup>3</sup> (see Neumann, 2002), which accompanies the separation from symbiotic unity with the mother, respectively the unity with the representation of the mother.

The imaginary "highway" from the symptoms to the heart of the matter was obvious, but it was also necessary to wait for some time before it was possible to approach it together with the client. It took a long time before I was able to abandon the attitude of an unconditionally accepting non-intrusive, exclusively containing, non-interpreting therapist, while the client gradually played out the necessary compensatory

images of the birth of a divine child in the sandtray and thought about the relationship between Christ and God which was very problematic for him ("Why did they send him into the world when they killed him?! And why do they hang him on the wall now when it's actually terribly sad?!"). In this phase of therapy his experience of himself and in front of me was that he was great, special and omnipotent in his identification with God and Christ, but also independent and admirable in his imaginativeness, which he exhibited before me and in which he could boldly compete with the brilliant essayist passages of the novel "The night train to Lisbon" (Mercier, 2011), which I happened to be reading at that time. All these events had to play out between us in order to establish a feeling of a good-enough Self, which could begin to enter in a non-threatening way into a dependent and needy position towards the therapist, but also towards other people in his life, especially outside of the family circle.

At the time of the strongest pandemic restrictions and at the same time the worst pandemic situation (constant growth in the number of infected and deceased Covid-19), when we were forced to meet exclusively online, the client brought the following dream. After optimal interpretation of the dream the atmosphere of our sessions, which I have described, changed significantly

and the therapy could proceed to the next phase:

† *Time changes are an authentic unchanged part of the client's telling.*

K†: *“Mom and I are walking down the street. Suddenly a giant ghost appears in front of us - it is running straight to us. We are running to hide in the house hoping that the ghost didn't notice us. But it shrank so that it could pass through the door. We ran up the stairs, but it was running after us. We quickly hid in an apartment and locked the door. We found a hole in the wall of the room, so we hid there, but the ghost probably shrank again and went through a keyhole. I was terrified because we had nowhere to run. When it seemed that it would penetrate the hole in the wall, we screamed and I woke up in horror.”*

T: *“I mean, you must have been really scared.” ... „What comes to your mind about that dream?” (First, I encourage free association of the client himself)*

K: *“I don't know...” (longer silence)... “I was terribly scared.” “But I can't think of anything at all... I don't know what it might be about...”*

T: *(After a moment of silence, I offered him my own idea) “I think it's about coronavirus - a big scarecrow that we are very afraid of and try to hide from it. We run from it and put various obstacles in its way - facemasks, respirators, we keep our distance, we do not leave the house, we no longer even interact with our loved ones... But the situation is getting worse and worse,*

*because it finds its way through the smallest of cracks in our body cells... which actually means that we are also quite helpless against it.”*

K: *(He moves his eyes from side to side, then turns his head intermittently from right to left... and finally after a moment of tension he shouts): “Coronavirus!” (breathes deeply, strongly and regularly, and the joy of the connection is evident on his face and eyes)... “Wow! Coronavirus! Oh, really!” (smiles with a bright brilliant gaze).*

T: *(I am silent, letting the new experience resonate. I process my own experience of being moved that the interpretation “fits” and the experience of a certain mystery).*

It is worth thinking about a) why I interpreted in this way; b) with what my interpretation could resonate in the client's mind, that led to such a strong psychosomatic response. During the whole pandemic and related restrictions, I interpreted the coronavirus in dreams only once - in this case. This was probably because I was attuned to the archetypal (collective) layer of the psyche, with which psychotically structured people are in strong contact - they place their projections in it, and cannot withdraw them due to their relative strength, just as they cannot withstand it from a certain moment. The failure of projective-introjective mechanisms eventually leads to splitting. The projection of an

exclusively personal character thus literally becomes a ghost, resp. later the archetype “scarecrow coronavirus”, which is well suited for symbolizing the client’s emotional experience. Simply put, we may talk about the splitting of “harsh experience” from its link to the “harsh reality”. It is more bearable to be afraid of a dream/nightmare than to be afraid of the reality which I wake up to and which I live in - so I offer a paradoxical consideration of the stabilizing function of nightmares (similarly thought by Ogden, 2005). In this spirit, we can further assume that the client dreaded me and my words as much as he now dreaded coronavirus and earlier wars, and as he most likely dreaded his own real mother. Through the lens of his dream image, he aptly shows how he sealed all the cracks in our sessions, so that I could not get to him in any way. Fearing my omnipotence and his helplessness, he activated his own omnipotence and forced me to experience his helplessness. My interpretation probably addressed the split experiences of helplessness, which could become more bearable thanks to my interpretation using the plural “we” and moving on a descriptive level of communication (“What is it like?”; see Alvarez, 2012). Moving his eyes and head can be understood as a transformative psychosomatic reaction, when the original split-off experience of helplessness gradually reintegrated (for more on

the process of deintegration and re-integration, see eg Fordham, 1994, or Sidoli, 2000) down to the deepest levels of the body itself.

K: *“Wow, I now have about four more dreams...” (The client continues in the same online session. I include a transcript of only one of them, namely the one that significantly coincided with the event that had just taken place between us on the relational level.)*

K: *“In one dream, I received a gift. It was a box of toys, exactly the ones I wished for and missed. I was very happy, but I saw that there was a foreign name on the box. It wasn’t mine. I told my dad and he said it was for me that I could keep it, but I insisted that we have to return it, that the man would miss it. We looked for him and found out that the man lived with my grandmother, but he was younger, a gentleman, I don’t know what he looked like, I forgot.” (among other things, we should notice that in the client’s unconscious the relationship to male figures that positively relate to the client becomes stronger, but he actively rejects them; he cannot accept anything from them; the dream displays the client’s problems with piercing clarity; I patiently continue the exploration and avoid being confrontational in the manner of “they give it to you and you reject it”, which would be true, but would have no positive effect, at most acknowledgment that it is a fact...)*

T: *“What comes to your mind about*

*that man and your grandmother?"*

*K: "The man could be about as old as you... I have only good memories of that place and my grandmother, nothing bad happened to me there."*

*T: According to the client's associations, I evaluated that it could be a transference dream, which also significantly coincided with what had happened here and now between us. So I allowed myself the following interpretation: "I think that you might feel here and now with me a bit like in that dream - you got something undoubtedly good that you could think about, that you could play with and that ultimately brought you joy and relaxation. But there is a problem, because you are afraid to take it with you and continue to play with it after our session. You wish you didn't need me, that you could create it yourself. Maybe you'll feel like a thief, as if you stole something good from me today. Like a hot cake from mom's baking tray, which she hasn't allowed you to take yet. You may be afraid that I will be angry with you, as you imagine that your mother would be."*

*K: (listens intently and finally says): "Yeah, it fits quite well. That's good with the cake!"*

After my last interpretation, in which I tried to address the central theme of dependence and envy literally in the middle of our relationship and probably in the middle of other

relationships in his real life, the client himself started talking about knowing someone else who also goes to therapy and who goes more often than he did and that he himself would also like to come more often. Here we can see how the client, based on a strong positive experience, dares to talk about his envy and becomes more attached to the therapist. We can see how the secure attachment pattern gradually replaces the original problematic insecure attachment pattern. In the next phase of his therapy, the client literally "sticks" not only to the imaginary therapeutic breast, but also to his peers and the world in general. He dares to bring his dark side (envy, hatred, greed, etc.), his own desire, his drive. The degree of hostile affect is becoming more tolerable and we are beginning to think about it without fear that he could be broken by the mother's (imagined) retaliatory anger. It was also possible to gradually repair the distorted representations of others as desirable and enviable and to make the experience of dependence and helplessness, but also desire more bearable. It was also possible to begin to touch on the defensive tendency to devalue those who owned the missing "good breast". The sessions following the above session were not "happier", rather more tearful and painful than before, but also allowed the pain to subside. Disappointment of expectations and hopes occurred not only

among peers, but also among us. As the client dared to start using the imaginary therapeutic breast to the full, resp. in proportion to his accumulated hunger, he sometimes even began to squeeze it, frustrating moments also arose when the imaginary therapeutic milk did not flow according to the client's omnipotent wishes and phantasies. I considered it a significant shift that the client dared not only to listen to my interpretations, but also began to talk openly about the fact that he sometimes doesn't understand them, or that they are too long, but also that he is afraid he won't remember everything or misunderstand me and that he does something wrong, or he dared to admit that sometimes he doesn't remember anything of our session. Finally, the most important therapeutic shift I consider the fact that it was possible to start talking openly about how much he was afraid of his mother's anger, whenever he separated from her and did not act in accordance with the internalized image of her, and that it became possible to gradually show how much of what he experiences in relation to his mother comes to life in the transference relationship with me.

Finally, the question of why meeting online had led to that desired opening up, increased closeness, interest in the real other, and his own dreams? Several factors occur to

me: a) intensification of family dynamics due to lockdown (increase in tension, need to share, ventilate) b) experience of absence - absence of therapist, including his office can awaken or intensify dream production (symbolization of the missing, the transference transformed into dreaming); c) as already written in the introduction, for some clients, online meetings are actually safer (greater sense of control, safe distance, feeling at home - they speak from familiar environment); d) I could prove to be "a visit that behaved decently and did not leave too much havoc" (online sessions are "remote" and "virtual", but often the client reveals details of his home, room - in another sense, on the contrary, the therapist is thus being let closer, and the way the client feels accepted including his own home is therefore crucial - the feeling of security and safety in the relationship may deepen and openness may increase). In reality, however, the most probable effect is the element of denial/prohibition and deprivation (intensifies the transference), as the client himself commented after the end of the lockdown that personal meetings would be "better". This also leads me back to the well-known fact that when we, as therapists, experience frustration with our clients, it does not mean that the client does not appreciate us or the therapy or that s/he does not benefit from it.

### ***Theoretical considerations on effective psychoanalytic technique***

We saw that the client brought several dreams to therapy, the latter I dared to interpret as a forerunner of what the client could not only experience with me in the present situation, but also defended against it in some way, or it was likely that it would happen. This is a situation that many psychoanalysts consider to be a key part of an effective therapeutic technique. Sigmund Freud (1997, p. 309) already noted on the problem of transference handling that “no one can be killed in absentia or in effigia.”, which means in the absence or representation (author’s note). There is a big difference when we talk about psychoanalysis, or perform it in vivo as an observable present experience, an event between two people. In practice, this means that we try to capture as many emotional movements as possible in the present moment and interpret them as also acting towards the person of the analyst. We then believe that the effective factor is the experienced difference between (according to the patient’s imagination or experience) the expected reaction of the analyst and how he actually reacts. Strachey (1934, in Etchegoyen, 2005, p. 448) later sharpened this procedure almost to perfection by precisely defining so-called “mutative interpretation”<sup>4</sup> and setting rules for distinguishing it from other kinds of interpretation and also distinguishing the stages of its use.

In the later work “Envy and Gratitude”, Melanie Klein (2005, p. 265) also comments on the issue of effective psychoanalytic technique. Her description is well suited to the events of the above-mentioned online session. “Our efforts to help the patient in integration are convincing only if we can show him in the present and past material how and why he is constantly splitting off parts of himself. Such evidence is often provided by the dream preceding the session and can be found in the overall context of the analytical situation... The cumulative effect of such interpretations gradually allows the patient to make progress in achieving integration and insight.”

Following the above-described tradition, which is close to me, I sometimes compare the whole analytical situation to the dream that the client needs to dream through (similarly expressed, for example, Ogden, 2005), and I try to recognize the traces of such a dream in free association (speech, dreams, and even body movements). For the interpretation of such unconscious transference manifestations in vivo I use the term “dream interpretation in a dream”, as I try to show the client that he IS dreaming and HOW he is dreaming, while (perhaps) we are awake side by side. I thus remain faithful to the fact that psychoanalysis, together with the concept of transference, arose from an effort to understand the dynamics of dreams

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*mutative  
interpretation*  
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as the royal road to the unconscious, where we believe that the foundation of our clients' difficulties rests.

### **Conclusion**

I have shown that the psychoanalytic process can take place in all its essential features and manifestations (transference, dream interpretation, containment of anxiety, making previously intolerable emotions more accessible, etc.) through the online medium that is still being, despite the exceptional situation that directly forced its extensive use, the subject of much discussion about whether or not it is at all appropriate to use it for psychoanalysis.

For me personally, it was and still is more difficult to get used to the exposed face of a new client who took off his mask, his or her face that went so far beyond my imagination based on the need to complete a closed shape („gestalt“). On the contrary the human face, which I had the opportunity to observe in its wholeness from the beginning and which affected me in some way from the start, was later different only in that it crossed the threshold of my office and was closer to me. It appeared to me with details that did not disturb the original impression too much, but rather complemented it.

In conclusion, I would like to offer a more controversial reflection on the essence of interpersonal online

contact as such and how it actually differs from the well-known so-called “personal” (eg “in-person” English; or “di persona” Italian.), and also about why we don't really want to go online, although such a transfer can sometimes be useful. If we try to distinguish online meetings from “personal meetings” by negation (ie on the basis of what they are not), we find that the connotations such as “personal”, “human”, “in-person”, “di persona”, “face-to-face”, eventually “emotionally alive” or “authentic” cannot be simply denied to them. Not to the extent that contact between two people can be “impersonal”, “inhuman”, “disconnected”, “inanimate”, “inauthentic” even outside the online space. However, we can say with certainty that online meetings are at least “uncommon”, “unusual” and “other than”. This means that it deviates from customs, norms, expectations, which naturally arouses archaic anxiety about otherness, unknown, unpredictable, but also open.

We can think and enrich ourselves (or each other) by reflecting on what we consider to be “ordinary” or “personal” form of contact. What is so satisfying about it, what does it bring us? Undoubtedly, what most of us do not want to be deprived of and lose? What is irreplaceable about it that we refuse to give it up? I invite you on a special journey to your dreams and phantasies about your or our meetings, to your or our unconscious...

## Glossary

**Acting out** *In the narrowest sense, it is a specific way of remembering (free association in the psychoanalytic situation) by which the patient unconsciously stages an event between him and the analyst (“here and now”), instead of speaking of it as a memory (“there and then”). In the broadest sense, then, as acting out we can understand any behavior motivated by experience that is not accessible to awareness and psychological processing. It can include certain specific events taking place, but also more complex relationship patterns.*

**Negative parent complex** *By this term we mean a more or less conscious sum of psychic contents (memories, fantasies, thoughts, etc.) centered around a common semantic archetype core “mother” carrying mostly negative emotional coloration (eg distrust, guilt, anxiety, etc.). Due to their strong emotional charge, such clusters have the ability to influence our experience and behavior whenever a given situation touches the complex in some way. In the transference to the therapist (regardless of his or her gender), the negative maternal complex can manifest itself, for example, in low self-confidence or low trust in the therapist, feelings of badness, or feelings of guilt in connection with receiving his care.*

**Primary guilt** *This concept was introduced by the jungian analyst Erich Neumann to distinguish it from personal guilt, which is a reaction to guilt springing out from trespassing the expectations of parents, the law, etc. Primary guilt is a feeling that develops in a child in response to lack of good care in the primary maternal relationship - instead of being angry with the “bad” mother, he begins to consider himself at its core as bad and blames himself. A person with such an early constellation can then feel guilty that he even is at all and that he is alright the way he is, no matter what he does in life and beyond - any step by which he could become a little more himself can be accompanied and complicated by a renewed sense of primary guilt.*

**Mutative interpretation** *is an interpretation of the patient’s impulse that has the ambition to produce structural changes in the patient’s personality (therefore mutative in the sense leading to change). In its administration, the analyst plays the role of an auxiliary (neutral) superego, which should be clearly different from good (supportive, reassuring) and bad (rejecting, forbidding) internalized parental characters. By addressing the impulse “here and now” and accepting it as directed towards him, the analyst awakens in the patient the original simultaneous anxiety that led to his suppression/displacement, as well as the original expectations in relation to the reactions of internalized others. The goal is first to arouse the optimal level of awareness of impulse and anxiety and then dissolve this anxiety by perceiving the contrast between the analyst’s expected reaction and his real reaction as a real person different*

*(neutral) from the original characters of the patient's inner drama. This two-phase procedure is gradually repeated until the goal is achieved, which is the integration of the impulse and the ability to handle it freely. As such, the mutative interpretation is exclusively transference (it focuses only on the interpretation of transference, the relationship in the analytical situation), it is immediate (it addresses impulses "here and now immediately after emergence), specific (based on the patient's material available to him), graduated (gradually, strategically dosed, cyclical).*

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# HANSEL'S CHRISTMAS

Case Study *Markéta Kavale*

Orality and celebrating various holidays, as well as Christmas, is an interesting theme in itself. I admit that before Christmas I tend to ask my clients how they experience Christmas or what it was like at home during Christmas when they were little. And I also ask children. It is interesting that children talk about everything imaginable: the Christmas tree, baby Jesus, the golden pig... While adults frequently mention food; what they eat or used to eat at home, and how beautiful it was or what horrid memories they associate with it. As if festive food in the memories of adults were something sacred, something that should evoke feelings of peace and quiet, which in some families certainly fails to happen.

I'd like to introduce you to one case study of an almost 5-years old little boy, who came to me in a very interesting way. Years ago I taught psychology on a course for nannies

and preschool teachers, and one teacher there asked me if I could help a little boy who then was attending her classroom. I remember she told me: "Hansel only eats rolls, but otherwise, he is cute enough to eat. He has amazing talks with his two friends. Actually he is usually silent, but when he says something, it's worth it. His dad is French, even though he is a beautiful tall black man. Dad and Hansel speak French together, although at home they speak Czech.

She gave my contact information to the parents and they contacted me.

I would like to point out in advance that it was an unusual kind of therapy for me. I was treating Hansel, but because his parents often intervened in the therapy, it was sometimes difficult for me not to get involved in family work. This was however extended by another, external member, his teacher, with

whom I met regularly while teaching on the psychology course.

For the first session I invited only the parents. We talked about Hansel. They tell me that in addition to rolls he also eats Activia yoghurt and Margherita pizza. Dad always gets the Margherita, because he knows that this is the only food Hansel will finish. The father adds that he had also troubled his parents with eating when he was a child, so it doesn't seem so strange to him that Hansel eats only these three things. Here mum opposes that she wishes that Hansel ate fruit and vegetables for instance and especially meat, which he strictly refuses. The mother says that they are very happy to have found this private preschool, where children are not made to eat what is being cooked there, which was the case in his previous preschool, where Hansel felt almost bullied. This preschool takes children as they are, respects their individuality. The children eat what their mums prepare in their lunchbox. Mum sometimes tries to put fruit or vegetable in the lunchbox for Hansel, but unfortunately has never managed to eat it.

I am asking about the history and development of Hansel's eating habits. When he was little, he ate porridge, but when he was able to start eating rolls, i.e. around 8-9 months, he stopped eating porridge and was refusing even milk, until they finally

discovered that he enjoys unsweetened Activia yoghurt.

We are talking about home eating rituals, how do they eat at home? It's clear from the answers that they meet together around food mainly at weekends, because the father often works evening shifts, since he works at the airport. Mum tries to eat a lot of vegetables, because it's healthy and at the same time she wants to keep slim. As a child she was apparently plump and she wouldn't want to be like that again. Hansel, according to her, has a nice figure, is not fat, and it is not visible at all that he only eats the three things they mentioned. They all have individual meals, which is obviously something that mum had introduced into the family. Dad has adapted to this. Margherita pizza is being bought by dad on the way from preschool. He picks up Hansel twice or three times a week. They both enjoy pizza. I ask the father what it used to be like at home, when he was little, with an emphasis on the question of how they used to eat at their home. The father says that he could eat what he wanted and that the parents tolerated this, they did not limit him in any way. They lived in Marseille, where he was born. His parents came there from Kongo. His father was a scientist and got a place at university. First his mum stayed at home and took care of four children, then she worked in a local library. He was the youngest of the children.

In the mother's family everything was different. Food was imperative. All food had to be finished. She was an only child, so she was brought up very strictly and firmly. She was a good daughter of her parents, and thus she ate everything, even when she didn't like it. That's why she looked so awful. Since then she had told herself that she would never make her children eat. She likes the liberal approach of her husband, but today even she feels that it is a little too much. She wishes that their son has a more varied diet, and eats healthy, but she doesn't know how to make it happen. Hansel refuses everything. The mother fears that if this continues, Hansel could develop anorexia nervosa, by which her parents scare her often. The father responds that there is no point in being nervous, and that it will come by itself. I ask if he also loved Pizza Margherita when he was a child. The father thinks for a while. He answers that he ate only Emmental cheese with baguette. Smiling he then adds that it is almost the same.

I am talking with the parents in Czech, nonetheless the father is speaking broken Czech and sometimes he has difficulties in expressing himself accurately. He gladly accepts, when he can say some phrases in French. He tells me that he speaks with Hansel only in French. The mother rejects the offer that we could all speak French. She wishes that they speak Czech at

home, because they are in Czechia. When they are in France they all speak only French. I ask how often they go to France. I get the answer that almost every holiday. Hansel is happy there, because there is a big family and everyone accepts his eating specifics. Contrary to this, the Prague grandma is still angry with the parents and blames them for Hansel's bad eating and that this will have catastrophic consequences.

At the end of the session I ask the parents if there is anything they haven't mentioned yet or anything they do not wish to be said in Hansel's presence. They look at each other for a while. It seems that the father wants to say something. Mum says it after a while: The marriage with Hansel's dad is her second. She has a daughter called Gretel from her first marriage and has shared custody. According to the mother: Hansel is getting on well with Gretel. It is apparent that she doesn't want to talk about Gretel any more. She closes everything with the following words: "As for the problem with Hansel, we have already told you everything..." But it is clear that much remains unsaid.

My impression from the initial session with the parents: Very kind and forthcoming father, who lights up when he talks about his only son. He expresses that he doesn't understand why they came to therapy, because his son's eating habits

remind him of his own in his childhood. Contrary to this the mother's attitude is rather ambivalent: She wishes her son ate more healthily, but at the same time she fears that he might eat too much, as she did in her childhood.

All three of them attend the next session: Hansel, the mother and the father. Hansel is shy at first and doesn't want to come in. Only when I take out the toy boxes and invite dad and mum in with a suggestion to play, Hansel accepts. Shortly afterwards he picks a box of Duplo, which contains various people figures. We all sit down on the ground. Hansel builds and we talk about what he does. He was mainly interested in a plane. Hansel is building a hangar with his daddy. We sat a Hansel figure on the plane. At first he flies all around, eventually he flies to other figures representing daddy and mummy. I act out a scenario in the play: dad and mum are hungry. I involve both parents in the play. They tell it to Hansel. I turn to Hansel with a question: "What would dad and mum like to eat?" Hansel says that mummy would have some vegetables, peas with carrot, and daddy would have sausages. I bring crayons and paper and let the parents draw vegetables and sausages. We cut out the food and give it to the figures that represent the parents. I ask Hansel what he would like to eat? He smiles teasingly and says: "Pizza Margherita obviously!" I let

the father draw the pizza. We sit the figures at the little table and we pretend that they are eating. The parents are obviously amused by the game and so is Hansel. When he is leaving, Hansel tells me that next time we have to also draw a roll, because he likes it very much. From the introduced play communication it is obvious that it is mainly the father, who actually plays with Hansel, while the mother 'completes the tasks' (drawing and cutting).

The next session Hansel comes with mum. I ask Hansel whether we will play by ourselves or with mummy. Hansel wants his mum to stay. We draw a roll. Well, mum draws a roll for Hansel, while we are talking about what it was like when mum was little. We are talking about the mother's parents, about grandma and grandpa. It's clear that Hansel knows almost nothing about his mother's childhood. The mother tells me that she is from a traditional family, where the father was the head of the family, but her mother turned the head, i.e. she was the one who made decisions. She has banned herself from such a family model. She wants her and her husband to always be partners. Hansel adds: "Grandma is pretty strict and grandpa, he reads the newspaper or sleeps..." We build garages for a train and a little town around the railway. Mum opened up about her parents. She feels that they have never accepted her as she is. They

always wanted something different. They were always dissatisfied with what she was doing. So it was even with her first marriage, which ended soon. She briefly indicates that her parents played a key role in its failure. Her parents still lecture her on how she should raise her children, but she doesn't want it. At present, they have limited contact to the bare minimum, i.e. they see each other only on birthdays and holidays. She doesn't want anything from her parents and she wishes that they didn't want anything from her. Unfortunately it isn't like that. They still try to contact her, but in order to criticise her soon after. They mind that Gretel is in shared custody, i.e. one week she is with them and the other with her father. Subsequently, the mother talks about Gretel. She attends 5th grade<sup>1</sup> and is a calm and kind girl, who is very similar to her (mother), when she was little, with the difference that she is not so fat. Hansel and Gretel like each other, although they sometimes argue a bit. While the mother talks, Hansel and I build railway tracks for the trains. I suggest to Hansel that we could also build a train for Gretel. We make a train for each member of the family - mum, dad, Hansel, and also for Gretel. It is interesting that Gretel's train disconnects soon after and goes in a completely different direction. I wonder whether it is so, because Gretel is going to her father. Hansel answers: "Maybe..." but he doesn't go on. I bring Gretel's train

back into play. I feel a strange tension. Hansel doesn't talk most of the time. He plays and seems in his own world engaged in the play. As if he wasn't interested in his mother's story.

Hansel comes to the next session with his dad. We draw food for dad: meat, potatoes and beer. Hansel gives it to the flyer doll. The play with Duplo continues while father and I talk about his childhood in Marseille. Since he cannot easily find words in Czech, we agree that he can speak French. Father gladly accepts it and describes the relationships in his family in a very colorful way. In the meantime he is building a tower from building blocks together with Hansel. Hansel interrupts frequently and asks about the family members he knows. It is evident that Hansel is more interested in the father's family. They see each other via Skype almost every week. We continue playing with trains and cars. Hansel then tells me about his friends in preschool. He is surprised that I talk with his dad in French. Hansel and I are still speaking Czech. Thus, we are talking in Czech-French, as they do at home. I ask how Hansel talks with Gretel. Hansel answers: "In Czech...!" After a while he adds: "But she is not talking to me that much." I ask whether she is talking to his dad. Hansel says: "A little bit..." Dad adds: "It is sometimes uneasy with Gretel. She is a bit of a teenager." The session ends. I ask Hansel

whether he would like to talk to me on his own next time. He agrees.

I have now made a rough outline of what Hansel entered the therapy with. Now I will be forced to do what David Holub calls "forced cutting", i.e. that in order to get to the promised theme of Christmas, I will try to briefly retell the course of therapy in the spring to autumn months. My initial hypothesis about Hansel's therapy was related to the idea of Hansel's difference; he looked like his dad, so he was different from other children, and it (difference) was related to the relationship with Gretel, with whom he still compared himself. Over the course of the therapy, however, I became increasingly aware that the primary attachment with the mother played an important role in Hansel's therapy.

As for his idea of being different from others, Hansel told me about his preschool friends, who sometimes mocked him and called him: "Black man"! I let Hansel explain what he imagines his friends mean by this word. "Well, that I am black, like my daddy is." I said that not only as his dad, but the whole daddy's family and the whole of Africa, which are lots and lots of people. "But no one in our preschool is as black!", Hansel said to me sadly. I asked him: "And would you like to be blond like Gretel is?" Hansel agreed. I replied: "Gretel takes after

mum and you are handsome like your dad." Hansel shook his head. "I am not handsome, I am not white." "White is the yoghurt...", I said, "You might imagine that when you eat yoghurt, you will be white..." Hansel muttered something like "Hmmm..." As it was obvious that my interpretations didn't impress him much, we took the crayons and began drawing friends, who ate differently coloured food and changed their colour accordingly (Peter ate blueberries - turned blue, Gretel ate banana - turned yellow, etc.) Hansel really enjoyed it. He was laughing especially, when his teacher turned green after cucumber. I later discovered that he continued the drawings also at home.

In his play Hansel constantly needed to ride and fly somewhere... From his play it was apparent how his difference troubled him. Difference that makes him, according to his phantasies, exclusive and excluded from the companionship of children in the preschool. At grandma's and grandpa's in Marseille this was not the case. Here, he was alike and therefore he flew there so often in his phantasy and also in his play. We frequently talked about Gretel. I learned that Gretel is already big and that's why she doesn't like to play any more. Hansel likes her and sometimes also doesn't. He didn't know how to reply when I asked him why doesn't he? And so we played it over in different ways with

teddies and also with Duplo dolls. Once he told me while we played: "Gretel is beautiful and I am not." I asked, whether it is because Gretel has blond hair and blue eyes. He shrugged his shoulders, and then added silently: "She might wish I wasn't here." I asked him whether Gretel told him so. "No, she didn't say that... I think that if I had not been born to mum, she would have had only Gretel... And she wouldn't have to go to her father. She would only be at our home." I allowed myself to raise the objection that maybe Gretel likes her father, and so she stays with him. Hansel replied: "Maybe... I don't know, she sometimes cries and I don't know why." I asked Hansel whether he was worried about that. He answered curtly: "Not really." Afterwards I asked mum, who just came to pick up her son, about Gretel, and she told me that it is sometimes really difficult with Gretel. Sometimes she thinks that Gretel should come to therapy rather than Hansel. But Gretel's dad is against therapy. However, she thinks that today together with Hansel's dad they have created a good family, in which they all love each other. I say to mum that she is probably very happy that Hansel was born to them. She agrees vehemently and she hugs him as she puts his jacket on. Just as they are leaving we also manage to explain that Gretel has a different dad, and that's why she looks different from Hansel. At home, mum

explained to Hansel, how it all was with Gretel's dad, how they had separated and how she had met his dad. Then Hansel told me all this. It was obvious that he was interested in it, but the parents had not paid attention to it, because it seemed to them as an overly adult topic. In another session, when mum brought Hansel in, I let myself praise her selection of names that she had chosen for her children. Hansel and Gretel, the siblings from the Tale of Gingerbread House. We then talked about it with Hansel. Hansel knew the tale, so he retold it to me and also replayed it. It was apparent that getting on the shovel and the compelled fattening prior to that caused him not only harm, but also remarkable excitement. He also told me that he would have liked to put grandma Jarka (i.e. the mum's mother) on the shovel. He doesn't have to go to her anymore, because mum and grandma are not friends. We talk about how fine it is to have siblings or friends, and that Hansel in the story had Gretel and Gretel had Hansel. They were lost in the woods, but they weren't afraid, because they were together. Hansel paused in thought and said: ... I would not have left Gretel in the woods."

Gretel then came with mum about twice to accompany Hansel to his session. I think she was curious about what Hansel and I are talking about here.

Before the holidays Hansel tries a banana and together with Gretel they have her favourite food: porridge. Apparently he also remembered other porridge that he used to eat in his early childhood. Together with Gretel he also tried a bit of soup, with a roll of course.

During the holidays the family leaves for France to meet the father's family. Thus we do not meet until September. Hansel has finally expanded his register of various sorts of pastry. They say he has grown fond of "pain au chocolat", which he had eaten with his cousin. Only he always puts the chocolate away. Hansel is more relaxed. We are talking a lot. It is apparent that he is interested in family and other relationships. He pays much attention especially to what everyone likes to eat. It is as if he was behind a glass wall and watched everything and commented. He himself still doesn't have the need to try anything new. He is still enjoying Pizza Margherita and Activia Yogurt, even though he sometimes admits that he had tried something, but he immediately adds that he didn't enjoy it at all.

Once when mum came for Hansel, she told me she would be happy if dad limited the satisfaction of Hansel's taste for Pizza Margherita. She believes that it is the reason why Hansel doesn't eat anything else. It is a weird ritual that the two have together, and she minds. But

she can't tell her husband. She fears it would hurt his feelings. It is apparent that Pizza Margherita is a really fragile theme at home, but mother is afraid to talk about it.

In the following session Hansel complains to me that the teacher told him a long time ago that she would have eaten him with love, because he was her chocolate boy and she loved chocolate. I say: "Probably she loves you and the chocolate, too." Hansel explains: "She likes chocolate, therefore she likes me." I suggest that it can also be reversed: "She likes him, therefore she likes chocolate." Hansel shakes his head that this is not the case. I say to him: "It is also said: I would eat you up (with love)! And this doesn't mean that someone would eat someone else, but quite ordinary that one likes the other..." "I like Pizza Margherita!", Hansel replies. "Well quite," I say, "and my name is Markéta, which is Margherita in Italian. So you could, in such a case, eat me up with love like the pizza! I'm surprised myself, what nonsense I made up. However, Hansel is laughing at it. He probably likes it. So we then play what it would be like if the teddies said to each other: "I will eat you up with love!" When mum arrives she also gets to know this expression. She is surprised, but she doesn't defend against it in any way. We are laughing at it together, but then she says: "I wonder what will be eaten today at home!"

Finally we got to the beginning of December. Both parents are present in this session. Hansel tells me that he tried a piece of chocolate from the advent calendar and that it wasn't bad. Dad adds immediately that Hansel not only tried chocolate, but he also took a bit of cheese and various sorts of yoghurt. On the contrary, mum says that he still eats neither vegetables, nor meat. At the preschool he still takes rolls with yoghurt or a piece of cheese, but he doesn't even touch vegetables. First we talk in general, then I mention that Christmas is coming. Hansel says right away that they talked about it in the preschool and some children said that Father Christmas is coming to them and others said that he is not coming to them. He has two. Father Christmas and Pere Noel. Last year they were at grandma's and grandpa's in Marseille and Pere Noel was there. In the morning he brought him presents through the chimney. He tells me about everything he got and also that then a lot of people came. The father adds and explains that in them at Christmas it is different from how it is in Czech. They celebrate on the 25th December and the whole family gathers together. His wife interrupts him and says: It is more like a big family party. All the time they talk, sing and dance. The father says he has the feeling that his wife doesn't like it much, but he likes it. Mum turns to him with a question:

"How did you find out that I don't like it?" I never said anything." He smiles and says jokingly: "You don't like turkey for Christmas." She replies almost angrily: "I like turkey, but not at Christmas." I let them explain it to me. It is clear that it is not about turkey at all, but their explanation is turning around Christmas food. The mother says that she always tries to honour the Christian Christmas traditions, and thus for her Christmas means advent contemplation and carp with potato salad. She looks forward to it all year, because she always tries to diet, only at Christmas she allows herself fried carp. She doesn't understand why in Marseille at Christmas they cannot eat fish, but it has to be turkey. As an explanation she adds that turkey has wings, and thus it should not be eaten, because the happiness would fly away...

I'm pretty disconcerted. I have my own thoughts about this but I am also observing Hansel all the time. He attentively connects and disconnects trains that are running around us. Mum seems to be trying to save the situation by saying that this year they should celebrate Christmas in Czech Republic. I ask spontaneously: "So will there be carp? Dad replies: "Anything but carp..." She replies: "We will probably have carp the second day at my parents' house..." The situation is thickening. The father explains that he on the other

hand finds Czech Christmas hard to bear: always in a rush, then cemetery visit, then back home quickly to get everything done. He already experienced it three times and it was always chaotic. Uncomfortable, nerve wracking! He would like to celebrate Christmas at peace but he has to respect the home ritual. To this mother replies angrily: "You don't have to, you can simply go to turkey..." It is the first time I see her angry, even poisonous. Hansel pricks up his ears. The father replies: "We will have Pizza Margherita anyway!" Hansel agrees enthusiastically. I say: "You may have it even sooner!" The mother reacts immediately: "Unfortunately." Finally, the suppressed conflict emerged. In the end, the father turns to his wife and gallantly says: "I will do everything to make you happy!" It is evident that his wife doesn't believe it.

Of course, it was not about turkey, but about the tension that the mother often provoked in the family. The father's family, as he describes it, is a large community of people, who like to meet each other, talk, and dance. In the mother's family, in her unconscious phantasies and beliefs it is different. Here order and ritual are honoured with everything that goes with them. The mother would like to live life more freely, but she continually evokes strong tension which is connected to what she carries from her original family. Stringency, that she still respects.

As if there persisted a weird inner fight between what she desires and wishes, and what she must do. The same way, she always had to eat up, no matter whether she enjoyed it or not. She responds to Hansel in the same way. The result is that she wants Hansel to eat and also doesn't. She has a completely ambivalent attitude not only towards her bodily projection, but also towards the idea about what she would like for her son in her unconscious phantasy. So the mother is often distant or ambivalently close. She wants peace, but she tries to reach it by provoking a conflict.

Hansel came with his dad for the following session.

We talk with Hansel about what happened after the last session. Hansel says right away: Mum cried! She didn't want to talk to anybody. Daddy and I went for the pizza, but they didn't have Margherita, so we bought the cheese one and brought it also for mum and she was very surprised. It is apparent that Hansel is very sensitive to his mother's crying. He felt sorry for her. He explained to me that she might have cried because of dad. But dad is said to say that it is not the case. When I ask: "What is the case then?" he says: "I just don't know... Maybe it is because of turkey." I ask him how he imagines that mother cried because of turkey. He doesn't want to talk about it any more, so we play

with stuffed toys. He plays that the bear family went somewhere and mum fell down and her leg hurt and she cried and cried. When the father comes, he returns to the topic of Christmas at their home and how it will be? The tension in the family seems to persist. It is clear that dad will do anything so that mum doesn't cry any more.

Two days later I meet the teacher on the course. She asks me right away: "What does Hansel have with that turkey?" As it happened his friend Martin got turkey breasts with mashed potatoes for lunch from his mother. When "turkey" was mentioned, Hansel seemed to come to life somehow. He asked him quite seriously: "Turkey breasts?" Does it mean that turkey has breasts? To this Pete reacted by saying that his mother has breasts. Martin joined immediately saying that his mother does too. Well, then the boys started arguing, which mum has breasts and what can be done with such breasts. One said that his mother breastfed him for a long time, another said that breasts are vulgar, that they looked at them in a magazine with his brother and that there were girls with big breasts. And breasts, as Martin stressed, are really the best...! Only Hansel was still contemplating turkey breasts. Finally, he came to me to ask how it is with the turkey breasts. I told him that turkey doesn't have breasts like his mother, but it is such

a white meat, which is very tasty, and that's why Martin is enjoying it now so much. Hansel turned to him, looked into his plate and said: "Can I try it?" You know, it is not that we allow children to taste food from each other, but in this case it was the second Christmas for us. So I allowed him to do it. Hansel tried it also with mashed potatoes and he really enjoyed it." I tried to explain to the teacher how Hansel is with turkey, but even she may not have understood much of it. I was curious about what I would learn about this from Hansel. This time he came with mum. Right in the doorway he told me that he ate turkey and that it was quite good, although pizza is pizza... We played with stuffed toys about Christmas with *Peré Noel* and what he would like from Father Christmas. When mum came for Hansel at the end of the session, she told me that Hansel said to her that he talked with the boys at preschool about whether their mum has breasts. It amused her a lot. He apparently didn't know about that. But while he was talking, he looked at mum and he just said: "You have them!" So they laughed at it together at home. "They say that it was all because of that turkey." I may give Christmas turkey a chance!", said mum and here we parted before Christmas.

When I met with all them, i.e. Hansel and his parents, in the new year, I admit that I asked right away how they

celebrated Christmas. Mum just smiled and said: Well. There were turkey breasts with mashed potatoes. These don't fly away. In addition Gretel likes it very much. And her husband added: But before it we went for a walk to the cemetery and to feed the swans... and we chilled... But Hansel didn't care about their food story at all. He brought the presents from Father Christmas to show me and told me how it all was. And so, after Christmas, we agreed that it is time to end Hansel's therapy. We met twice more. At that time Hansel was already eating fruit with Gretel and after he tasted turkey, he also tried chicken. But always only breasts and only a little bit. Well, white meat is white meat...

At the end of the therapy I noted in my records: *I believe that with the*

*dawning of rational judgement his unconscious belief that white is good will convince him over time that "being chocolate is perhaps even better and that turkey has other meat, although, as Martin the expert said in the preschool: breasts are the best anyway!"*

### ***Final comment:***

I hope that this slightly humorous case study was an illustrative communication on the important role of emotional attachment to the mother in the unconscious experience of the child, and the importance of the mother's experiencing and her capacity to share her emotions. I think that this was the most important moment in releasing Hansel's anxieties, which did not allow him to desire to taste more than he allowed himself.

# ESTER STARÁ, MILAN STARÝ: ŠEDÍK A BUBI

Pikola, Praha, 2018

Review of a children's book *Lenka Očková*



In a house that smells of bread three kittens are born. The last one takes his time but when his mummy calls to him "Come on, I am keen to meet you," he cannot resist.

He becomes known as Grey. He feels things deeply. When he notices that his mummy is wasting away he goes exploring. He looks for food elsewhere and then talks to her about his adventures long

into the night while his brothers are sleeping. In time, even his brothers begin to leave their den more and more often but they are never the less surprised to find it empty one day.

There is a scratched note on the wooden floor:

"I will be gone for a while, look after yourselves."

The brothers are surprised but soon settle in their bed and fall asleep, while Grey is full of worries and sadness. "Where did she go?" "Why





did she leave?" "When is she coming back?" His brothers complain that he made their fur all wet and push him out.

Grey goes in search of a place that is 'soft as a cloud and as warm as mummy's fur'. His search leads him to the attic. It is dark here but Grey knows that cats are friends of the night so he enters the darkness without fear. He worries that he will not be able to find what he is looking for, that nowhere will be like being in mummy's den. Suddenly the wardrobe door springs open and he



catches the smell of the violet flowers he knows from the garden. Grey does not hesitate and jumps in. The top shelf is full of knitted jumpers, a soft bed just right for him.

"Bu, Bu..." enters his dream.

What sounds like a scary monster turns out to be a lost woolly hat called Bubi. No one notices it, no one looks for it, no one wants it. Grey knows just how that feels.

"I want you. You are nice and warm," he says and gently gathers Bubi close to him.

Bubi and Grey become friends. Grey carries Bubi on his back while he explores the house. He begins to enter and discover the adult world. When his brothers claim the milk that the baker leaves out for them all and try to push him out, Bubi turns into

a monster and scares them away. When they see Grey walking fearlessly, they acknowledge him and nod admiringly.

Bubi and Grey have many more adventures but when winter approaches, Bubi becomes sad again. Just then a little girl Ola appears in the house and she and Grey become friends straight away.

"I will show Bubi to Ola. Ola will like her, she will keep her warm," Grey immediately thinks of his friend. He suddenly hesitates. What if she takes Bubi? I would lose my friend. No, who would I fall asleep with, who would I cuddle with, who would I play hide and seek with? But if Ola likes Bubi, Bubi will be happy, his mind is full of thoughts.

When he sees his friend high up in the attic watching the world through a tiny crack he makes up his mind.

"Come on Bubi, jump on," he says and gives Ola his friend. They all run out to play with the first snow flakes. The woolly hat is shining as if it was full of golden threads. And it isn't the sun making it shine, it is the greatest happiness.

Suddenly Grey comes across paw prints that he knows.

"Hello Grey," greets him the familiar voice of his mother. Grey is so happy that he doesn't know where to cuddle first and his mother swallows her tears and keeps saying "I was looking forward to seeing you so much..."

"But why did you leave?", Grey can finally ask the question that had troubled him so deeply.

"I had to let you grow up," whispers his mother. "And now you have truly grown up."



This beautiful story written by Ester Stará accompanied by award winning illustrations by Milan Starý captures ordinary separation, which is essential for growth. Grey is born with a big heart. He was the only one to notice that his mother was wasting away and was trying to spare her. He is able to feel concern and express his love and gratitude. The fundamentals of the depressive position as described by Melanie Klein (1975). His brothers are unbothered by concerns for others. They have pushed them out along with Grey. They pair up to form a kind of brotherly gang<sup>1</sup> (Meltzer & Harris) and rely on each other as if they did not need anyone/ anything else. Grey's empathy and concern seem threatening perhaps and they only acknowledge him when they see how fearless he is.

Grey on the other hand relies on his internalised good mother. This is apparent when he is looking for a place that is 'soft as a cloud and as warm as mummy's fur' and in his capacity to appreciate how Bubi feels. Their friendship is based on mutual understanding and support. They can enter the world with open hearts and hope although they sometimes feel sad and lonely. During their adventures they rescue a mouse and an injured bat among other creatures. Their capacity to bear their hurt, loneliness and loss and remember the goodness within helps them to rescue

others and becomes the source of their internal richness. Bubi undergoes several transformations in the story. She hides a mouse from the baker, scares Grey's brothers when they want to claim all the milk and heals the wing of a bat. Bubi's name evokes the stuff of children's nightmares: fear of loss and abandonment, things that hide under the bed and go boo in the night.

Grey faces the greatest test when Ola appears. Grey knows that Bubi is sad and wants to keep someone warm again, to belong to someone, but how can he give up his friend and guide? His mother returns when Grey gives Bubi to Ola and in doing so truly grows up. He undergoes a transformation which accompanies the depressive position, the work of mourning<sup>2</sup>. Their encounter is the moment when Grey can finally ask his mother why she had left and she can explain that she had to let him grow up.

We can also contemplate the missing father in the story. Fathers play an important role in separation. Where is the father in Grey's thoughts? Meltzer (1992) writes about the important reparative role that the father plays in relation to the mother when he considers the anxieties about emptying the mother or poisoning her. These anxieties press the child away from viewing the father as a rival towards enlisting him for the preservation of mother. The

1 *Internal gang*  
glossary p. 49

2 *Work of Mourning and*  
*the depressive position*  
glossary p. 49

father's function in feeding, cleaning and repairing the mother is more easily accepted than his genital baby nurturing one (1992, p. 63) Perhaps the missing father plays a role in Grey's anxieties that his mother is wasting away and his first ventures into the world when he is trying to forage for food himself.

He then tells his mother about his adventures long into the night. Although the father is missing in the story, it seems that Grey encounters and gets to know a benign father through his mother's thoughts. His mother supports his attempts to separate and loves to hear about his adventures. It seems that she is a mother with a benign father in mind and Grey thus experiences a parental couple through his experience of her.

In our lives we face many moments of separation; birth, first steps, first day at nursery or entering adolescence are all potentially transformative moments of separation and growth. Some children manage by pairing up or relying on their big-ness and fearlessness a bit like Grey's brothers. Other children can manage feelings of loneliness when they are missing their mother or their father more easily. They can risk being sensitive and even console someone else who has just hurt their knee or is sad and missing their mum. The good mother inside that they can rely on helps

them to turn to mummy or daddy teacher or to their friend.

The way we enter the world: whether we are full of fears or hopes and expectations is by and large related to our makeup and our early experiences of separation. It will also be coloured by how our parents send us into the world including their unconscious thoughts and experiences of separation. A traumatic delivery, serious operations in early years or other sudden separations can be traumatic and need to be contained and understood. Otherwise we may trip over them with each separation we face. Sometimes our parents carry such trauma within them and then we may think about intergenerational trauma which is beautifully described for instance by Selma Fraiberg in her article *Ghosts in the Nursery* written in 1975.

Bion (1962) and O'Shaughnessy (1964) have written extensively about the absent object and that the way we process separation is essential for the development of thinking<sup>3</sup>. Bion describes the hungry infant in need of the breast who feels that this frustration and pain is what is present to him, and this is initially felt as a bad breast present. In time the infant has to advance from experiencing the needed absent breast in phantasy as a bad breast present, to being able to think of the real missing good breast. This crucial advance

in his development is hard since the bad breast is felt to be starving him to death. He needs to tolerate the pain and terror of his frustration enough so that he can put himself in the position of being able to think about them, to think eventually that what he needs is the missing good breast. Such knowledge in thought will also help him endure his state of need. Thus we may say that the absent object gives the child his first opportunity to know reality through thought, and also gives him the impetus by making frustration more tolerable.

Anne Alvarez (1992, 1998) adds another important dimension concerning the qualities of the present object, which are of equal importance. '...the present object possesses several features important for the promotion of learning about reality:

its willingness to enliven, seek and, when the child is depressed, reclaim him; its eagerness to return to the child after absence, its ability to receive pleasure and delight from the child, to permit reparation, to forgive'. (Alvarez 1998, p. 216)

We can guess that Grey can use these aspects of his mother's care and keep her in mind, when he is trying to cope without her and find his own way into the world.

The book is intended for pre-school children and children who are beginning school. These are transitional and potentially transformative times in children's lives. I believe that the story which is full of humour as well as the beautiful illustrations that accompany it will be enjoyed by children and parents alike in their quest to enter and discover the world.

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## Glossary

**Internal gang** *In a gang state of mind, the defences and organisation of the personality are more akin to the paranoid-schizoid position described by Klein (1946). The dominant and destructive parts of the self take hostage what they feel to be those other parts that would expose them to feelings of neediness, littleness and ignorance and they do so by imposing a reign of terror on these other parts. This dynamic process happens within gangs but also can effectively structure the personality of individuals through an atmosphere of intimidation, fear of reprisal and a coercion to conform.*

*The dominant mentality - group or gang - is highly dependent on the extent to which projective processes are at play and the degree to which vulnerability and neediness can be owned. In other words, integration of aspects of the personality is the key to a shift from gang to group.*

*Canham, Hamish (2002) Group and Gang States of Mind. Journal of Child Psychotherapy, v.28 (2),*

**Work of Mourning and the depressive position** *Mourning relates to the depressive position in Kleinian theory. 'Depressive position' is a mental constellation defined by Klein as central to the child's development, normally first experienced towards the middle of the first year of life. It is repeatedly revisited and refined throughout early childhood, and intermittently throughout life. Central is the realisation of hateful feelings and phantasies about the loved object, prototypically the mother. Earlier there were felt to be two separate part-objects: ideal and loved; persecuting and hated. In this earlier period (called the paranoid schizoid position) the main anxiety concerned survival of the self. In the depressive position, anxiety is also felt on behalf of the object.*

*If the confluence of loved and hated figures can be borne, anxiety begins to centre on the welfare and survival of the other as a whole object, eventually giving rise to remorseful guilt and poignant sadness, linked to the deepening of love. With pining for what has been lost or damaged by hate comes an urge to repair. Ego capacities enlarge and the world is more richly and realistically perceived. Omnipotent control over the object, now felt as more real and separate, diminishes. Maturation is thus closely linked to loss and mourning. Recognition of the other as separate from oneself encompasses the other's relationships; thus awareness of the oedipal situation inevitably accompanies the depressive position.*

<https://melanie-klein-trust.org.uk/theory/depressive-position/>

**Thinking** *Thinking in Bion's terms is 'concerned with a human link – the endeavour to understand, comprehend the reality of, get insight into the nature of oneself or another. Thinking is an emotional experience of trying to know oneself or someone else. Bion designates this fundamental type of thinking – thinking in the sense of trying to know, by the symbol K.' (O'Shaughnessy 1981, p. 181)*

*The capacity to think thoughts comes out of an emotional experience of being thought about and becoming known. (Bion 1962, 1967) Bion coined the term container – contained to describe this two way process between the mother and her baby. The infant communicates his primitive states of feeling and body to his mother for her to receive and to know them. The mother uses her imaginative capacity (reverie) to grasp and understand the communication and respond to him. Her thinking transforms the infant's feeling states into an experience that can be known, tolerated and understood. Through repeated experiences of having been understood in this way the child begins to internalise this capacity and develop his own capacity to make sense of things and have space in his mind. This process is as vital for the development of the mind as are food and care for the survival of the infant.*

*Ron Britton develops this concept and highlights the importance of the father (the third) in the development of the capacity to think as well as in the process of containment. Britton emphasises the Oedipus complex as the basis of psychic reality. However it is the particular understanding he brings of the important role the internal triangle, representing links between the child and parents, in the growth of knowledge and mental life that stands out as highly original. These ideas, published in 'The Missing Link' (1989), were developed through his work with patients who feared catastrophe if they experienced a link between their parents. He suggests that, as a consequence, these patients cannot develop a prototype of an object relationship in which they are a witness and not a participant, i.e. a third position. The internal Oedipal triangle is also the stage on which Britton places the imagination. He views imagination as a phantasised mental space which is truth-evading, or truth seeking, depending upon whether the underlying phantasy is wish fulfilling or reality seeking. This poetic space contains a primal couple that remains unavailable to observation and can only be imagined. His studies of poetry lend these ideas further verification through their depth of understanding.*

<https://melanie-klein-trust.org.uk/writers/ron-britton/>

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