

to crime that is not due to excitement but to unfaced, therefore evacuated, regret. The difference between this motivation and the greedy, domineering, excited crime is that enacting the crime gives gratification, relief rather than acquisition or revenge. It is linked with but not precisely the same as committing a crime out of a sense of guilt, as written about by Freud as long ago as 1916.

From 'Cruelty, Violence & Murder' (1998)
by A. Hyatt Williams.

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Criminality and the Claustrium

When I first began to attempt the psychodynamic therapy of convicted criminals, including the consequence of their being convicted for murder, I was struck by the fact that some of them showed a genial and apparently healthy side to their characters. This was associated with behavior toward other people and toward themselves that could be regarded as healthy. Nevertheless, in each of them there appeared to be a split-off, encapsulated, cruel, perverse, and often evil side that I came to regard as primitive and savage and that had remained unmellowed during the course of emotional development. This aspect tended to erupt episodically, like a volcano, and when it did so, a sometimes murderous crime or series of crimes ensued. Meltzer's (1992) work and views on what he calls "The Clastrum" offer a conceptual framework by means of which it is possible to gain insight into the phenomenon of murderousness. Few tasks are more important than the reduction of its menace toward other people, victims, and the brand of Cain that marks the owner of such proclivities, which often defy therapeutic modification. In *The Clastrum*, subtitled *An Investigation of Claustrophobic Phenomena*, Meltzer stresses the ubiquitousness of projective identification.

Some years ago I began to relate the persistent constellation of murderous fantasies, impulses, and actions to the idea that death had not been digested psychically. A usual reason for this has been the absence or inadequacy of the baby-mother interchange of projective identification. Following Bion's (1967a) paper "On Arrogance," I viewed the situation as having consisted of a projective identification refusing or blocking mother or mother surrogate, or else a baby or young child who could not or did not accept and use what was relayed back to him or her by the mother or her substitute in her response to the projective identification into her of Bion's, "No breast; I shall die." This is not the place to describe the many possible reasons for the ineffectiveness of the interaction, but the results of its failure may promote the development of "no-go areas" as far as psychic digestion and metabolism are concerned. These phenomena tend to remain the same over long periods of time and, like other pathological character organizations, strongly resist the analytic process as far as change and development are concerned. (See Rosenfeld [1987], "The Impasse," and Steiner [1993], "Psychic Retreats.")

Following are two accounts of individuals who have committed murders or have or have had fantasies of doing so. We shall see how sometimes the fantasy/impulse constellation has long simmered within the mind of the individual, militating toward action, sometimes functioning as a substitute for action, sometimes as a prelude to such action, that is, the enacting of punishment on the self as murderer.

Patient X

X, mentioned briefly in earlier chapters, was aged 26 when I was asked to see him with a view to giving him psychotherapy during the life sentence he was serving for the murder by strangulation of a 60-year-old woman who had asked for a lift in his truck. He had had the idea of rape and murder in his mind. The elderly victim told him that rape was out of the question; he killed her (almost immediately regretting it) and left her at the roadside in a dry ditch.

X had a criminal record of rape and attempted rape, and had spent many of his twenty-six years in a reformatory or prison. During the interview he was serious, puzzled by his recurrent behavior, honest, and anxious. He told me that for some unknown reason refusal of his sexual advances made him feel murderous, but that he could turn away from a murderous impulse in certain circumstances and be kind and helpful instead. Significant factors in his early history were that he was the eldest of two boys and two girls, and was evacuated during the early part of World War II to a farm far from home while his parents remained in London. His companion in evacuation was his brother Donald, next to him in sibling order. This brother was the good boy, attractive to the evacuation couple in loco parentis, while he, X, was singled out for criticism. He came to think of himself as the "ugly duckling," a notion based on low self-esteem, not an objective fact of nature. During these lonely, unhappy months, X planned to run away from his uncongenial foster home/prison, and on a hot summer day he did so, scantily dressed and unfed. A hue and cry ensued. He felt that the whole village was hunting him. Eventually, to escape, he had to run through a tightly matted bed of tall nettles, but as he did so, he fell into them and was recaptured. Although he was not badly treated by his captors, the innumerable nettle stings caused a severe allergic reaction, much worse than the painful return to his foster home. His mother was summoned to the farm and when she was due to go home, he successfully begged to be taken with her to the much less persecutory situation of London during its bombing.

As a youth X made investigatory sexual advances to each of his sisters in turn. Eventually, the sisters decided that because he was kind to them, they would together ask him to desist and would not report him to their parents. Home was in an East End area where delinquency was endemic. X did bad things and good things. He was organized in either activity, and while his childhood passed relatively uneventfully, adoles-

cence brought a crop of problems concerning learning, sexuality, and obedience to or transgression against the law.

X got a job as fireman on a local steam train service. The engine driver, whom he had admired, made homosexual advances to him, pursued with some cruelty. Precisely what happened I was never able to ascertain, but I think that both anal intercourse and fellatio might have taken place. The cruelty with which the abuse was enacted seemed to have gotten into X, and during the course of a fifty-minute session with me, he could swing from male to female and back to male identification several times. This change was evident in his face. I might say, "Now you are having a feminine fantasy," or "Now you are having a masculine fantasy with some cruelty in it," and it was invariably right because he confirmed that he did switch in his identification with remarkable lability. Even his voice changed: he spoke one octave lower in a male identification than he did in a female identification.

Not long after this he made several attempts to rape young women. One of these was an assault on a 30-year-old woman who said, when he started to struggle with her, "You are a silly young man. Why do you attempt to invade me like this? If you ask me nicely, how do you know that I would not say yes?" Eventually they did attempt intercourse, but he was so afraid that he might be impotent that she helped him to complete the act, and then invited him to spend the weekend with her. His paranoid anxiety mounted at this invitation and he fled from her into his own solitude. She, in a state of pique, gave his description to the police, who arrested him. He said that he deserved the prison sentence of about three years, and didn't argue about it because his intention had been rape. This sense of justice regarding what he did and what he had intended to do characterized him throughout his criminal history. When he felt he was unjustly treated, he was exceedingly angry and resentful; when he felt he had been justly treated, he accepted his punishment, indeed almost welcomed it.

The next attempted rape was of an 18-year-old girl who was

coming down a hill on her bicycle. He put a stick into the spokes of her front wheel. She fell off into the long grass beside him at the roadside. He attempted to rape her and when she began to cry he was torn between two impulses: one, to go on with the rape, the other, to console her. The latter prevailed and he explained that when she sobbed as he was holding her against him, he could feel her heart beating through her thin clothes. This reminded him of his sisters whom he loved. He decided not to pursue the attempt to rape her and told her so, helped her to get composed, dried her tears, and said, "You are now free to go." He apologized to her and she said, "But you'll get caught and punished." He replied: "Well, that is my fault and my business. You didn't ask me to do this to you." They parted on reasonably good terms, but as they were doing so a police car came along and a police officer asked her why she was so ruffled. She told them, and X was arrested, subsequently receiving a four-year sentence that he did not resent, or at least stated he did not, because he felt he had deserved it. Whether, in the provocation, there was an assertion of his masculinity rather than the threat to him constituted by his femininity was difficult to discern, but I think this did figure in some way.

His total identification with the role that pervaded him at any given moment was one of his principal characteristics. Whatever he identified with, he pursued to its limits. I recall him working through some of his anxieties about the fugitive escape from the evacuation home/prison in a very feeling and vivid way. I left him in quite a state at the end of the session. When I went to see him a few days later, I was told he was confined to his cell because he had swollen up like a balloon. I went to see him and found him blown up with angioneurotic edema. He had pretty well psychically repeated the trauma of the nettle stings. I made interpretations along such lines to him in his cell, and by the end of the discussion the swelling had gone down visibly, and he made an eventual recovery over the next twenty-four hours.

At some point X became attracted to the process of learning. He had always been sensible, logical, and able to understand, but was poorly educated. Prison afforded him the opportunity to remedy this and he embarked enthusiastically and successfully on any courses he could take, eventually piling up an impressive list of good grades. This was no mean achievement. Of note was the speed with which he picked up Spanish in one year, even writing a sonnet in the language during the following year.

The situation he repeated in the course of therapy was one in which he was unfairly treated, and then reacted violently to being so handled. One day I heard he was on a charge and was being sent before the governor, whom I knew to be a fair person. X had had a fracas with a prison officer. Each said that the other pushed him. I saw both together and was struck how alike they looked. Here perhaps was a sibling situation like that with his brother Donald. I wrote a note to this effect to the governor, who replied: "This may be so, but I have to support the prison staff." A minimal period of loss of privileges was the punishment, but the governor was impressed with the character of X and a few weeks later restored his privileges. Shortly after, X was given certain responsibilities and allowed to move freely about the prison.

John

John, aged 15½, also discussed briefly in previous chapters, was a quite different kind of person. The doctor who referred him to me had made arrangements with a well-known charitable organization to pay for several years of psychoanalysis should it be thought necessary, as was probable. John had gone in great distress to his parents, complaining that he was unable to work because of his total preoccupation with murderous, homosexual fantasies directed against just-pubertal boys who had certain required characteristics. They should be slightly plump, have smug, well-cared-for faces, and be wearing clothes

with shiny, silky surfaces. This had a fetishistic quality that was to prove important later. He had two kinds of fantasies. One was to attack the boy with a knife, which he would stick up the boy's anus and twist, causing death; the other was to do a kind of projected hara-kiri, that is, he would come up on the boy from behind, grasping the knife with the right hand and holding the boy with the left. He would then use the knife to make an up, along, and down rent in the abdominal wall so that the victim's guts fell out and he would then die. One of these two fantasies was the prerequisite of satisfaction during masturbation. John's worry was that he thought he might get so desperate that he would have to commit the crime, rather than be able to fantasize it, if a boy excited him sufficiently.

John was a studious young man with a sense of humor; yet there was a continuous, underlying tension in him that was appropriate to the fantasies and impulses he suffered from. His younger brother would fit into the category of victim, but the brother was handicapped by a birth injury and had never challenged John as regards intelligence, proficiency at schoolwork, and so forth. He also wasn't especially good-looking and didn't wear the kind of clothes required of the fetishistic victim of John's fantasy sexual murder. The two boys were the only children of a businessman father and a mother who was a trained schoolteacher. They lived in an outer suburb of London and seemed to have a satisfactory if rather dull way of life.

It was clear when we began that John had no clue about psychoanalysis. After a month or two of association that one could scarcely call free, and interpretations I felt were appropriate, he suddenly looked at me and said, "When is treatment going to begin?" The containment of his anxieties that was taking place, crude though it was, was sufficient to enable him to take his exams without undue distress and to pass satisfactorily. He went on to advanced levels with a view to going to university, possibly to study history.

I discovered that John's fetishistic object of desire had evolved in stages from the first transitional object, a smooth scarf that used to be regarded as essential to his well-being, especially necessary to be in his hand when he went to sleep. It had gone through a number of evolutions, although still existed in itself, until it became a masturbatic object of desire. Behind this lay the idea of the youth. It seemed that the anticipation of the brother had brought part of this constellation into being, but that with the brother's very considerable handicap, it had to be displaced onto somebody else. Sometimes it was a boy at school in the same class, or a class or two junior, and sometimes it was a fascination with a young adolescent he saw in the street. Although there had been a phase during which father, straight out of the armed forces, had apparently been rather brutal to John as a young lad, it did seem that he had settled down to be an understanding parent. John felt his mother to be the hostile parent who did not understand him.

John's internal situation fluctuated quite a lot. The homosexual way of life that he maintained in his fantasies seemed not to be fixed, and at times he became fond of and sexually attracted to one or another of his two girl cousins, one a little older than himself and one a little younger. These feelings neither crystallized nor grew, and he returned to the original kind of object of stimulation, which was entirely homosexual. He got on quite well with women at university and later at work. As Keats would have it, "the fierce dispute between damnation and impassioned clay" seemed to be mitigated to some extent by drinking, and later he developed the habit of consuming a bottle of wine a day.

In the early days he felt that if anybody offended him, including his sexual objects, that person should be murdered. Anybody who affronted him, belittled him, or lowered his self-esteem was liable for the same kind of attack. This attack was a bit different in that it wasn't so sexualized but was more in

the nature of a revenge for injury. It became evident that John did not want to rid himself completely of the capacity to murder, should it become necessary, and this was based on some sort of delusional appraisal of the situation. Should it become necessary to kill somebody, then he would have the ability and he didn't want to forfeit his ruthlessness. It must be stressed that he did not *want* to kill, only to be *able* to kill. A necessity to kill would result from overwhelming sexual temptation; a blow to his self-esteem, which would be catastrophic; or financial or social ruin.

He also feared injustice, and I think this linked to the feelings of injustice in his home, specifically the treatment of him by his mother. She found him difficult to understand and contain, but there was more than a small element of refusal to contain him. I had thought for some time that he exaggerated this problem, but after he had been in analysis for two and a half years, there was a crisis in which he felt very guilty and persecuted and thought the only thing to do was to kill himself. I am not sure how determined and sincere this intention was: he came into the consulting room looking very ill and readily confessed to having taken an overdose, mainly of aspirin, in my waiting room. After getting him taken to the local hospital where his stomach was pumped out, I telephoned his mother and asked to arrange for him to be picked up from the hospital as it would be impossible to preserve the analytic situation if I had to do it. She went into a long, angry, explanatory speech about his always doing things like that, always causing crises when she had something on. For instance, that afternoon she had a church sale to go to. I pointed out the seriousness of the situation and she said, "Oh, well, ring his aunt. She will come." I told her to ring the aunt herself and arrange for it, and she did. An understanding, containing woman arrived later that day with the young man, who now looked like an unhappy little boy. The contrast between the seriously uncontainable mother and the good containment of the aunt was striking. I think he was not exag-

gerating about his mother's treatment of him, although one doesn't know what damage he did to her as a container.

Let us jump over many years, in some of which he had no therapy or help of any kind. He returned to therapy because of the increased activity of his fantasies and the feeling that he needed to be contained. He saw me once a week, paid for himself, and did moderately well at his analytic work. However, it did seem that he was determined to have an interminable analysis and to keep me as a container until I either died or stopped work. He would then want to find someone else to act as a container. This situation defied interpretation for a long time. Nevertheless, he was quite successful at his job and was able to lead life with minimal acting out. His difficulties were also mitigated and mellowed by a good sense of humor. In his earlier days at school, he had a tendency, if he ran into difficulties in a given subject, to give it up. Nevertheless he managed to get into the University of London and read history. Over the years there were small episodes of acting out. On one occasion he tried to touch an adolescent boy on the genitals. On another, to prevent himself from doing the same thing, he tripped over a stair with a tray full of glasses and drinks. This caused a ruckus and deflected attention from the tension state he was in. On another occasion he saw an exciting-looking Indian youth and hit him hard in the back. No other similar situations occurred to my knowledge.

His sense of humor was ironic and sometimes very funny. He had once been mugged and robbed of his wallet and other valuables. He went along with this with a considerably increased reality sense, not fighting an impossible fight against three large young men who could have knocked him out or possibly killed him if he showed resistance. He then called out to them, "I have a bottle of wine. You've taken everything else I value, why not take that as well?" They didn't quite know how to handle this situation. Eventually they said, "No you can keep that, we've got what we want."

While he was a university student, he took up mountaineering and rock climbing. I think this was because he was afraid not only for his own skin, but of having the opportunity to endanger his companion or companions, which was outside the strict desiderata for murder he had adopted. These restrictions would constitute defenses against action of a murderous kind.