# OF THINGS INVISIBLE TO MORTAL SIGHT

## Celebrating the Work of James S. Grotstein

Edited by
Annie Reiner

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*Edited by*
*Annie Reiner*

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*To Susan Grotstein*

*1936–2015*

Susan Grotstein died on December 6, 2015, just seven months after the death of her husband, James Grotstein. She was the embodiment of the adage, "Behind every great man there is a great woman." What she gave to her husband through her intelligence, insight, grace, devotion, and love was reflected in all he gave to the psychoanalytic world. Like O, enigmatic and ephemeral, women's contributions are often less visible, or even invisible to others, but they are essential, and so in honouring James Grotstein we also concurrently honour his wife, Susan.

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## *For James Grotstein*

*Who Is The Dreamer?**

*We are the dreams of our ancestors*
*not yet dreamed,*
*we are answers to a question*
*no one has asked.*
*We wait patiently to be created,*
*in empty spaces we wait*
*in the night*

*till a blinding light expands*
*at the speed of chance*
*to ask the question*
*to which we are*
*unwittingly*
*the answer.*

*Annie Reiner*
*May* 29, 2012

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*Dr. James Grotstein especially liked this poem, inspired by his book, *Who Is The Dreamer Who Dreams the Dream?* (2000).

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# *INTRODUCTION*

*Annie Reiner*

The idea for this book grew out of a tribute to Dr. James Grotstein at the 8th International Bion Conference held in Los Angeles in October of 2014. Though already quite ill at the time, Dr. Grotstein presented excerpts from a paper he had recently written. In trying to think of a gift to present to him, the most fitting thing I could come up with for this internationally esteemed psychoanalyst and scholar who wrote brilliantly and prolifically for over forty years, was a book celebrating his many contributions. His generosity is widely recognised by an endless list of writers, including myself, whose books he read, discussed, and endorsed, often with lavish praise. It seems likely that Dr. Grotstein will forever remain the "Blurbmeister General" of psychoanalytic book jackets.

The idea of a *Festschrift* in his honour surprised and delighted Grotstein, but I feared that he might not be around by the time the book was published. Sadly this turned out to be true. James Grotstein died in Los Angeles on May 30, 2015. He did, however, have a hand in choosing the contributors, except one—himself. I am pleased to include as a chapter in this book the last paper Grotstein wrote, with the intriguing title, "Bion Crosses the Rubicon: The fateful course—and curse—of 'O' in psychoanalysis, and the furies left in its wake". While it is unusual

in a *Festschrift* to include a work of the person being honoured, there seemed to be no better way to celebrate his contribution to psychoanalysis than to give him another chance to speak. We have this chapter, thanks to Grotstein's close friend and colleague, Dr. John Lundgren, who had recently facilitated its publication in the Italian journal, *Rivista di Psicoanalisi*, to which Grotstein had earlier promised it.

## *Grotstein and Bion*

To honour James Grotstein is to honour Wilfred Bion, his muse for a half century, who inspired Grotstein's encyclopedic writings about Bion's work. Grotstein's insatiable passion for learning led to his studying and contributing to the literature of many other psychoanalytic orientations as well, ranging from Klein to Kohut to intersubjectivity. Until the end of his life, however, Grotstein continued to find inspiration in Bion's work, and in Bion himself—the genius, mystic, and "extraordinary individual".

As Grotstein pointed out, Bion unleashed a revolution on classical analytic theory and technique– indeed on *any* theory and technique—for only with one's own intuition, Bion said, could one make contact with the essential truth of a session—O. Theory and technique are only the bare bones of what is needed to become an analyst, for they do little in the quest, as Bion put it, to become a real analyst, or more accurately, to be in the constant *process of becoming* an analyst. In that task the analyst cannot look to others, not to Bion's, Grotstein's, or anyone else's theories. One needs instead to be an evolving, ontological self-in-progress, able to respond in an authentic way, in the hope of helping patients to become their authentic selves.

*Of Things Invisible to Mortal Sight: Celebrating the Work of James S. Grotstein* includes fifteen chapters by esteemed colleagues of Dr. Grotstein from throughout the world. These fifteen authors hail from six different countries and various cities around the US. Their contributions range in scope from direct discussions of Grotstein's theories, like Aguayo's historical perspective on Grotstein's earlier publications, Brown's examination of many of Grotstein's seminal ideas, and Ferro's review of Grotstein's (2007) book, *A Beam of Intense Darkness*, a scholarly overview of Grotstein's understanding of Bion's theories. Other chapters, while dealing less directly with Grotstein's ideas, are in some ways outgrowths of his contributions, including clinical accounts like

Eshel's, examining patients' experiences of deadness and emptiness as metaphorical "black holes" in the personality, Vermote's exploration of a transformation in O in a borderline patient, and Ogden's description of "talking-as-dreaming" which helps patients facilitate access to waking dream states. Paul gives a detailed account of patients whose defences against authentic emotional experience render them machine-like, driven by totalitarian mental states rooted in intrauterine states of mind. Other clinical accounts also deal with these earliest states of mind, like Tarantelli's description of patients whose deep traumas leave indelible marks, "mute symptoms", impervious to conscious recall, and Fix Korbivcher's fundamental questions about the clinical challenges inherent in the revolution brought about by Bion's concept of O. Panajian presents a philosophical/psychoanalytic exploration of the notion of tolerance, and from a Kleinian perspective, Mason gives a timely discussion of states of internal and external terror as states of projective identification. What the chapters have in common are concerns related to primitive, even primal mental states, that Bion (1961) called proto-mental or potential thoughts.

Many of the contributions help us to think about different aspects of O. Though deeply buried in a non-place beyond conscious awareness, these unthinkable, unnamable realities can make themselves known to analysts who are willing to "listen" to and "watch" for that which cannot be heard, seen, or otherwise experienced through the senses. They are known only through traces they leave as they are transformed into more apprehensible phenomena. Like invisible subatomic matter in a particle accelerator which leaves ghostly traces as constituents break down into smaller and smaller particles, we can glean evidence of the ghostly traces of these "subatomic" states of mind. Examinations of these mental "ghosts" can be found in many of the chapters in this volume which deal with O, among them Eigen's discussion of Bion's enigmatic *Memoir of the Future*, and the challenges of births and deaths in the mind, Pistiner de Cortiñas's ideas about the "aesthetic dimension of the mind", and my own (Reiner) examination of Ferenczi's controversial theory of the "astra", a realm of instinctual wisdom he posited in the infant, which I compare to O. Finally we have Grotstein, as provocative and complex as ever in this, his last work. In some ways it is a *précis* of his writings about O, but as always with fresh ways to think about the unthinkable. Grotstein asserts that with O, Bion had crossed the Rubicon, a reference to Julius Caesar's point of no return in what

became a declaration of war against the Roman Republic. Bion had similarly breached the point of no return for a psychoanalysis based on instinctual drives rather than a vastly wider view of a mind driven by a need for ontological truth.

## *O—the mystic and psychoanalysis*

Grotstein aptly described Bion as "a secular mystic", referring to him as "the first to establish the new 'mystic science of psychoanalysis'—a numinous science …" (2007, p. 24). O, Bion said, was the central psychoanalytic perspective; this was his revolution. Grotstein was one of the first and most intrepid analysts to delve into this unknowable realm, returning to it over and over again until the end of his life. As Bion's own theories of the mystic and the group predicted, these ideas alienated and angered many analysts (Blass, 2011), who saw the uncertainty and mystic slant of this unknowable realm as unscientific. Bion clearly distinguished the mystical aspect of O from traditional religion which is the antithesis of O (cf. Reiner, 2009, 2012). However, many analysts still equated O with traditional religion, to which Grotstein (2007) said, "Nothing could be farther from the truth" (p. 231). Bion (1970) himself had said that viewing O as *super*natural may simply reflect "a lack of experience of the 'natural' to which it relates" (p. 48). These are natural functions of the human mind, intuition into the mind's metaphysical functions which are the realm not only of psychoanalysis, but of all creative endeavours—music, painting, literature, poetry, and the sciences. Grotstein's poetic turns of mind and phrase helped give conceptual form to formless experiences, like his references to the flights from unbearable realities of those traumatised infants he called, "Orphans of O" (2007, p. 115), and describing Bion's "thoughts without a thinker" as "O's offspring … intimations of immortality" (2007, p. 125).

Of course, even with his considerable linguistic gifts, Grotstein could not define the indefinable O, but his fertile mind gave us ways to think about it as he guided us through very dark areas. This included a lot of words many of us had to look up in the dictionary—autochthonous, entelechy, apotropaic—as well as those he coined—"projective transidentification", the "transcendent position". He described O as a "truth instinct", access to which reflects a level of mental integration beyond the depressive position. "[The] evolved individual … who has become

O", Grotstein (2007) wrote, "has traversed beyond the depressive position and attained the *transcendent position*" (p. 3).

Grotstein loved ideas, he loved learning, and although he also loved Klein, he dared to state that the concept of O may render some aspects of her model, and Freud's, "an inadvertent manic defense against the reality of the transcendent" (ibid., p. 114). It is not the death instinct or life instinct, Grotstein upheld, but O, truth, which "is the instigator of … persecutory anxiety" (ibid., p. 115). Grotstein held that Bion's concept revealed the paranoid schizoid and depressive positions to be adaptive defences *against the emergence of* that more primal reality—O. Grotstein wrote, "What we commonly call reality is an illusion that disguises the Real (O)" (ibid., p. 123). This was Bion's "metapsychological revolution whose echoes are still reverberating across the psychoanalytic landscape worldwide" (ibid., p. 114).

In *A Beam of Intense Darkness*, Grotstein (2007) expressed his intention to "synopsise, synthesise, extend, and challenge Bion and his contributions … in a spirit of active, respectful enthusiasm" (p. 5). Throughout his writings, Grotstein succeeded in and far exceeded this aim. Filtered through Grotstein's unique perspective, Bion's ideas were transformed. This is an extremely important contribution, for as it says in Ecclesiastes 1:9, "The thing that hath been is that which shall be … and there is no new thing under the sun." Along these lines, Bion (1977) pointed out that it was not the analyst's job to create new psychoanalytic theories, but instead to learn to bear the feelings attendant to our experiences. The truths represented by O go by many names throughout history. There is certainly nothing new about the unknowable reality of O, although Bion represented it differently as he brought it into a psychoanalytic context. In *The Bhagavad Gita*, it is called, "the one imperishable … core of knowledge" (Bolle, 1979, p. 129). These are Bion's (1970) "thoughts without a thinker", truths which exist with or without us to think them, impersonal, non-human, emanations of O. The title of this book, taken from Milton's (1667) *Paradise Lost,* also reflects these invisible truths of O, and the need to "blind oneself artificially" that Freud (1919), like Bion, saw as essential to analytic intuition.

> … Celestial light
> Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
> Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
> Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell

> Of things invisible to mortal sight. (Milton, 1667, Book III, lines 51–55)

Although these truths have always existed and will always exist, each analyst has to discover them anew to make them personal and alive. Grotstein was gifted in this endeavour, for his prolific contributions about the most profound strata of mental life were driven by truth, a force in his mind capable of uniting with that greater, more essential source—O.

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*CHAPTER ONE*

# The early psychoanalytic work of James Grotstein (1966–1981): turning a Kleinian/Bionian tide away from American ego psychology

*Joseph Aguayo*

## *Introduction*

To begin to contextualise the psychoanalytic and historical importance of some of the early, significant, and important publications of James Grotstein, we first of all must remember something of the analytic climate in which he came to his analytic maturity. I also limit myself here to Grotstein's early publications, which during this time, both preceded and occurred contemporaneously with his analysis with Wilfred Bion. I restrict my contribution to the years between 1966 and 1981—from the publication of his first co-authored article on projective identification (Malin & Grotstein, 1966) to the publication of his two books in the same year: *Splitting and Projective Identification* and *Do I Dare Disturb the Universe*? (Grotstein, 1981a, 1981b). The former book was the first extensive American presentation of Kleinian ideas to an audience of analysts in the United States, while the latter book was the one and only formally published *Festschrift* in Bion's honour that appeared after his death in 1979. To avoid having the current contribution become an impossible mission, as Grotstein was a prolific writer, I restrict myself to his analytic beginnings in the warm climate of southern California and his first institute home, the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Society and

Institute. Later on he was an important member of the Psychoanalytic Center of California, an IPA-affiliated institute in Los Angeles whose curriculum was based primarily on British object relations theory.

First, some thoughts about Grotstein's unique analytic background: his four training and personal analyses were quite varied, the first with Robert Jokl, an orthodox Freudian, the second with Ivan McGuire, a Fairbairnian, a third with Bion himself, and the last with Albert Mason, the only London-trained Kleinian back then in Los Angeles. The variety of these personal analytic experiences attested to one central and distinguishing characteristic of Grotstein's analytic thinking: his struggle to integrate his passionate dedication to Kleinian/Bionian analysis as an American trained analyst.

### *Grotstein's early publications (1966–1981) and Bion's sojourn in California (1968–1979)*

It requires an act of historical imagination to capture how unusual and strange Malin and Grotstein's (1966) first publication on projective identification must have been to many of its readers. Reputed to be the first American article on the subject, it was unusual because of the circumstances in which it occurred (Spillius & O'Shaughnessy, 2012). Published at the height of the ascendency of ego psychology in the United States, its emphasis on the clinical value of Klein's ideas would have seemed a bit outlandish to its American analytic readers. Most American institutes did not include readings from either Klein or her students—and if they did, they labelled them as "deviant" or "heretical" (Aguayo, 2013). Nowadays British Kleinians (Spillius & O'Shaughnessy, 2012), have characterised American analysts, James Grotstein, Thomas Ogden, and Otto Kernberg, as "adopters" who use the term "projective identification" in a conceptual matrix that includes Klein, as well as other contributors, most notably independent school analysts like Winnicott.

Malin and Grotstein's (1966) paper came at a time when American analytic journals were filled with scores of articles on ego psychology. Typical of these writings are those of New York analyst Charles Brenner (1966), who steadfastly maintained that ego psychology was an advance that incorporated Freud's ideas on the structural model because it encompassed both neurotic as well as normal psychological phenomena. In addition to its analytic conceptual vocabulary—"compromise

formations", "drive derivatives", "the ego and its mechanisms of defense" and the like—there were new and important extensions, such as Ernst Kris's notion of "regression in the service of the ego". With such ideas in hand, American ego analysts took the field in the direction of the normal, adaptive, and constructive, a point of view which revolved around the centrality of the ego and its vicissitudes. It is indeed hard to resist thinking that the ascendency of American ego psychology occurred at the height of the political and military supremacy of the United States as a post-World War II international superpower.

And yet in this context, Malin and Grotstein clearly marched in a different direction by becoming wholesale importers of British object relations theory. They marginalised the vicissitudes of the ego and what Grotstein once termed "defense analysis interminable", all in favour of "unconscious phantasy", "part-objects", and "early object relations". One practical reason for their interest was that as American trained psychiatrists—and recall here that the American Psychoanalytic Association was then a monopoly of psychiatrically trained physicians—these analysts all had psychotically disturbed patients in inpatient hospital settings. Even the most eminent Los Angeles analysts of that time, such as Ralph Greenson, were severely tested by patients such as Marilyn Monroe, whose psychological disturbance went beyond the boundaries of the classical psychoanalytic method for neurotically disturbed patients. In this respect, Malin and Grotstein were part of a tide that began a turn away from ego psychology and—along with others such as Harold Searles, Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, and John Rosen—began to interest themselves and others in innovative treatment approaches to the psychotically disturbed patient.

However, in the context of London-based Kleinian analysts, the work of Malin and Grotstein would have appeared both commonplace and a bit strange, but for different reasons. In other words, while they were enthusiastic about ideas such as the projection of a "bad self" into the analyst, and saw the value of Kleinian ideas about destructiveness towards a good object, these ideas were already well established in London after the publishing cohort of Herbert Rosenfeld, Hanna Segal, and Wilfred Bion had galvanised support for a thoroughgoing Kleinian psychoanalytic treatment of psychotic states of mind from 1947 to 1959 (Aguayo, 2009).

While there was genuine innovation in Malin and Grotstein's introduction of Kleinian ideas to a new audience of American analysts, they

also mixed ideas, such as those of W. R. D. Fairbairn, Michael Balint, and Melanie Klein, and, as such, would not have recognised how strange and contradictory these admixtures would have sounded to British ears. After all, the strict boundaries still existed between the warring three groups of Kleinians, independents, and (Anna) Freudians at the British Psychoanalytical Society. Of course, at that time, the heated differences between the three groups was not the subject of much public discussion or scholarly publications—that would have to wait until King and Steiner (1991) memorialised the Melanie Klein/Anna Freud debates during the time of the Controversial Discussions from 1941 to 1944. In point of fact, Malin and Grotstein's eclectic mix of British object relations was received in London with some sense of bewilderment. When Grotstein met British analyst, Sydney Klein in London at a dinner held at Herbert Rosenfeld's house in 1967, not knowing he was speaking to Grotstein, Klein said, "Imagine that, *Americans* writing about projective identification!" According to Sydney Klein, these American authors were mixing incompatible elements like Fairbairn, Balint, and Melanie Klein. When Grotstein confessed that he was one of the authors of the papers, Klein gasped and said, "The devil you say!" (Grotstein, personal communication).

Nonetheless, Grotstein and his colleagues proceeded undaunted with their enthusiastic version of British object relations theory. As part of a private study group at the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Society and Institute, one that included Bernard Bail and Marvin Berenson, these young analysts supplemented their education, which had been based in American ego psychology. Urged on by Bernard Brandchaft, a generation older, who was the first Los Angeles psychoanalyst to travel to England for training in British object relations theory, this small group gathered some interest as the first major proponents of Klein's ideas in Los Angeles. Ivan McGuire was also influential, a senior training and supervising analyst who was quite interested in British ideas, particularly those of the Middle Group. Both Brandchaft and McGuire encouraged the study group to take up Klein's work (Kirsner, 2000, pp. 167–172).

With Brandchaft's help this group began financially to sponsor the visits of British analysts to Los Angeles beginning in the early 1960s. Visitors included Hanna Segal, Herbert Rosenfeld, Donald Meltzer, and Wilfred Bion, among others. These small meetings initially started as clinical lectures and seminars held in private homes, but as interest

blossomed and attendance grew, these meetings were moved to larger venues such as the Beverly Wilshire Hotel (ibid.). Looking back several years later, Grotstein gave his study group the moniker "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" for having brought Kleinian ideas to Los Angeles.

However, Bion was the first Kleinian analyst invited to live and work in Los Angeles by this group, an effort spearheaded primarily by Brandchaft and Bail. Bion's decision to relocate to Los Angeles would have a life-altering effect on the work of James Grotstein and many other colleagues there. Enthusiastic to hear the work of this London Kleinian, Grotstein both attended Bion's seminars in Los Angeles in April 1967 as well as participated in a private supervision group where clinical material was presented to Bion as consultant. Bion arrived to stay in 1968. Shortly after relocating, Bion realised he needed other colleagues to join him, both for support and to meet the growing demand for Kleinian analytic and supervisory services. Other Kleinian analysts, such Albert Mason and later, Susanna Isaacs Elmhirst, also accepted invitations to join him in Los Angeles.

The Los Angeles analysts could not have known the significance of their invitation to Bion. A number of important issues in his psychoanalytic career crystallised as he now turned seventy. Bion had been both president of the British Psychoanalytical Society and chair of the Melanie Klein Trust in the period from 1962 to 1967. His oft-cited comment, rendered in his 1966 paper, "Catastrophic Change", namely "… loading up the psychoanalyst with such honours that he's sunk without a trace" (p. 17) may have reflected his weariness of having such an administratively burdened schedule in London, among other things. It is hard to imagine that all this work had not compromised the time that he could devote to his passion of theorising and writing about psychoanalysis. Bion evidently decided that the interest in his work shown in Los Angeles was serious and significant enough to warrant his move there. In addition, he arranged to take on no administrative and leadership responsibilities there. His hope was for a receptive enough environment that would give him ample time to continue his research and writing.

Bion had some sense that his work, particularly on the treatment of borderline and psychotic patients, would be well received in Los Angeles. As mentioned, there was tremendous interest in the claims made by Kleinians that they had had some limited success in the

treatment of psychotically disturbed patients. Many physician-analysts in attendance at Bion's 1967 Los Angeles seminars had extensive experience working with hospitalised psychotic and near psychotic patients (Greenson, 1965; Wexler, 1965), and they were quite interested to hear new ideas on how to go about doing such difficult work. All the clinical examples given by Bion (Aguayo & Malin, 2013) in the Los Angeles seminars were of psychotic and borderline patients, and the transcripts make clear that these examples struck a responsive chord.

So when Grotstein and other Los Angeles colleagues first heard Bion speak of his ideas on technique, epitomised in his brief sketch, "Notes on Memory and Desire" (originally published in a Los Angeles analytic journal, *The Psychoanalytic Forum* in the fall of 1967), they were quite enthusiastic. Recall here that not much had been written on technique by the London Klein group up until the 1960s, so Bion's "Notes on Memory and Desire" struck a fertile chord. I have maintained elsewhere that Bion himself may have felt quite intrigued by why his paper created such a controversial stir in Los Angeles. As attested to by the various commentaries written on this paper—and published in *The Psychoanalytic Forum*—some American analysts were quite enthused while others were shocked and appalled by Bion's (2013) ideas, such as the active abandonment of memory for previous sessions (Aguayo, 2014).

More importantly, this "here and now" technique of active and receptive listening also implicitly challenged ego psychological assumptions regarding the importance of the patient's early history, its careful reconstruction and interpretative understanding in the past-to-present transference. Bion's "Notes on Memory and Desire" was exceedingly compressed, direct, and forthright, almost to the point of being strident. The responses to the paper demonstrated some interest but much incredulity and utter bewilderment regarding just what Bion was attempting to convey. Interestingly, Los Angeles analyst John Lindon, the editor of *The Psychoanalytic Forum*, expressed his own appreciation of Bion's work in his own separate discussion, finding it "… provocatively nihilistic of all that we have learned as psychoanalysts" (Bion, 1967b, p. 274).

In light of the fact that few American analysts were familiar with his publications, Bion (Aguayo & Malin, 2013) spoke plainly and directly to his American colleagues, inviting them to ask him questions, repeatedly if need be, so that he could clarify his intended meanings. In these 1967 seminars, Bion shunted aside his dense, epistemological