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The Dead Mother

If one had to choose a single characteristic to differentiate between present-day analyses and analyses as one imagines them to have been in the past, it would surely be found among the problems of mourning. This is what the title of this essay, the dead mother, is intended to suggest. However, to avoid all misunderstanding, I wish to make it clear that I shall not be discussing here the psychical consequences of the real death of the mother, but rather that of an imago which has been constituted in the child's mind, following maternal depression, brutally transforming a living object, which was a source of vitality for the child, into a distant figure, toneless, practically inanimate, deeply impregnating the cathexes of certain patients whom we have in analysis, and weighing on the destiny of their object-libidinal and narcissistic future. Thus, the dead mother, contrary to what one might think, is a mother who remains alive but who is, so to speak, psychically dead in the eyes of the young child in her care.

The consequence of the real death of the mother – especially when this is due to suicide – is extremely harmful to the child whom she leaves behind. One can immediately attach to this event the symptomatology to which it gives rise, even if the analysis reveals later that the catastrophe was only irreparable because of the mother-child relationship which existed prior to her death. In fact, in this case, one should even be able to describe modes of relationship which come close to those that I wish to expound here. But the reality of the loss, its final and irrevocable nature, will have changed the former relationship in a decisive way. So I shall not be referring to conflicts that relate to such a situation. Nor shall I take into account the analyses of patients who have sought help for a recognized depressive symptomatology.

Effectively, the reasons which motivated the analyses of whom I am going to speak to undertake an analysis barely touch on the characteristic aspects of depression, in the preliminary interviews. On the other hand, the analyst immediately perceives the narcissistic nature of the conflicts that are invoked, connected as they are with character neurosis

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and its consequences on the patient's love-life and professional activity.

Before examining the clinical framework that I have just defined, by exclusion, I must briefly mention a few references which have been the second source of my ideas – my patients having been the first. The reflections which follow owe much to authors who have laid the foundations of what we know about the problems of mourning: Freud, Karl Abraham and Melanie Klein. But in particular the more recent studies of Winnicott (1971b), Kohut (1971), N. Abraham (1978), Torok (1978) and Rosolato (1975) have set me on this path.

Here then is the statement on which I shall be concentrating:

The most widely shared psychoanalytic theory entertains two ideas. The first is that of *object-loss* as a fundamental moment in the structuring of the human psyche, at which time a new relation to reality is introduced. Henceforward the psyche is governed by the reality principle, which takes precedence over the pleasure principle which it also protects. This first idea is a theoretical concept and not the result of observation, for this shows that a gradual evolution, rather than a mutative leap, has taken place. The second generally accepted idea is that of a *depressive position*, but this is interpreted variously by different authors. This second idea combines observed fact and theoretical concept for both Melanie Klein and Winnicott. Both ideas, it should be noted, are linked to a general situation referring to an unavoidable event in the process of development. If previous disturbances in the mother-child relationship make its passage or its resolution more difficult, the absence of such disturbances and the good quality of maternal care cannot help the child to avoid living through this period, which plays a formative role in the organization of his psyche.

Besides, these are patients, whatever their presenting structure may be, who seem to suffer from more or less intermittent and more or less invalidating depressive traits, which seem to go beyond the normal depressive reaction that periodically affects everyone. For we know that a subject who never experiences any depression is probably more disturbed than someone who is occasionally depressed.

So the question I ask myself is this: 'What is the relation that one can establish between object-loss and the depressive position, as general given facts, and the singularity of the characteristics of this depressive configuration, which is central, but often submerged among other symptoms which more or less camouflage it? What are the processes that develop around this centre? What constitutes this centre in psychic reality?'

THE DEAD FATHER AND THE DEAD MOTHER

Psychoanalytic theory, which is founded on the interpretation of Freudian thought, allots a major role to the concept of the dead father, whose fundamental function is the genesis of the superego, as outlined in *Totem and Taboo* (Freud, 1912–13). When one considers the Oedipus complex as a structure, and not merely as a phase of libidinal development, this is a coherent point of view. Other concepts derive from this: the superego in classical theory, the Law and the Symbolic in Lacanian thought. This group of concepts is linked by the reference to castration and to sublimation as the fate of the instincts.

On the other hand, we never hear of the dead mother from a structural point of view. There may be allusions to this in certain individual cases, as in the case of Marie Bonaparte's analysis of Edgar Poe, but that concerns a particular event: the loss of the mother at a very early age. There is a limitation imposed here by a purely realistic point of view. It is not possible to explain this exclusion by invoking the Oedipus complex, because one could refer to it in connection with the girl's Oedipus complex, or again with the boy's inverted Oedipus complex. In fact the answer lies elsewhere. Matricide does not involve the dead mother as a concept, on the contrary; and the concept which is underlined by the dead father, that is to say the reference to the ancestor, to filiation, to genealogy, refers back to the primitive crime and the guilt which is its consequence.

So it is surprising that the general model of mourning that underlies this concept makes no mention of the bereavement of the mother, nor the loss of the breast. I am alluding to this not because these are supposed to be prior to it, but because one is forced to notice that there is no articulation between these two concepts.

In *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* Freud (1926d) categorized castration anxiety by including it in a series which also comprises anxiety about the loss of a loved object, or a loss of its love, anxiety of the superego, and anxiety at the threat of the loss of the protecting superego. We know, besides, that he was careful to make the distinction between anxiety, pain and mourning.

I do not intend to discuss in detail Freud's thinking on this point, because this would lead me away from my subject, but I should like to make one remark: with castration it is the same as with repression. First, Freud well knew that, concerning both, there exist as many other forms of anxiety as other varieties of repression and even other defence mechanisms. In both cases he considers the possibility of the existence of chronologically earlier forms, from which the one and the other derive.

However, in both cases he specifically fixes castration anxiety and repression as a centre, in relation to which he places the other types of anxiety and different varieties of repression, whether they come before or after, which is proof of the structural and genetic character of Freudian thought. This is clearly stated when he makes a primal fantasy of the Oedipus myth, which is relatively independent of the vicissitudes of the conjuncture which gives it its specificity for any given patient. Thus, even in the cases where he notes the presence of an inverted Oedipus complex, as in the 'Wolf Man', he asserts that the father, object of the patient's erotic wishes, remains nonetheless the castrator.

This structural function implies a constitutive conception of the psychical order – that constitutes a symbolical organization – which is programmed by the primal fantasies. This path has not always been followed by Freud's successors. But globally it seems that French psychoanalytic thought, in spite of its divergences, has followed Freud on this point. On the one hand, reference to castration as a model has obliged authors to 'castrate', if I may express myself thus, all other forms of anxiety; one speaks of anal or narcissistic castration, for example. On the other hand, by giving an anthropological interpretation of Freudian theory, one relates all the varieties of anxiety to the concept of lack in Lacanian theory. Now, I believe that, in both cases, one is doing violence as much to experience as to theory to save the unity and generalization of a concept.

It may be surprising that on this point I seem to dissociate myself from a structural point of view that I have always defended. Thus, what I would propose, instead of conforming to the opinion of those who divide anxiety into different types according to the age at which it appears in the life of the subject, would be rather a structural conception which would be organized not around one centre or one paradigm, but around at least two, in accordance with a distinctive characteristic, different from those which have been proposed to date.

Castration anxiety can be legitimately described as subsuming the group of anxieties linked by the "little one" detachable part of the body', whether it be penis, faeces or baby. What gives this class unity is that castration is always evoked in the context of a bodily wound associated with a bloody act. I attach more importance to the idea of 'red' anxiety than to its relation to a part-object.

On the contrary, whether referring to the concept of the loss of the breast, or of object-loss, and even of threats relative to the loss of the superego or its protection, and in a general manner, to all threats of abandonment, the context is never bloody. To be sure, all forms of

anxiety are accompanied by destructiveness; castration too, because the wound is, of course, the result of a destruction. But this destructiveness has nothing to do with a bloody mutilation. It bears the colours of mourning: black or white.¹ Black as in severe depression, or blank as in states of emptiness to which one now pays justified attention.

I defend the hypothesis that the sinister black of depression, which we can legitimately relate to the hatred we observe in the psychoanalysis of depressed subjects, is only a secondary product, a consequence rather than a cause, of a 'blank' anxiety which expresses a loss that has been experienced on a narcissistic level.

Having already described negative hallucination and blank psychosis, I shall not return to what I have said on the subject, but I shall attach blank anxiety or blank mourning to this series.

The category of 'blankness' – negative hallucination, blank psychosis, blank mourning, all connected to what one might call the problem of emptiness, or of the negative, in our clinical practice – is the result of one of the components of primary repression: massive decathexis, both radical and temporary, which leaves traces in the unconscious in the form of 'psychical holes'. These will be filled in by recathexes, which are the expression of destructiveness which has thus been freed by the weakening of libidinal erotic cathexis. Manifestations of hatred and the following process of reparation are manifestations which are secondary to this central decathexis of the maternal primary object. One can understand that this view modifies even analytic technique, because to limit oneself to interpreting hatred in structures which take on depressive characteristics amounts to never approaching the primary core of this constellation.

The Oedipus complex should be maintained as the essential symbolic matrix to which it is always important to refer, even in cases of so-called pre-genital or pre-oedipal regression, which implies the reference to an axiomatic triangulation. However advanced the analysis of the decathexis of the primary object, may be, the fate of the human psyche is to have always *two* objects and never one alone, however far one goes back to try to understand the earliest psychical structure. This does not mean to say that one must adhere to a conception of a primitive Oedipus complex – phylogenetic – where the father as such would be present, in the form of his penis (I am thinking of Melanie Klein's conception of the early Oedipus complex: the father's penis in the mother's womb). The father

¹ *Noir ou blanc* – in French *blanc* can mean either 'white' or 'blank'. In this chapter it has the latter meaning, 'empty', throughout. [Translator's note.]

is there, both in the mother and the child, from the beginning. More exactly, *between* the mother and child. From the mother's side this is expressed in her desire for the father, of which the child is the realisation. On the side of the child, everything which introduces the anticipation of a third person, each time that the mother is not wholly present and her devotion to the child is neither total nor absolute (at least in the illusion he maintains in this regard, before it is pertinent to speak of object-loss), will be, retrospectively, attributable to the father.

It is thus that one must account for the solidarity which links the metaphoric loss of the breast, the symbolic mutation of the relation between pleasure and reality – established retrospectively as principles – the prohibition of incest, and the double figuration of the images of mother and father, potentially reunited in the fantasy of a hypothetical primal scene which takes place outside the subject. It is from this scene that the subject *excludes himself* and constitutes himself in the absence of affective representation, which gives birth to fantasy, which is a production of the subject's 'madness'.

Why is this metaphorical? The recourse to metaphor, which holds good for every essential element of psychoanalytic theory, is particularly necessary here. In chapter 3, I pointed out that there are two Freudian versions of the loss of the breast. The first, which is theoretical and conceptual, is that to which Freud refers in his article 'Negation' (1925*h*). Freud talks about it as though it implies a unique, instantaneous, basic event – decisive, it goes without saying, because its repercussion on the function of judgement is fundamental. In the second version, in *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1940*a*) in particular, he adopts a position which is less theoretical than descriptive, as though he were applying himself to infant-observation, so much in vogue today. He accounts for the phenomenon, not theoretically, but in a 'narrative' form, if I may so describe it, where one understands that this loss is a process of progressive evolution which advances step by step. Now, I believe that the theoretical and descriptive approaches are mutually exclusive, rather as perception and memory exclude each other in theory. The recourse to this comparison is not only analogical. In the 'theory' that the subject elaborates about himself, the mutative interpretation is always retrospective. It is in the aftermath that this theory of the lost object is formed, and acquires its unique, instantaneous, decisive, irrevocable and basic characteristic.

The recourse to metaphor is not only justified from a diachronic point of view, but also from a synchronic point of view. The fiercest partisans of the reference to the loss of the breast in contemporary psychoanalytic

theory, the Kleinians, now admit, humbly watering down their wine, that the breast is just a word to designate the mother, this, to the satisfaction of non-Kleinian theoreticians who often psychologize psychoanalysis. One must retain the metaphor of the breast, for the breast, like the penis, can only be symbolic. However intense the pleasure of sucking linked to the nipple, or the teat, might be, erogenous pleasure has the power to concentrate within itself everything of the mother that is not the breast: her smell, her skin, her look and the thousand other components that 'make up' the mother. The metonymical object has become metaphor to the object.

One may note in passing that we have no difficulty in reasoning in the same manner when we speak of loving sexual intercourse, in reducing the whole of a relationship, which is far more complex, to the pairing 'penis-vagina', and in relating its mishaps to castration anxiety.

From this one may understand that, by going more deeply into the problems relating to the dead mother, I refer to them as to a metaphor, independent of the bereavement of a real object.

THE DEAD MOTHER COMPLEX

The dead mother complex is a revelation of the transference. When the subject presents himself to the analyst for the first time, the symptoms of which he complains are not essentially of a depressive kind. Most of the time these symptoms indicate more or less acute conflicts with objects who are close. It is not infrequent that a patient spontaneously recounts a personal history where the analyst thinks to himself that here, at a given moment, a childhood depression should or could have been located, of which the subject makes no mention. This depression, which has sometimes appeared sporadically in the clinical history, only breaks into the open in the transference. As for the classic neurotic symptoms, they are present but of secondary value or, even if they are important, the analyst has the feeling that the analysis of their genesis will not furnish the key to the conflict. On the contrary, the problems pertaining to narcissism are in the foreground where the demands of the ego ideal are considerable, in synergy with or in opposition to the superego. The feeling of impotence is evident. Impotence to withdraw from a conflictual situation, impotence to love, to make the most of one's talents, to multiply one's assets, or, when this does take place, a profound dissatisfaction with the results.

When the analysis is underway, the transference will reveal, sometimes quite rapidly but more often after long years of analysis, a singular depression. The analyst has the feeling of a discordance between the

transference depression – an expression that I am coining on this occasion to oppose it to transference neurosis – and the behaviour outside the analysis where depression does not blow up, because nothing indicates that the entourage perceives it clearly, which nevertheless does not prevent the people close to him from suffering from the object-relationship that the analysand establishes with them.

What this transference depression indicates is the repetition of an infantile depression, the characteristics of which may usefully be specified.

It does not concern the loss of a real object; the problem of a real separation with the object who would have abandoned the subject is not what is in question here. The fact may exist, but it is not this that constitutes the dead mother complex.

The essential characteristic of this depression is that it takes place in the presence of the object, which is itself absorbed by a bereavement. The mother, for one reason or another, is depressed. Here the variety of precipitating factors is very large. Of course, among the principal causes of this kind of maternal depression, one finds the loss of a person dear to her: child, parent, close friend, or any other object strongly cathected by the mother. But it may also be a depression triggered off by a deception which inflicts a narcissistic wound: a change of fortune in the nuclear family or the family of origin, a liaison of the father who neglects the mother, humiliation, etc. In any event the mother's sorrow and lessening of interest in her infant are in the foreground.

It should be noted that the most serious instance is the death of a child at an early age, as all authors have understood. In particular there is a cause which remains totally hidden, because the manifest signs by which the child could recognize it, and thus gain retrospective knowledge of it, is never possible because it rests on a secret: a miscarriage of the mother, which must be reconstructed by the analysis from minute indications; a hypothetical construction, of course, which renders a coherence to what is expressed in the clinical material, which can be attached to earlier periods of the subject's history.

What comes about then is a brutal change of the maternal imago, which is truly mutative. Until then there is an authentic vitality present in the subject, which comes to a sudden halt, remaining seized from then on in the same place, which testifies to a rich and happy relationship with the mother. The infant felt loved, notwithstanding the risks that the most ideal of relationships presupposes. Photos of the young baby in the family album show him to be gay, lively, interested, carrying much potentiality, whereas later snapshots show the loss of this initial happi-

ness. All seems to have ended, as with the disappearance of ancient civilizations, the cause of which is sought in vain by historians, who make the hypothesis of an earthquake to explain the death and the destruction of palace, temple, edifices and dwellings, of which nothing is left but ruins. Here the disaster is limited to a *cold core*, which will eventually be overcome, but which leaves an indelible mark on the erotic cathexes of the subjects in question.

The transformation in the psychical life, at the moment of the mother's sudden bereavement when she has become abruptly detached from her infant, is experienced by the child as a catastrophe; because, without any warning signal, love has been lost at one blow. One does not need to give a lengthy description of the narcissistic traumatism that this change represents. One must however point out that it constitutes a premature disillusionment and that it carries in its wake, besides the loss of love, the loss of *meaning*, for the baby disposes of no explication to account for what has happened. Of course, being at the centre of the maternal universe, it is clear that he interprets this deception as the consequence of his drives towards the object. This will be especially serious if the complex of the dead mother occurs at the moment when the child discovers the existence of the third person, the father, and that the new attachment should be interpreted by him as the reason for the mother's detachment. In any case, here there is a premature and unstable triangulation. For either, as I have just said, the withdrawal of the mother's love is attributed to the mother's attachment to the father, or this withdrawal will provoke an early and particularly intense attachment to the father, felt to be the saviour from the conflict taking place between mother and infant. Now, in reality, the father more often than not does not respond to the child's distress. The subject is thus caught between a dead mother and an inaccessible father, either because the latter is principally preoccupied by the state of the mother, without bringing help to the infant, or because he leaves the mother-child couple to cope with this situation alone.

After the child has attempted in vain to repair the mother who is absorbed by her bereavement, which has made him feel the measure of his impotence, after having experienced the loss of his mother's love and the threat of the loss of the mother herself, and after he has fought against anxiety by various active methods, amongst which agitation, insomnia and nocturnal terrors are indications, the ego will deploy a series of defences of a different kind.

The first and most important is a unique movement with two aspects: *the decathexis of the maternal object and the unconscious identification with the dead*

mother. The decathexis, which is principally affective, but also representative, constitutes a psychical murder of the object, accomplished without hatred. One will understand that the mother's affliction excludes the emergence of any contingency of hatred susceptible of damaging her image even more.

No instinctual destructiveness is to be inferred from this operation of decathexis of the maternal image. Its result is the constitution of a hole in the texture of object-relations with the mother, which does not prevent the surrounding cathexes from being maintained, just as the mother's bereavement modifies her fundamental attitude with regard to the child, whom she feels incapable of loving, but whom she continues to love just as she continues to take care of him. However, as one says, 'her heart is not in it'.

The other aspect of the decathexis is the primary mode of identification with the object. This mirror-identification is almost obligatory, after reactions of complementarity (artificial gaiety, agitation, etc.) have failed. This reactive symmetry is the only means by which to establish a reunion with the mother – perhaps by way of sympathy. In fact there is no real reparation, but a mimicry, with the aim of continuing to possess the object (who one can no longer have) by becoming, not like it but, the object itself. This identification, which is the condition of the renouncement to the object and at the same time its conservation in a cannibalistic manner, is unconscious from the start. Here there is a difference from the decathexis, which becomes unconscious later on, because in this second case the withdrawal is retaliatory; it endeavours to get rid of the object, whereas the identification comes about unawares to the ego of the subject and against his will. Here is where its alienating characteristic lies.

The ulterior object-relations, the subject, who is prey to the repetition-compulsion, will actively employ the decathexis of an object who is about to bring disappointment, repeating the old defence, but, he will remain totally unconscious of his identification with the dead mother, with whom he reunites henceforth in recathecting the traces of the trauma.

The second fact is, as I have pointed out, *the loss of meaning*. The 'construction' of the breast, of which pleasure is the cause, the aim and the guarantor, has collapsed all at once, without reason. Even if one were to imagine the reversal of the situation by the subject, who in a negative megalomania, would attribute the responsibility for the mutation to himself, there is a totally disproportional gap between the fault he could reproach himself for having committed and the intensity of the maternal reaction. At the most, he might imagine this fault to be linked with his

manner of being rather than with some forbidden wish; in fact, it becomes forbidden for him to be.

This position, which could induce the child to let himself die, because of the impossibility of diverting destructive aggressivity to the outside, because of the vulnerability of the maternal image, obliges him to find someone responsible for the mother's black mood, though he be a scapegoat. It is the father who is designated to this effect. There is in any case, I repeat, an early triangular situation, because child, mother and the unknown object of the mother's bereavement are present at the same time. The unknown object of the bereavement and the father are then condensed for the infant, creating a precocious Oedipus complex.

This whole situation, arising from the loss of meaning, leads to a second front of defence:

the releasing of secondary hatred, which is neither primary nor fundamental, brings into play regressive wishes of incorporation, but also anal features which are coloured with manic sadism where it is a matter of dominating, soiling, taking vengeance upon the object, etc.

auto-erotic excitation establishes itself in the search for pure sensual pleasure, organ pleasure at the limit, without tenderness, ruthless, which is not necessarily accompanied by sadistic fantasy, but which remains stamped with a reticence to love the object. This is the foundation for hysterical identifications to come. There is a precocious dissociation between the body and the psyche, as between sensuality and tenderness, and a blocking of love. The object is sought after for its capacity to release isolated enjoyment of an erogenous zone (or more than one) without the confluence of a shared enjoyment of two objects, more or less totalized.

Finally, and more particularly, *the quest for lost meaning structures the early development of the fantasmatic and the intellectual capacities of the ego*. The development of a frantic need for play which does not come about as in the freedom for playing, but under the *compulsion to imagine*, just as intellectual development is inscribed in a *compulsion to think*. Performance and auto-reparation go hand in hand to coincide with the same goal: the preservation of a capacity to surmount the dismay over the loss of the breast, by the creation of a patched breast, a piece of cognitive fabric which is destined to mask the hole left by the decathexis, while secondary hatred and erotic excitation teem on the edge of an abyss of emptiness.

The overcathected intellectual capacity necessarily comprises a considerable part of projection. Contrary to widespread opinion, projection is not always false reasoning. This may be the case but not necessarily. What defines projection is not the true or false character of what is projected, but the operation which consists in transferring to the outside

scene – the scene of the object – the investigation, even the guessing, of what has had to be rejected and abolished from within. The infant has made the cruel experience of his dependence on the variations of the mother's moods. Henceforth he devotes his efforts to guessing or anticipating.

The compromised unity of the ego which has a hole in it from now on, realizes itself either on the level of fantasy, which gives open expression to artistic creation, or on the level of knowledge, which is at the origin of highly productive intellectualization. It is evident that one is witnessing an attempt to master the traumatic situation. But this attempt is doomed to fail. Not that it fails where it has displaced the theatre of operations. These precocious idealized sublimations are the outcome of premature and probably precipitated psychical formations, but I see no reason, apart from bending to a normative ideology, to contest their authenticity. Their failure lies elsewhere. The sublimations reveal their incapacity to play a stabilizing role in the psychical economy, because the subject remains vulnerable on a particular point, which is his love life. In this area, a wound will awaken a psychical pain and one will witness a resurrection of the dead mother, who, for the entire critical period when she remains in the foreground, dissolves all the subject's sublimatory acquisitions, which are not lost, but which remain momentarily blocked. Sometimes it is love which sets the development of the sublimated acquisitions in motion again, and sometimes it is the latter which attempt to liberate love. Both may combine their efforts for a time, but soon the destructiveness overwhelms the possibilities of the subject who does not dispose of the necessary cathexes to establish a lasting object-relation and to commit himself progressively to a deeper personal involvement which implies concern for the other. Thus, inevitably, it is either the disappointment in the object or that in the ego which puts an end to the experience, with the reappearance of the feeling of failure and incapacity. The patient has the feeling that a malediction weighs upon him, that there is no end to the dead mother's dying, and that it holds him prisoner. Pain, a narcissistic feeling, surfaces again. It is a hurt which is situated on the edge of the wound, colouring all the cathexes, filling in the effects of hatred, of erotic excitement, the loss of the breast. In a state of psychical pain, it is as impossible to hate as to love, impossible to find enjoyment, albeit masochistic, impossible to think; only a feeling of a captivity which dispossesses the ego of itself and alienates it to an unrepresentable figure.

The subject's trajectory evokes a hunt in quest of an unintrojectable object, without the possibility of renouncing it or of losing it, and indeed,

the possibility of accepting its introjection into the ego, which is cathected by the dead mother. In all, the subject's objects remain constantly at the limit of the ego, not wholly within, and not quite without. And with good reason, for the place is occupied, in its centre, by the dead mother.

For a long period, the analysis of these subjects will proceed with the examination of the classic conflicts: Oedipus complex, pregenital fixations, anal and oral. Repression reposing on infantile sexuality, on aggressivity, will have been interpreted without cease. Probably some progress has become manifest. But it hardly convinces the analyst, even if the analysand himself seeks comfort by underlining the points on which there would be cause for satisfaction.

In fact, all this psychoanalytic work remains subject to spectacular collapses, where everything again seems to be as on the first day, to the point where the analysand realizes that he can no longer continue to bluff himself and he finds himself forced to admit to the insufficiency of the transference object: the analyst, in spite of the relational manoeuvres with the supporting objects of lateral transference which had helped him, the patient, to avoid approaching the central core of the conflict.

In these cures, I finally understood that I had remained deaf to a certain discourse that my analysands had left me to guess. Behind the eternal complaints about the mother's unkindness, or her lack of understanding or her rigidity, I guessed the defensive value of these comments, against intense homosexuality. Feminine homosexuality in both sexes, for in the boy it is the feminine part of the psychical personality which expresses itself thus, very often in the search for paternal compensation. But I continued to ask myself why this situation prolonged itself. *My deafness related to the fact that, behind the complaints concerning the mother's doings, her actions, the shadow of her absence was profiled.* In fact the enquiry against X concerned a mother who was absorbed, either with herself or with something else, unreachable without echo, but always sad. A silent mother, even if talkative. When she was present, she remained indifferent, even when she was plying the child with her reproaches. Thus, I was able to represent this situation for myself quite differently.

The dead mother had taken away with her, in the decahexis of which she had been the object, the major portion of the love with which she had been cathected before her bereavement: her look, the tone of her voice, her smell, the memory of her caress. The loss of physical contact carried with it the repression of the memory traces of her touch. She had been buried alive, but her tomb itself had disappeared. The hole that gaped in its place made solitude dreadful, as though the subject ran the risk of

being sunk in it, body and possessions. In this connection I now think that the concept of *holding*, of which Winnicott spoke, does not explain the feeling of vertiginous falling that some of our patients experience. This seems to me to be far more in relation to an experience of psychical collapse, which would be to the psyche what fainting is to the physical body. The object has been encapsulated and its trace has been lost through decahexis; primary identification with the dead mother took place, transforming positive identification into negative identification, i.e. identification with the hole left by the decahexis (and not identification with the object), and to this emptiness, which is filled in and suddenly manifests itself through an affective hallucination of the dead mother, as soon as a new object is periodically chosen to occupy this space.

All that can be observed around this nucleus organizes itself with a triple objective:

- to keep the ego alive: through hatred for the object, through the search for exciting pleasure, through the quest for meaning;
- to reanimate the dead mother, to interest her, to distract her, to give her a renewed taste for life, to make her smile and laugh;
- to rivalize with the object of her bereavement in the early triangulation.

This type of patient presents us with serious technical problems which I shall not go into here. On this point, I refer the reader to my paper on the analyst's silence (Green, 1979a). I greatly fear that the rule of silence, in these cases, only perpetuates the transference of blank mourning for the mother. I will add that I do not believe that the Kleinian technique of the systematic interpretation of destructiveness is of much help here. On the other hand, Winnicott's position, as it is expressed in his article 'The use of an object and relating through identification' (Winnicott, 1971b), seems appropriate to me. But I fear that Winnicott somewhat underestimated the sexual fantasies, especially the primal scene, which I will take up later on.

FROZEN LOVE AND ITS VICISSITUDES: THE BREAST, THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX, THE PRIMAL SCENE

Ambivalence is a fundamental trait of the cathexes of depressives. What is the case in the dead mother complex? When I described above the affective and representative decahexis of which hatred is the consequence, this description was incomplete. What one must understand, in the structure that I have expounded, is that the inability to love only derives from ambivalence, and hence from an overload of hatred, in

the measure that what comes first is *love frozen* by the decathexis. The object is in hibernation, as it were, conserved by the cold. This operation comes about unknown to the subject, in the following way. Decathexis is withdrawal of cathexis which takes place (pre)consciously. Repressed hatred is the result of instinctual defusion, all unbinding and thus weakening the erotic-libidinal cathexis, which, as a consequence, frees the destructive cathexes. By withdrawing his cathexes, the subject believes he has brought them back within his ego, for want of being able to displace them onto another object, a substitute object, but he ignores that he has left behind, has alienated, his love for the object, which has fallen into the *oubliettes* of primary repression. Consciously, he believes his reserve of love to be intact, available for another love when the occasion arises. He declares himself ready to become attached to another object, if he appears to be friendly and he feels loved by him. He thinks the primary object no longer counts for him. In truth, he will encounter the inability to love, not only because of ambivalence, but because his love is still mortgaged to the dead mother. The subject is rich but he can give nothing in spite of his generosity, for he does not reap enjoyment from it.

In the course of the transference, the defensive sexualization which took place up to now, always involving intense pregenital satisfactions and remarkable sexual performance, comes to a sudden halt, and the analysand finds his sexual life diminishing or fading away almost to nothing. According to him, it is a matter neither of inhibition nor of the loss of sexual appetite: it is simply that no one is desirable, or, if perchance someone is, it is he or she who is not attracted in return. A profuse, dispersed, multiple, fleeting sexual life no longer brings any satisfaction.

Arrested in their capacity to love, subjects who are under the empire of the dead mother can only aspire to autonomy. Sharing remains forbidden to them. Thus, solitude, which was a situation creating anxiety and to be avoided, changes sign. From negative it becomes positive. Having previously been shunned, it is now sought after. The subject nestles into it. He becomes his own mother, but remains prisoner to her economy of survival. He thinks he has got rid of his dead mother. In fact, she only leaves him in peace in the measure that she herself is left in peace. As long as there is no candidate to the succession, she can well let her child survive, certain to be the only one to possess this inaccessible love.

This cold core burns like ice, and numbs like it as well, but as long as it is felt to be cold, love remains unavailable. These are barely metaphors. These analysands complain of being cold even in the heat. They are cold

below the surface of the skin, in their bones; they feel chilled by a funereal shiver, wrapped in their shroud. Everything happens as though the core of love frozen by the dead mother does not prevent the ulterior evolution towards the Oedipus complex, in the same way that the fixation will be ultimately overcome in the life of the individual. These subjects may outwardly have a more or less satisfactory professional life; they marry and have children. For a while all seems well. But soon the repetition of conflicts contributes to turning the two essential sectors of life, love and work, into failure: professional life, even when profoundly absorbing, becomes disappointing, and marital relations lead to profound disturbances in love, sexuality and affective communication. It is in any case this last which is most lacking. As for sexuality, it depends on the later or earlier appearance of the dead mother complex. It may be relatively preserved but only up to a certain point. Love, finally, is never completely satisfied. Thus, at one extreme, it is completely impossible, or, at best, it is somewhat mutilated or inhibited. There must not be too much: too much love, too much pleasure, too much enjoyment, whereas on the contrary the parental function is hyperinvested. However, this function is more often than not infiltrated by narcissism: children are loved on condition that they fulfil the narcissistic objectives which the parents have not succeeded in accomplishing themselves.

Thus, if the Oedipus complex is reached and even bypassed, the dead mother complex will give it a particularly dramatic aspect. Fixation to the mother will prevent the girl from ever being able to cathex the imago of the father, without the fear of losing the mother's love; or else if love for the father is deeply repressed, without her being able to avoid transferring onto the father's imago a large part of the characteristics that have been projected onto the mother. Not the dead mother, but her opposite, the phallic mother whose structure I have attempted to describe (Green, 1968). The boy projects a similar imago onto the mother, while the father is the object of a homosexuality which is not very structuring but makes him into an inaccessible being and, as in the familiar descriptions, insignificant or tired, depressed and overwhelmed by this phallic mother. In all cases there is a regression to anality. In anality the subject not only regresses from the Oedipus complex backwards, in every sense of the term, but also protects himself by the anal buttress against the tendency towards oral regression to which one is always thrown back by the dead mother, because the dead mother complex and the metaphoric loss of the breast reverberate each other. One also always finds the use of reality as a defence, as though the subject feels the need to cling to the presence of what is perceived as real and untouched by any projection,

because he is far from sure of the distinction between fantasy and reality, which he does his utmost to keep apart. Fantasy must be only fantasy, which means that one witnesses, at the limit, the negation of psychological reality. When reality and fantasy are telescoped together, intense anxiety appears. Subjective and objective are confused, which gives the subject the impression of a threat of psychosis. Order must be maintained at any price, by a structuring anal reference which allows splitting to continue to function, and above all keeps the subject away from what he has learned of his unconscious. This is to say that psychoanalysis allows him to understand others better than to see clearly within himself. Whence the inevitable disappointment with the results of the analysis, though it is strongly cathected, albeit more often narcissistically.

The dead mother refuses to die a second death. Very often, the analyst says to himself: 'This time it's done, the old woman is really dead, he (or she) will finally be able to live and I shall be able to breathe a little.' Then a small traumatism appears in the transference or in life which gives the maternal imago renewed vitality, if I may put it this way. It is because she is a thousand-headed hydra whom one believes one has beheaded with each blow; whereas in fact only one of its heads has been struck off. Where then is the beast's neck?

A habitual preconception expects one to delve to the deepest level: to the primordial breast. This is a mistake: that is not where the fundamental fantasy lies. For, in the same way that it is the relation with the second object in the Oedipus situation that retroactively reveals the complex which affects the primary object, the mother, likewise, it is not by attacking the oral relation face on that one can extirpate the core of the complex. The solution is to be found in the prototype of the Oedipus complex, in the symbolic matrix which allows for its construction. Then the dead mother complex delivers its secret: it is the fantasy of the primal scene.

Contemporary psychoanalysis has understood, many indications attest to it – belatedly, it is true – that if the Oedipus complex remains the indispensable structural reference, the determining conditions for it are not to be sought in its oral, anal or phallic forerunners, seen from the angle of realistic references – for orality, anality or phallicity depend on partly real object relations – nor either in a generalized fantasizing of their structure, 'à la Klein', but in the isomorphic fantasy of the Oedipus complex: that of the primal scene. I emphasize this fantasy of the primal scene to stress the difference here from the Freudian position as it is expounded in the 'Wolf Man' (Freud, 1918b), where in the controversy with Jung, Freud searches for proof of its reality. Now, what counts in the

primal scene is not that one has witnessed it but precisely the contrary, namely that it has taken place in the absence of the subject.

In the case with which we are concerned, the fantasy of the primal scene is of capital importance. For it is on the occasion of an encounter between a conjuncture and a structure, which brings *two* objects into play, that the subject will be confronted with memory traces in relation to the dead mother. These memory traces have been forcibly repressed by decathexis. They remain, so to speak, in abeyance within the subject, who has only kept a very incomplete memory of the period relative to the complex. Sometimes a screen memory, of an anodyne nature, is all that is left of it. The fantasy of the primal scene will not only recathect these vestiges, but will confer to them, through a new cathexis, new effects which constitute a real *conflagration*, that sets fire to the structure which gives the complex of the dead mother retrospective significance.

Every resurgence of this fantasy constitutes a *projective actualization*, the projection aiming to assuage the narcissistic wound. By actualized projection I designate a process through which the projection not only rids the subject of his inner tensions by projecting them onto the object, but constitutes a *revivifying* and not a *reminiscence*, an *actual* traumatic and dramatic repetition. What happens to the fantasy of the primal scene in the case that concerns us? On one hand the subject takes account of the insuperable distance that separates him from the mother. This distance makes him realize his impotent rage at being unable to establish contact with the object, in the strictest sense of the term. On the other hand the subject feels himself incapable of awakening this dead mother, of animating her, or rendering life to her. But, on this occasion, instead of his rival being the object who had captivated the dead mother in her experience of bereavement, on the contrary, he becomes the third party who shows himself apt, against all expectation, to return her to life and to give her the pleasure of orgasm.

This is where the revolting aspect of the situation lies, which reactivates the loss of narcissistic omnipotence and awakens the feeling of an incommensurable libidinal infirmity. Of course, in reaction to this situation there will be a series of consequences which may come singly or in groups:

1. The persecution by this fantasy and hatred for the two objects which form a couple to the detriment of the subject.
2. The classic interpretation of the primal scene as a sadistic scene, but where the essential feature is that the mother either has no orgasm and suffers, or else has orgasm in spite of herself, forced to it by the father's violence.

3. A variation of the last situation; when the mother experiences orgasm, she becomes cruel, hypocritical, playing it up, a sort of lewd monster, that makes her the Sphinx of the Oedipus myth, rather than Oedipus' mother.

4. The alternating identification with the two imagos: with the dead mother, whether she remains in her unaltered state or gives herself up to a sado-masochistic type of erotic excitation; with the father, the dead mother's aggressor (necrophilic fantasy), or he who repairs her, through sexual union. More often, depending on the moment, the subject passes from the one to the other of these identifications.

5. Erotic and aggressive delibidinalization of the primal scene to the advantage of intense intellectual activity, which restores narcissism in the face of this confusing situation, where the quest for meaning (which was lost anew) results in the formation of a sexual theory and stimulates an extensive 'intellectual' activity, which re-establishes the wounded narcissistic omnipotence by sacrificing libidinal satisfaction. Another solution: artistic creation, which is the support for a fantasy of auto-satisfaction.

6. The negation, 'en bloc', of the whole fantasy. Ignorance of everything pertaining to sexual relations is highly cathected, making the emptiness of the dead mother and the obliteration of the primal scene coincide for the subject. The fantasy of the primal scene becomes the central axis of the subject's life which overshadows the dead mother complex. This is developed in two directions: forwards and backwards.

Forwards, there is the anticipation of the Oedipus complex, which will then be experienced according to the schema of defences against the anxiety of the primal scene. The three anti-erotic factors, namely hatred, homosexuality and narcissism, will conjugate their effects so that the Oedipus complex is adversely structured.

Backwards, the relation to the breast is the object of a radical reinterpretation. This becomes significant retrospectively. The blank mourning for the dead mother reflects back to the breast which, superficially, is laden with destructive projections. In fact it is less a question of a bad breast, which is ungiving, than a breast which, even when it does give, is an absent breast (and not lost), absorbed with nostalgia for a relation that is grieved for; a breast which can neither be full nor filling. The consequence of this is that the recathexis of the happy relation to the breast that existed prior to the occurrence of the dead mother complex, is this time affected with the fleeting signal of a catastrophic threat, and, if I dare say so, it is a *false breast*, carried within a *false self*, nourishing a *false baby*. This happiness was only a decoy. 'I have never been loved'

becomes a new outcry which the subject will cling to and which he strives to confirm in his subsequent love-life. It is evident that one is faced with a situation of mourning which is impossible, and that the metaphoric loss of the breast cannot be worked through for this reason. It is necessary to add a precision concerning oral cannibalistic fantasies. Contrary to what happens in melancholia, here there is no regression to this phase. What one witnesses above all is an identification with the dead mother on the level of the oral relation and with the defences which arise from it, the subject's fearing to the utmost either the ultimate loss of the object or the invasion of emptiness.

The analysis of the transference by means of these three positions will lead to the rediscovery of the early happiness that existed prior to the appearance of the dead mother complex. This takes a great deal of time, and one has to work it over more than once before marking a victory, namely before blank mourning and its resonance with castration anxiety allow one to reach a transference repetition of a happy relationship with a mother who is alive at last and desirous of the father. This result supposes one has passed through the analysis of the narcissistic wound, which consumed the child in the mother's bereavement.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRANSFERENCE

I cannot dwell on the technical implications which arise in those cases where one may identify the dead mother complex in the transference. This transference presents remarkable features. The patient is strongly attached to the analysis – the analysis more than the analyst. Not that the analyst escapes from it, but the cathexis of the transference object, though it seems to present the whole scale of the libidinal spectrum, takes deep root in a tonality of a narcissistic nature. Beyond acknowledged expressions which give rise to affects, which are very often dramatized, this can be explained by secret disaffection. This is justified by a rationalization of the type 'I know the transference is but a lure, and everything is quite impossible to carry out with you, in the name of reality: so what is the use?'. This position is accompanied by the idealization of the analyst's image, whether it is a question of maintaining it as it is, or of being seductive, to attract his interest and his admiration.

Seduction takes place in the area of the intellectual quest, the search for lost meaning, which reassures intellectual narcissism and which constitutes as many precious gifts for the analyst; all the more so to the extent that this activity is accompanied by a richness of representation and a gift for auto-interpretation which is quite remarkable, that

contrasts with its meagre effect on the patient's life, which is only slightly modified, especially in the affective sphere.

The analysand's language often adopts rhetoric here, which I described in an article concerning narcissism (Green, 1976): narrative style. Its role is to move the analyst, to implicate him, to call him to witness in the recital of conflicts which are encountered outside; like a child telling his mother of his day at school and the thousand small dramas which he has experienced, to attract her interest and make her participate in what he has been through during her absence.

One may guess that narrative style is hardly associative. When associations are produced, they coincide with a movement of discrete withdrawal, which makes one feel that all is said as though it were the analysis of someone else, who is not present at the session. The subject disconnects, becomes detached, so as not to be overcome by revivifying emotion, rather than reminiscence. When he gives way to it, naked despair shows itself.

In fact there are two notable traits in the transference. The first is the non-domestication of the instincts: the subject cannot renounce incestuous desire, nor, as a consequence, consent to mourning for the mother. The second, and more remarkable trait, is that the analysis induces emptiness. This is to say that, when the analyst succeeds in touching an important element of the nuclear complex of the dead mother, for a brief instant, the subject feels himself to be empty, blank, as though he were deprived of a stop-gap object, and a guard against madness. Effectively, behind the dead mother complex, behind the blank mourning for the mother, one catches a glimpse of the mad passion of which she is, and remains, the object, that renders mourning for her an impossible experience. The subject's entire structure aims at a fundamental fantasy: to nourish the dead mother, to maintain her perpetually embalmed. This is what the analysand does to the analyst: he feeds him with the analysis, not to help himself to live outside the analysis, but to prolong it into an interminable process. For the subject wants to be the mother's polar star, the ideal child, who takes the place of an ideal dead object, who is necessarily invincible, because not living, which is to be imperfect, limited, finite.

The transference is the geometric space of condensations and displacements reverberating between the fantasy of the primal scene, the Oedipus complex and the oral relation which are constituted by a double inscription: peripheral, luring and central, voracious, around the blank mourning for the dead mother. What is essentially lost here is contact with the mother, who is secretly maintained in the depths of the psyche,

and concerning whom all attempts of replacement by substitute objects are destined to fail.

The dead mother complex gives the analyst the choice between two technical attitudes. The first is the classic solution. It carries the danger of repeating the relation to the dead mother by an attitude of silence. But I fear that, if this complex is not noticed, the analysis may sink into funereal boredom, or into the illusion of a libidinal life, finally rediscovered. In any event, the time for despair cannot be avoided and disillusionment will be harsh. The second, which I prefer, is that which, by using the setting as a transitional space, makes an ever-living object of the analyst, who is interested, awakened by his analysand, giving proof of his vitality by the associative links he communicates to him, without ever leaving his neutrality. For the capacity to support disillusionment will depend on the way the analysand feels himself to be narcissistically invested by the analyst. It is thus essential that the latter remains constantly awake to what the patient is saying, without falling into intrusive interpretation. To establish links which are proffered by the preconscious, which supports the tertiary processes, without short-circuiting it by going directly to the unconscious fantasy, is never intrusive. And, if the patient does express this feeling, it is quite possible to show him, without being excessively traumatizing, the defensive role of this feeling against a pleasure which provokes anxiety.

For one will have understood that it is passivity that is at the heart of the conflict, here: passivity or passivation as primary femininity, femininity common to the mother and the infant. The blank mourning for the dead mother will be the common body of their deceased loves.

When analysis has succeeded in rendering life, at least partially, to the aspect of the child which is identified with the dead mother, a strange reversal will take place. Restored vitality remains the prey of a captive identification. What then happens is not easily interpretable. The former dependency of the child upon the mother, at a time when the infant still needs the adult, becomes inverted. From now on, the relation between the child and the dead mother is turned inside-out like the fingers of a glove. The healed child owes his health to the incomplete reparation of the mother who remains ill. This is translated by the fact that it is then the mother who depends on the child. This seems to me to be a different movement from that which is usually described as reparation. It has less to do with positive acts, which are the expression of remorse, than simply a sacrifice of this vitality on the altar of the mother, by renouncing the use of these new potentialities of the ego, to obtain possible pleasures. The interpretation to give the analysand then is that everything is happening

as though his activity were aimed at furnishing the analysis with an occasion to interpret, less for himself than for the analyst, as though it were the analyst who needed the analysand, contrary to what had been the case previously.

How is one to explain this change? Behind the manifest situation there is an inverted vampiric fantasy. The patient spends his life nourishing his dead, as though he alone has charge of it. Keeper of the tomb, sole possessor of the key of the vault, he fulfils his function of foster-parent in secret. He keeps the dead mother prisoner, and she remains his personal property. The mother has become the infant of the child. It is for him to repair her narcissistic wound.

A paradox arises here: if the mother is in mourning, dead, she is lost to the subject, but at least, however afflicted she may be, she is there. Dead and present, but present nonetheless. The subject can take care of her, attempt to awaken her, to cure her. But in return, if cured, she awakens and is animate and lives, the subject loses her again, for she abandons him to go about her own affairs, and to become attached to other objects – with the result that the subject is caught between two losses: presence in death, or absence in life. Hence the extreme ambivalence concerning the desire to bring the dead mother back to life.

METAPSYCHOLOGICAL HYPOTHESES: THE EFFACEMENT OF THE PRIMARY OBJECT AND THE FRAMING STRUCTURE¹

Contemporary clinical psychoanalysis has been engaged in defining more precisely the characteristics of the most primitive maternal imago. In this respect Melanie Klein's work accomplished a mutation in theory even though she was mainly concerned with the internal object, as she was able to represent it, as much through the analysis of children as through the analysis of adults of psychotic structure, and without taking account of the part played by the mother in the constitution of her imago. Winnicott's work was born of this neglect. But Klein's disciples, without sharing Winnicott's views, recognized the necessity of readjusting her ideas on this subject, starting with Bion. In fact, Melanie Klein went to the limit of what could be attributable to a group of innate dispositions concerning the respective strength of the death and life instincts present in the baby, the maternal variable hardly entering into the question. In this she was following Freud's lead.

Above all, Kleinian contributions concentrated on projections relative

¹ 'La structure encadrante'. This notion combines in the word 'cadre' the meaning of 'frame', but is also used in the French sense of the 'setting', 'le cadre analytique' (of technical importance in this paper). [Translator's note.]

to the bad object. Up to a point this was justified in the face of Freud's denial of their authenticity. Frequently one has noted the way he overshadowed the 'bad mother' with his immovable faith in the quasi-paradisical bond uniting the mother to her infant. So it fell to Melanie Klein to touch up this *partiel* and partial picture of the mother-infant relationship, and this all the more easily as the cases she analysed – whether children or adults –, being mainly of a maniac-depressive or psychotic structure, revealed the evidence of such projections. Thus an abundant literature describes to the full this omnipresent internal breast which threatens the infant with annihilation, with fragmentation and infernal cruelty of all kinds, that a mirror-relation links with the baby, who defends himself, as well he may, by projection. When the schizo-paranoid phase starts to give way to the depressive position, the latter, which coincides with the unification that links the object and the ego, has as a fundamental characteristic the progressive cessation of the projective activity, and the fact that the infant becomes able to assume his own aggressive drives – he becomes 'responsible' with regard to them, in a way –, which in turn encourages him to take care of the maternal object, to worry about her, to fear losing her, by reflecting his aggressivity onto himself by way of archaic guilt and with the aim of reparation. This is why, more than ever, there is no question here of incriminating the mother.

In the configuration that I have described, where vestiges of the bad object may persist, as a source of hatred, I suspect that hostile characteristics are secondary to a primary imago of the mother, where she happened to be devalued by a mirror reaction of the child who was affected by her bereavement. This leads us to develop the hypothesis that has already been proposed. When conditions are favourable to the inevitable separation between the mother and the child, a decisive mutation arises in the depths of the ego. The maternal object in the form of the primary object of fusion fades away, to leave the place to the ego's own cathexes which will found his personal narcissism. Henceforth the ego will be able to cathect its own objects, distinct from the primitive object. But this effacement of the mother does not make the primitive object disappear completely. The primary object becomes a 'framing-structure' for the ego, sheltering the negative hallucination of the mother. Most certainly, the representations of the mother continue to exist and are projected inside this framing structure onto the backdrop of the negative hallucination of the primary object. But they are no longer *frame-representations* or, to make myself clearer, representations that fuse what comes from the mother with what comes from the child. One may

as well say that they are no longer representations whose corresponding affects express a vital character, which is indispensable for the baby's existence. These primitive representations hardly deserve the name of representations. They are the compounds of barely outlined representations, probably of a hallucinatory nature rather than representative, and of loaded affects which one could almost call affective hallucinations. This is just as true in the hopeful anticipation of satisfaction as in states of want. When these are prolonged, they give rise to the emotions of anger, rage and then catastrophic despair. Now the effacement of the maternal object that has been transformed into a framing structure comes about when love for the object is sufficiently sure to play this role of a container of representative space. This latter is no longer threatened with cracking; it can face waiting and even temporary depression, the child feeling supported by the maternal object even when it is not there. The framework, when all is said and done, offers the guarantee of the maternal presence in her absence, and can be filled with fantasy of all kinds, to the point of, and including, aggressive violent fantasies which will not imperil the container. The space which is thus framed constitutes the receptacle of the ego; it surrounds an empty field, so to speak, which will be occupied by erotic and aggressive cathexes, in the form of object representations. This emptiness is never perceived by the subject, because the libido has cathected the psychical space. Thus it plays the role of primordial matrix of the cathexes to come.

However, if a traumatism such as blank mourning occurs before the infant has been able to establish this framework solidly enough, there is no psychical space available within the ego. The ego is limited by this framing structure, but in the circumstances this frame surrounds a conflictual space which strives to hold the mother's image captive, struggling against its disappearance, and alternately noting the revival of the memory traces of lost love, with nostalgia, which is expressed by the impression of painful vacuity. These alternations reproduce the ancient conflict of unsuccessful primary repression, in the measure that the effacement of the primordial object will not have been an acceptable experience, nor mutually accepted, by the two parties of the former mother-infant symbiosis.

Arguments on the theme of the antagonism between primary narcissism and primary object-love are perhaps . . . without object. All depends on the point of view adopted. That primary object-love can be observed straightaway by a third party, an onlooker, can hardly be disputed. On the other hand, that this love should be narcissistic from the child's point of view could hardly be otherwise. Doubtless, the debate has been

obsured by differing uses of the term of primary narcissism. If by such a term one wishes to designate a primitive form of relation where all cathexes come from the child to start with – which is probably distinct from auto-erotism which has already elected certain erogenous zones on the baby's body – then, there is certainly a characteristic primary narcissistic structure of inaugural forms of cathexis. But if one means by primary narcissism the accomplishment of a feeling of unity which is established only after a phase dominated by fragmentation, then one must conceive of primary narcissism and object-love as two modes of cathexis centred around opposite and distinct polarities. For my part, I see here two successive moments of our mythical construction of the psychical apparatus. I am inclined to believe that the earliest primary narcissism encompasses *all* cathexes in a confused way, including primary object-love, and even what we might symmetrically call primary object-hatred, because it is this early subject-object indistinction which characterizes the type and quality of the cathexes. Thus it is that, when separation is accomplished, one may with justification oppose later primary narcissism, in the sense of designating the sole cathexes of the ego, as distinct from object cathexes.

To complete this description, I propose to distinguish a *positive* primary narcissism (attachable to Eros), tending towards unity and identity, from a *negative* primary narcissism (attachable to the destructive instincts), which is not manifested by hatred towards the object – this is perfectly compatible with the withdrawal of positive primary narcissism – but by the tendency of the ego to undo its unity and to proceed towards nought. This is clinically manifest by the feeling of emptiness.

What we have described under the name of the dead mother complex helps us to understand the failures of favourable evolution. We watch the failure of the experience of individuating separation (Mahler) where the juvenile ego, instead of constituting the receptacle for cathexes to come, after separation, relentlessly endeavours to retain the primary object and relive, repetitively, its loss, which on the level of the primary ego (which is melded with the object) gives rise to the feeling of narcissistic depletion, expressed phenomenologically by the sentiment of emptiness, so characteristic of depression, which is always the result of a narcissistic wound experienced on the level of the ego.

The object is 'dead' (in the sense of not alive, even though no real death has come about); hence it draws the ego towards a deathly, deserted universe. The mother's blank mourning induces blank mourning in the infant, burying a part of his ego in the maternal necropolis. To

nourish the dead mother amounts, then, to maintaining the earliest love for the primordial object under the seal of secrecy enshrouded by the primary repression of an ill-accomplished separation, of the two partners of primitive fusion.¹

It seems to me that psychoanalysts should have little difficulty in recognizing a familiar clinical configuration in the description of the dead mother complex, which may however differ in one or another aspect from my own account of it. Psychoanalytic theory is elaborated from a limited number of observations, and it may well be that what I have described covers at the same time sufficiently general characteristics to coincide with the experiences of others, and more singular characteristics which would be particular to the patients I have had in analysis.

Although I may perhaps have schematized the structure of this dead mother complex, it is quite possible that it may be found in more rudimentary forms. In this case one might imagine that the traumatic experience to which I have alluded has been either more discrete or more tardy, taking place at a time when the child was better able to support its consequences, and thus having only to resort to *partial* depression, more moderate, and easier to overcome.

It may seem surprising that I should attribute such an important role to a maternal traumatism, at a period in psychoanalysis when one tends to insist a great deal more on the vicissitudes of intra-psychical organization and when one is more prudent about the role played by conjuncture. As I indicated at the outset of this work, the depressive position is a fact that is now recognized by all authors, whatever explanations they may give. On the other hand, the depressing effects of early separations between mother and infant have been described for years, without however, any general accord being established between the importance of the trauma and the observed depressive manifestations. In the dead mother complex, the situation cannot be reduced to the level of the

¹ What I have just described cannot fail to evoke the very interesting ideas of N. Abraham and M. Torok. However, even if, on numerous points, our conceptions converge, they differ elsewhere on a theme to which I attach great importance, namely the clinical and metapsychological significance of states of emptiness. The manner in which I attempt to account for them is taken up in a continuous thread of thought, where, after having tried to define the heuristic value of the concept of negative hallucination and proposing the concept of 'blank psychosis' with J. L. Donnet, I have in this work been engaged on the elucidation of what I call blank mourning. One might summarize these differences by stating that narcissism constitutes the axis of my theoretical reflection, whereas N. Abraham and M. Torok are essentially concerned with the relation between incorporation and introjection, with the crypt-like effect to which they give rise.

common depressive position, nor assimilated with the serious traumatisms of real separations. In the case that I describe, there has been no effective break in the continuity of the mother-infant relationship. However, independently of the spontaneous evolution towards the depressive position, there has been an important maternal contribution which intervenes, disturbing the positive outcome of the depressive phase and complicating the conflict, because of the reality of maternal decaethesis which is sufficiently perceptible, by the infant, to wound his narcissism. This configuration seems to me to conform to Freud's views on the aetiology of the neuroses – in the wide sense –, where the child's psychical make-up is formed by the combination of his personal inherited dispositions and the events of his earliest infancy.

FREUD AND THE DEAD MOTHER

The starting-point of this work is contemporary clinical experience which is the outcome of Freud's writings. I have not adopted the usual course, namely to begin by seeking out the new approaches that Freud's work opens up, but have preferred on the contrary to leave this until the end of the chapter. In fact it is only at a late stage, almost at the end of proceedings, that repression in me has lifted, and that I have remembered retrospectively something in Freud that can be related to my subject. It is not in 'Mourning and melancholia' (1917e) that I found Freud's support, but in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900a).

In the last chapter of the *Traumdeutung*, and already in the first edition, Freud tells a final personal dream concerning the arousal by dreams (*ibid.*, p. 583). It is the dream of the 'beloved mother', and the only childhood dream he recounted, either in this work or in his published correspondence. In this matter, Fliess' psychical deafness made one of Freud's dead mothers of him, after having been his eldest brother. With the help of previous interpretations by Eva Rosenfeld and Alexander Grinstein, Didier Anzieu (1986) gives a remarkable analysis of it. Here I cannot go into all the details of this dream or the multiple commentaries to which it gives rise. I shall limit myself to the reminder that its manifest content shows 'my beloved mother, with a peculiarly peaceful, sleeping expression on her features, being carried into the room by two (or three) people with birds' beaks and laid upon the bed'. The dreamer awakes in tears and screaming, interrupts his parents' sleep. It is an anxiety dream which is interrupted on waking. The commentators who analyze this dream, beginning with Freud himself, do not pay sufficient attention to the fact that it is a dream that could not be dreamed, a dream that may have been a dream, if ever it had been dreamed through, one would

almost have to construct the end. Which, the two or the three – an essential hesitation –, will join the mother in her sleep? In his uncertainty, the dreamer can stand no more; he interrupts, killing two birds with one stone – the dream and the parents' sleep. Detailed analysis of the dream, both by Freud and his commentators, ends up with the conjunction of two themes: that of the dead mother and that of sexual intercourse. In other words, we find confirmation of my hypothesis concerning the relation between the dead mother, the primal scene and the Oedipus complex; here, besides the object of desire, two (or three) people with birds' beaks are brought into play.

The associations shed light on the origin of these people derived from the Philippson Bible. Grinstein's enquiry (1972) allows one to attach this representation to figure 15 of this Bible, which was a gift of Freud's father, an illustration which becomes the object of a condensation. In effect, in this illustration, it is not a question of gods with falcons' heads, which was Freud's first association, but of two pharaonic personages of Lower Egypt – I emphasize Lower – while the birds surmount the columns of the bed. I think this is an important condensation, for it displaces the birds from the mother's bed to the head of the personages, who are two here, and not three. Thus the mother is perhaps attributed with a bird-penis.¹ The corresponding text illustrates the verse 'King David follows the litter (of Abner)', which, as Anzieu remarks, abounds with themes of incest, parricide and, I stress this, fratricide.

Anzieu interprets the two personages correctly, I believe, as the representations of Jacob Freud, grandfatherly image, and Philipp, the younger half-brother of Freud, paternal image. This because, as everyone knows, Philipp, who was born in 1836, was himself only one year younger than Freud's mother, and Freud had Philipp's eldest son Emanuel as a playmate. In the dream the dead mother has the expression of the maternal grandfather on his deathbed, on October 3, 1865, when Sigmund was nine and a half. Thus this is a bereavement which must have resonated upon the relationship between Amalie Freud and her son. The commentators have noted the erroneous dating in this dream, which was not rectified by Freud. He says he dreamed it when he was seven or eight years old, i.e., a year and a half or two years prior to the time of the grandfather's death, which is impossible. Whereas others have simply noted the error and corrected it, it seems to me a revealing lapsus, and it leads me to conclude that it is not the bereavement of the maternal grandfather that is in question, but a former bereavement. The

¹ Bird = *oiseau*, also a familiar term for penis. [Translator's note.]

significant period in the error – a gap of one and a half to two years – reminds me of another bereavement of the mother: that of Freud's younger brother, Julius, who was born when Sigmund was seventeen months old (almost a year and a half) and who died when he was twenty-three months old (nearly two). Hence the double explication: *two (or three)* people, namely Jacob, Philipp or Jabob, Philipp and *Philippson*: Philipp's son, Julius; because in 1859, when Freud was three, he dreads that his mother might be pregnant again, like the Nanny, and that Philipp might have shut her in the cupboard, have her 'boxed up'.

This, I shall note in passing, is why the young initiator, the *concierge's* son who reveals the information on sexual intercourse, is supposedly called Philipp. It is Philipp who copulates with Amalie, and it is Philippson (Julius) who allows Sigmund to understand the relation between copulating, giving birth and dying . . . Julius' name will be forgotten, that of the painter Julius Mosen, who Freud writes about in his letter to Fliess, on August 26, 1898 (Masson, 1985). Mosen-Moses, we know what follows and also Freud's insistence on making an Egyptian of Moses, namely, to make the point clearly, the son, not of Amalie and Jacob, but of the *concierge*, or if need be, of Amalie and Philipp. This also sheds light on Freud's conquest of Rome, if one remembers that he quotes Livy (Freud 1900a, p. 398n) in connection with the incestuous dreams of Julius Caesar.

I understand better the importance of this age, eighteen months, in Freud's works. It is the age of his grandson playing with the wooden reel (mother dead–mother resurrected), who died when he was about two, and which will be an occasion for intense mourning, though it is minimized. This is also the age at which the Wolf Man supposedly witnessed the primal scene.

Anzieu makes two remarks which link with my own deductions. He shows, concerning the preconscious elaboration of Freud, the *rapprochement* that there is between Freud and Bion, who, besides love and hatred, gave a specific place to knowledge as a primordial reference within the psychical apparatus: the quest for meaning. Finally, he concludes that one should hold suspect Freud's insistence on reducing the specific anxiety of the dream, anxiety over the mother's death, to something else.

There is only one other hypothesis pending, that of the oral relationship. Another dream which is in keeping with that of the 'beloved mother' refers to this, where the mother appears to be alive: the dream of the 'Three Fates' (1900a, pp. 204–5). In this dream Freud's mother is making *Knödel*, and while little Sigmund is waiting to eat them she

intimates that he should wait until she is ready ('these were not definite spoken words', Freud adds). One knows that his associations with this passage concern death. But further on, when he has put the analysis of the dream aside, he comes back to it, to write: 'My dream of the three Fates was clearly a hunger dream. But it shifted the craving for nourishment back to a child's longing for his mother's breast, and it made use of an innocent desire as a screen for a more serious one which could not be so openly displayed' (*ibid.*, p. 233). Probably, and how can one deny it when the context is so pertinent, but here again it would be as well to remain suspicious. One should especially question this triple image of woman in Freud's thinking, which is examined again in the 'Theme of the Three Caskets': the mother, the wife (or beloved), and death. The censure of the beloved has been much discussed in recent years (e.g. Fain and Braunschweig, 1971). I in my turn wish to point out the censure of the dead mother: the mother of silence as heavy as lead.

Now our trilogy is complete. Here we are again referred to the metaphoric loss of the breast, interrelating with the Oedipus complex, or the primal scene fantasy, and that of the dead mother. The lesson of the dead mother is that she too must die one day so that another may be loved. But this death must be slow and gentle so that the memory of her love does not perish, but may nourish the love that she will generously offer to her who takes her place.

Thus we have come full circle. It is again significant retrospectively. I have known of these dreams for many years, as well as the commentaries to which they have given rise. One and the other were printed in my mind as significant memory traces of something that seemed to me to be obscurely important, without my knowing exactly how or why. These traces have been recathected by the discourse of certain analysands whom, at a given moment, I was able to hear, though not before. Is it this discourse that permitted me to rediscover Freud's written word, or is it the cryptomnesia of this reading that made me permeable to my analysands' words? In a rectilinear conception of time, this hypothesis is the correct one. In the light of Freud's concept of deferred action, it is the other that is true. Be it what it may, in the concept of deferred action, nothing is more mysterious than this preliminary statute of a registered meaning which remains in abeyance in the psyche while awaiting its revelation. For it is a question of 'meaning', otherwise it would not have been able to be recorded in the psyche. But this meaning-in-waiting is only truly significant when it is reawakened by a recathexis which takes place in an absolutely different context. What meaning is this? A lost

meaning, refound? It would give too much credit to this presignificative structure, and its rediscovery is much more of the order of a discovery. Perhaps potential meaning which only lacks the analytic – or poetic? – experience to become a veridical experience.

On Private Madness



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