

MELANIE KLEIN ON ENVY

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ENVY AND GRATITUDE (1957)

By the 1950's Mrs Klein had assumed a central position within the British Society; a position buttressed and consolidated by an ever increasing group of influential adherents. In the Preface to "*New Directions in Psychoanalysis*", published in celebration of her 70th birthday, Ernst Jones wrote:-

"it's a matter for wide satisfaction that Mrs Klein has lived to see her work firmly established"

One might have thought that things could have rested there, at the age of 70, after 30 years of contribution. But Melanie Klein wasn't finished yet!

In a fragment of a letter discovered in her unpublished papers, she says:-

"Freud certainly did not draw the full conclusions from his own work."

She postulates that:-

"this may have been due to his age, his illness and also the fact that there might be a point beyond which no person, however great a genius, can go with his own discoveries."

She adds that:-

"Abraham's work too was not carried further, owing to his death."

The letter ends with the warning that regressive components within the Society may serve to undermine her work.

Quote:

"This danger is nowhere greater than where the superego and the deeper layers of the unconscious are concerned. This is my reason for saying in my letter to you, that if the regressive tendencies in our Society prevail, Psychoanalysis in its essence might go under. These hostile, regressive tendencies, though they are particularly directed against my work, in fact also attack much of what Freud himself found."

In 1953 Klein's health began to deteriorate. She was admitted to hospital due to dizzy spells which were particularly frightening when they occurred on the stairs at home. Phyllis Groskurth says that she was highly agitated about her health, an agitation aggravated by the necessity to sell her much loved home at Clifton Hill, her home for 20 years, in order to move into a ground floor apartment.

One must wonder how much her concerns about the regressive and undermining influences within the Society, influences she feared threatened the viability of her work, were also in part a reflection of a similar anxiety going on internally. As Maria Theresa so graphically portrayed last week, Melanie Klein's greatest contributions were a consequence of her struggles with her own experience, anxieties and internal objects. Her work on Envy and Gratitude was no exception. Melanie Klein died on 22 September 1960. Betty Joseph has said that even in hospital, she was intent on exploring the experience of death. *"She was hungry for experience."*

It was in this state of mind that Melanie Klein wrote "Envy and Gratitude II – her last major contribution to psychoanalysis. She delivered the paper at the Geneva Congress in 1955.

The paper, *"A Study in Envy and Gratitude"*, in keeping with Melanie Klein's character and personality, was provocative, controversial, some thought brilliant, others thought outrageous. It is frequently commented that Mrs Klein liked to choose a new hat to wear to each Congress. Hanna Segal says that it was a joke amongst her friends that the moment the Congress paper was ready, she would turn all her attention to choosing her Congress hat and hoped that nearly as much notice would be taken of the hat as of the paper. Apparently, at this Congress, she looked even more regal and I think should be added, more lively than ever. Phyllis Groskurth comments that some of her English colleagues said she greeted them as though she were the hostess of a very grand garden party.

Yet, however dramatic the hat and regal her presence, this paled to insignificance next to the drama of the paper.

On hearing it, Winnicott buried his head in his hands and was heard to say, *"Oh no, she can't – she can't do this!"*

It was as if envy was the crowning Kleinian concept. Years later Winnicott proclaimed that, *"To this day, 'envy' is a badge indicating who belongs and who does not belong to the Klein group"*. This final paper provoked more controversy and criticism than any preceding it and polarised opinion and allegiances within the Society more than any other.

What was so provocative? It could be said that the concept of “*Envy*” per se is provocative and unpalatable; we’re disinclined to include it as part of our own emotional repertoire. Little attention had been paid to the issue in Psychoanalytic Theory, with the exception of Freud’s discussion of “*Penis – envy*”. Interestingly enough, Freud saw envy in terms of weakness and as a feminine affliction. The idea of men being envious, as opposed to being envied, seemed quite remote to Freud, and perhaps also to many members of this still predominantly male Psychoanalytical Society of 1955.

Yet, there was a lot more to it than that!

The fundamental statement of the paper, the statement that many felt did take Klein beyond the point that even a genius can go, was this:-

“I consider that envy is an oral sadistic and anal sadistic expression of destructive impulses, operative from the beginning of life and having a constitutional basis.”

How could she contend this? – “*operative from the beginning of life and having a constitutional basis?*”

This brought the controversy over how much ego and object awareness there is at birth right back into focus. Similarly, it aroused the ever present and still present conflict over views concerning nature of aggression – to what degree is aggression innate and constitutional as opposed to reactive to a frustrating environment? Where was the mother in all this? It was contended that an infant could not be capable of a feeling of envy which many people viewed as quite sophisticated – capable surely of rage and frustration, but not of envy related to good experience. Hanna Segal points out that:-

“It was contended that Klein was reverting to the doctrine of original sin, which she recast as envy”, and generally, that “she blames too much on the infant”.

As Phyllis Groskurth says, “*the presentation of this paper on the first morning of the Congress certainly gave people something to talk about over lunch!*” – and we’re still talking.

I’ll proceed with a discussion of the paper and refer to some clinical material.

Melanie Klein introduces her work by reference to Karl Abraham's paper a "*Short History of the Development of the Libido Viewed in Light of Mental Disorders*" which he wrote in 1924. She regards Abraham's work, and now her own, as bringing out more fully and more deeply Freud's theories concerning the roots of destructive impulses and their significance in terms of development. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle of 1920, Freud's postulation of a Death Instinct, by which he meant a perverse streak in human nature ultimately aiming towards death, laid the basis and germinated the ideas that finally gave birth in Klein's mind to the notion of envy. Klein called envy anything that is an attack on the source or the support of life.

Klein speaks of an innate conflict between love and hate and, as stated earlier, believes that the capacity for both love and hate, or destructive impulses is to some extent constitutional. This constitutional endowment and the relative strength of love and hate, varies from individual to individual, but from the beginning of life, it interacts with external conditions. This means that even when the environment is gratifying, this gratification or potential gratification may be modified or even nullified by the infant's own innate destructiveness.

From the beginning of life, the infant under the influence of oral impulses instinctively endows the breast in its good aspect with all that the infant desires. The good breast is felt to be not only the source of nourishment, but also a font of inexhaustible love, patience, generosity and creativity. In the infant's phantasy, this breast is the prototype of all that is good and life promoting, since it is capable of converting his states of distress into ones of contentment and wellbeing. The introjection of a primal object imbued and enriched by all these fantasies, which Klein says are underlined by gratifying experience in reality, forms the foundation within the infant of hope, trust and a belief in goodness. This forms the basis of satisfactory development and healthy relationships.

Klein says that the infant feels that he concretely internalises the good breast and all it stands for. "*The good breast is taken in, it becomes part of the ego, and the infant who was first inside the mother, now has the mother inside him.*" For the infant, this is experienced at some level as a recreation of the fantasised sense of unity and security experienced in the prenatal state inside the mother.

However, the element of frustration by the breast is, of course, inevitable. The fantasy of this ideal prebirth state can never be permanently recreated. Consequently, the reality of the breast is experienced by the infant at various times as either being sublimely gratifying and inexhaustible, or else, as supremely withholding and abandoning.

The infant idealises the mother/breast in phantasy. When it is unavailable, he imagines that all its goodness and richness is being kept by the breast for itself in a mean and depriving way. This provokes frustration and compounds feelings of hatred and envy. Conversely, when the goodness of the breast is experienced, this can also provoke two opposite reactions in the infant's mind. One reaction is that of gratification leading to love and a primitive form of gratitude, but the other reaction can be in terms of hostility and envy, as gratification is proof of the infinite richness of the breast and of the infant's need and dependency on the mother who supplies it.

These dichotomous experiences reinforce the conflict within the infant's mind between life and death and result in the feeling that both a good and a bad breast exist.

Early emotional life is characterised by the experience of losing and then regaining the good breast.

Melanie Klein proceeds in the paper to make the important distinctions between jealousy, greed and envy.

Jealousy

Jealousy, though based on envy, is a quite sophisticated emotion related to the oedipal triangle. It is primarily based on love, and the prime motivation in jealousy is to be rid of the rival for the loved object. It is the wish to protect and to maintain the loving connection with the other that provokes the rivalrous attack.

Jealousy is quite different to greed. Greed aims at possession of the richness of the object beyond what is needed and with a total disregard of the consequences for the object. It's a ruthless scooping out and insatiable devouring of the object.

I once had a patient who admitted to a fantasy of wanting to take into himself what he imagined to be all my understanding and knowledge; he said, "*Like a mosquito penetrates its victim, fills itself up with blood and then feeds off itself*". He was also very keen on the Samson and Delilah story – Delilah wanted the secret of Samson's great strength – finally he tells her and she cuts off his hair while he sleeps. Consequently, she is rendered the powerful one in possession of the knowledge, and Samson is rendered impotent and powerless.

This mosquito mentality and Delilah way of thinking was, I felt, an expression of greed. An expression of the desire to completely appropriate the breast by means of destructive introjection. The wish is to be able to empty the breast completely, devour it, suck it dry, have it all inside and be able to feed oneself off it, rather than have to feed from the external object.

For my patient, it was the wish to be able to feed off his own mind, rather than have to need mine at all. The problem is though, that when he fantasises that he has plundered and emptied me completely, there's nothing left to introject, but a diminished, depleted and lifeless object. The mosquito can't feed off itself indefinitely.

However, envy is even worse. Mrs Klein believes envy to be one of the most primitive of emotions arising in a part – object relationship and first experienced in relation to the infant's primal object; the mother – breast. Like greed, the aim of envy is to rob and plunder the object, but as well as this, the envious impulse seeks to put badness, primarily bad excrements and unwanted parts of the self into the mother, in order to spoil and to destroy her.

Envy is primarily motivated by hatred and destructiveness, in particular, hatred of and a wish to destroy the good, life giving and creative aspects of the other.

The frequently quoted and famous reference to envy is from Shakespeare's "*Othello*", although as is common, Shakespeare mistakes jealousy for envy.

"Oh, beware my Lord of jealousy (envy)

it is the green eyed monster which

doth mock

the meat it feeds on".

I once heard chilling material shortly before a long Christmas break. My patient started to talk about a pantry cupboard, locked against him and had the fantasy of staring at it, staring hard enough, and long enough, and with such ferocity, that finally the lock would fall from the door, the hinges would rust and disintegrate, staring until finally the door would fall from its frame and the contents of the cupboard would have rotted and decayed.

Whatever different aspects of meaning were contained in this material, there was certainly an expression of envy. It evoked the image of an omnipotent, penetrating stare, invading, breaking down the boundaries, ruining the insides of the mother with his eyes. It evoked images of “*the evil eye*”, the expression “*if looks could kill*”.

However, in this desperate situation, the infant dominated by such fantasies of omnipotent destructiveness, is faced with an object which is as if staring back at him. In the infant's phantasy, all good in the object has been destroyed by means of projective identification; there is nothing to introject but a dead or else retaliatory and sadistic object. This gives rise to tremendous persecutory anxiety and a massive inhibition of introjective mechanisms. Greed is mainly bound up with introjective mechanisms, but envy is dominated by projective ones. The problem is that this maintains a state of impoverishment in the ego. The fantasy is that there is nothing to introject but the product of one's own destructiveness, and all the anxieties associated with it.

The meat is mocked, and then can't be fed from, the contents of the cupboard have been poisoned and spoiled and now, can't be consumed without poisoning.

Jealousy, greed and envy are, of course, interrelated emotions and they interact with each other. Greed may serve as a defence against envy. If in fantasy the object is completely taken inside and possessed, there is nothing outside to envy. Similarly, spoiling may serve a defensive function. If there isn't anything good and unspoiled to want, there's nothing to envy. I think that the ruining of the pantry cupboard and the spoiling of its contents, had this sort of defensive function about it as well as also being an envious attack in itself.

Mrs Klein contends that if envy is excessive, this indicates that paranoid and schizoid features are abnormally strong. Excessive envy fundamentally effects and inhibits development in the paranoid schizoid and depressive position.

Now in order to trace the operation and effects of envy in early development, it is necessary to begin with Klein's conceptualisation of the ego. She believed that the ego exists from the beginning of post natal life, but in rudimentary form and lacking coherence. Its earliest and most important function is to protect the self from what she calls the ***primordial anxiety*** to do with the threat of annihilation as represented by the Death Instinct.

The Life Instinct is manifest in the forces within that push towards love, coming together and integration, as opposed to the Death Instinct aimed at destructiveness, breaking apart and disintegration. The ego attempts to split and to keep separate these two opposing forces and to evacuate or deflect outwards the destructive and disintegrative aspects of the self.

This primary splitting, which by definition is a movement against integration, occurs in part because the ego lacks cohesion at birth, but also because it is a defence against the threat of annihilation; a means of preserving the ego, plus a good aspect of the external object. Yet, if early envy is very intense, other splitting processes come into play which results more in a sense of fragmentation rather than the normal process of splitting into an ideal good and a persecutory bad object. As it is the ideal breast that gives rise to envy, this is the very thing that has to **again attacked** by means of projective mechanisms. This results in tremendous confusion as what is good and bad. The proliferation of attacks gives rise more to a state of fragmentation and disintegration, a proliferation of splitting rather than a more stable and ordered split into good and bad. The good and bad become confused, muddled and mixed up. The ideal object can't be maintained, so there is little good to introject. Even if some identification with the good object is introjected, this then becomes the focus of an internal envious attack and is ruined and broken up from inside.

Excessive envy results in feelings of tremendous confusion and despair; an ideal object can't be preserved, a good internalisation can't be maintained and there is little hope of love or help.

In a desperate effort to maintain a viable self, the good object has to be extremely idealised in order to guarantee its survival. The only way the infant can do this is by divesting itself of its own goodness and projecting this very goodness into the external object. This further impoverishes the ego. However, the envy felt in relation to the good object is inevitably directed even more fiercely towards the idealised object. Consequently, this idealisation and any identification with it is extremely precarious. Moreover, the degree of idealisation of the good object is directly proportional to the degree of destructiveness and persecutory anxiety associated with the bad object. Excessive idealisation is simply a defence against excessive envy. As Mrs Klein says, "*I discovered many years ago in my work with young children, that idealisation is the corollary to persecutory anxiety, a defence against it, the ideal breast is the counter part to the devouring breast*".

Yet another consequence of excessive envy is the premature experience of guilt. However, the ego at this early stage is not yet capable of bearing guilt and guilt is then experienced as persecutory. Similarly, the attacked object arousing guilt is felt to be a persecutor. Depressive anxiety and persecutory anxiety become confused. *“Have I damaged the object, or has the object damaged, is damaging me?”*

This confusion interferes with the working through of both persecutory and depressive anxiety. It seems to me that guilt experienced at a later time, when the ego is more integrated and better able to bear it, would be more to do with fears of having damaged the object, whereas guilt experienced prematurely has more to do with the terror of having annihilated the object, and this, along with the threat of retaliation, precludes any possibility whatsoever of reparation. It's the difference between spoiling and damaging as opposed to absolutely ruining. Premature guilt experienced in the paranoid schizoid position increases persecution and disintegration, and by definition, prevents the working through of the depressive position.

Things are further confused by the fact that excessive envy interferes so fundamentally with the capacity for oral gratification at the breast. Orality may be inhibited and instead genital gratifications and trends may predominate prematurely. The oral relationship is simply genitalised, there is no development and all the anxieties and problems at the oral level are displaced to the genital one. There is a blurring and confusion of oral, anal and genital impulses and fantasies. Sexual sensations may then enter into all areas of functioning.

A patient of mine often referred in sessions to *“the woman with whom I have having sexual intercourse”*. This in fact went on all the time, and with many women, all of whom were kept equally anonymous. There seemed to me to be a pattern that when he'd had some sort of emotional intercourse with me, *“this woman”* tended to come into the picture. I understood this as being a reaction to his fear of the hatred and envy aroused when he had some experience of me as the maternal object. Out of fear of his hatred and envy, he turns away from me to his **own** woman with whom he has intercourse. However, it's a no-name, no-person woman, simply a genitalised part object he turns to in his own mind, in order, I think to escape the depressive and persecutory anxiety aroused when he experiences personal contact with me. His sexual partner cannot be allowed to be a separate person, any more than he can allow real personal contact with me as representing the breast. The difficulties stemming from the oral relationship are simply genitalised.

As with every stage of development, development of the *oedipus* complex of course, is profoundly influenced by excessive envy. The greater the degree of envy, the less equipped the infant is. There is not a sufficiently internalised and stable good object to help him deal with feelings of rivalry, jealousy and loss. Father is fantasised as being a hostile intruder living inside mother, in absolute possession of her. The infant feels that if mother is not possessed absolutely, there is absolute loss of all that is good – the terror of abandonment, the terror of annihilation. If the infant is not in absolute possession, the father is and as such, he constitutes a deadly rival. When paranoid and schizoid mechanisms predominate, the fantasy is that mother and father are locked together; perpetually gaining gratification from each other in every way imaginable to the infant, and in a very mean and sadistic way actively excluding the infant. This, of course, only stimulates greater hatred and envy. The parents can become so inextricably interlinked in the infant's mind that there is no differentiation between them and they remain a terrifyingly combined parental figure arousing overwhelming envy, jealousy and anxiety.

At the oedipal level, excessive jealousy may mask overriding envy, the infant is not jealous of the father as a rival of the loved object, as in a three person relationship, a more normal oedipal situation, but rather is envious of father's attributes. The fantasy wish is to gain possession of the mother, incorporating father's attributes, but not primarily out of love for the mother, rather in order to rob and to empty her of the father. Klein came to see penis envy as being related to this. The infant may defensively, or omnipotently, turn away from the envied breast to the idealised penis, but this of course inevitably becomes the focus of the very envy being defended against. The primary source of excessive penis envy must be understood as being at root related to the breast.

When paranoid and schizoid mechanisms are strong, envy and jealousy remain unmitigated. Consequently, the depressive position and the *oedipus complex* are not able to be negotiated or worked through.

The projection of envy into the object gives rise to a superego of intense hatred and imbued with enormous potential for persecution and retaliation. This internalised superego then focuses its attack, not only against the individual's aggression but also against any good internal object. Whatever creative capacity exists within, any capacity for creative thought itself is then ruthlessly attacked and enviously spoiled. Along with the destruction of the capacity for creativity goes any possibility of reparation. Proper reparation is incompatible with excessive and unmitigated envy. The best that can be achieved is a manic attempt at reparation, but one in which the self remains superior to the object.

Guilt is further exacerbated as the persecutory superego is felt to be a consequence of the individual's own attacks and spoiling of the good primal object. The need for punishment, and retribution for having attacked and damaged the object, keeps the infant locked into a hating and self destructive mechanism.

In summary, the infant overwhelmed by excessive envy becomes trapped in a vicious circle. The more the good object is destroyed, the greater the inhibition of introjective mechanisms and consequently the greater the impoverishment of the ego. The impoverished ego then idealises the good object. The only way the infant can do this is by divesting itself of its own goodness and projecting this very goodness into the external object. Then the link must be broken to protect the psychotic self from retaliation and persecutory guilt and neurotic self from depressive anxiety. This, of course, further impoverishes the ego. It also has the effect of increasing paranoia and persecutory anxiety. Splitting turns into fragmentation, resulting in confusion. There is confusion as to what is good and bad, between persecutory and depressive anxiety, between oral, anal and genital levels, and between self and other. Confusion dominates and at this level, is the basis of psychotic confusions and schizophrenia.

The confrontation of the damage done to the external object arouses premature and intense guilt and the projection of hatred and envy onto the external object produces an enormously persecutory superego.

The infant's attempts to defend against all this merely creates greater fragmentation, more confusion, and due to the sense of impoverishment, even greater envy. This envy then ultimately attacks anything good and creative within the individual and results in the state of hopelessness and despair. Reparation is not felt to be possible. The infant is caught in the grip of a vicious and deadly spiral. The ultimate consequence of the reign of excessive and unmitigated envy is a disintegrative and mad making attack on the mind.

However, in normal development, Klein believes envy to be constitutionally less intense and more able to be mitigated by love. Gratification experienced at the breast fosters admiration, love and gratitude in greater proportion than envy and destructiveness. The ideal breast infused with love and gratitude can be introjected and forms the basis within the ego of a good, loving and life promoting primal object. The object is felt to be full of goodness as is the ego. This creates a benevolent, life promoting spiral, rather than a vicious one where envy dominates. Envy diminishes as gratification increases; with less envy there is greater gratification; when there's less sense of impoverishment, less envy is mobilised. There is less terror in terms of having damaged the object and guilt is not so persecutory. A more loving internalisation allows for the wish and the belief in the possibility of reparation.

In more normal development, envy may be split off or become more integrated within the ego, but although diminished, it remains. In healthy development, Klein believes there to be a movement from the primary self-directed destructiveness of the deep instinct, to a deflection of envy outwards and onto the life-giving object, but then hopefully there can be a further movement. This is a further movement in which envy can be displaced onto rivals for the loved object and becomes modified and fused with jealousy. The envy of the mother's breast is displaced onto the father's penis which then allows for a loving connection to be maintained with the primary object. If not overwhelming, envy remaining in relation to the primary object may become the basis of emulation; the wish to become more like the life-giving and loving object.

However, I think there is also a further step in the opposite direction; the pathological one. This was not so much developed by Melanie Klein, but elaborated by her followers, particularly Rosenfeld and Bion. This final ultimate step is in terms of the idealisation and the celebration of destructiveness – *“the wish to become more like the force against life; the deadly and destructive aspects of the self-object relationship”*.

Now to turn to the clinical situation, the combination of envy and the defences against it largely contributes to, and accounts for, negative therapeutic reactions. These are manifest in difficulties for a patient in taking in, in making use of interpretations and in allowing the analysis to flourish. It may appear “as if” all is going well, but close observation may reveal a chronic, yet subtle undermining of progress. There may be a feeling of lifelessness, passivity or withdrawal. Negative therapeutic reactions may also be expressed as day to day, or even moment to moment fluctuations in the analysis. Interpretations felt as being helpful in the sense of making real contact with the patient, may immediately, or soon after, be followed up by a sense of confusion, fragmentation or persecution. This negativity may, of course, also be expressed in terms of violent and massive reactions.

Envy is one of the most painful emotions to bear. In all of us, the envious aspect of our personality is linked with psychotic anxieties and mechanisms and exposure to it arouses the fear of madness. For the analyst, to touch on the nerve of excessive envy is to risk opening up the patient to the emergence of excruciating pain and guilt, pain often felt to be unbearable and to risk becoming at that moment in the patient's mind, a sadistic persecutor and tormentor.

We are all victims of envy; our own and sometimes the envy of others. If we can't address our own, we can't help our patients with theirs. This, of course, pertains to all analysis, but I think profoundly so in relation to the patient trapped in the grip of envy.

The analyst is tempted to collude with the patient's defences against envy, or to act out projections rather than to contain them. The analyst may be seduced into basking in a defensively idealised transference, rather than evoking its corollary. Both patient and therapist may fear any real development in the work, and in subtle ways make sure that the status quo is maintained. The analysis becomes simply a place for both patient and analyst to hide.

The more intense the envious aspect of the patient, often the greater his capacity to rummage around in mind of the analyst and to hone in on whatever uncertainties, insecurities and vulnerabilities can be discovered.

The envious patient has an overwhelming urge to rid himself of his own illness and distress, and by means of projective identification, lodge this aspect of himself in the analyst, grafting it onto and exploiting any vulnerability. Remnants of the analyst's own narcissism, envy and depressive anxiety can be aroused. I think that it can easily happen that envy can be interpreted intellectually, while at the same time, the analyst can feel quite wounded or even enraged. The intellectual interpretation, though correct, is defensive, and of course, no use to the patient. What the patient experiences, either consciously or unconsciously, is the realisation of both his wishes and his nightmare. It's confirmation that he can, has in fact, damaged the object, not simply in fantasy, but in reality and must bear the consequences. In this situation, what the patient is left with is either a damaged analyst of little value, or else, an envious and retaliatory one.

This is the corollary to containment. It is only if the analyst is able to contain the patient's projections and interpret them, survive rather than feel destroyed, or have to retaliate, can the patient become less fearful of himself and more confident in the liveliness and goodness of his objects, internal and external.

I want to illustrate envy at work in the session with some material from a patient of mine with great difficulty in this area. His envy became constant, pervasive and unrelenting. When I made an interpretation that had some real meaning for him, he generally responded in the same sort of way.

"That's right, that's exactly how I feel, you're right" –

Then followed up with,

"but you're right for the wrong reasons".

He'd proceed to explain to me how I'd been thinking, how it was I'd inadvertently got him right, but in fact, got it wrong. I sensed some real contact with him for a second, but then he had to turn the tables; he became the analyst exploring the working of my mind and then providing me with the right interpretation. I think that the moment he experienced me as "*knowing anything*", this knowledge had to be idealised,

"that's exactly right".

But he then had to own it, take possession of it, as his own creation. The needy, unknowing envious one was projected into me, enabling him to restore himself to his "*all knowing*" position. A position though by definition precluding the possibility of any learning or development.

On one occasion, after a period during which I thought we'd been working quite well together (in fact, I think we both even dared to feel a faint smile of success), envy was provoked as if by magic. The initial response to the interpretation was positive and affirming, but followed up with –

"You know, occasionally Elizabeth, you say something that's really quite perceptive".

The tone of voice and the emphasis, however, was in the direction of – not often though, rarely, hardly ever really. It was as if you could feel the milk being soured.

The interpretation was the result of our work together, something conceived of between us, he had helped and allowed me to perceive something of him in my mind. Did this represent an envied parental intercourse which had to be destroyed? There had been a hint of a movement forward towards separation, integration, relationship, creativity, with all the hope involved in that. But in envy, all hope must be dashed;

"Wipe that smile of success off your face",

anti-hope prevails. Anti-hope leaves you with nothing, but at the same time, if there's nothing to hope for, nothing to desire, there's nothing to envy either. The only hope lies in the capacity of the analyst to contain the destructiveness and to maintain a hopeful connection with a healthier aspect of the patient and in relation to the analyst's own internal objects. Perhaps the only hope the patient could tolerate at this stage, was for soured milk – diluted progress, because anything more than that was absolutely unpalatable and provoked overwhelming destructive reactions.

Envy must be contained and interpreted if the analysis is to progress. However, lack of progress or patient's attacks and criticisms of us are obviously not always related to envy and destructiveness. It could simply be good reality testing. It's too easy to interpret what in fact may be quite valid and justified criticisms of our own failings defensively. Just as it was felt by some, rightly or wrongly, that Mrs Klein had a tendency to "*blame too much on the infant*", we can easily, "*blame too much on the patient*" in order to protect our own narcissistic identifications.

In thinking about patients, I was also reminded of a little boy I saw a long time ago. Sam was 2 years old and psychotic. My first memory of him was of seeing him running down a long corridor towards me, about 6' away from me he suddenly stopped and the look on his face became one of abject terror. He turned, ran in the opposite direction towards his mother, stopped about 6' from her with the same look. He ran to a point equidistant between us, collapsed to the floor and rocked himself into oblivion. I picked him up, the rocking stopped, not because he felt held in my arms, I'd simply taken over the function of movement. Yet his position remained fixed. It was like carrying a block of wood; Sam was gone. What he ran towards was some sort of delusory or hallucinatory object, one which suddenly turned him to terror and threatened him with annihilation. His only escape was to disintegrate his mind. The terror, the threat of annihilation was palpable.

I began therapy with Sam, his mother and I working together with him. After 6 months, I took a 2 week break. The first session back was less eventful than I expected, until it was about time to finish. Sam went to a swivel chair in the playroom, climbed into it and began to spin. When the chair stopped, he doubled over, seeming to be experiencing some unbearable pain in his tummy. He began to sweat profusely, and then he fell into what seemed to be a deep sleep. So deep that neither his mother nor I could rouse him. It was more like he was unconscious. His mother asked:-

"Does this sometimes happen?"

I said:-

"Yes",

but I was as frightened and mystified and confused as she was. It was literally as if Sam was dead and I realised that both his mother and I were frightened that he might die. His mother put him in his stroller, strapped him into his car-seat and took him home. As soon as the front door closed at home, Sam began to revive and 20 minutes later, he was back to usual. This happened at the end of every session for the next 2 weeks and at no other time. Eventually it stopped.

The next time I took a break, something similar happened. Towards the end of the first session back, Sam spun in the chair. When it stopped, he doubled over with the pain inside, began to sweat, but this time instead of being rendered as if dead, he vomited. He was able to get out of himself whatever it was causing so much devastation inside – certainly a tremendously persecutory and destructive object. He also began to “*break out*” in boils. However, the “*death*” hadn’t been able to take him over so deeply, he’d been able to “*get it out*”.

I remember years later, at the end of sessions, when his mother would say:-

“Say goodbye to Mrs Kerr”

And Sam would come up to me, look at me (make eye contact) and then he’d open up his mouth, fill and puff out his little cheeks with air, squish it around inside his mouth and leave – not leave me, or everything outside, of course, everything went home with him in his mouth.

But this marked an enormous development in Sam in that he had some sense that there was something good, something life promoting that he could take in, keep a grip on, instead of feeling caught in the grip of the deadly terrifying and annihilating experience of before.

It was these sorts of experiences and observations with children like Sam that Melanie Klein was able to think about and to make sense of and to help us understand.

Someone asked the question a few sessions ago:-

“Was Melanie Klein hard?”

Maybe a related question is whether Kleinian analysis has to be persecutory? We all know that development is hard, whether it’s as patient, as analyst/therapist or in terms of analytic theory. Klein gives us hard things to think about – envy, destructiveness, separation, loss and despair, but that’s not the question.

I can’t imagine that Melanie Klein was hard in relation to her patients, because I don’t think she could have worked with them in the way she did if it was from the position of a hard, rigid, closed, unfeeling state of mind. She was clearly working as much with the child in herself as with the child in the session and with the developing child of her analytic theory. This can only come from a position of openness, heightened sensitivity and receptiveness, and the capacity to think creatively.

Perhaps the idea that she was hard might also come from the fact that often it's forgotten that she was as much preoccupied with love, life, liveliness, hope and creativity as she was with hate and destructiveness. The thrust of her work was to help and enable her patients to gain insight into aspects of themselves interfering with healthy development. To help the patient mitigate and integrate these destructive aspects, so that the love and creativity of the patient can be allowed to flourish.

Betty Joseph wrote a paper entitled "*Envy in Everyday Life*" which is on the reading list. Envy is no stranger to everyday life. Literature abounds with it. It's in the Bible, Chaucer, Shakespeare as well as the fairy tale literature of childhood. At the end of this series on the work of Melanie Klein, maybe we can be allowed the indulgence of going back to the child, as she did, not so much to the child like Sam, but to the "*getting on well enough*" child, the child in ourselves, we can perhaps relate to more easily.

What immediately comes to my mind from the literature of childhood in relation to envy is this,

*"Mirror mirror on the wall,
Who is the fairest of us all?"*

This echo from childhood we all "*know*", not simply the words, but the competitiveness, murder and envious destructiveness of which it speaks. Something in "*Snow White*" spoke to our imagination as children, indeed has spoken to the imagination of children for generations, long before Klein.

The Brothers Grimm set the fairytale to a very paranoid schizoid tune. You will remember that:-

"Once upon a time, in the middle of Winter, when flakes of snow were falling like feathers from the sky, a Queen sat at her window sewing, and the frame of the window was made of black ebony. And while she was sewing and looking out of the window at the snow, she pricked her finger with the needle, and three drops of blood fell upon the snow and she thought to herself 'would that I had a child as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the ebony frame'".

As happens in fairy tales, soon after she had just that, but when the child was born the Queen died. After a year, the King took himself another wife, who could not bear that anyone could surpass her in beauty. She had a wonderful looking glass and when she stood in front of it, looked at herself and spoke to it, it answered that she was the fairest of all. Yet, little Snow White was becoming more and more beautiful and the time came when the looking glass replied:-

*“Thou are fairer than all who are here Lady Queen,
but more beautiful still is Snow White,
as I ween”.*

The Brothers Grimm say:-

“Then the Queen was shocked and turned yellow and green with envy. Envy grew higher and higher in her heart, like a weed, so that she had no peace day or night”.

Now, if we think of the characters as being aspects of ourselves, representing our internal objects that Melanie Klein describes so vividly, and the fairytale as a dramatisation of what goes on in the mind, what goes on in the interaction between these objects, what do we have? *“The three drops of blood on the snow.”* Is this birth; the beginning of life? But it also brings with it the idea of death – the death of Snow White’s mother.

As Klein contends, issues to do with life and death take up centre stage in the drama of what goes on in the infant’s mind. The two principal characters appear. One is the Snowy White self-Snowy White breast, uncontaminated, pure as the driven snow and in juxtaposition, the other; the wicked stepmother. Is this the mother made wicked by what Klein calls the first step in development; the externalisation of destructiveness; the mother made wicked by the infant’s projections?

When the mirror reflects reality, evidence of one separate and of greater love, beauty and virtue, the Queen is overwhelmed by her hatred, envy and destructiveness. Nothing other than the mirror of her narcissism is tolerable. She orders the Huntsman to *“take the child into the forest, kill her and bring me back her lung and liver as a token”*. Fortunately, the forces towards love and life triumph over those towards destructiveness and the Huntsman spares Snow White. Instead, he cuts out the lung and liver of a young bore which he takes to the Queen.

True to form, the Queen devours the lungs and liver of Snow White. She plunders the insides of the idealised object and in a frenzy of oral incorporation, imagines that she has taken possession of all beauty and virtue. At the same time, her envy abates as she believes that all goodness in the other has been destroyed.

However, as we know, when idealisation magnifies so does persecutory anxiety!

“But now the poor child was all alone in the great forest and so terrified that she looked at all the leaves on the trees, and did not know what to do”.

She runs for a whole day – she runs a mile from this envious and destructive aspect of herself.

Fortunately, she comes upon the little cottage of the Seven Dwarfs.

“She was so hungry and thirsty, that she ate some vegetables and bread from each of the seven little plates and drank a drop of wine out of each mug, for she did not wish to take all from one only”.

-not like the greedy, devouring wicked stepmother in brackets.

But who are these seven little dwarves? We are told that they go into the mountains and they mine for copper and gold, extract richness and goodness from inside the object, but there is no suggestion of plunder or exploitation. They work hard, long and conscientiously, seven days a week – working on the breast, but from a position of love and appreciation of its richness, working hard to internalise its goodness. Snow White’s relationship with the dwarfs is one of love, gratitude, mutual care and protectiveness.

“If you’ll take care of our house, cook, make the beds, wash, sew and knit, if you will keep everything neat and clean, you can stay with us and you will want for nothing”.

The dwarves’ little cottage was resplendent and enriched by the internalisation of the good maternal object.

The dwarves, from a position of love and gratitude, wish to protect the breast from destructiveness.

“Beware of your stepmother, be sure to let no-one come in”.

But of course, this only provokes the Queen. The mirror tells her:-

*“Snow White is alive and well
and no-one is so fair as she”.*

The Brothers Grimm say:-

“So long as she was not the fairest in the whole land, envy let her have no rest”.

Twice the Queen visits the little cottage and attempts and tricks Snow White. Twice Snow White falls down as if dead, but is brought back to life by the devotion of the dwarves. The life and death drama is played out within. Snow White is seduced away from her good relationship with the breast by her own envy and destructiveness, but this good breast/good relationship is then revived and enlivened by her capacity for love and reparation.

But not for long. When the Queen heard from her magic mirror that Snow White lives, *“she trembled with shock and rage. Snow White shall die, even if it costs me my life”*.

This is madness. Pure culture of the death instinct. *“Even if it costs me my life”*. The Brothers Grimm say:-

“Thereupon she went into a quiet, secret, lonely room, where no-one ever came and there she made a very poisonous apple”.

She went into a psychotic part of her mind, poisoned and poisoning – she went into the idealisation of destructiveness.

The apple, *“outside it looked pretty, white with a red cheek, so that everyone who saw it longed for it, but whoever ate a piece of it, must sure die”*.

The Queen disguises herself and tempts Snow White.

“Are you afraid of poison?” said the old woman,

“look, I will cut the apple in two pieces; you eat the red cheek and I will eat the white”.

The apple was so cunningly made that only the red cheek was poisoned. Snow White could resist no longer. But hardly had she a bit of it in her mouth, then she fell down dead. The Queen looked at her with a dreadful look, and the mirror answered:-

“Oh Queen, in this land thou are the fairest of all”.

“Then her envious heart had rest”.

The Brothers Grimm rightly say though:-

“So far as an envious heart can have rest”.

Klein would add that the Queen overwhelmed by her envy and destructiveness has to keep attacking and splitting the breast; the apple into a good and bad aspect. The apple reminiscent of the breast is also reminiscent of Snow White herself.

“Outside it looked pretty, white with a red cheek”.

But inside we know that there's a poisonous part.

Snow White confused by the Queen as to what is good and bad, takes the apple in and falls down dead. She is tricked into introjecting the poisoned breast.

The dwarves come home, try to repair her but to no avail. Reparation seems out of the question.

“The dwarves laid her upon a bier, and all seven of them sat around and wept for her, and wept three days long. They loved her too much to bury her in the dark ground, and instead, placed her in a glass coffin, and all the time, one of the dwarves resided over it. Snow White lies for a long long time in the coffin, looking as if asleep.”

What is happening during this long period of gestation?

Will she move closer to the depressive position? Closer to the dwarves who continue to care for her, weep for her, mourn her and attempt reparation or, will she remain immobilised, locked into the glass coffin of the paranoid schizoid position?

Fortunately, a handsome prince arrives and falls in love with her. Out of love the little dwarves relinquish their precious possession and allow in the idea of a loving couple.

As the King's servants carry away the coffin, they stumble over a tree stump, and with the shock of this movement, the poisonous piece of apple is dislodged from her throat. This movement, motivated by love, is what restores the good breast. The poisonous envy is finally split off and projected and Snow White moves to a genital level, moves into the possibility of a creative partnership with her prince.

However, to rub salt into the wounded narcissism of the Queen, she's invited to the wedding.

“When she went into the wedding, she stood still with rage and fear, she could not stir”.

Persecutory and retaliatory anxiety are at their height.

“Iron slippers had already been put on the fire and they were brought in with iron tongs and set before her. Then she was forced to put on the red hot shoes and dance until she dropped down dead”.

The wicked stepmother meets her fate at the celebration of the loving union, at the wedding. This inflames her so much that she’s finally consumed by her own hatred and envy. There is nothing for her to feast on, but her own destructiveness.

The wicked stepmother meets her end and we are all enormously relieved. She has finally been brought under control and for this moment at least, envy no longer lurks in the background of our minds.

Like all good fair tales, this one has a happy ending.

Within the material of Snow White, perhaps we can discern something of the drama of what goes on in the infant’s mind; some of the fantasies and intrapsychic relationships Klein articulated. This is the narrative the child’s unconscious listens to in the fairy tale. However, the fairytale is limited in the sense that there is not an equal emphasis on the drama of what goes on in the mother’s mind in relation to her infant. Of course, this has also been said of Melanie Klein and it was for her followers, particularly Bion, to develop and to elaborate this aspect of the work – and that’s for next term.