

Transitions in the relation of the self to the internal objects

I would like to illustrate through two dreams, separated by a period of six months, some modifications that I observed in the internal world of a patient over the course of the first four years of analysis. These are dreams that he wrote down and read at the beginning of the sessions and then gave to me. I thought it was important for him that I accepted the written dreams as a way of showing that I accepted him with his present difficulties in verbalizing his inner world. In this way we approached new aspects, dissociated until that moment of the analysis.

In the first dream, a conflict between the most aggressive parts of the self and a tyrannical and unjust paternal object appears. This is reminiscent of the Freudian description of the father of the primordial horde. In the second dream more protective paternal qualities arise, along with normative aspects of the law, less arbitrarily prohibitive and despotic. There is no longer a confused and relentless superego, resulting from the baby's projection of his destructive fantasies into his objects. The prohibitions of the terrifying figure of an authoritarian and absolutist mafia boss leave room for the presence of an ideal ego with valuable and attractive attributes.

Patient's story

The patient, who I'll call Martin, is currently 33 and in his sixth year of treatment.

He was born in Rome, but immediately after his birth his parents decided to move him and his older sister to a small town in Northern Italy. After some years his brother was born.

Martin studied in a prestigious university in central Italy. His family is still living in the same town and, although he lives and works in Rome, he visits them frequently.

He was referred to me by his medical doctor because of acute anxiety symptoms with hypochondriasis. At the same time he was referred to a psychiatrist who treated him with medications for about a year.

During the interviews and the first sessions other symptoms such as ornithophobia, aichmophobia, fear of being homosexual and premature ejaculation appeared. One and a half years later he told me that he felt compelled to ask for therapy due to his premature ejaculation, which he finally admitted was the primary problem he was concerned with.

When he was 10 his childhood ended when his father was arrested for bribery during the period of "Tangentopoli" (the court proceedings related to mass bribery in Italy. "Tangente" means "bribe" in Italian).

Only in the third year of analysis did he report that in his adolescence he was defined as "a puncher of fascists; a skinhead of the left" and was involved in violent acts. He said he came out of that difficult situation by imposing rules of conduct "*much stricter than my parents had imposed on me*". This comment made me think that at that time he manifested a superego of extreme cruelty that on the one hand allowed him to leave this antisocial behavior, but on the other hand was absent, robbed and mistreated.

When Martin started consultations at age 28, he initially gave the impression of someone very formal, very structured; that evoked a boy in latency. Given his initial formal behavior, I was surprised that he could express such violence. At present he would like to act politically, but he is frightened by extremist groups with different ideologies.

When he finished high school, he broke up with his first girlfriend and began a relationship with his current partner. In those years the violent acts completely disappeared and he decided to have a psychological consultation because he feared for an “*attraction-repulsion towards handsome and well-dressed male figures*”. In particular he referred to feeling forced to look at their genitals, which made him afraid that he could be homosexual. In that consultation he was suggested to begin psychotherapy, but he refused.

Especially during the first two years of analysis, the Kleinian theory of early Oedipus represented a valuable theoretical model to which I referred to, to interpret Martin's intense persecutory anxiety and to formulate some hypotheses about his inner world's organization. I conjectured from the first interviews, some of his central unconscious fantasies; themes that he took up at different moments of the analysis, associated with the Ornithophobia:

“When the psychologist (referring to the first consultation he had years before) gave me the Rorschach test, I was very anxious. In those stains I only saw vaginas and sphincters. In one of the cards, I do not remember which one, I saw someone inside a hole that was looking at me. I wanted to control him; I also wish I could control myself”.

The first dream:

“I am in a bar that is also a work place with a garden. Two female co-workers, A and B, are at the bar. I work in the garden for one of the institutes for 'Labor Efficiency'. Next to me are C and D, my male colleagues. The place becomes threatening and I do not reach my goal. There are some plebs that provoke us and a clash begins. The scene changes as some crazy gypsy-mafiosos enclose the chief of the plebs. They are imprisoned worse than animals. The mafia boss dictates unfairly and arbitrarily as in the movie 'Suburra’” [“Suburra” is the name of an old neighborhood of Rome of bad reputation, crowded with prostitutes and drunks. It comes from the Latin “sub-urbis”. Also the English term “suburb” is derived from “sub” = below and “urbs, urbis” = city].

Commentary

It is interesting to note that the moment the plebs appear in the dream, Martin begins to speak in the dialect he surely used at the time he was in his “skin-head” phase. I think his “skin-head” characteristics came alive at that moment in the session. A destructive aspect interrupts the tension that was in search of efficiency and work. I wonder about the destiny of my interpretations, and how he will relate to them from now on.

I noticed above all Martin's eagerness to achieve his objectives of “pleb-skin-heads” that violently disrupt the libidinal order of the first part of the dream, in which the sexual functions are differentiated. His disparaged feminine aspects are split and projected into the female co-workers whom he defines in his associations as “mere secretaries submitting to the boss”. The place of food, as a female role, is separated from the “garden Suburra”, as the sexual place of competition between males.

In "The Sexual State of Mind", Meltzer points out how only in the approach to the depressive position, competition in the "garden" of sexuality is replaced by work capacity. Martin lives life at a very fast pace, with the feeling that he never reaches his goals. He competes with the split and the idealized image of his father. He cannot be perfect, nor can he 'play' in his life. In a session where he is talking about soccer players he says: *"I have to be like Pirlo, that's why I have anxiety about performance. I do not want to be like Ventola"*. He refers to the different technical abilities of these players: Pirlo is the best Italian midfielder and by comparison Ventola is merely mediocre. But it is clear in the chosen names his castration anxiety: "pirlo" is the name given to male genitalia in northern Italy and "ventola", which means "fan", is a reference to female genitals fecalized with flatulence. He is thus trapped in a "phallic-castrated" dichotomy. If he cannot be "perfect", he is "crap".

Especially in the early years of analysis, the paternal imago was strongly split in its idealized and persecutory aspects. On the one hand it was unattainable and on the other was very deteriorated by oedipal defenses. Innumerable times he defined his father with a phrase in Neapolitan dialect as "the rooster standing on a mountain of rubbish", a father-bird-phallic-castrator, smeared with feces.

In this dream his "mad-mafioso" father, with whom he faces, has caught his playful and aggressive pubertal part, the chief of the plebs. He is also a "father-pleb" who has twice been arrested for "bribery", in which Martin identifies himself. That is why he fears that if he undertakes the political career he desires, he will end up in the same way.

The second dream:

"I have ridden my bike through Rome, X [the city where he grew up] and B [the city where he studied]. Once I leave the last city I realize that I am lost. There are two towers that mark a border, aligned along the side of the road. They look like the ones seen in Rome. In the tower there is a guard who thinks, "What is he doing here?" He knows I'm not a threat. As I cycle away, a magistrate, a judge or a distinguished politician quickly pass the barrier that marks that border. I go after him and then he goes away. I realize that those guards are protecting the politician. This is his home. I think I am seen as a threat: "what am I doing here?" A guard in the tower is alarmed and stands up. The magistrate accelerates without looking back. I am afraid that a misunderstanding has been created and that he thinks I will shoot him. For reassurance, I overtake so he can see me. He looks at my face. We split up the moment we approach a side street. I'm going home, which is far away. The problem is that it is getting dark. There is a lot of traffic. I'm afraid the cars will not see me. I do not know what to do, whether to continue pedaling or to stop to be safe. I decide to stop, because the night is advancing and I have no lights, only reflectors. I think about calling home to ask my father to come and get me. I do not know whether I would leave the bike or load it in his car. I do not think it will fit in the car, so I think about hitchhiking. No... I call my father to come and get me, I think he will come. The last doubt is on which side of the road to expect him. I know that he will come on the opposite side of where I currently am, so I decide to cross the road... However I'm afraid to cross and I wake up scared and moaning".

Commentary

Martin left home earlier than his siblings in search of a new city, a new place to study and work. In "Love, Guilt and Reparation" M. Klein (Klein, M. 1937) speaks of a new territory, a new mother who replaces the destroyed body of the inner mother. A promised land: the land from which milk and honey flow.

Martin feels lost and is not finding his direction in life. Following in the footsteps of the politician-magistrate, he returns to the primary scene, intruding into the city that is his father's home. The vehemence in seizing the maternal object, represented by Rome, the city where he and his mother were born, would be, in the words of D. Meltzer, the "... powerful desire to recapture the early fantasy of the hero's return to demand total possession of what belongs to him by right of birth - the mother..." (Meltzer, 1973, p. 153).

The cities that Martin describes in his dreams and stories are often destroyed or deteriorated: degraded peripheries, the ancient ruins of Ercolano, the "Imperial Fora" in Rome. The signifier "Fora", "Fori" in Italian, that is to say "holes", refers us to the early anxieties and to the aforementioned image of the Rorschach test. It also condenses the meanings of "place of food" and "judgment", since the "Fora" in ancient Rome was the place where markets developed and trials were carried out. It is as if Martin would wait for a verdict for the exploitation of the nutritious wealth of the breast.

A fragment of one session illustrates this voracious emotionality of Martin. In relating his discomfort to his "premature ejaculation", he associates this sexual disorder with silence in the session, his dissatisfaction with the scarcity of interpretations that nourish him as he wishes. He says:

"The silence is incapable of leaving something... it is like music: there has to be notes and pauses so that there is a melody. But I have the fervor to know all the notes and the chords, however I do not understand the silence, I have no rhythm [...] [My girlfriend] is a symphony of notes and pauses, a very complex and beautiful symphony and I want to know all her notes at once".

With this impetus to have everything at once, he brushes the tower's breasts and almost collides with them. Again I observed the displacement of his libidinal interest from "breast to penis", from the tower to the politician-father he pursues. However, a transformation took place in the inner world of Martin, expressed in a greater balance between "Hubris", the eagerness to exploit the breast, and "Dike", the Justice that restores order.

This second dream does not focus, like the previous one, on deadly clashes. There are no anxieties linked to terrifying birds that rip off the genitals or crazy mafioso bosses who rule arbitrarily. The attributes of the paternal Law are now represented by a Super-ego-ideal with more benign and attractive qualities, the "distinguished" magistrate-politician. In this dream appears the admiration for the wealth of the father's testicles, which according to D. Meltzer, is expressed in the unconscious fantasies "...in terms of armies, weapons, tools and power..." (Meltzer, D. 1973. p. 158).

The use of the bicycle to reach the politician, who eventually walks away is revealing in many ways. It shows the eagerness, the voracity of Martin in achieving his objectives as quickly as possible, his narcissistic nature, his premature ejaculation and his being centered on his performance both in the bed and in the workplace. It is precisely this longing to follow in the footsteps of the idealized father and overcome it, which prevents Martin from realizing his own interests and desires. There can be no satisfaction in the narcissistic zeal to reach one's own ideal.

The Justice, the fulfillment of the Law, appears in the image of the guard that will be alerted in the tower if Martin accelerates through the passage. D. Meltzer writes:

"...the flow of milk is felt as regulated by a nipple-penis [...] the sphincter of each space, mouth, introitus and anus is experienced as an internal penis of the mother." (Meltzer, D. 1973. page 69).

Following D. Meltzer, I consider "the-tower-and-the-guard" as an internal combined object in its most primitive form, "the-breast-and-the-nipple", experienced by the baby as an object that knows everything, and which is intimately linked, in the Meltzerian work, to the infantile image of the parental heads and eyes.

The presence of a panoptic parental eye, which observes and monitors Martin's movements, now appears in the figuration of two towers symbolizing breasts and eyes which see and know everything. The standing up of the soldier, disturbed by Martin's impetuous search for possessing the breast, would show the erection of the nipple, a structure that is similar to a penis and protects the breast from the voracity of the baby. It is as if the sphincter would shut and say: "It's enough! No more milk! You cannot suck all the milk at once. There has to be a rhythm in the suction".

The two panoptic-towers, with the feeling of disturbing omniscience they carry, lead us to an image of prison architecture reminiscent of Orwell's "Big Brother".

In Meltzerian theory, the administering function of internal penises also extends to the expulsion of intruders, as evidenced by claustrophobic anxieties (Meltzer, D. 1992). In this dream we see something of this function. The part of the self, outside the projective identification with the maternal internal object, describes the intrusive access to the "mother-city" of another part which ends cloistered. The atmosphere becomes disquieting: if Martin "shoots his pistol", that is to say if he participates in the coitus of the parents, he ends up killed in the same way, according to the law of Talion. But he recognizes that the city is the house of the magistrate-father and not his. He wants the idealized image of the father not to be unreachable and to recognize his value and look him in the face. In the transference he asks me to stop writing notes and to do the same thing as the politician in the dream. He constantly tests the setting, but only by skimming the "analytical guard towers", without crashing them.

According to D. Meltzer, only if we are not caught between memory and desire, we can capture the emotional experience, which is only possible in the present moment. The emotional experience, which can lead us to satisfaction, would be, as this author writes quoting Keats, a creature nourished by silence and time.

Referring to ideas from W. Bion, D. Meltzer argues that: "neurotics do not live in the moment" (Meltzer, D. 1978, p. 459), but rather they live among memories and expectations that can be indistinguishable from each other. The memory-desire that Martin would need to put aside is the possession of the idealized mother of childhood. She appears in numerous dreams as a wooden hut or a table in which Martin crouches under to take refuge to escape a tornado. In Italian "tornato" means returned. This tornado could refer to the hero's return to the desired maternal body. The pistol would be the weapon of seizure of the breast, rhythmically moving back and forth; to which he removes its freedom. Martin tells us that the pauses, the silence, the waiting, provoke anguish and unbearable mental suffering, as they represent the distance of the sensorial contact with the breast. He cannot let the breast approach and rhythmically move away, as a "very complex and beautiful symphony". Martin cannot surrender to the moment of enjoyment of the beauty of the body, but disconnects from the person and is directed to the

possession of the genitals, as if they were separated from the rest and not incorporated. In this narcissistic closure, the other is a hole in which he enters and that he exploits, trying to reach the performance of "Pirlo", scoring a spectacular goal.

Meltzer points out that partial objects "...could be used, valued, feared, placated but they could not be loved and admired..." (Meltzer, D. 1973-b, p. 34). The central theme of Keats' poem is the power of imagination that transcends bodily sensations. Faced with the silent coolness of the Greek urn; the imagination and not the pleasure of the sense organs, allows us to reach the eternal moment of beauty, animating and making live the immobile illustrations:

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endeared,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone
(Keats, J. "Ode to a Grecian urn")

Finally, the second part of the dream describes the departure of the deceptive quality of integrity, uniqueness, and grandeur of projective identification into the internal objects. Martin realizes that he has to 'turn his back' on the intrusion in the primary scene. He has to look back in the opposite direction of the paternal house. But the output of projective identification leaves him unprotected and helpless. According to D. Meltzer, it is the "feeling of limitation akin to littleness, tinged with loneliness" (Meltzer, D. 1973 p. 52) that characterizes the experience of identity as part of the Self outside of the projective identification.

Martin feels he isn't brilliant nor does he possess a powerful "penis-car" like others, but a small "penis-bicycle". He is afraid of being run over if he opens up to life, crossing the street and turning his back on his parents. He thinks of "hitchhiking" ("autostop" in Italian), where "auto" (self) refers to his own body exclusively, to masturbation and projective identification into the "car-penis of the father" that transports him. However, he finally stops and waits for the arrival of his father. It also manifests in this dream the uncertainty, the doubt regarding the possibility of incorporation of paternal values, the possible conflict of castration with the father. Martin seems to equate his dependence on the loss of his own manhood. As in a competition with the father, he suspects that parental help entails the loss of his bicycle, which may not fit in the car.

The material that emerged in recent months undoubtedly refers to a relationship of distance and coldness that he felt especially with his mother and that hitherto has not changed. Martin describes it as André Green described his concept of "dead mother". A mother libidinally withdrawn, present in body but in a work of mourning that does not stop failing; the reason why she is always seen as distant, in another mind and place.

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