**Parasitism: An Autistic Island**

**BY DR. NILOFER KAUL**

At a restaurant I see a family walk in and take the table next to me. They smile apologetically. The parents look weighed down, prematurely old. One of the two daughters looks sadly overweight- and seems autistic. She makes loud, babbling, incoherent noises when the waiter brings in a bread basket. She asks him repeatedly if he has something sweet in it : “Candy? Cake? Cookies?” The father looks pale and withdrawn and looks blankly at his daughter eating through the bread basket without a pause. The mother looks thin with worry and talks rapidly about mounting debts, failing health and her husband’s depression- to her other daughter who has thick glasses and vacant eyes. I see the poignantly parasitic relationship of this hapless, overgrown girl with her family. Later it occurs to me that the family is unable to imagine this child in any other way, but as a liability. It strikes me that it is not inevitable for this to be a parasitic network, but that hopelessness and defeat of the parents, the power of the death wish that had to be warded off rendered all other possibilities remote; parasitism here is both inherent in the situation but also fostered by an imagination denuded of hope.

So far as we can see parasitism is used as a derogatory term. But this could well be a paranoid way of understanding the phenomenon: one where psychic parasitism is smeared with malevolence and intentionality. By contrast, the life sciences see this as an evolutionary achievement, as ubiquitous and as extremely dynamic. Blomfield (1985) made a similar point where he expanded Klein’s (1955) view of placental parasitism as a form of projective identification. Is it time to revise the term in order to open the sessions up where we feel leeched upon? Does the limitation of our vocabulary impede our work? And is this semantic roadblock related to an autistic island created by the moment of encounter of two autistic parts?

**Parasitism in the Natural Sciences**

*Symbiosis : “Any of several living arrangements between members of two different species, including mutualism, commensalism, and parasitism. Both positive (beneficial) and negative (unfavourable to harmful) associations are therefore included, and the members are called symbionts.Any association between two species populations that live together is symbiotic, whether the species benefit, harm, or have no effect on one another.”* **Encyclopaedia Britannica**

*Parasitism: “All varieties of inter-specific associations in a gradient of inter-dependence. Therefore, associations defined as commensalism, mutualism and symbiosis are distinct features of a same phenomenon – parasitism. Moreover the classical definitions of mutualism, commensalism and symbiosis do not establish clear cut-offs that distinguish them from parasitism.*”( Araújo, et al, 2003).

The two definitions from the natural sciences above disagree on the nomenclature of the umbrella term. But in a more fundamental way, they are markedly similar. They each define the umbrella term as including all living arrangements between two species. The degree of dependence varies, as does the nature of the relationship. The second definition also draws attention to the dynamic quality of such association.

In common parlance parasites (literally para- besides and sitos - food) “receive bad press” (Matthews, pp16). The OED (2009) defines a parasite as “One who eats at the table or at the expense of another; always with opprobrious application: ‘One that frequents rich tables and earns his welcome by flattery’…; one who obtains the hospitality, patronage, or favour of the wealthy or powerful by obsequiousness and flattery; a hanger-on from interested motives; a ‘toady’” . But natural scientists observe that predators that kill are often admired while the parasite is a figure of revulsion for us. This is indeed ironic. Yet something inhibits us from sharing this generous vision of parasites with their human counterparts; what is fascinating is the number of permutations that can exist between hosts and parasites. In psychoanalysis, as in Shakespeare’s use of the term, a parasite is a scrounge- repugnant and insidious- in some ways the antithesis of the mother-child relationship, or so we imagine. But I am going to look at this from another vertex:

“To see this spirit of maternal generosity carried to its logical extreme, consider *Diaea ergandros*, a species of Australian spider. All summer long, the mother fattens herself on insects so that when winter comes her little ones may suckle the blood from her leg joints. As they drink, she weakens, until the babies swarm over her, inject her with venom and devour her like any other prey. You might suppose such ruthlessness to be unheard-of among mammalian children. You would be wrong. It isn’t that our babies are less ruthless than *Diaea ergandros*, but that our mothers are less generous. The mammal mother works hard to stop her children from taking more than she is willing to give. The children fight back with manipulation, blackmail and violence. Their ferocity is nowhere more evident than in the womb.” (Sadedin, 2014)

I have quoted at some length the above passage to provocatively extend the idea of parasitism as a more pervasive phenomenon. The foetus embodies a parasitic relationship to the maternal body ( Giard 1913; Blomfield 1985). In fact, the foetus will not remain so and throughout life, equations change and even reverse - old parents often being experienced as a ‘burden’ by their children. How can we give shape to the internal world of a parasite? I suggest that the womb-foetus link can be read paradigmatically to imagine the birth of parasitism. The womb may be seen to correspond with an enclosed chamber of the mind in the transference, and the ferocious response engendered in the foetus which is desperate to survive may be what we experience as parasitism in the field. The enclosed chamber is like an enclosed part of the analysts’s mind that confronts the patient and creates an autistic island in the field.

**Parasitism in psychoanalysis**

*“You knot of Mouth-Friends:‥Most smiling, smooth, detested Parasites”*

Shakespeare*,* **Timon of Athens***. Act 3. Scene 6.*

Psychoanalysis like Shakespeare above, tends to use “parasitic” derogatorily. Envy - which is a pervasive emotion- can be responded to by throwing out everything - devaluing the goods- the interventions of the analyst (throwing baby out with bathwater) or it can be responded to by stealing something. This is a very interesting difference. When envy is unbearable, it often leads to projection or vomiting, everything that is given is stripped off its value and expelled with fury. But it may take another route. The envious gaze may actually see the value and decide to steal what is good but appear to reject it. One way of looking at it is that the parasite is more hopeful, in that he does not expel everything. Stealing shows a potent need for survival as compared to evacuating. Perhaps the internal object is marked by guilt and wants to be robbed, or someone who derives power from the knowledge he possesses - or engulfing or castrating- the possibilities are endless.

Here it might be helpful to recall Klein’s distinction between greed and envy (1977). “Greed is an impetuous and insatiable craving, exceeding what the subject needs and what the object is able and willing to give. At the unconscious level, greed aims primarily at completely scooping out, sucking dry, and devouring the breast: that is to say, its aim is destructive introjection; whereas envy not only seeks to rob in this way, but also to put badness, primarily bad excrements and bad parts of the self, into the mother, and first of all into her breast, in order to spoil and destroy her.” (pp.180)

Extrapolating from this, envy disables splitting, and nothing good can be introjected. This is not so with parasitism where hunger overcomes envy. The parasite does not just survive, s/he thrives.Unlike with some forms of envy, the good news with parasitism is that the spirit is alive to beauty. However, if the beauty can be quietly imitated or plagiarised, we don’t need to feel obliged. We don’t need to repay or feel inferior or beholden. The object who possesses the beauty is experienced internally not as a generous one but in fact mean-spirited.

Blomfield’s (1985) is amongst the first full-fledged investigations of parasitism from different psychoanalytic vertices. He recognises Klein’s idea of the foetus discharging its waste into the host as a parasitic link between the womb and the foetus. When Klein (1946, 1952) writes about the “infantile phantasies” that “attack the mother's body in many ways, including the projection of excrements and parts of the self into her”

(pp. 311), Blomfield observes rightly that this again suggests a “parasitic derivation.” (pp303). He adds that the “biologist Giard (1913) considered that mammalian evolution incorporated a stage of endoparasitism—the foetus being a true 'placental parasite’. Giard's (1898) concept of metamorphosis permits a hypothesis which escapes the fantasy of current views, still influenced by a 'homunculus' attitude involving the projection of infancy into the womb.” (pp.308)

Taking this forward, we can link this with Bion (1977) who characterises a dyadic relation as being between a container and a contained; on the model of either a nipple-mouth or penis-vagina. This link can be either commensal, symbiotic or parasitic. “By ‘commensal’ I mean a relationship in which two objects share a third to the advantage of all three. By ‘symbiotic’ I understand a relationship in which one depends on another to mutual advantage. By ‘parasitic’ I mean to represent a relationship in which one depends on another to produce a third, which is destructive of all three.” (pp. 95) He sees parasitic as destructive to “all three”, i.e. the parasite, the host and the link between them. In the transference, the link between the patient and the analyst and the link between their thoughts may be seen to take on any of these shapes.

Meltzer and Harris (1976) identified six dimensions of mental life - one of which was the geographical notion of mental life (p.1). This dimension helps us to identify the psychic link in parasitism between objects as being more reliant on intrusions rather than projections. This suggests the foetus did not find room in the womb and had to nestle, even camouflage itself elsewhere - somewhat like in an ectopic pregnancy. This is akin to what Meltzer (1982) terms the claustrum which describes the “inside of the object penetrated by intrusive identification” (pp.202). “Having perversely entered the object, the subject becomes prone to identity confusion, ‘geographical confusions’ and claustrophobic states within what he terms the claustrum. Inherent in this geography is the notion of a multi-dimensional space, which may be containing or confining, entered intrusively, by consent or invitation, and by concrete or imaginative means.” (Skelton 2006) It is when this entry into the mind and /or body is through violence and stealth, that it feels parasitic. It would not be untrue to say that such violent entry evades separateness through mourning, and that such relationships perversely intrude into a territory and deny this invasion, so as to obfuscate debt, gratitude, dependency.

But this register suggests semantically an intentionality to what may well be minutely fragmented bits of ego that can not reside without taking residence inside another. Sandy particles require a shelter, but can only be sheltered by entering the body and mind, because outside every breeze is a storm. My point then is of a continuity between an autistic part of the personality that seeks refuge parasitically in another ( Ogden 1989). This is not unrelated to the idea of a continuity between the inter-uterine life and the “caesura of birth” that Freud (1926) writes of . This is the transitional stage between the foetus and the baby; where the baby still needs sheltering from the overwhelming stimuli, it can only tolerate modulated contact with reality. The baby’s need for a warm shelter, its helplessness at the overwhelming stimuli may be experienced as parasitic, viewed from a scientific perspective. The ‘binocular vision’ here refers to the two distinct vertices from where to view parasitism ( intrapsychic or bipersonal/ scientific or emotional) and this paper tries to embody this vision in its form as well content.

**How do we know a parasitism in the field?**

Unlike encounters that are demanding or challenging or exhausting, here there is a peculiar sense of being drained and squeezed. The parasitic encounter is marked by depletion. It can be either the analyst’s or the patient’s. It can be common or alternating or fluctuating.There may be other tell-tale signs: stealing the skin of the analyst : sounding like her, dressing like her, buying the same car or jewellery. By hiding changes from the analyst. By telling stories of how s/he spoke to someone in which one hears echoes of oneself, but it is never acknowledged.But all this can be misleading unless it is echoed in the feelings the patient evokes in us. For instance, the patient may look unresponsive when we say something that may be important, but use it in a subsequent session, where they may be saying something similar to a third person. It may stir in us a fantasy that something is being stolen and reused, passed off as the other’s: the fear of plagiarism. When we offer analysis, the patient either takes what we have or rejects it. But s/he may also take while not letting it on. Does the patient let on changes in some way? And if not, is it because they can’t bear that you have anything to give or do they secret away what they get because they can’t bear for you to know? It is this last response that is experienced as parasitic.

The above passage is written as it is experienced in the mind of the host who is unable to think about it or shift his vertex. This experience in analysis is marred by what is often our inability to locate this - terming an incapacity as resistance, envy or ingratitude makes this an unapproachable island in the work, akin to a “bastion” (Baranger and Baranger 2008). But while the “bastion” is a turning away from something unbearably painful, I suggest the island is a collision of two rocks that do not know how to communicate with each other.

The case vignettes have been written in the way my own understanding developed. The initial understanding of each of these people was superficial on my part - histrionic, narcissistic, perverse and of course the link felt parasitic ( as I felt like a paralysed and reluctant host). But it is only over time that I am beginning to see a pervasive underlying pattern - of coming upon that object in the transference - finding myself too shallow to be able to think about them. I thus gave them no choice but to cling to the surface of my mind. I was then collaborating on an autistic link by the limits of my mind - my thinness, opacity and “stupidity”( Bion 1957).

**Case 1: When the womb goes rogue**

*Most extreme form of togetherness in the bladder of a rodent - the male lives in the uterus of the female*.

(Matthews 1998, p. 4).

J’s utterances are always dotted by the word ‘depleted’ and ‘drained’. I hear her talk of the work she does and I feel enchanted by her description - she for her part, speaks only of how depleted she feels. In her mind there appears no difference between exhaustion and depletion. Reserves are always being drained, because there is no experience of nourishment. When I say this to her, she is startled. She had never thought there was a difference. Perhaps the entire colony of internal objects were experienced like termites eating into the woodwork. And yet, my experience of her is not parasitic. I have felt hopeless, but not leeched off. This allows us to imagine the possibility of the presence of parasitism in an internal world, to which the psychic response need not be to join in. But to survive with a measure of helplessness. This survival feels like an act of courage.

J has often spoken of being bisexual, even though she is mostly single. One lonely day J decided to invite one of the men who she met in a virtual chat-room. The man came two hours late. She led him inside and offered him tea. The man seemed preoccupied with his phone and none too friendly. Nervously, she went into the washroom when she heard the doorbell ring. I might add here that J lives a hermit-like existence in a very desolate part of the city and works from her home. In short, she has barely any company other than me. She wanted to ignore the bell, but it rang again aggressively. She felt gripped by terror and went slowly to the door. On opening it, she saw “a withered looking man” who demanded to know what kind of prostitution racket she ran. She denied this, he pushed her roughly aside and entered. After two harrowing hours, the two men left - only after they had humiliated and molested her, stealing everything she had: cash, camera, I-pad, but also innocuous things - bed sheets and towels. They took pictures of her lying on the bed and threatened to expose her. Paralysed for hours with terror and shame, J finally fell asleep. In a session later, she speaks of her preferring her corner to everywhere and everyone:

She: I would rather be in my duvet than anywhere else in the world. Just order in food, finish my duties online on my laptop. Never to stir.

Me: As if it were a air-raid shelter.

She: Yes, and just to stay in my bunker.

I imagine a jealous womb suffocating in its grip. She tells me about the experience of being preserved in a jar. “Sterile”, I say, “with both its meanings- safe and lifeless”. J’s internal world seems infested by parasites. They take but are never sated. Every time she manages to save some money, she buys expensive gifts for her widowed mother. This robbery leaves her depleted. J remains tied to this parasite, unable to travel, go to another city for a job. Even though she lives on her own, it is in the same district as her mother. She spends her last reserves trying to buy love. She buys her jewellery for every occasion, every new gadget for the home. But she comes full of tears - mother did not like the colour of the ruby - it was more pink than red, she never wore the gold chain, she never looked at the camera. I feel myself swell up in anger - “why would you keep on trying? Just give up on that parasite” - comes to my mind. J is abundantly grateful. Nevertheless she brings in a parasite. She seems to be swallowed up by this bloodsucking object. It feels as if the session sometimes takes the form of trying to deliver the baby from a womb that has gone rogue. The mother is experienced as a leech who needs to suck everything J has. When J complains these are often pseudo-complaints and do not usually indicate a wish to separate, but are more masochistic in nature: where complaining has a masturbatory pleasure. Sometimes it feels she is offering chunks of her flesh to others, so they may do the same. In the exaggerated adhesive attachment to me, I see an intensely furious attempt to swallow me in. In those moments I feel suffocated by her as she does by mother. But it takes me a lot longer to figure that that is how she is experiencing me. When she is unable to give me what I seek ( words, logic, proportion), she is enraged and screaming back at me: “What do you want? I give you what I can and you are never happy?” When I begin to decipher this, our space together becomes the “autistic envelope” she describes as the bunker that can be seen to emerge as a momentary respite from an otherwise relentlessly parasitic link. (Mcclelland 1993) Parasitism here is born from the ‘confusion of tongues’ ( Ferenczi 1988) - the mismatch between the analyst/ mother who can not recognise the infantile needs of her baby and recedes as she is overwhelmed by his growing neediness.

**Case 2: The opaque object**

*Antagonism: In ecology, an association between organisms in which one benefits at the expense of the other. As life has evolved, natural selection has favoured organisms that are able to efficiently extract energy and nutrients from their environment. Because organisms are concentrated packages of energy and nutrients in themselves, they can become the objects of antagonistic interactions. Although antagonism is commonly thought of as an association between different species, it may also occur between members of the same species through competition and cannibalism.* Encyclopaedia Britannica

Many people strike us adolescents through their lives: bored, restless, unable to stay for long anywhere, hanging out in groups. The group dynamic is one of extreme rivalry with each other and often have perverse entanglements with each other. The popular American high school comedy **Mean Girls** made me realise there was a thriving adolescent sub-genre catering to a narrative of bullying amongst girls. The heroines are disingenuous in their naivete, while they are pitted against wily and vain antagonists. Cat-fights erupt over delectable but rather pointless boys and gang-wars that trivialise to the point of ludicrousness. These gangs are different from the mafia-type gangs Rosenfeld (1983) describes, for instance in the following passage:

“*The destructive omnipotent way of living of patients like Simon often appears highly organised, as if one were dealing with a powerful gang dominated by a leader, who controls all the members of the gang to see that they support one another in making the criminal destructive work more effective and powerful. However, the narcissistic organisation not only increases the strength of the destructive narcissism and the deadly force related to it, but it has a defensive purpose to keep itself in power and so maintain the status quo. The main aim seems to be to prevent the weakening of the organisation and to control the members of the gang so that they will not desert the destructive organisation and join the positive parts of the self or betray the secrets of the gang to the police, the protecting super-ego, standing for the helpful analyst, who might be able to save the patient*.” (pp. 10-11)

Girl gangs are different in that while boy gangs attack reality by grandiosity, these live on the surface of reality and are more trivialising than grandiose. If boy gangs brutalise and dare their members into risk-taking behaviour - drugs, speeding, drunken brawls; girl gangs have catfights, boyfriend poaching and bitching. While destructive narcissism may still be the force that pervades such a group, here, it is the shallowness that is striking, reminiscent of what Meltzer calls “empty-headedness” ( Meltzer 1975). Such a member I will call Q - a young divorcee. A very attractive beautician who married her high school sweetheart, but whose marriage broke up within six months. They were only 22. When she first came I recall feeling charmed. Even deeply sorry. She could not understand what made him “drop” her. He seemed to want to get back his bachelor life. “Poor Q” , I would think. One who tries so hard and gets envied by everyone. How badly everyone treats her.

To the innumerable times I tried to get her to process her grievances and injury, she would always respond by saying, she had done nothing to deserve this treatment. I was reminded of how initially I kept making excuses for her maltreatment by thinking it was the envy of her peers. It was almost as if she wanted me to say how they envied her. Men would pursue her forcefully and then suddenly drop her after a a few weeks or months. Initially she could not understand what she was doing wrong. Later we could not see what she was doing at all. She would just lie down on the couch with her eyes closed, tell me the events in between and then wait for me to give my reading. Her manner began to remind me of how Martha Harris (2007) describes a patient: “that wanted to go on existing as a sort of parasite baby that was excused all difficult things, that could just go on dreaming and being comfortable.” She always agreed and left after telling me how I had nailed it this time. And yet, nothing ever budged.

Eventually these feelings gave way to seeing the aridity of the desert that she felt. This then was the pattern of her relationships. A show of adoration masked the deadness, docility posed as thoughtful listening, eager movements suggested attentiveness, mimicry looked liked synchrony, disingenuousness passed itself off as innocence. The disenchantment I felt had elements of not just disappointment, but anger. As if she had wilfully deceived me. But of course the hollowness of the posture had to reveal itself.

I felt each session become a repetition of the last and the gang of high school friends seemed never to exit. It was terrible for single girls, no couple seemed to want them- she was falling off the map. It seemed all the men had fancied her and the women were envious of her sexiness. They all accused her of “stringing along” men. Naturally Q has no idea of intimacy. She had no idea of who or how to pick: “If someone asks me whether I prefer vanilla or chocolate, I don’t know what to say. I look around and see what others are choosing…”.

Tustin (1980) writes about how autistic objects are a response to “unbearable frustration, but they prevent the development of thoughts, memories and imaginations which, in normal development, in some measure, compensate for the inevitable lack of complete satisfaction which being a human being entails. Another result is that the children themselves are vulnerable to being manipulated as autistic objects instead of being treated as human beings.” (pp. 31) For Q, her girl gang functioned - amongst other things- as a substitute for a mind - she would keep returning for decisions. No matter how pernicious the values, gangs are extremely decisive. In the transference I often felt like one of the mean girls.

I wondered if some coquettes ( derisively named molls, dolls, airheads) were made of this indecisiveness which comes from an enclosed rather than a repressed part of the unconscious. When the psyche encounters “opacity” (Bion 1977) in the object, the words mostly bounce back. The communication has the quality of deadness, the voice sounding an indistinct echo of itself. Akin to echolalia (Tustin 1969, 1980, 1984, 1988). There can either be an embracing of this deadness or else, as in the case of Q, a despairing quest for a host. Searching for a mind that can think for her. For Q, the gang had been her mind. She would return to different members who spoke in different voices, creating discord. This “anti-mind” only exacerbated dependency, which was antagonistic to the mind the analysis sought to create. Helpless without judgement, she sought instructions. She was drawn to people who exuded power and authority. Symbols of power were located in prom queens and older men with BMW cars. Here we see another variant of parasitic organisation - where the host body is a part of a perverse organisation and the parasite leeches on in order to cling for survival. This then is clinginess - latching on to a breast that does not want you.

The link between us felt parasitic - as if there were no real communion or intercourse, but just a stowing away of my gestures and sounds. Words could be repeated, but the meaning can never be, without an echo of hollowness.And yet it seemed to be needed as a gesture and posture. Till such time as the plant’s stern becomes a bark, it feels like a protecting cylinder is needed. And the analysis is just that encasing for Q. The inability to think, Bion (1959) realised, makes thoughts themselves antagonistic presences. In Q’s recognition of her need, there was a hope. Her coming to me, noticing the externalia, was a space of waiting for the bark to grow. So what felt like parasitism and in fact was so, in one manner of speaking, was also about locating a womb outside the mother’s body. Where the foetus experiences the mother’s abortive wishes, and feels blocked, he may develop a tenacity that feels parasitic to the womb that has drawn up the walls. It requires me to observe my walls rather than to feel frustrated by her inability to climb them. For now she can only stick to the walls, in what Tustin (1986) calls ‘adhesive equation’ because there is no interior to introject into.

**Case 3: Living in his penis**

*Castrator pea crabs live up to their name. They live inside the sex organs of marine molluscs and prevent them from reproducing. But it turns out the pea crabs’ parasitic ways also make it terribly tricky for them to find a mate.Castrator pea crabs (Calyptraeotheres garthi) are tiny parasitic crustaceans found off the east coast of South America, from southern Brazil down to Argentina’s Valdez Peninsula. They spend most of their adult lives in the sex organs of various slipper limpets.( Joshua Rapp Learn, 2017)*

F runs a PR company and is fairly successful. She has long known her partner’s yen for pornography. It feels as if he does little else. In my fantasy, he lives off pornography and she leeches off his addiction. This arrangement seemed to have provided a scaffold for them till she found he was cheating on her virtually with her closest friend. This brought about a complete breakdown and she turned to therapy. But it often appears like we are stuck inside a revolving door. She seems to want to restore her omnipotent fantasy of being inside him and little else. She only speaks of betrayal, dwelling on the details of their sex chats and little else. Rage and bitterness enter me and paralyse my thinking. This voyeuristic and perverse obsession formed a loop or “chuntering” (Joseph 1982) which she used to avoid a breakdown.

I would try not joining in the loop of pseudo-thinking: “So does this mean I should leave him? But why should I? But I can’t bear being with him.” As a true connection between thoughts forces reality, and brings unbearable pain in its wake, this was aggressively expelled. As the agent of that, I would be subsequently attacked:

“So are you saying I should leave him? I have no self-respect because I carry on…Are you trying to say I should carry on staying with him. That means I have accepted what he did…” This pseudo-thinking carries on even now after 4 years, but is a bit reduced. Yet it comes back especially after there has been a pause, a breather. As if the winds of change presage pain, she returns to the loop. “Again he was looking at porn last night. I told him to leave the house, so he left.”

“It’s been a week now. He is in a different hotel every night and keeps sending me texts, photos, porn…I saw it…I am so afraid”.

Again I feel very exhausted, unable to think. Then I think of castrator pea crabs and I wonder aloud: “Do you live in his genitals?” The nauseating rhythm of her “yo-yoing” grinds to a halt. She quietens down. “Yes”, she says after a pause. “You will be dropped from there if he ejaculates” ( pertinently, her partner can not ejaculate with ease and certainly never with another person!) What has also been a refrain is the exclusion from the primal scene, F’s way of dealing with being excluded is to force her way in. Somehow I think being inside the penis insures that she sleep right inside the most intimate point of contact and ensures she is not ejaculated. This brought us a brief reprieve.

In the early sessions, I recall the bottomless nature of her neediness. If I ever did answer a question directly and simply, as opposed to interpreting it, she would ask another before taking in the first. This could carry on till I felt completely emptied. It felt like I was seeing her gulp down whatever I gave, without biting, chewing or swallowing. I did not realise how little her digestive system could process. Very soon she would begin burping and even on occasion, farting.

How is this related to her experience of her internal objects? Over time I have come to see a misalignment - the mother who overfeeds her baby to compensate for her not wanting it in the first place. Much of this is based on our work together. But it was quite concretely evident in her habit of burping in almost every session, especially when I was finding her unbearable, even repugnant. This makes her cling to me more tenaciously, with a biting fury. But pleading helplessly her inability to digest what she gets. She also recognises that is all I can give - words. Something from me is preferable to nothing. She can’t digest words but she can use them as pacifiers .

It seems she seeks to return to the claustrum-like space she was in, where in fact she has been conceived and born in. This would seal her together and stop her from falling apart. Her objects typically suffocate and engulf her, but they are also experienced as having a perverse interest in her. With the discovery of her partner’s virtual affair, she has been rudely expelled from there. She must to claw her way back in through any portal that is left open through violence, intruding through virtual history, phone texts, through the penis, the vagina, the anus. This is evident even in her perversion; unlike her partner who is addicted to pornography, she is addicted to him and seeks to enter him through all his orifices. It is not surprising that he is can never ejaculate during intercourse.

We see perverse relationships emerge in the transference where I would find myself wrestling with the desire to expel her. This has been dealt with by entering through another portal and the analysis begins to feel as suffocating. Meltzer(1990) identifies the different zones where residence may be taken. In our work, we can say, the patient finds it hard to leave the genitals/anus which have encapsulated them and they are as yet unfamiliar with being in the mind of their objects. I find myself unwilling to give more, somewhat repulsed by the primitive quality of her neediness and her lack of responsiveness when I give. I would feel myself swell with irritation when she would turn to look at me, a strong urge to screen myself. But while Q would float giddily on the surface of my mind , F tends to pierce me. She peeps in to my house, the enclosed space behind my table, sniffs the air, comments on each tiny sound I make, buys the same car as I have. I thought of this as intrusive and perverse, but it is a psychic stance around objects that are so thin that they stare back like hungry glass rather than contain as vessels do. This misalignment between us is telling. I was unable to think beyond the obvious - “Whenever mother sees me, she tries to feed me. I hate food, I hate eating…”. This complaint of hers echoed her experience of me. Her analyst seemed to have solid meals for her, while she wanted soft mush. My rigidity of sticking to age-appropriate food and a disapproval of her immature digestion was in fact again, an encapsulated area of darkness for me. Looking back now, I can see how my autistic retreats in childhood were ridiculed and chastised. Are we witnessing a repetition of the same frustration with ‘primitivism’?

**Conclusion**

The impetus to write this paper comes from the resentment stirred in what appears to be an experience of parasitism in the clinic. The door of the mind seems to close itself against the seeming stealthiness. Scientifically however, parasitism may be seen as a form of relating that is not dissimilar to symbiosis. Does that allow us to reconsider the lens through which we view parasitism? Can we use a “binocular” lens - looking at both our emotional responses and the scientific approach simultaneously? And if we do, where might it take us?

Can the link be a dynamic one like the kea parrot of Australia that starts out in a commensal link by cleaning the sheep’s skin by eating the ectoparasites, but in winter turns parasitic. Often it seems we have a meaningful link with our patient, and speak the same words, but then we come upon winter and an “impasse” ( Rosenfeld 1987) arrives. We are no longer able to see our way out. Is this perhaps the limit of our imagination? The as-yet “encapsulated” part. (Bergstein 2009)

I have suggested through my epilogue that if the mother/analyst is unable to see what s/he receives from the baby/patient, a parasitic link may be forged. This may be seen in our inability to re-imagine the patient, to be able to expand our spectrum into imagining areas outside the ones we know in ourselves. Parasitism has been related to envy, but differs in the way that it steals to survive. Or when something is offered, it may be stowed away, but the giver does not know; there is a convoluted relationship with both what is given and the giver. This overlaps with perversion - in that the relationship between giving and taking, mother and baby, or analyst and analysand is ‘perverted’ - “to turn round or about, turn the wrong way, overturn, turn to error or ruin, undo, corrupt.” (OED) And yet at times this may be our inability to dream that is experienced as opacity. If we shift the lens from reluctant host to bewildered to thin and despairing host, it reveals a variety and complexity that is closer to a sterile link between two hard castle walls.

When the foetus finds a closed-off womb, it takes residence wherever it can find space. I have suggested the priority of this link to the nipple-mouth link in Kleinian writing. This link may provide a paradigmatic space for understanding the primacy of survival in parasitism. The womb has been either parasitic on it, suffocating it like with J. Or the walls have been like those of old castles - opaque and sticky, and the foetus has had to cling tenaciously to the surface - as we saw with Q. Or very thin glass that can only stare back, a travesty of the containing mother. The inaccessible part of the mind can feel attacking but it can also feel asphyxiating or suffocating. This may be experienced like what Meltzer (1990) evocatively calls the claustrum. I have tried to see the claustrum-like space in the bipersonal field as possibly emerging from a stalling of analysis because of an “autistic barrier” (Tustin 1986) in the analyst. Or the moment of encounter where both patient and analyst seem to be in what Ogden calls the “autistic-contiguous position” (1989).

Often the way to survive is to try to cling to the skin ( “adhesive identification” or “adhesive equation”) akin to the clinging of the ectoparasite or to claw their way into the genitals or the anus (perversion). This “claustrum-like” space we could experience in the transference in the feelings of revulsion, suffocation, engulfment, feeling hoodwinked and even robbed. However I have tried to suggest that this is a paranoid reading that comes from the roadblocks in our mind. Perhaps tolerating the adhesiveness and the thinness of the parasitic patient is made possible when we see it related to our own opacity, thinness and rigidity; seeing the “autistic barrier” in ourselves. Parasitic links may be seen to emerge from autistic uncoupling (sterile proximity) when there is a collision between the encapsulated parts of the analytic dyad and an island is formed.

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