

Review of: "The Empty Chair"

Nadine Proia-Lelouey¹

¹ Université de Caen Basse Normandie

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Dear Susan Schwartz

Your text is very interesting and shows great clinical sensitivity. It's a clinical-theoretical elaboration, which is always a difficult exercise, requiring us to move from "transference-counter-transference" language to conceptual language. It is also a fine plea for psychotherapies based on an episteme of the Subject, nowadays qualified as "non-scientific", a sign of a lack of understanding of the basis of our therapeutic approaches. As you put it, it's all about supporting the subject in his or her attempts to (re)make contact with parts of him- or herself that have been isolated, cleaved and therefore unintegrated until now (which, by the way, corresponds to what neuroscientists call traumatic memory). The therapist draws on his or her own emotional world to enable the subject to reconnect with his or her own, opening up an area of play and creativity (D. Winnicott and, following on from him, A. Green & R. Roussillon - and others...) where there was only emptiness. A process you describe in your writing.

Your approach is also interesting because, in this process of elaboration, you don't remain tied to your theoretical frame of reference (Jungian analysis) and don't shy away from "wandering" elsewhere. However, while this approach always seems to me to be heuristic in terms of clinical understanding (which is clearly seen in the unfolding of your clinical case), it can be risky when transposed into a more "secondarized" form of writing.

So, your use of Green's concept of the dead mother strikes me as risky. It's the dead mother, and it's not possible to extend this notion to the father in the sense that the author gives to these notions. When he speaks of the dead mother, he's talking about the primary object. He even speaks of "the primary object of fusion" (1983, p. 246 p 165). This primary object may hypothetically be carried by a man (the child's father or another), but the fact remains that evoking this concept means we're on the side (of mourning) of the maternal, of the primary relationship...

Green certainly evokes a dead father, but in contrast to the dead mother, he clearly relates him to the Oedipal (triangular) field (he refers to the father of the primitive horde - Freud). Oedipal triangulation, which he associates with the question of castration (red) (p. 226/p145), while he places the dead mother on the side of loss (reference to the depressive position - Klein but above all Winnicott) and absence (white) (p. 226/p146).

He also describes the paternal position in cases where the subject is a prisoner of *a dead mother* (p 231 / p 241 p 155-161). On this subject, the author speaks of "a precocious and lame oedipal triangulation¹" (p 231/ p150). Either the father becomes the cause of the mother's psychic withdrawal, or he becomes the object of intense investment as a replacement for the mother and not as a third party.

In fact, it's the whole process leading to secondary symbolization (what Green calls the framing structure p246 p165-166) that is affected (cf. Freud's bobbin game), where the child has to endure the absence of a living mother. In the dead mother complex, the child remains a prisoner of a mother who is dead (psychically) but very present.

Your work is nonetheless highly enriching in several respects: it dares to build bridges between different theoretical fields, it serves as a means of transmitting the (difficult) clinic of "as if" / "false-self" patients that we often encounter in our clinics, and it helps to put us back to work from a theoretical and epistemological point of view.

Footnotes

¹ We give the literal translation which is more illustrative than the translation published in English "a premature and unstable triangulation".

References

- Green A, La mère morte in *Narcissisme de vie, narcissisme de mort*, 1983, Edition de Minuit, Paris.
- Green A, The death mother in *On private madness* (1986/2005), Karnac Books Ltd. London