

**Father's envy and resentment against women perpetuated in the daughter's  
superego**

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In the following very abbreviated version I would like to present some excerpts from a long lasting analytic therapy of a severely traumatized young woman where what I infer to be the father's womb envy manifested itself in an extremely destructive attitude towards his daughter. I would like to show how in the course of the therapeutic process the patient gradually succeeded in finding access to her femininity and to liberate herself from the paternal introject reflecting his womb envy, which had been „lodged“ in her superego. In the treatment I allowed myself to be guided above all by my countertransference feelings as a woman. It was essential in the encounter with her that I put at her disposal my own female inner space which resulted in Nora's gradual relinquishment of her protective pseudomascularity by discovering and developing her own inner feminine spaces.

Moreover, we encounter in the material an intertwining of the personal pathology of the patient's father with the then ruling Nazi ideology. Because of this phallic orientation with its destructive goals, the development of the individual and particularly its maternal and creative possibilities are put under phallic control and reduced to secondary functions. These conditions prevailed in the background of the father of Nora, the patient to be presented, with the result that he was unable to react either to the femininity of his wives or of his daughters in a constructive and specifically supportive way. To the contrary, his (birth)-envious and hateful attacks upon their femaleness and creativity were, from the beginning on, manifestly present. On the other side, Nora's "responses" to them were only revealed during her long analysis — a treatment still not concluded now (after 15 years, with interruptions). The main interest in this presentation is directed at the particular destructive dynamic occurring between father and daughter, especially because of their different gender and leading to its destructive precipitate in the psychological structure of the patient.

When Nora first sought my help, she presented herself as an attractive, sporty, and slim young woman (she was thirty years old at the time) and claimed that, although usually able at first to

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get involved with men, she was unable to keep long-term relationships: “I have so much anxiety about closeness. I come with a lot of hope and a lot of anxiety — hope that there will finally be somebody who can put up with me, anxiety that the relationship could fail because of me. And at the same time, I am also afraid of what would happen if it did not fail because of me.”

In the **first encounter**, Nora showed very much her masculine identification. Her external appearance reminded me of a “rocker bride”: she wore jeans, black leather stiletto boots and a black leather jacket. Shaking her hand, I felt my own caught as if in a vise; it relayed to me, in a quite physically imposing fashion, besides the pain, also her ability to strongly grasp at something. She let me know that she was a karate fighter, and I felt queasy at the thought that there could be any differences of opinion between us.

At the time, I could not yet grasp fully in fantasy the emotional content of what she was telling me, but I understood that her phallic behavior was very important for her survival. I was preoccupied by this lacuna in my fantasy space that I had not encountered in other circumstances, and I observed how I was tempted to fill this hole with content. Now I understand that what was very clearly communicated to me was her inner state of a split and of the lack of an inner space, of a “transitional space” necessary to be able to think, to fantasize, and to give meaning to things. Thus, already in the first encounter, the central themes were palpably present: intrusion, violation of boundaries, her splits, and the tension between “male” and “female”, most of all however, that in her object fantasy I was her father: that she could have only such a notion of a close relationship. Her self-representation entailed being hateful and phallic because she needed this in order to save herself from her father; being soft vis-à-vis him and opening herself would be a mortal peril. This was her primary transference.

Nora is the only surviving biological child of her father. Before her, there were three other sisters. The oldest died 24 days after her birth, allegedly from sepsis. The mother took the next two sisters (+5 and +3) in a murder-suicide with her when she drowned herself in the Danube; the sisters were 4 and 6 at the time. Nora probably survived only because on the day of the drowning, fatefully on the day of her first birthday, she was hospitalized for an attack of croup. She remained for several weeks in the children’s hospital because her father’s possible participation in her mother’s death was investigated by the police. Nothing could be proven against him, and Nora was therefore allowed to return home to him. Not long afterward, a housekeeper moved in with her own children; she took care of household and child.

Nora describes her **father** as being very much tied to his own mother, as restrictive and unreachable, with little tenderness towards his daughter: “He was inclined to extreme reactions.” For instance, he shot roving cats and forced Nora to bury them, as punishment for her having eaten his strawberries against his prohibition. He also shot her own favorite cat when it was sick.

The **mother** had been born out of wedlock; her own mother had died right after the child’s birth, so that she (Nora’s mother) was raised in an orphanage and very early had to become independent. Nora believes that she was artistically gifted and a faithfully caring mother. I was very touched by this yearning for an idealized, good mother.

Now some biographical details about Nora’s father: In Nora’s memory, no emotional relations were noticeable between **her father and his mother** although it was very important for the father to care for his mother’s needs. The grandmother allegedly was a beautiful, well-groomed, but non-sensual woman who showed little interest in men, but was very close to her own sister. There was very little that connected her with her own husband. In her marriage she wished for female children and was very disappointed about the birth of her two boys; she did not know what to do with them. Nora’s father was the firstborn. Ten years later, the second son was born. In contrast to his little brother who presented himself as girlish, wrote poetry, and on the surface was able to adapt himself very well to his mother’s expectations, Nora’s father was allegedly a vivacious little rogue who was often beaten by his mother and presumably never felt accepted in his gender identity. As a child, although taken care of, he never felt any warmth or love. The brother married, but never had children of his own; to the contrary he hated children altogether. Originally, Nora’s father wanted to become an architect, yet he was not allowed to study because early on he had to independently earn money. Therefore he chose, as a compromise, civil service in the city. He manifested his identification with his mother’s hostile regard in his effort during the Third Reich to be inducted as a volunteer parachutist in the Wehrmacht. He saw the resulting danger to his life as a punishment of his parents. During the War, he became a prisoner of war in Russia. After many unsuccessful attempts to flee, he finally succeeded in marching home, where, shortly after the war’s end, he arrived completely undernourished and deathly ill. He was very paranoid and for one year was unable to leave the apartment. Even later on, he slept with his gun at the ready under his bed cover. With every movement of Nora who had to sleep with him in the same room, he startled and grabbed his weapon. He thus reenacted his captivity, by holding Nora in his thrall.

These descriptions let us surmise that the father continually experienced the interaction with the grandmother as an attack upon his gender identity and that the inability of the grandmother to let him participate in her own feminine interior space had the effect that the father developed a very **phallic and hostile attitude towards everything “weak”, foreign, and feminine**. Partly this appears as a self-destructive attitude, but also in externalized form when his personal mindset joined up with the Nazi-ideology and continued to be expressed in his destructiveness against everything that is feminine and generative.

In Nora’s third year of life, the father married the housekeeper. During her marriage, she at first developed an addiction to tablets, then in addition an alcohol dependency. Allegedly, the father did not notice anything of this development, and he blamed the children for having kept it secret from him. In Nora’s 18<sup>th</sup> year of life, the stepmother tried after a family fight to kill herself, and soon thereafter committed suicide in the same way as Nora’s mother had done, namely by drowning herself in the Danube.

The question imposes itself: What role was played here by **the father’s intolerance of utterances of neediness and his own envy and jealousy of the relationship between mother and her baby?**

Nora used her first analysis with me to free herself from the constricting external entanglement with her father. Originally, she had followed in his footsteps professionally in order to avoid **conflicts around envy and the fear of separation** in the relationship with him. Now she started using the analysis to dare leaving her father’s outer sphere of power and to develop her own autonomous life plans. Defying her father’s insistence on her lack of intelligence she decided to make up her high school graduation on the so-called “second path of education” while simultaneously working professionally.

The analysis helped her to achieve her high school equivalency, to establish for the first time in her life a friendship built upon trust and intimacy with a girlfriend, and finally to enter university studies. This exposed her to father’s **annihilating resentment**. With all available means, he attempted to thwart Nora’s development, and she **terribly dreaded her father’s envy and revenge for her successes**. Eventually, she was able to conclude her finals as the second best of her class. During this time, she increasingly realized how difficult it was for her to separate herself in real life effectively from her father because he could not enjoy any of her successes nor any autonomy of hers and thus refused her the permission to separate. She was not yet conscious

then of how a part of her was still identified with him, in particular with his conflicts about birth envy and revenge. She was still assuming that an external separation from him would solve her inner conflicts. Her paternal object representation was then still largely externalized.

Why birth envy? We infer: Because he had been so painfully excluded from the inner space of his mother he harbors very deep resentment against the abilities of women; they remind him of the original hurt. Therefore he has to persecute everything that is so particularly feminine.

Her defensive fantasy of becoming, thanks to the analytic treatment, the wished-for son of her father became more conscious. The analysis nearly broke down because of her insistence that she would indeed become a son. She staunchly maintained the doubleness of acknowledgement and denial of her gender — a true splitting in Freud's sense (the Yes and No of character perversion).

During my own pregnancy she dreamt that her father emerged as a butcher who dismembered the bodies of women. Another dream sequence had her intrude into my womb in order to tear out the growing child from my body. In my counter-transference I sometimes felt as if paralyzed by anxiety about the destructive part of her, fearing that I could not maintain my body boundaries and protect my unborn child against her hatred so that I would suffer a miscarriage or premature birth. In her primitive regressive fantasies, the man's "poisonous" semen destroyed the woman from within, and in a condensation, she equated the baby with the stick of stool, but she also experienced it with another part of herself as belonging to her own self. Another part of herself was identified with the dangerous baby within me.

**In the transference** I changed from the mother of symbiosis, prior to the separation by suicide, into the disappointing mother and into the unreliable addictive stepmother after her mother's death, and I saw myself exposed to **annihilating envy and hatred**, just when she had begun believing that she had found something like a substitute mother. She felt violently and from one day to the other catapulted out of the dyad of the analytic relationship, terrified that she was losing everything, namely her place within me. She gained access to her **jealousy** of her siblings who could remain united in death with their mother while she was excluded from that union. The stepmother also ultimately felt closer and more attached to her own biological children than to Nora. Finally, she said good-bye to me for my delivery with the words: "If we survive this separation it could be very valuable for me." Then I understood the remark under the aspect of her lacking object constancy, and that parts of her self and of her conflicts were somatized and

projected upon the baby. Only much later did I recognize that I may have reacted in my counter-transference to the birth-envious paternal introject within Nora, but also that she could make valuable experiences for her gender identity because I did not let myself be destroyed in my female potency by this introject.

She was afraid that she would **poison everything by her envy** so that she would ruin the relationship with me (and her boyfriend) and that ultimately she would again remain alone with her guilt for her destructivity in her dead world. Nora said: “**It is so unfair**. Many people had something from the start, and I had to fight so strongly for everything. I ruin my happiness because I have not learned to accept it. I can be so truly poisonous just when something is truly good. Now I can only be sad. I know I become venomous as soon as somebody tries to approach me. This is also the case with you, and I find this so horrible. I want so much to live differently, to experience what is beautiful with others, and that is just what I cannot do.”

In regard to treatment technique, I intuitively understood our work on the extra-transference relationships as extremely important and valuable, with the (preconscious) intention to separate the traumatic introject from the more authentic part of her self. The aim was to enable her gradually, as a second step, to free herself from those foreign elements that had been imposed on her by intrusion.

In the relationship with me, Nora expected that I would completely empathize with her view of things, that I in fact would see the world through her eyes. She reacted to the slightest touch of subjectivity on my side with hatred. Working on these sequences, we comprehended that **the other's subjectivity was for her identical with the devaluation and shaming of her self**. Only in being equal was it possible to be protected against these attacks.

She decided for the first time to confront the murder-suicide of her mother: She asked in the city archives for the newspaper reports from that time. She also brought copies to her sessions and addressed the perverse dynamics of her parents' relationship: “The children were used in a brutal battle between the parents.” We tried to comprehend the impulsive act of her mother. Was it a response to the shame of having been involuntarily impregnated, of having submitted to the father, and of having been functionalized by him? In this context, I was compelled to think of Melvin Lansky's considerations about Medea and her unbearable shame as motive for the murder of her children.

Nora however did not want me to see her pain. I interpreted that there was a strong conflict in her between the wish to share these horrible things with me and the anxiety about what would then happen in that closeness with me. I added that she herself was very shocked about that cold part within herself that could not admit any “weakness” and hurt, and that she feared I would condemn it just as much as one part of her did. At this point it became very clear to her how her experience and feelings had in the past been misunderstood, wrongly named, and reinterpreted, and that there was one part within her which did the very same thing now with her own experience, and also time and again with the experience of the others.

At the end of her effort to deal with the murder-suicide, she threw flowers in a symbolic act at the suspected place of the suicide in the river and bade in this way farewell to her mother and sisters. She could reconcile herself with her mother. She believes now that on the day of that dreadful event her mother must have been desperate and that her action had nothing to do with Nora’s worthlessness and guilt: “She did not have the support in her crises which I have received in the meantime.”

Time and again it is evident how great her fear is of the envy and the hatred coming from the negative introject in her — **i.e. her superego laden with resentment**. She gets hold of a document of her father’s descent (i.e. genealogy for the Nazis, *Abstammungsurkunde*). She finds out that during the Nazitime, her paternal grandfather functioned as a block leader: “Actively collaborating, that must cause an incredible guilt, and this guilt was transmitted. It is so difficult because it is not only a thing of one generation. I would like so much to have a child and transmit something good.” She gets stuck on one sentence in the document: “It has to be burned into the brains of the young people how essential Aryan descent is. I always thought that I was something better. This Aryan descent! This pure race stuff! Such a strange form of pride!” This transmitted guilt is also part of her tormenting superego.

She adds: “I want to get rid of the father within me, and I do not know what I can do to succeed. Simply throwing him out of me does not work. He would always return because he cannot live without me. He needs my energy. I imagine I throw him out of our house and slam the house door. But he keeps standing there and is waiting for me... This morning during breakfast, I watched a fly get caught in a spider web. It was gruesome to watch. The spider was simply squatting in its corner and waiting. When the fly had gotten in its web it came and wrapped up and enmeshed the fly. The fly was still living but she could not move anymore. This is like a

living reserve... It is the same with my father. Time and again he has ensnared me by hopes that turned into their opposites and then wrapped me up. He has sucked out my life... And I argue with myself so much: in spite of everything I still hope that before his death, he will wake up and notice what he has done to me, that shortly before his death he will say: 'Nora, I know I have done much to you.', that we can reconcile."

Commenting on the dream about decline and death of an idolized singer, the traumatic introject in her superego, Nora says: "Now I know why I dreamt of Freddy Quinn. My father wanted to have me as a boy, not as a girl. As a girl I always felt like dirt. I always had to deny and hide my femininity."

She had only known sadomasochistic forms of bonds. Therefore, she was unable to gain any trust because she had never gotten to know any love in a true sense and had only learned to exert control and to expect violence. She was familiar with this sadomasochistic universe of omnipotence and impotence, of power through suffering, of sexualized victimization and sadistically used intimacy.

Slowly however during our treatment, a counter-image started emerging, the notion that there could be loving attachments, that there could be closeness without power and control. It meant trusting that the other will return after separation: She says that deeply imprisoned within herself there is a core self with feelings of love, trust, and genuineness. She had been so attached to those tormenting relationships because "if there is so little love, you can also not separate from the other. Sensing love you can accept boundaries." Sobbingly she says before the Christmas break "Ach, how beautiful it would be if you were my mother! Then I would have one! Then I would belong to your family, and we could celebrate together."