

Envy: the canker in the bud

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the origins and mechanisms of envy through the relationship between two fictional sisters, Ruth and Elizabeth, in the short novel *Sin* by Josephine Hart (1992/1996, p. 138) and draw some parallels with case material. It will develop the hypothesis that the desire behind envy is not only to destroy the good that the envied one has, but also to become who the envied one is in order to have what they have. It will also show how this compulsion, which seeks basically to destroy and supplant, arises from an infant's failure to retain goodness for itself, resulting in a deep sense of unworthiness. Melanie Klein's assertion that envy arises in the very early dyadic stage of development is central to the way in which it is experienced, and this will be explored. Through its obsession with what is projected outside of the self, envy inherently alienates the envier from himself and is ultimately destined to fail in its desire, resulting only in self-destruction.

Sin concerns the relationship between two first cousins, thrown together as 'sisters'. It is the story of envy pursued with cold and calculated precision. It illustrates in painful detail the desire of the envier, Ruth, the narrator, to destroy the goodness that she envies and to become the envied one, Elizabeth. It offers its own hypothesis about how the envied one protects herself against envy without becoming contaminated by these destructive impulses and the aggressive desire for retaliation. Finally, it reveals the terror of annihilation that envy defends against and how, indeed whether, it is possible to confront this underlying threat.

Keywords: *Envy, the desire to supplant, rivalry, fear of annihilation, contempt, spoiling, destructiveness, projective identification.*

The story of *Sin*

Elizabeth is orphaned at 9 months when her own parents are killed in a car accident. She is taken in by her dead mother's sister and her husband. Later Ruth is born, the natural firstborn of her parents, but her place as the eldest

child has been usurped. Ruth's hatred and anger is fuelled by persecutory anxiety:

chance did not bring her into my life. By grand design she waited for me. In my own home. She was my mother's first child. Though not her firstborn. A terrible injustice to me (Hart, 1992/1996, p. 5).

Ruth's life becomes dedicated to obliterating her sister and putting herself in her place, thereby restoring what her sister has dispossessed her of. Initially, through childhood and adolescence, this is a hidden pursuit involving small objects and clothes secretly stolen away and hoarded. As an adult, her self-perpetuating and escalating obsession demands that she steal Elizabeth's husband too. The fact that this fails to bring satisfaction leads Ruth on to further, more calculated attacks on Elizabeth. Everything that happens to Elizabeth becomes grist to this poisonous treadmill.

In Ruth the canker of envy seeps maliciously into every relationship and becomes both the end and the means of her hostile aim to destroy and supplant. Following the tragic loss of both her son and Elizabeth's son in a drowning accident, the affair with Elizabeth's husband is exposed, and Elizabeth leaves. Ruth is eventually compelled to seek her out, and in the confrontation which follows, she is finally brought face to face with the devastating pain of betrayal and rejection which she has defended herself against all her life. It is ugly and humiliating, and comes close to the annihilation that she has always feared. However, a kind of truce ensues, the self-torture subsides, and Ruth achieves a kind of peace.

Discussion

This story captures something universally familiar in the dynamics of sibling rivalry whether one relates more to the position of Ruth or of Elizabeth. The murderous desire of a first child to rid themselves of a new sibling seems more akin to the jealous desire to hold onto what is already possessed. Envy as demonstrated in this story by Ruth, the second child, arises from deprivation, the desire to have what has never been possessed sufficiently, but which is perceived as possessed by the older sibling and making all the difference (Klein, 1997, p. 182). I hope to show that the perspectives of both first and second child are built on fantasy generated by the degree to which the good object has been securely established.

Klein (1957, p. 176) believed that the destructive impulse, and thus the capacity for envy or gratitude, is there from the beginning in greater or lesser degrees.

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

Klein's view of the innateness of aggressive impulses is also in the tradition of compelling examples from literary sources. Shakespeare, for example, is aware of the inherent flaw in even the most perfect expression of natural beauty:

Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud;
Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun,
And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud.
All men make faults (Sonnet 35).

The oral-sadistic and anal-sadistic components of envy are what give it simultaneously its characteristic obsessive desire to possess and angry need to destroy. These co-exist and are at the same time mutually antagonistic.

The biblical story of Isaac and his two sons Jacob and Esau also suggests the innateness of envy and rivalry. When Isaac's wife Rebekah becomes pregnant, she is disturbed by the twins she is carrying 'struggling together within her'. When she enquires of her God why this is so, she receives the answer:

Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples, born of you, shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger (Book of Genesis, 25: 23).

Competition and rivalry are thus part of the human condition and inevitable wherever two people strive for the same goal/object/prize, or seek gratification from the same finite source. In this story, Esau is born first, followed by Jacob who emerges from the womb holding on to Esau's heel with his hand. In young adulthood, Jacob, the smooth man, takes the place of Esau, the hairy man, and succeeds in deceiving their father and obtaining what was rightfully Esau's. Jacob's name means 'He supplants', an indication of this aspect of envy which seeks to take the place of the envied one. Sibling rivalry is thus not an option. Rather, the task is to learn to manage it in oneself.

Klein places envy right at the heart of early infant experience and the good/bad dichotomy which confronts the infant at birth. In this undifferentiated state, goodness, symbolized by the breast, is taken in by the infant who thus feels itself to be good. Goodness introjected over time establishes a secure internal structure and endows future character with the building blocks of gratitude, generosity, the ability to make reparation and the ability for enjoyment.

Envy arises in the black hole of frustration and unmet need left by the withholding breast. The hostile impulses which are unleashed fuel a vicious cycle of destruction, i.e. lack of gratification arousing destructive impulses which then attack the source of potential gratification – and the ability to retain the good internal object is hijacked (Klein, 1957). In such circumstances, the infant not only rejects the unbearable goodness that cannot be contained, but feels him or herself to be not-good-enough.

In the novel, the goodness Ruth refers to is not a firmly established good inner object. She says:

I believe now that I was exposed too early to goodness and that I never recovered. Trapped in the fierce grasp of Elizabeth's kindness, . . . I suffocated on the high thinness of the air around her. The corrosive power of her generosity killed, as they arose in me, my own small instincts towards goodness (Hart, 1992/1996, p. 9).

Goodness has been projected into Elizabeth and is experienced as persecutory. Ruth, the adult, is contemptuous of it.

Encouraged when small to follow the sweetness of her [Elizabeth's] behaviour – to imitate her many acts of generosity, to note her kindness – I followed in cold envy the path she laid before me through the years (Hart, 1992/1996, p. 11).

There is a sense that Ruth has sustained a mortal wound that struck at the core of her being and from which she will never recover. Indeed her whole life becomes a theatre for righting this wrong. She is expressing a deep narcissistic wounding which leaves her without a foundation on which to build a benign self. Mirroring of the infant by the mother reflects back to the infant its right to exist, its right to take up space, and most importantly, affirms the 'all rightness' of the whole range of emotions and sensations which the infant feels and experiences in the first few months. Waddell (1998, p. 31) takes up Bion's (1962) ideas and illustrates the positive, self-enhancing, ego-building outcome of this maternal, thinking attitude in facilitating the child's ability to make sense of its experience. When this 'thinking breast' is not available to the infant, the outcome is very bleak.

The kind of maternal reverie and being held in mind and gaze which Ruth longs for is hinted at when Ruth stumbles on Mother, Father and Elizabeth engaged together in a kind of trinitarian tableau which so wounds and enrages her because she feels herself to be excluded and superfluous:

Perfect happiness. Complete happiness. And I am outside the circle. . . . A vision has been burnt into me, a vision of heaven. In darkness, I gaze at the light. The light in which I should have bathed alone (Hart, 1992/1996, p. 8).

Ruth's fundamental grievance seems to be a lack of specialness, a feeling that her birth was nothing more than a completion of what the adoption of Elizabeth had first begun. She is seen only in relation to Elizabeth, or paired with Elizabeth: 'I would be forever, falsely the second. Not only the second, but one of a pair: less valuable without the other' (Hart, 1992/1996, p. 10). There is nothing explicit written about Ruth's mother being disturbed or depressed, but there are hints at her being emotionally cut-off. One can only speculate about the possible reasons, which nevertheless present plausible explanations as to why Ruth may have suffered such a massive lack of maternal input that led to the catastrophic consequences described. Ruth's mother had lost her sister unexpectedly in an accident. Her sister had a baby, which Ruth's mother at this point did not. One can imagine the possible envy of Ruth's mother towards her sister, and the subsequent guilt when she becomes the adoptive mother of the baby she so coveted. It would be as if she had actually succeeded in killing off the object of her envy and replacing her sister as the baby's mother. Her guilt may thus lead her into an over-protectiveness towards the adopted child, Elizabeth, and rejection of her own baby, Ruth, for being a reminder of her destructive envy towards her own sister. She may also fear the power of her 'evil eye' (Ayers, 2003), which had apparently acted out its evil intent towards her sister. In this context one can not only imagine what the infant Ruth may have seen reflected in her mother's gaze, but also can witness unconscious envy being transferred into the next generation.

Ruth in fact appears to be extremely assertive and confident, but the cold steely quality of her ambition suggests a mind unmediated by feeling, using knowledge and logic as its springboard rather than a valued sense of self. The absence of the 'thinking breast' referred to above would have forced her to build an ego structure capable of supporting a deeply isolated internal world and defending against the despair provoked by such a bleak landscape. According to Ayers (2003, p. 189), non-seeing and non-feeling can be experienced by the child as all there is between existence and annihilation, and therefore something to latch on to and identify with: 'In order to hold onto any feeling of existence and a love that may never come, the infant ends up merging with mother's deepest disturbances'.

Nora

I would now like to look at the material of a patient, Nora, in which there are parallels with both Ruth and Elizabeth. Nora (whose name and details have been changed), now in her fifties and a grandmother, was the middle of three siblings and the second girl with only a year between herself and her older sister. She had felt rejected by this older sister from birth, an outsider in the family generally, and shut out in particular from the close relationship she perceived between her sister and her mother. Her lack of containment

was compensated for by fantasies of centrality and omnipotence resulting in frequent disappointment and perceived attack and plunging her into paranoid-schizoid mode.

Similarly to Ruth, Nora recalled being seen only as part of a pair, without a distinct identity herself. This contrasted with her perceptions of both her siblings. Each seemed to her to hold a unique position which elicited expressions such as 'Of course [the oldest] may do things on her own because she's the eldest', or 'Oh [the youngest] must be included because he's the baby'. She could remember no special privilege which fell to her position.

There were times when this sense of being a 'non-entity' became particularly overwhelming and unbearable such as when a sibling was the focus of special attention at a birthday or wedding. Nora would then be compelled to try to upstage the sibling in some way. This came to be understood as a survival measure, in circumstances when Nora's sense of being an outsider came close to annihilating all sense of existence. Such a focus of attention and affirmation on the other was tantamount to a total denial of Nora. Her desperate attempt at upstaging was a means of displacing the sibling so that Nora herself would acquire the attention, recognition or affirmation accruing to the other. A similar kind of upstaging is effected by Ruth who cannot bear to endure Elizabeth's happy marriage and motherhood, and so contrives her own.

Nora's desire was always to manipulate events in order to affirm her own existence over her siblings. For example, when her sister's daughter chose to go on holiday with Nora and her family rather than with her own parents, Nora experienced pure triumph – needless to say short-lived, before another incident triggered feelings of unfavourable comparison with the sibling and the unconscious complex of murderous hatred was re-ignited.

Nora's feeling of being an outsider in her family is evocative of what Elizabeth's experience may have been. Her lack of embeddedness and belonging compelled Elizabeth to be good, to conform, unable to risk being bad for fear of forfeiting her place. For Nora, constantly bemused by her sister's apparent ability to command co-operation from those around her and have her needs met with such ease, the absence of entitlement meant much effort and calculation for meagre gain.

Nora's relationship with her mother during childhood was fraught and she was often beaten and treated violently by her. What emerged powerfully in the course of the work was how Nora's difficulties with her mother were part of an inherited dysfunction going back at least to her maternal grandmother and continued in the relationship between Nora and her daughter, Alice. In Kleinian terms, the bad object had been internalized over four generations, and Nora was painfully aware that her daughter had retrieved little goodness from their early relationship. Her longing to break the cycle of violence and for Alice to have a different experience of

mothering had been continually undermined by her own desperate need to find and retain a good object for herself. This uncontained part of Nora saw Alice as a rival with whom Nora was over-identified, leading to a confusion of roles where Nora would seek containment from her daughter instead of vice versa.

I have referred to Nora's rivalry with her daughter in the sense of her own longing to be looked after and looked at. Her identification with Alice made it difficult for Nora to find sufficient distance (the triangular space described by Britton, 1989) from which to think about Alice's needs. Fonagy and Target (1999, p. 62) refer to Fairbairn's (1952) suggestion that it is: 'the fundamental need of every infant to find his mind, his intentional state, in the mind of the object'. Furthermore, they state that:

it depends on the capacity of the mother . . . to demonstrate to the child that she thinks of him as an intentional being whose behaviour is driven by thoughts, feelings, beliefs and desires (1999, p. 54).

In their discussion of violent patients, Fonagy and Target highlight the inability of such patients to conceptualize the mental state of others. Nora felt that her mother was probably depressed when she had her. The overall impression is of an experience very far from Bion's idea of 'maternal reverie'. Waddell (1998, p. 34) describes this as

the state of mind in which it is possible for the mother unconsciously to be in touch with the baby's evacuations or communications of pain, and of his expressions of pleasure, to receive them, to be able to engage with and savour them if calm and loving, or to modulate them if distressed and hating, and to hand them back to him in recognisable and now tolerable form.

This foundation for understanding oneself and relating to others appeared to have been severely lacking for Nora, and the consequent violence to herself manifested in self-cutting and self-denigrating behaviour, seemed to have its origins in these precarious beginnings.

Nora's desperation to feel securely attached held an immediacy which made her believe that one good day or one good session could put everything right for ever. Of course it would all be lost equally suddenly and completely. The concept of an attachment taking root and growing over time was absent. Polledri (2003, p. 206) says:

From the point of view of containment, psychotherapeutic treatment is, in a sense, offering the patient the very thing they have never had, so they do not know what to do with it, or how to internalise the experience of the attachment.

She goes on:

As individuals we build our character through introjection – taking into ourselves our experiences of our early relationship to our carers and others close to us in infancy and childhood. If, for whatever reason, envy prevents us from building loving, warm, trusting relationships, our whole inner world will be influenced and we are likely to remain correspondingly insecure. According to Joseph (1986), this insecurity or sense of inadequacy to form an attachment will increase hatred of others who can do so – who are more comfortable, more confident and more stable – so this insecurity increases the envy, creating a vicious circle.

The inability to ‘know what to do with’ the good object is perhaps what spurred both Nora and Ruth to be constantly attempting to put themselves in the place of someone who appeared to them to have a hold on the internalized object, and thus to repossess what they had projected outside of themselves. Nora, having started therapy, deeply regressed, was able to achieve a degree of self-containment and her omnipotence and ego-centrality reduced markedly. However, her need for immediacy led her to leave therapy abruptly when she was feeling ‘good’, and to what extent she was able to retain her embryonic sense of self remains unknown.

I will now explore further the effects of the inability to secure the good object and the resulting sense of no-good-ness. I will then attempt to round out this discussion of the experience of envy by looking at how envy arising at the early stage of part-object relating differs from jealousy and may give rise to contempt. Finally, I explore the experience of being envied and how, indeed whether, confronting envy can be survived.

The unworthiness at the heart of the compulsion of envy

In the envious person the hatred engendered by unfulfilled entitlement and the aggressive desire to destroy what cannot be tolerated in others, masks a deep feeling of unworthiness and vulnerability – the ‘not-good-enough-ness’ referred to earlier – which accounts for the inbuilt failure of envy. By the very nature of their obsessional focus on the idealized external object, the envious person is condemned never to accept or come to terms with his own mediocre good (Klein, 1957). As soon as someone succumbs to envy, ‘they get off the hook of their struggle with themselves and their relation to the good’ (Ulanov, 1983, p. 9). This is what makes envy such an endlessly unsatisfying pursuit that constantly reinforces its own futility.

In order to grow and mature, the polarized world, at once ideal and dreadful, must be let go of in favour of the messy ambivalent mix of reality. Mourning signifies this acceptance. It also signifies an acceptance of oneself as good and bad – a similar messy, ambivalent mix. For Ruth to

acknowledge the pain as opposed to the injustice of her losses would, one feels, be a self-annihilating exercise. In defence against this precariousness she develops an arrogant self-confidence fuelled by a powerful intellect, which defies confrontation but masks a deep self-hatred. This self-hatred gets projected out onto the object of her betrayal, Elizabeth.

The unspoken fantasy which accompanies Ruth's desire to supplant Elizabeth and establish herself as first-born is that if this could be achieved, all the missing love, recognition, significance and goodness would be restored. What this denies is that in the actual place that she does occupy, goodness has been banished, forfeited by her own unconscious sense of unworthiness. Instead she hates and devalues it. Her conclusion that 'in the end, there is something stony in the heart of goodness. Which is perhaps why, all too often, we avoid it' (Hart, 1992/1996, p. 138), suggests that in the envious person goodness and hate are intimate bedfellows and discovering one will only evoke the other. This prevents her from claiming the actual goodness that she has received as opposed to the longed-for goodness that she was denied.

Immediately one feels envious, one loses touch with the self which becomes projected into the other person. It seems that envy arises when something outside of the self highlights not just a lack of some thing or quality within, but a fundamental alienation from the self, and a sense of not properly inhabiting one's own life or being rooted in one's own self. At heart, being at home with oneself is what is envied. The illusion of envy is perhaps that if one can inhabit the other's place one will come home to one's self. This is illustrated by Leslie Farber (1966, p. 37) who places great emphasis on the part self-assertion plays in arousing envy. He describes being overtaken by envy aroused by witnessing in another the self-assertion that he himself lacked.

What I clearly observed . . . was his egotism, his infatuation with self, his dramatic need to impress that self on both posterity and on his more immediate audience. In brief, I detested his self-assertion.

By the author's own admission he wants to demolish the self innocently asserted by the other which threw into relief his own inner emptiness and inferiority, his fear of no self and nothingness.

Envy, jealousy and contempt

According to Klein, envy arises at the dyadic stage, where the infant still relates to part-objects as an extension of himself, and 'being' and 'merging' are paramount. In this paranoid schizoid state, the chaotic mix of warring emotions is controlled by projection and splitting. Survival or annihilation are the endgames. It follows that envy at any stage of life will replicate this same lack of separateness.

When the infant matures to the point of beginning to recognize separate entities, it must also become aware of the corollary of separateness, i.e. that whole objects can relate to other people as well. With this latter awareness comes the idea of 'having' and 'possessing' as an extension of 'being', and envy moves into the arena of Oedipal jealousy. Jealousy is rooted in a later developmental stage where separateness has been established, and does not threaten existence in the same way that envy does. It involves the fear of losing what one has to another person – the first-child position referred to earlier. However, as Joseph (1986) suggests, even when three people may be involved, the two-person envy might be the more significant element if it emanates from that dyadic place.

Ruth never sees Elizabeth as a whole object. If she did, she would at least have a degree of understanding and compassion for her that is completely missing. If Ruth was able to see her as a whole person, she would see in Elizabeth a young child who underwent the severe trauma of losing both her parents very suddenly in an accident. She would see the implications for Elizabeth of being taken in as an orphan and given a home and having to adapt to a family that was not her own. She would at least, as she grew up, have been able to think about why Elizabeth was as she was, and what her goodness meant. The goodness that she felt 'exposed to too early' may have been Elizabeth's only means of surviving as a cuckoo in someone else's nest. For Elizabeth, being good may have been her way of ensuring that this adopted home could be as secure as she could possibly make it, and defending in the only possible way her place in this family that was not her own. Did Elizabeth envy Ruth her freedom to be bad or good without the threat of eviction hanging over her? None of these possibilities were available to Ruth to think about because they belong to the more developed stage of whole-object relating.

Ulanov (1983, p. 20) refers to Helmut Schoeck's sociological study of envy between Western and Third World countries where the relationship has turned sour: 'Generosity has aroused ingratitude and hateful resentment, because lavish giving seems to demonstrate the giver's superiority'. This resentment is an attempt by the receiver to upend the unbearable feelings of inferiority and impoverishment which are exposed by being the object of such generosity. Weakness and insecurity is denied, split off and projected out, and then despised in order that the weak person can feel strong. The urge to attack, destroy and harm is in fact the urge to annihilate the despised self. In the vicious circle of contempt, the persecutor and the victim are one.

Ruth expresses this kind of envious resentment towards Elizabeth's kindness and generosity. To allow it to penetrate her defences would expose her inner worthlessness and no-good-ness. The only way to deal with it without being overwhelmed is to despise it, as her attitude to Elizabeth's recognized success as an artist reveals: 'Obsessed with sky, she was unfashionable, rarely exhibited and in my opinion totally without talent' (Hart, 1992/1996, p. 16). 'Elizabeth is not an artist.... [She] is a

reasonably competent painter of skies' (p. 75). And when Ruth's deception with Elizabeth's husband is eventually revealed and Elizabeth, now alone, is making her living through her painting: 'Ridiculous to me that so small a talent could sustain her' (Hart, 1992/1996, p. 139).

The experience of being envied

Ulanov (1983) describes three particular marks of being the object of envy: the first is the feeling of being possessed and one's identity nullified. The wholeness of the envied one's subjective reality is dismissed, overlooked, and reduced. They are seen by the envier only from the angle that evokes the envy – as part-object. Second, the envied one feels helpless to effect any kind of reparation. Envy cuts off all constructive connection between the envier and the envied, which can only be repaired by the envier withdrawing the projections. Third, the envied one has done nothing to deserve the envier's persecutory attacks other than to exist and to be in the envier's line of fire. As Ulanov (1983) says: 'the very existence of the envied is the problem. The target of envy's attack is not one's doing, but one's being (p. 21).

How does Elizabeth cope with being envied? At the apex of Ruth's destructive attacks, when Elizabeth has lost her husband to Ruth, when both their sons have died, the one trying to save the other from drowning, Elizabeth finally speaks of her torment: 'All my life I've been quiet. So quiet. I knew . . . that this was not really my place. I was here . . . because of a death. I had inherited a grief. I was loved . . . still I never had the confidence to be difficult. Or to displease' (Hart, 1992/1996, p. 137). And when Ruth was born: 'The more she became Ruth – Ruth the wild, Ruth the dangerous, the brilliant – the more I needed to be good and quiet'.

At the heart of this is the fear of losing what she had only inherited 'because of a death', which was never rightfully hers in the same way that it was Ruth's. And the tragedy is that it was Ruth's – it didn't need to be envied – it was hers by birth.

This suggests that Ruth is living out envy which belongs to Elizabeth in the same way that Elizabeth inhabits the good which belongs to Ruth. In this way, the 'sisters' can be seen as the split halves of one person. There is a scene after the loss of their sons when Ruth in her anguish attacks Elizabeth physically with a dead bird. She says:

I stopped at last and looked down at her. Was something broken? [Had I] got to the bone, or again only hurt soft tissue? The smell could have been the rotting body of the bird, and not something rotten in Elizabeth that I had at last burst open (Hart, 1992/1996, p. 128).

It is as if Ruth is desperate to expose a hidden core of badness in Elizabeth which will match her own and bring the two split halves together. Ruth is no

doubt carrying Elizabeth's projected envy, just as Elizabeth carries Ruth's projected goodness.

It is as if Elizabeth has been as imprisoned by goodness as Ruth has by envy. Some years later, when Ruth is living with Charles, the husband whom she stole from Elizabeth, and Elizabeth is living on her own in Scotland, she tells Ruth: 'It was useless to fight you...that was why I decided to love you instead...[T]o fight you...might enrage you further...You were full of hidden angers' (Hart, 1992/1996, p. 151). Envy is as destructive to the envied as to the envier.

Confronting envy and the fear of annihilation

Recognition, mourning what was not available, being able to withdraw what has been projected, developing empathy for the self – all these paths to overcoming envy have been hinted at. The one thing that made them all too threatening for Ruth was her fear of annihilation. Her power, her cold calculating determination to destroy, her obsession with stepping into her sister's shoes and taking over her life were the manifestations of a false self which enabled her to live her life in spite of the continuous threat posed by her inner precariousness. As Klein says about addressing these very early impulses and emotions in analysis: 'The anxieties aroused by interpretations of hate and envy towards the primal object, and the feeling of persecution by the analyst whose work stirs up those emotions, are more painful than any other material we interpret' (Klein, 1957, p. 232).

In the final chapters of the novel, Ruth visits Elizabeth in Scotland. Perhaps because Elizabeth, stripped of everything, has begun to discover *her* true self and to live *her* own life, she finds a new note from which to relate to Ruth. Ruth is taken by surprise at her tone: 'Elizabeth! That sounded a little bit like me. Almost mocking' (Hart, 1992/1996, p. 149). It is as if the world between them is becoming a little less polarized by projection, a little more based in reality.

This new strength which Ruth perceives in Elizabeth is of a different quality to the excessive goodness of the past. So, when Ruth's envy surfaces again at the discovery that Charles still visits Elizabeth, Elizabeth is able to confront her for the first time in her life:

You're like a child, Ruth. What you can't have, you must destroy. You'll spoil what you have with Charles. Because of your anger at his small need of me. You want that as well (Hart, 1992/1996, p. 155).

This direct confrontation with the reality of Ruth's envy allows Ruth for the first time to experience her murderous rage at Elizabeth's being: 'If I could kill you, I would... If I could strangle you, I would. If I could plunge a knife into you, I would'. This release of rage acts as a catalyst to a sort of

physical enactment of the dreaded annihilation: 'My bones were becoming liquid. I had miscarried myself. Was there a vessel to contain me?' (Hart, 1992/1996, p. 156). It is Elizabeth who provides the containment – perhaps symbolizing the appearance of an embryonic internalized good object.

Conclusion

In this novel, Hart has portrayed the deadly net of envy which traps both the envier and the envied. Using Klein's exposition of envy as a springboard, I have tried to explore how envy arises out of a sense of one's own unworthiness, itself the product of massive early infantile deprivation; how the appearance of envy at this very early two-person stage effects the nature of envy and makes it what it is; and how the resulting lack of embeddedness of the internalized good object permeates into adult life. With the help of Ruth and Elizabeth, and of Nora, I have highlighted the lack of self-worth at the heart of envy, the need for strong defences to protect the precarious ego, and the risk involved in allowing the vicious cycle of envy to be breached. Klein suggests that the deep-rooted spoiling nature of envy can be mitigated by later relationships if there remains a remnant of the good internalized object which is capable of generating gratitude. It seems that her life was a demonstration of her lack of this capacity. However, the breakthrough into Ruth's raw and wounded feeling life signifies that her mourning may perhaps have begun.

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