

Evolution of the psychoanalytic theory of anorexia (1)

Paola Camassa

Abstract:

The author carries out a brief theoretical and bibliographic review on the various psychoanalytic perspectives that have tried to focus on multiple aspects of anorexia and introduces her hypothesis by exploring new points of knowledge on the disorder through the presentation of a case of early anorexia. The article focuses on the complex intrapsychic and relational vicissitudes of the anorexic world, following the Bionian theory (1965) of "transformations into hallucinosis"; it is a question of an "other" world, wonderful and "superior", different from the human one of the given body. By making a pact with the divinity, the anorexic produces a double movement of denial, both with respect to the breast and the "lower" maternal body, and with respect to the mating of the parents; the denials multiply, extending, with puberty, to the prescription of the sexuality of one's own body and to the multiple fragments of reality involved. In the context of a terrible complicity with the "savior" father, antagonist at the breast (Camassa, 2012) and against the breast and the mother, patients with anorexia cannot grow: they are always, eternally, nine years old, like the nymphs of Artemis. If the analyst allows himself to be dazzled by the narcissistic exaltation of the cult of the "superior" body without distancing himself from it, he will be able to understand, with his tools, the reasons for this incarnation and avoid witnessing the mortification of the real body. In the hypothesis set out, the terrible effects of the great anorexia are, from the patient's point of view, the martyrdom of the upper body, its *via crucis*, the destiny of the Incarnation.

Key words: anorexia, ego ideal, transformation in hallucinosis, superior body, eternalization, top object

Introduction

The psychoanalytic literature about anorexia and bulimia intersects with all general theories, such as the instinct, object relation, relational and intersubjective ones and their evolution.

In the framework of the instinct theory, the object relation one has been identified as a neurosis, essentially a form of hysteria or a classic conversion, which is being driven by the Oedipus anxieties (Breuer and Freud, 1895). It has also been considered as an obsessive neurosis, that is a displacement as a flight from the Oedipus anxieties in line with the classic Freudian model of the instinctual regression (Freud, 1914b). In either case, central is the conflict between the Ego and Id and repression as a defense. Another approach has focused on the power of the narcissistic drive at the expense of the sexual drive (Freud, 1914b). According to this approach then, the Oedipus complex is not the driving force here as the psychogenesis of anorexia can only be the aspiration to regain the omnipotence of the original condition.

In this approach, body is the main focus of attention. At puberty, more than in other periods in life, the body seems to go out of the Ego's control and girls, more than

boys, have to renew their effort of integrating the body ego and psychic ego (Tausk, 1919). The girl's pubescent body, which has become similar to that of her mother, is a new acquisition, which will be either rejected or cathected with libido and attributed to the ego (Tausk, 1919).

Apparently, a crucial role is played by autoerotic experiences aimed at an autarchic use of a ghost of the part object, that is autoerotic experiences do not develop instead of the object relation but *against* it. The deviations of autoerotic experiences actually give an account of the confusion between food/stool, and breast/anus. This perspective provides a particularly exhaustive explanation of the bulimic behavior. However, a higher degree of autarchy is enough to also explain anorexia (Chasseguet Smirgel, 2003).

The psychogenesis of anorexia, according to many authors of the Kleinian school, seems to lie in the impossibility to accept a united parental couple. Such rejection is firstly aimed at internal objects, and secondarily and partially at external ones, then becoming a partial rejection of reality. Rejecting the internal parental couple would be the extreme form of the typical manic defense based on control, contempt and triumph.

One of the developments of this approach has tried to explain the differences between sexes through intrusive objects. Girls, again according to Klein (1950), are more inclined to introjecting objects to populate their internal world. This same inclination may be at the origin of their anxiety of being intruded by bad objects. Such anxiety however might become very violent as a result of an excessive primary envy as it could originate an intrusive and damaging object. Predisposition to anorexia/bulimia would then be originated first of all by an excessive primary envy, the manic refusal of the parental couple, presence of an intrusive and damaging object and consequences of such intrusiveness.

In the framework of the relational theory, two hypotheses have had some impact: first that of the mother being the cause of anorexia and the daughter being intruded by her anxieties (Polacco, 1997), and, more recently, that of a real experience of an early sexual intrusion (Lawrence, 2002). In addition to these two hypotheses, which have never been discarded, have come those of an absent father, absence of a paternal function, hereditary psychogenesis of anorexia and, finally, that of its sociocultural psychogenesis (originated by changing aesthetic models, values and lifestyles).

By presenting a case study of early anorexia, I am going to try and demonstrate a different explanatory hypothesis.

Sveva was 11 years old and her disorder had suddenly manifested in all its dangerous aspects in the past few months. She refused to eat, go to school and leave the house. She was like a raging and desperate wild animal. Her age made it difficult to decide about the setting: I was sure that she did not want to play or draw, but I could not see her lying on the couch.

I was told that she had always been the best pupil at school, wrote stories and screenplays under her father's guidance. According to their parents' description, she was small and did not show signs of puberty. Already before losing weight, she was

very small, a child, as opposed to her peers. In all my young patients, appearance does not reflect age. This might have been a consequence of her disorder and weight-loss in particular. However, during the sessions with Sveva, I realized that her physical immaturity was not due to anorexia, that she had already developed her disorder before its impressive display. I will come back to this point.

Although the situation was dramatic, I needed to gain time. The mother was her primary carer but she was subject to the violent attacks of the daughter and was discredited by her husband at the same time. Consequently, I decided to offer her some support and meet her three times a week before starting to meet Sveva. As a matter of fact, the latter had no intention whatsoever of starting any form of therapy. Also, her pediatrician had been the object of her violent rejection due to an exhausting negotiation about nutrition, but in the end, she had accepted a liquid feeding to be taken in three daily doses. However, it was only due to her father's mediation that the deal had been won. It was difficult for the mother to see Sveva "drinking from the bottle", but given the serious situation she "was not allowed to express her opinion". I understand that she had felt left out since she had failed in convincing her daughter to eat.

All that had already happened.

After Sveva's first days of life, when she started breastfeeding, the father's sister was hospitalized in the same private hospital due to an attempted suicide. The mother could still remember her own dismay: the joy for her first child was overcome by the desperation for that painful event.

"No one could rejoice at me or the baby: relatives went from one floor of the hospital to the other".

In a few weeks, breastfeeding was stopped. The baby vomited her mother's milk and the pediatrician stated that she was 'intolerant'; therefore, she was fed with soy milk. The mother explained that the baby continued vomiting and that she wanted to try breastfeeding again. She was denied this opportunity. As a matter of fact, the baby started to regularly drink soy milk after a few days and grew 'beautifully'. So, everybody thought that it had been the best decision.

Pathogenesis of anorexia

Issues with breastfeeding emerge in most of the cases I have treated, but my hypothesis about the pathogenesis of anorexia has been and still is that it is a specific capacity of resistance, an idiosyncratic defense vis-à-vis those issues.

Bion (1965) pinpointed that the special mix of intolerance to frustration, hatred, envy, rivalry and vigor pushes an individual to believing that an ideal object must exist which can satisfy all your desires. However, if it does not exist, he will be able to create it by himself. This is a fundamental step to understand "transformations in hallucinosis".

Frustration at the breast is denied, so the individual makes his own breast, a better breast (Camassa, 2010). This fantasy gains the status of discipline: a tool, method, object to escape frustration is superior to any tools, methods and objects used to look for gratification.

Bion (1963) links that series of experiences called hallucinosis to Klein's (1946) concept of projective identification, that is a thought which could be included in the category of action (row 6 of Bion's grid). It is also true that at an early stage projective identification is the norm.

Freud (1911) had already highlighted that there are different stages: one where a muscular action is needed to modify the environment, and one where the sophistication of thinking has come into place.

The same set of built-in emotions pushing the mind towards fantasies, which are actually actions, could be also compared to the concept of Ego Ideal.

According to Freud (1914a), at the origins of the ideal needs of personality there might be a process aimed at restoring the omnipotence of infantile narcissism.

According to Nunberg (1932), the ideal ego would be an early formation prior to the super-ego.

According to Lagache (1958) it is an unconscious narcissistic formation which is not the mere union of Ego and Id, but it also involves a primary identification with another being invested with omnipotence, namely the mother. The ideal ego serves as the basis of *heroic identification* and "...it is further revealed by cases of passionate admiration for great historical or contemporary figures who are remarkable for their independence, nobility or superiority. As the treatment progresses, we see the ideal ego taking shape and emerging as a formation which cannot be confused with the Ego-Ideal" (Lagache). The formation of the ideal ego has sado-masochistic implications, namely the denial of the other stemming from the affirmation of oneself. Originally, it is an identification with the aggressor: in the conflict between adult and child demands, the child identifies with the adult whom he endows with omnipotence and thus the latter is misperceived, subjugated, even abolished altogether (Lagache).

Lacan (1958) also believed that the ideal ego is a narcissistic formation originating from the mirror stage and belongs to the imaginary realm.

Freud (1914b) differentiated a more serious form of anorexia, stemming from a refusal of sexuality, from hysterical anorexia. He explained that girls at puberty may develop a neurosis so through anorexia they express their refusal of sexuality is. Such neurosis is to be related to the oral stage of sexual life.

I take this dynamic explanation of anorexia as the most convincing and clear (although Freud did not deal with it and he even discouraged the use of psychoanalysis in such cases).

Disavowal is an attempt of refusing the reality of a traumatizing perception. Freud (1925) mainly dealt with castration disavowal (*Verleugnung*), but not only. This type of defense needs to be differentiated from repression, which pertains the conflict between the Ego and the Id.

Disavowal is related to reality

Defenses such as repression and disavowal can coexist without influencing each other: this can be called splitting of the Ego (Freud, 1938).

However, it is possible that this attitude, current, defense, the oldest and deepest, which simply consists in rejecting reality, prevails. And according to Freud, this would be characteristic of a psychosis.

There is a conceptual continuity between denial as a primary defense mechanism, Klein's projective identification, and Bion's concept of hallucinosis. These are normal mental operations at the onset of psychic life, but they take on pathological traits if they prevail over other mental operations.

Provided that disavowal is the general mechanism, the disavowal of breast frustration is going to be a prototype.

In my view there are two levels of disavowal: an early one (concerning coupling to the breast) and a later one (concerning coupling of parents).

Sours wrote that he could not find a symbolism connected to breast frustration. I find it an interesting observation. As a matter of fact, it is true that there is not such symbolism. What we find is a symbolism connected to the disavowal of breast frustration manifested by means of dizzying substitutions of food with idealized stool and breast with idealized anus. We might even say that the symbolism revolving around food-breast-idealized anus saturates the space of dreaming.

And not only that. Many dreams are mere food presentations.

These dreams express an opposed capacity to symbolism, namely hallucinosis, where memory of gratification is used to deny the absence of gratification.

Can we still talk about substitution or symbolic activity in relation to hallucinosis?

The rules of hallucinosis can be compared to those of symbolization, and these are the differences:

- The ontological status of hallucination, the latter being a free production of the subject, is different from the ontological status of the symbol and symbolized element (real).
- Signified and signifier are fused in hallucination.
- Signified is a characteristic of signifier.
- Hallucination is an active way to reach autonomy from the limited world of space-time.
- Analysis can bring hallucination back towards symbolization, if it is capable of finding an answer to the patient's question: what he is really doing? And why?

A person suffering from anorexia is a direct food producer, but his produce cannot be eaten. I can still remember when Patrizia proudly gave me a present she had brought for me from Japan. It was a beautiful box, with an artistic packaging, but when I opened it I was astounded: it contained freeze-dried chicken nuggets painted with green powdered sugar.

Bion (1963) said that what is predetermined can destroy the preconception of the breast and provide for endless supply of nothing.

The premorbid condition

From Sveva's mother I learned about some very crucial events that I have put in a chronological order. During the child's analysis I checked her 'transcriptions' of those events.

1) When Sveva was three, during a trip with her husband, the mother felt seriously bad during the flight, so she had to be hospitalized after their landing in Bangkok. She immediately went under surgery and they found out that she had had an ectopic pregnancy. Sveva was told that her mum had fallen and she had been operated to her arm. When she was nine, the same happened to the mother of one of her friends, and at that point they explained her what had truly happened and the meaning of ectopic pregnancy.

2) When she was about four, the girl manifested the Henoch-Schönlein purpura, a particularly vicious syndrome of unknown etiology.

3) When she was ten, after having had her tonsils removed, she had continued eating liquid food and communicating through written notes although she had fully recovered.

According to the mother, during that period Sveva changed into a difficult and stubborn girl, while she used to be a 'wonderful child'.

There had already been situations when she 'seemed to be a totally different girl' and the mother had found a nickname for her in those situations. She was "Ella, my little Cruella. Here she is, my little Ella has come!" When after those episodes Sveva calmed down, after many tears and cuddles, they laughed together about what had happened. She could not imagine that her daughter would turn into Ella and not come back to normal.

During therapy, Sveva told me about Ella as if she was real and about that name the mother had invented for fun and she had adopted as if it was another personality, her double. Yet this other personality did not magically disappear as the mother thought. On the contrary, she was always there, she controlled, criticized and 'did some things' in her dreams. Ella was dubious, skeptical, saw everything from her hiding place.

S.: "I have dreamt of her several times. In my dreams, she makes me see things I love, many small things".

During the winter of the same year, the group of classmates with whom she had always played theatre did very bad in staging the screenplay of Hamlet she had written with the guidance of her father.

"They had stopped having fun acting". "On Saturdays they wanted to go to parties and missed their rehearsals". The mother reported me her daughter or husband's comments, but it was clear that she had her personal opinion which she was afraid of sharing. The father was completely absent and left Sveva alone in that difficult circumstance. When he returned from his trips he often brought home actors or directors as guests, who stayed also for long periods of time. He was increasingly absorbed by his job and "nervous, impatient and irritated by the problems of the family and Sveva's requests for support". "You need to learn to give orders now" he had advised her on the phone. "Actors need a boss".

The small 'company' broke up. She had felt betrayed by her father and, following his advice, she had become unpleasant with her friends and they had turned away from her. She had talked to her mother about it with tears in her eyes, but immediately after she had made the mother promise that she was not going to say it to the father. In the meantime, the mother had heard her saying to a friend: "I fired them all, they were all lazybones".

During the summer, she had agreed on the project of a school trip of two weeks to London with some girls of her age and a teacher they trusted. The parents had decided to go on holidays to the beach while she was in London.

After a week the girls had already divided into two groups. She was part of the group of the 'young ones' and she hated the 'older ones' who made fun and isolated the younger girls.

Sveva emphasized those disputes, those rows between the two groups with her parents. During the analysis we used to call it "The War of England". Yet it was clear that the unexpected and firm 'no' from her father during one of the many phone calls when she asked him to come back home earlier made Sveva explode with rage, a catastrophic rage. She denied her hate for her father and her travel companions were given all the responsibility, so she sworn she would stop seeing them. And she did it. Sveva was left completely alone and the mother became the only target of her desperation.

From late August to early October Sveva had lost ten kilos, the mother five. In the family they were looking for specialized private hospitals.

The father formulated two hypotheses about what had triggered Sveva's disorder. The first, which made him feel guilty, was that he had not allowed her to return immediately from England; the second one, his favorite, made the wife feel guilty and linked the two events: it had been Sveva's first trip without them and that was his and his wife's first holiday at the sea. The child usually went with them or stayed with the grandparents. In addition, before leaving, it seems that the mother had foolishly revealed some details about adult sexuality.

The strict outcomes of the father's investigation shed light on the 'control' the girl exerted on the parental couple and their sexual life and I realized that that control was already in place before the facts the father was now illustrating. From the onset of Sveva's disease, they had stopped having sexual intercourse: "it was impossible" said the mother in tears.

Behind those words and tears, I could echo the accusations of the father and feral screams of the girl who had precociously expelled her parents intercourse from her internal world. She was resolved to continue refusing it alongside its consequences such as her own growth and, the more her knowledge of sexuality became concrete and inevitable the more stubbornly she would have fought.

When she was nine, she had made a promise with Chiara, the friend of hers who had been also humiliated by the 'grown ups' during their trip in England: "We are never going to have our period!"

I was later going to discover that she had made other similar 'promises'.

As I have anticipated, we can suppose she made a double disavowal: the breast first and then her parents' coupling, which demanded that she 'banned' sex from her life. It is at this point that body got in the game.

Such violent ban, her rejection, was proportional to the forces which made it difficult to comply with it, such as the inevitability of a sexual body, knowledge of sexuality suited to age, education, freedom of culture, especially considering the environment where she was growing up.

The girl started a war against the external world, reality, truth, inevitability of sexuality, and even the same feminine aspirations.

It is necessary to differentiate an attack on sexuality and its swaying degraded/sublimated manifestations from the narcissistic ban on sexuality.

Many authors have used for anorexia the same dynamic Freud (1914b) used for obsessive neurosis: when the instinctual and biological forces are awakened, anxieties connected to the Oedipus complex are reactivated and impose an instinctual regression towards a previous stage.

The case Risen (1982) reported reiterates this dynamic, including the fear of a pregnancy connected to the desire of having a baby with her own father and the fear of the rival mother. Risen diagnosed Susan with anorexia nervosa. We do not know what happened after analysis was successfully concluded with promises of children, love and restoration of external relationships. After a few years Risen learned directly from the patient that she was studying to become a psychotherapist.

By reading the case study it seems to me that the analyst had allowed the patient to manipulate him, that Susan's case was serious and it was by no means a neurosis. I have been similarly manipulated by Silvia and Laura, who terminated her therapy earlier. After a few years Laura came back, we had to start again and the analysis was long and insidious. Silvia came back after ten years. In my opinion, the first part of both analysis, which had been apparently well resolved, had managed to reduce the level of ego splitting but I had never met the psychotic core.

Laplanche would say that once instinct emerges it is game over. In the case of anorexia, the instinct never shows up or if it does, it is immediately forced to move back. Only a totalitarian instinctual regime, such as the narcissistic one, can be so powerful: anorexia mirabilis!

The ideal ego cannot regress; on the contrary, it grows haphazardly and uses the Ego to represent its eternalization. Anorexic patients are usually nine, like the nymphs of Artemis.

We can equally use Bion's concept of predetermination (1963). The body is not asked to remember of a shape (preconception) but it has to be the reincarnation of an independent person, regardless of its personal information (biological one, for instance).

All those early childhood promises and denials have generated an atypical inner world. Relationships with the external world do not impact on the ones with the internal world, they are rather shaped by the ideal relationships of the internal world. When the external world manages to prevail, a war is going to start followed by a collapse.

And it is going to be neither the usual decline of the Oedipus complex nor its destruction (obsessive neurosis): what appears to be an extension of latency is rather the firm consolidation of all those denials. When anorexia is on the verge of setting in it is easy to recognize the traits of personality disorders.

I agree on the hypothesis that in spite of having the same inclination towards denying breast frustration and parental intercourse, boys are less inclined to reject sexuality and the sexual body once they reach the threshold of puberty due to narcissistic investment in the penis.

Sessions with the mother lead to two key consequences. First, they allowed mother and daughter to come close again. The physical and verbal hatred against the mother had reached very worrying peaks: she came to the sessions with bruises, patches of missing hair and shaking for fear. She was completely overcome by her daughter, and the grandmothers and housemaid alike. Only the father could stop Sveva's fury. It repeatedly happened that when the father got home, Sveva surrendered, which seemed to me a manifestation of their *terrible complicity* (Camassa, 2012).

Another positive outcome of the mother's sessions with me was that Sveva could begin her analysis. Although the father had stated that he was looking forward to her starting therapy and that he trusted my skills, he had immediately entered in a competition with me. He read about the disease and forced the daughter to a huge mental work.

On the contrary, the mother relied on me and our cooperation was so successful that the day came when she brought Sveva. And she stayed with us in the room until the day Sveva asked her to wait for her out of the room.

Sveva's mother was less fragile and infantile than she appeared to be; on the contrary, she was very feminine, smart and, above all, she loved her daughter. She told me about the good relationship she had with her own father and that since he had died three years before, many things had changed. She felt less confident, almost vulnerable, especially in the relationship with her husband. And after the father-in-law had died, who was an authoritative figure and a point of reference for the family, her husband had become more arrogant and assertive.

"He might feel less confident too", she commented thus showing her ability to see the two sides of the same coin.

"Like Sveva, they look like each other. At first, I was happy that they were so united as a father and daughter. Now they look so similar: furious and weak, two mad people who have decided that I am the mad one".

One of the first tales Sveva wrote described a situation the mother had reported to me.

"One day, a bad, arrogant and greedy Queen annoyed with her Butler, who had always been faithful to her, gives him a potion that blinds him. The desperate and blind Butler turns to his friend the Wizard who shows him in a crystal ball the true face of the person who had blinded him. They see the Queen, who was actually a very bad witch. By seeing the Queen's true face, the butler regains his sight and, with a spell, the Wizard makes her mad forever. The scene ends in a wood with the raging

Queen running among the trees; she screams and rips leaves and branches out. The Butler and the Wizard spy on her and laugh, laugh, laugh.

From Sveva's analysis

The first month was dramatic. She was violent, insulted me, ran away in rage taking her mother with her. "You are fake, vain, you can only say words and talk rubbish!" I smiled. "Do not smile! I feel terrible and you smile. You understand nothing!"

She was right, that was too much.

I can perfectly recall the dress I had picked for our first session: it was a long and colored jersey dress. On the table there were yellow/orange gerbera daisies.

With patients like her, it is particularly important to look nice and provide a lively environment.

I left much space for destructive narcissism, I knew I was going to meet a little girl terrified by her own destructiveness, who then needed to introject vital objects.

Some lucky coincidences helped us. I also write screenplays. On the day she allowed her mother to leave the room, she had brought her first short story and read it to me.

The title was "The Stone World". She had quickly written it at the beginning of her illness. Now she did not want to do not even the things she used to love, that is writing short stories and screenplays.

This is how the setting was organized at the beginning: we read her last story, an extraordinary version of the catastrophe of her internal world and of her adventurous attempts to save it. This could dangerously remind of the special bond with her father, but luckily a positive figure was beneficial for our relationship, that is the maternal grandfather. Sveva grew fond of her analysis and was keen on learning from this experience. We were reviving, 'enacting' an old situation where her grandfather held her in his arms and told stories.

The Stone World (2)

My good friend the cat told me once that there was a fantastic place, the most beautiful world on earth, full of trees, of many colorful suns. It was inhabited by friendly and funny fava-beans who were always cheerful, lively, ready to tell a joke and spent their days feasting.

One bad day, the dreaded Bean-eating Frog, who was very jealous of those lucky creatures and very hungry as well, ate all the beans and transformed that world into the "stone world". The stone sank to the bottom of the sea.

A sad, strange, mixed world was now living in the stone.

Its inhabitants were different from each other, with nothing in common. They lived in different eras, spoke different languages. Even colors and jobs had changed.

No maintenance work was being done, the inhabitants were unable to communicate, so they were going crazy and broke everything in desperation.

Among the inhabitants there was Erbochia. It was a little creature all covered in eyes, a little monster who lived in one color.

A color was a world inhabited by very bad pieces of fabric which slept and washed themselves in their color without eating or speaking.

For some time Erbochia had been attempting to work out a solution for the problem, which was: who had to be fed. The leader of the pieces of fabric handed Erbochia a sheet of paper with the writing:

BRAYOPRGD RTHJU DIUUh DOZPL GDTLMDTRE looooooop

that is,

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW THE SECRET, YOU MUST FEED THE TICKLISH ONE!

It emerged that the one who laughed the most would accept to be fed and finally revealed to Erbochia how to save what had become the stone world.

Yet it was very difficult to find out where the pieces of fabric were ticklish: did they have armpits? or feet? Where? "If you make a mistake, it's the end, they won't talk anymore. these pieces of fabric are really mean. Perhaps their ticklish area runs along an inner thread: you have to unstitch them"!

Erbochia succeeded. She tickled that thread and they started laughing, and one laughed so much that he finally became REALLY BIG, let themselves be fed and talked.

It is possible to defeat the Bean-eating Frog with hippopotamus breath, brined bats, walnut must with pureed turtles. The whole thing had to be spat at by the snatching weapon 5486217 consisting of many monstrous flying mouths attached one to the other.

But this potion could only be found in the enchanted garden of the king of the old planet Sercilius.

The expert Racchetugi, Erbochia's good friend, was too lame for that difficult journey and then the Musketeer Trerenpoti, despite not having enough powers, offered to go immediately to that planet, while Erbochia guided him with the 'malcomio of stralcomio', that is a camera.

When the Musketeer arrived, he discovered that the planet was burning due to the invasion of the chimney wizards, and thousands of strange robots were making sure that no one was left alive.

The commander of those Robots was ... the Bean-eating Frog!

That was the end! The Musketeer would never be able to get the potion from the spell garden. But... A terrible sound transformed the Frog into the friendly Favotto, an old inhabitant of the beautiful world that had previously been the stone. He too had been the victim of a spell. The Black Lizard, the oldest and most feared monster in the world, had captured and transformed him into the evil Frog.

There was still the danger of the Robots which no longer had a boss and were very dangerous. Favotto found all the ingredients in the enchanted garden. At that point Erbochia managed to send the snatching weapon to the planet, which, after having being loaded, managed to eliminate all the Robots by spitting poison.

The Musketeer and Favotto could finally return. The Musketeer remained on the earth and he became VERY LUCKY having discovered that he had many powers.

The leader of the pieces of fabric together with the others went back to coloring tablecloths, clothes and many other things.

Favotto returned to his world which was more spectacular than before while the fava-beans had a great banquet and invited the Musketeer and also the old

Racchetugi. And how much they chatted and laughed at that banquet: they were happy again.

What did my imagination say to me starting from this story?

I thought of a happy infancy, a child reared in a special atmosphere, as in Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander*. Her grand-grandmother used to paint sunny, Sicilian landscapes when Sveva was little and had taught her all the secrets about colours.

There were many trees, and colors and many suns.

The grandfather was passionate about local traditions and studied them. At home they had a precious Sicilian traditional puppet theatre and many stories had been staged for the little Sveva. He was a storyteller himself and spent much of his time reading stories.

They were all...always cheerful, lively and ready to tell a joke.

When Sveva was eight, the grandfather first and the great-grandmother then had died. The family had lost two key figures and with them a routine of customary events, wit and vivacity.

Now it was a sad, unusual and mixed world.

Her mother had also talked to me about a radical transformation of her family following her father's death.

Sveva's father, a writer, traveled a lot and when he came back he brought guests home. The house was *invaded* with intellectuals, artists, bizarre and eccentric people who stirred Sveva's curiosity and were exciting.

However, her father's new world made her feel left out, a stranger and rather aroused her jealousy, envy and criticisms.

"I cannot tell who is a man and who is a woman, they are all divorced, drink and smoke all day, speak in a strange way".

They live in different ages, speak different languages. Colors and jobs alike were different. And the old planet Sercilius, where the king's palace and the enchanted garden were located, had been destroyed by the invasion of the Chimney Wizards and Robots.

I thought she hinted at the second floor of the house, where the great-grandmother and grandfather lived and where no one went any more to animate the precious theatre, which used to be inhabited by fairies, kings, queens and knights. That part of the house was now a guesthouse for all those 'queer' guests.

Peculiarity and unfamiliarity were the most common adjectives Sveva used to describe the new world. Her description seemed to underline the impact those losses had on the way people lived in that house. The screenplay of her life had deeply changed, her ideal world had become barbaric.

This is the beginning of Sveva's story.

My good friend the cat, whom I met in a dream, every morning told me his adventures of the previous nights. And this time he told me the story of the stone world.

A.: “Your good friend the cat could be your grandfather. The old *Racchetugi*, who used to have a lot of powers and was now too lame, could represent your grandfather as well. He could not miss the stunning final banquet and this could be a representation of your grandfather, whom you would like to have next to you once again, happy and smiling”.

S.: “While the Musketeer, who did not inherit the powers of the grandfather but still found the courage to help me, is uncle Riccardo!”

A.: “They are your loyal friends on the planet earth and they are going back to earth after having celebrated the return of Favotto and the fava-beans.”

Sveva had grown fond of turning the story into an autobiography, however the real analysis was to be started yet. I then shifted to the exploration of her inner world although that autobiographical approach had been very helpful and enticing.

A.: “Let’s use your ‘malcomio di stralcomio’, that is your bile-fueled camera. I think you are angry for the fate your wonderful world had to meet. It became a stone at the bottom of the sea, a small stone subjected to unknown forces that you cannot control. That stone is still crawling with lives although it is still in danger, and you, the protagonist, have still many powers although you have been turned into a little monster, *Erbocchia ... covered in eyes, a little monster who lived in one color.*

A color was a world inhabited by very bad pieces of fabric which rolled over in that color without eating or speaking.

Sveva was actually a little monster when she started the analysis: big eyes wide apart on her face, which was the sum of two profiles glued together. Her thin hair was in a pony tail, exactly like *Erbocchia*. And she writhed in fits of rage. In the presentation of her tale, all characters were sketched on the first page: livid red was the color of the pieces of fabric.

Where had she found such an effective representation of her rage? She was a condensation of her spots on the skin, of the bandages soaked in tincture (the disease she had in her early childhood) and of pads soaked in menstrual blood.

Sveva was truly surprised when with my help she realized that the secret code of the very bad pieces of fabric who lived in their own color was a distortion of the name of the disease she had had when she was a little girl and also that the very bad pieces of fabric and the color where they lived were marks of that terrible skin disease.

Henoch–Schönlein purpura was the name of the disease she had had when she was four.

BRAYOPRGD RTHJU DIUUH DOZPL GDTLMDTRE looooooop was the secret code.

I showed her that the code was a combination of consonants and vowels which sounded like the name of that disease and of some medication. Also, the final sound of it echoed the last letters of the disease name.

Sveva recalled of the itch it caused and of the long bandages turning red. She also recalled of the puzzled looks of everybody around her and the doctors who came to check her. She had heard the name of that strange disease hundreds of times, but she had not learnt it.

The disease had been described as the attack of some evil forces and she had felt helpless in the face of them ... the same feeling she was now experiencing due to the terrible monthly period.

A prodigy was necessary: make the evil pieces of fabric laugh! Turning the itch into tickle! The game children loved the most! And Erbochia seemed to know all the innermost secrets of tickling! She played that game with her father.

Sveva will eat and speak only when she can regain the possibility to laugh as she used to. This is the coded message she sent her father: I am going to eat and speak only if you start tickling me again. I am growing into an adult only if I can be your little children forever.

According to the myth, the little Artemis jumped on Jupiter's lap, her father, and said: I want to stay a virgin forever, I want a court of sixty nine-year-old nymphs.

With the complicity of the whole family and all its resources, Sveva had lived in her own world in the company of her most strenuous infant defenses (her denials) for far too long.

There were no differences in Sveva's wonderful world.

They all spoke the same language, that of kindness.

They were all children: children-grandparents, children-fathers...

They all had the same job: eating, sleeping, chatting and playing with Sveva.

Favotto and fava-beans were the happy family of the old world: *they were all little children, they were all children-fava-beans.*

Now that world was going to be wiped away by a destructive and uncontrollable force, which had permeated and contaminated everything and everybody, that is the *Black Lizard*.

The "original sin" was the spell that the Black Lizard had cast. It had turned the good Favotto into the terrible Bean-eating Frog.

I underlined that there were three worlds in her story: her own world, the planet 'Sercilio', and the earth.

A.: "Your wonderful world 'of before', the one inhabited by funny fava-beans, was made of vegetables. Even if that little monster of Erbochia is not a bean any more, she still belongs to the world of vegetables, which is very exciting for children."

S.: "True! (with her eyes wide open, as if she could see it) Why?"

A.: "Simply because you do not see some things in that world. A little girl I know very well, one day yelled at the mother: why was not I born like flowers do? The planet Sercilio, the one inhabited by kings, queens and fairies, is a fantastic world. It is not tranquil and blissed like the world of vegetables, where nothing dangerous ever happens. However, if anything had to happen there, solutions could be found. Most of children like this world, it is the world they choose to get away from the earth. Then there is the real world, the earth, where the Musketeer and old Racchetugi live. From your story, it clearly emerges that you have lived in that wonderful world, you have traveled across that world of fantasy, and it seems that you have never stepped on earth. However, you have some loyal friends there who are ready to visit you. I met a girl who came to my studio because she did not want to eat anymore, like you. Well, when we were alone in the room she told me: "You see, the person who just

left the room is not my mother, I come from another planet. I feel so uncomfortable here because I was not born in your planet. In my planet, there are no mothers.” I think you could have understood how she felt: a stranger and unhappy.”

S.: “I truly feel a stranger and unhappy like that poor girl. I do not know where I am anymore, who I am. All my girlfriends know what to do, I do not.”

Sveva wants to continue living in her wonderful world, going back and forth from her fantastic world of the old planet, and maintain good relationships with the world of humans. There are no differences in the wonderful, old world. Differences originate from evil acts. Erbochia can resist being turned into an evil being. She can fight against the evil pieces of fabric which stained her with their colors (which is now the color of pads-period of her mother), the same color as the bandages she was wrapped in when she suffered from the terrible itching.

The snake has always been the symbol of sexuality. The Black Lizard has the power to turn the world of vegetables into the world of animals: it can contaminate the plant species. As a matter of fact, the good father Favotto is turned into a fava-bean eater, the Frog.

It is a recurring symbolism among anorexic patients. Bianca feared that reptile mothers could contaminate the mammalian fathers.

This is one of Bianca’s dreams: *We need to differentiate two intercourses: that among reptiles from that among mammals. The reptile mother is hungry for little reptiles, while the mammalian father grazes and plays with his little family. I would like to know whether they are eating reptile or mammalian meat.*

There are a sexual and an a-sexual intercourse. I need to know whether I am being fed to become a reptile, that is to become sexual, or on the contrary, if I am being fed to remain a mammal, that is a little girl made of milk and honey.

The dream of Bangkok

The aircraft I was on with my parents had landed on the roof of a large theatre. There, a surgery room had been organized and my mother and I underwent stomach surgery. With a gunshot, they put a seed into my head, similar to a grain of wheat or rice.

Sveva told me of a night of high temperature and desperate crying when she was three, while her parents were traveling to Bangkok where the father was going to be awarded a prize.

She wanted me to clearly understand that she had realized that her mother had got sick. However, at the time, she had been told that she had only broken her arm.

On the contrary, two years ago, when her friend Chiara had discovered that her mother had had an ectopic pregnancy, she was told the truth about the trip to Bangkok and the meaning of ectopic pregnancy.

A.: “So you learned that from the trip, although you probably had already perceived it (temperature and desperate crying), mum and daddy were almost coming back with a little brother!”

S.: “It is terrible to think that a baby who could have been born had died!”

A.: “That revelation was a true gunshot in our head. In the dream the name of the city sounds like that gunshot: BANGkok”.

S.: “Why are they operating me too?”

A.: “Do you fear that the same may happen to you? So, you wonder why your parents can allow that such terrible may happen to you!”

S.: “I wanted a sibling when I was little, I was jealous of the girlfriends who had a brother or a sister.”

A.: “And then?”

S.: “Then I realized that they were not happy at all of *having a brother or a sister* (!), so I decided that I did not want one anymore.”

A.: “Ah, YOU have decided! You should be aware of the fact that you have often decided upon situations which were not depending upon you, such as your period, having a sibling... What do you mean when you say so?”

S.: “It is not true that I have decided that, I had implored them when I was little, they made the decision. Then I stopped thinking of it and of course they did the same.”

At this point Sveva became furious and the trickiest moves were her raging conclusions: I do not want to eat at all.

She reacted in many different ways to my comments:

I do not like a thing of what you are saying!

If you go on like that, I am going to leave at once!

But also: *Then? What does that mean?*

Sometimes, she would exhaust me with her greedy as she wanted to know all the meanings of a word or an object in a dream. I was ready almost all the times, and lively, I did not lose heart.

It was as if a book of dreams and their meanings really existed. So, we could go through it, look at it and also contribute to it with our discoveries. This was our game, we were building a ‘transitional’ book.

I was aware that we were exploiting her competitiveness, that she wanted to redeem herself from the offences she had been given by her more developed girlfriends, the lazy actors and, above all, by her father. She fantasized of regaining her special power through this new ‘art’.

The dream of the steak

I was with my maths teacher and we were staging a scientific screenplay. My father came to collect me. He immediately needed to eat a steak as a starter and since it was a Saturday, we also went for pizza.

When she finished telling her dream Sveva commented: “Dad is very jealous of us!”

And she burst into a laugh.

A.: “In the dream you want to show your daddy that we are doing important things, even more important than his. You want him to be in your shoes, that he feels envy for us and the important things we do together. This envy is going to make him very greedy.”

Sveva has gained ten kilos of weight in a year but has grown only two centimeters in height. So, she is very angry.

The dream of the little black horse

“First scene: I am leaving with my dad. We are going to a guesthouse where we know the owner. There are yellow daisies, they are old. I think they give them to me as a present.

Second scene: I am with my mom in a supermarket. I meet Chiara. She is smaller than me. I am eating a sandwich smaller of hers by a few grams.

Third scene: I go to a playground. Going through a passageway I get to a lush garden. Everybody is dancing and laughing, there is also my grandmother. They are all tiny. I realize I belong to this world.

I do a magic trick: a little black horse appears.

The owner of this world, who is the owner of the guesthouse, explains to me that the little horse symbolizes thinness. Someone turns the little horse into a witch.

I am not sure that I am going to tell this dream to mummy and daddy, as they do not belong to this world. By discovering that one belongs to this world, it is possible to recover from anorexia.”

I know that in reality Chiara is taller than her. I explain that her dream complies with her aspiration to make the most (growing taller) from the minimum increase in calories (eating less than Chiara).

Sveva becomes irritated.

A.: “Why does your grandmother belong to the same world?”

S.: “Because she is tiny. What does that mean? Tell me immediately what it means!”

A.: “That you are looking for a world where everybody is tiny so the problem of height simply does not exist. Yet now you think that the master of the world of meanings, that is me, is ruining your wonderful world where everybody is tiny and happy. I am the evil and powerful witch.”

S.: “I am furious. You promised that I was going to grow. On the contrary I am still the same.”

A.: “Trust me, together we will be able to wait.”

Theoretical conclusions

The sexual theory of the anorexic child is that the father is the “rescuer” as he can rear a species which is independent from the body (of the mother).

The mother is the “evil force” as her body is the source of all sufferings: avidity, seduction, possession and seizing. It is from her, from that body that the lower species, the sexual one, reproduces itself.

My theory is that:

- An attack to the mother’s breast, since its power is addictive, translates into an early request to the father, or his substitute, for an intercourse based on the denial of one’s being dependent on the breast.
- The father provides these girls with a “superior breast”, which is better than the breast, an antagonist to the breast and in competition with the breast.

With puberty, the body is on the verge of acquiring the characteristics of the lower, sexual body. It is this body, its transformations, that is being *rejected*. At this point, they are going to make a promise, a deal with the god who offers of being rebirth in a superior body, a self-sufficient and different one.

The analysis has allowed Sveva not to plan her incarnation into a higher body.

Bibliography

Bion, W.R. (1963). *Elements of Psycho-Analysis*. London, Heinemann. - *Elementi della psicoanalisi*. Armando: Roma, 1973.

Bion, W.R. (1965). *Transformations: Change from Learning to Growth*. London, Tavistock. - *Trasformazioni. Il passaggio dall'apprendimento alla crescita*. Armando: Roma, 1973.

Camassa, P. (1998). Anoressia. *Rivista di Psicoanalisi*, 44, 3, 1998, pp. 461-490.

Camassa, P. (2010). Anoressia: un'epidemia del corpo come oggetto superiore. *Rivista di Psicoanalisi*, 56, 3: 549-559. - Anorexia: An Epidemic of the Body as a "Top Object". *The Italian Psychoanal. Annual*, 2011, 5:63-72

Camassa, P. (2012). Ero diversa. Invarianti dell'allucinosi anoressica. *Rivista di Psicoanalisi*, 59, 2013, 1, pp. 105-118.

Chasseguet Smirgel, J. (2003). *Il corpo come specchio del mondo*. Raffaello Cortina: Milano, 2005.

Freud S. (1895) *Studies on Hysteria*. Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of S. Freud, Vol. II. - *Studi sull'isteria*. OSF vol. I. Bollati Boringhieri: Torino, 1977.

Freud, S. (1911). *Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning*. Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of S. Freud, Vol. XII - *Precisazioni sui due principi dell'accadere psichico*. OSF vol. VI. Bollati Boringhieri: Torino, 1974.

Freud, S. (1914a). *A Case of Paranoia Running Counter to the Psycho-Analytic Theory of the Disease*. Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of S. Freud, Vol. XIV - *Il caso dell'Uomo dei lupi*. OSF vol. VII. Bollati Boringhieri: Torino, 1977.

Freud, S. (1914b). *On Narcissism: An Introduction*. Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of S. Freud, Volume Vol. XIV. - *Introduzione al narcisismo*. OSF vol. VII. Bollati Boringhieri: Torino, 1977.

Freud, S. (1925). *Negation*. Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of S. Freud, Vol. XIX. - *La negazione*. OSF vol. X. Bollati Boringhieri: Torino, 1978

Freud, S. (1938). *Splitting of The Ego in The Process of Defence*. Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of S. Freud, Vol. XXII. - *Scissione dell'Io nel processo di difesa*. OSF vol. XI. Bollati Boringhieri: Torino, 1979.

Klein M. (1946). Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 27:99-110 - Note su alcuni meccanismi schizoidi. In *Scritti: 1921-1958*. Boringhieri, 1978.

Klein, M. (1950). Le conseguenze delle prime situazioni d'angoscia sullo sviluppo sessuale della bambina. In *Psicoanalisi dei bambini*. Martinelli: Firenze, 1969.

- Lacan, J. (1958). La direction de la cure et les principes de son pouvoir. *Écrits vol.2 - Scritti vol 2*. Einaudi: Torino, 1974.
- Lagache, D. (1958). La psychanalyse et la structure de la personnalité. *La Psychanalyse*, 6, 5-54.
- Lawrence, M. (2002). Body, Mother, Mind. Anorexia, femininity and the intrusive object. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 83, pp. 837-850.
- Nunberg, H. (1932). *Principles of Psychoanalysis*. International Universities Press: New York, 1955.
- Polacco, G. W. (1997). *Paesaggi interni e corpi estranei. Disordini alimentari e altre patologie*. Bruno Mondadori: Milano, 1999.
- Riolo, F. (2007). Psychoanalytic transformations. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 88,6.
- Riolo, F. (2010). Trasformazioni in allucinosi. *Rivista di Psicoanalisi*. 2010, LVI, 3 - Transformations in hallucinosis. *The Italian Psychoanalytical Annual*, V, 2011.
- Risen, S. (1982). The psychoanalytic treatment of an adolescent with anorexia nervosa. *Psychoanal. St. Child*, 37, 433-439.
- Sours, J. (1974). The anorexia nervosa syndrome. *International Journal Psychoanalyses*, 55: 567-576.
- Tausk, V. (1919). Sulla genesi della 'macchina influenzante' in schizofrenia. *Scritti Psicoanalitici*. Astrolabio: Roma, 1984.

Notes

(1) Unpublished work, read for a seminar of the Palermo psychoanalysis center in 2013. The bibliography is not updated to the present. It is advisable to read in the *Psychoanalysis Journal: Anorexia* (1998); *The body as a superior object* (2010); *I was different* (2012).

(2) I enclose a drawing by Sveva which represents her story in the following way:

Guardare (Mentre si legge e' indispensabile).
GUARDARE MENTRE SI
LEGGE

(E' INDISPENSABILE)

Ti prego di leggere la mia storia e dare un giudizio con affetto

Ti prego di leggere la mia storia e dare un giudizio con affetto

②

I Personaggi della mia storia



Paola Camassa is a Psychoanalyst, Full Member and Training Analyst of the Italian Psychoanalytical Society and Full Member of the International Psychoanalytical Association.

E-mail: camassa.mariapaola@gmail.com

Translated from Italian by Maria Concetta Spinosa