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**THE FLAW IN THE DIAMOND:
PARANOID-SCHIZOID STRUGGLES IN *THE COUNSELOR***

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Abstract: *The Counselor* (2013) tells the story of a young, newly engaged lawyer, addressed as The Counselor throughout the film, who enters a cocaine deal along the Texas-Mexico border. Immersing himself in the ruthless world of the cartel with haste and minimal understanding, The Counselor finds himself brutally ill-prepared as his idealized fiancée is kidnapped and his world begins to crumble. Malkina is the sexually powerful mastermind behind the plan that dismantles the drug deal and leads to the collapse of The Counselor's world. Both characters grapple at the interface of Melanie Klein's paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions. A Kleinian perspective informs a number of part-object struggles within the film, including idealization and devaluation, denial and projection, envy and spoiling of the good object, and manic defenses of omnipotence and omniscience, among others. This paper presents a Kleinian analysis of the two main characters of the film, The Counselor and Malkina, and their difficulties in achieving whole object representations and more advanced depressive experiences of guilt, mourning, reparation, and love.

The Counselor (2013), a film directed by Ridley Scott about the dangerous world of drug smuggling, is based upon a screenplay written by National Book Award winner, Cormac McCarthy (2013). Throughout his career, McCarthy has created an impressive body of work that penetrates and explores the boundary zones of human experience. From a psychoanalytic perspective, his characters are immersed in the primitive world of Klein's paranoid-schizoid position, trying to penetrate barriers to understanding and enter the more complex, nuanced world of Klein's depressive position, which is just out of reach. McCarthy has written some of the most artfully crafted novels and screenplays about some of the bleakest of American landscapes, ranging from the poverty-stricken hills of Appalachia, to the blood-soaked frontier between Texas and Mexico, to a post-apocalyptic world of ashes and despair. His work provides a variety of settings and

characters that take the reader/viewer to that place between isolation and attachment, compassion and depravity, social structure and murderous drives, and human love and the unsheltered void. The titles themselves evoke a sense of interface between two worlds: *Inner Dark*, *Blood Meridian*, *The Border Trilogy*, *No Country for Old Men*, and *The Road*. While McCarthy is a master novelist, his written work can be difficult for some readers. However, much like the use of dreams in psychoanalysis, the use of film as a medium makes his work immediately accessible to viewers, speaking directly to the unconscious and giving visceral power to the violent, heart-wrenching struggle at the interface of these two worlds.

The Counselor explores the psychological passage of the film's two main characters (The Counselor and Malkina) as each tries to negotiate the interface between the violent world of the drug cartel and the possibility of a complex, committed human relationship. Both protagonists function within the more primitive paranoid-schizoid position, which is dominated by fear and greed, idealization and devaluation, sex, aggression, and the roles of predator and prey. Both make efforts to enter the complexity of Klein's depressive position, with its recognition of whole objects, ambivalence, loss, grief, and reparative acts. However, the step to the depressive position is too difficult and the attraction, too weak; neither character fully gets there.

The film opens with an idyllic love scene between The Counselor and his girlfriend, Laura, as they lounge in bed and engage in sex play, holding an anticipated separation at bay. The Counselor leaves for Amsterdam to purchase an engagement ring he can only afford by fully entering the world of the cartel. He willfully remains oblivious to the dangers of this move, despite warnings from his partners, Reiner and Westray. Instead, he prefers to remain aware only of his idealized version of his anticipated life with Laura. After she accepts the ring and his marriage proposal over an elegant dinner, The Counselor (against his will) enters the violent side of the paranoid-schizoid world, a world that will take from him the unrealistic fantasy of Laura and everything he holds dear. The drug shipment is intercepted, as marked by the beheading of the Green Hornet motorcyclist by a well-placed wire. With that, a boundary is crossed and The Counselor becomes entwined in a tightening noose of horror from which he cannot escape and that he cannot understand. In the end, his desperate search for the

kidnapped Laura leads to total despair, which reaches its climax when he receives the snuff film of her tragic death.

The counterpoint to *The Counselor* is Malkina, a brilliant, calculating, and sexually powerful woman who is an alpha predator in a sociopathic world. Her eyes are wide open to the depravity of the paranoid-schizoid world. As the film opens, she is the lover of Reiner, a high-level middleman in the drug trade who finds Malkina fascinating and overwhelming. In a key scene, she performs a sexual act upon the windshield of his car. Malkina steals information from Reiner and uses it to mastermind the death of the Green Hornet and subsequent hijacking of the drug shipment. When the shipment is stolen back from her by the cartel, she changes plans and orchestrates the murder of Westray through use of the 'bolito', while robbing his offshore accounts. She acts the role of a calculating assassin, walking away in the end with her fortune turned to diamonds. Yet, there is a more complicated and conflicted side to Malkina, as she makes efforts to grasp the experiences of early loss, love, forgiveness, and mourning. At the close of the film, she is pregnant with a boy; the father is dead. Malkina plans to keep the child and adore it, even in a world that is on the verge of apocalypse.

Klein and the early internal world

Melanie Klein offers an in-depth psychoanalytic angle on the internal world of primitive object relationships and fantasy, which is then played out in action in the world of real relationships. Klein describes two 'positions' in early pre-oedipal development that must be passed through and 'mastered' before one can reach neurotic or healthy functioning and hope to have the capacity for love, work, and creative play. The first is the paranoid-schizoid position and the second is the depressive position (Klein 1935, 1940, 1946).

For the individual who does not sufficiently negotiate Klein's earliest *paranoid-schizoid position*, life revolves around all-good and all-bad part-objects and desperate efforts to preserve the good from being destroyed by the bad (Klein 1933, 1940, 1957). Excessive (at times overwhelming) aggressive/destructive tension from the inner 'death instinct' requires constant defensive containment. This earliest position is termed

'paranoid-schizoid' because the defensive mechanisms used to deal with the destructive inner elements are the splitting off of the bad from the good ('schizoid') and the projection of it out of the self and into an object (other person), where it becomes a danger in the world rather than within the self ('paranoid' process) (Klein 1958). The good self or good object, infused with life force from the libidinal instinct, also needs to be projected out of the self into an idealized fantasy object in order to preserve it from destructive envy. Consequently, the paranoid-schizoid world is full of enticing and dangerous objects that can change from inside to outside quickly and unexpectedly. At times, the self still becomes overwhelmed by aggression and must 'fragment' in order to protect itself from psychological death. These poisoned and poisonous fragments are then projected out and experienced as 'bizarre particles' or 'beta-elements' that remain dangerous and unpredictable (Bion 1962/1978). All of this functions in the service of preserving a good experience of a loving, perfect object that 'feeds and comforts' the good and perfect self.

The *depressive position* is a developmental achievement in which both good and bad elements in the self and object can be appreciated at the same time. Now, the individual needs to deal with destructive wishes toward an object that is loved and hated, desired and feared. This may evoke the 'manic' defense of imagining omnipotent control over the object (Klein 1935). Devaluation and denial of any ambivalence or weakness may occur through the experience of domination or triumph. Manic defenses hold depressive tensions at bay, but only temporarily. Ultimately, the individual must accept his or her destructive wishes and experience the guilt, remorse, and yearning of having damaged or destroyed the loved object. Reparation and mourning become the psychological mechanisms of repair and integration at this higher level. As it is repaired, the hurt object is taken in and becomes part of the ego, which strengthens the latter; thus, a better hold on reality forms, requiring less escape into fantasy and leading to further ego development.

In order to successfully move through and master these two developmental positions, one needs to start with a manageable amount of 'death instinct,' or aggressive drive, as compared to libidinal drive. In addition, an early environment that provides a predominance of good experiences over bad experiences is essential. For some, this may

never happen. Such an individual continues to experience the adult world through the lens of more primitive states; he or she lives out in actuality the early fantasies of dangerous evil objects lurking in the world. Without hope of repair or comfort, he or she is left to face the catastrophic losses inflicted by these fantasized objects. One's experience of self, object, emotions, and time are influenced. Such a world is fascinating, yet terrifying to the neurotic or healthy individual who has passed through this position in early development; still, he or she knows that this world lies just below the surface of higher-level defenses and subsequent adaptations.

The arc of The Counselor

Blinded beneath white sheets: Idealization and the illusion of the dyad

'Are you awake?'. To the gentle dance of sheer white curtains with the wind and the chirping of birds, we enter the room where The Counselor and Laura lie nestled beneath a sea of perfectly white linen. Laura's sensually whispered question conveys the dream encapsulated beneath the white sheets, a dream from which The Counselor refuses to be awakened: 'No'. Appropriate to the pairing, the time is almost two o'clock, though it is less relevant whether it is day or night. Appearing as one in an amorphous state of bliss, The Counselor and Laura seek time and place in each other. We do not see either in full, only in parts, and we will discover that The Counselor does not truly see Laura.

Rather than investing himself in a whole object relationship, The Counselor maintains Laura as a split-off, idealized part-object. To see her as separate, and thus not under his control, would result in an unbearable narcissistic wound. Laura must be what he needs her to be, and those qualities that lie outside of this limited scope are not to be heeded. As The Counselor's ideal woman, Laura holds purity and innocence, together with a vibrant inner sexuality capable of being unlocked by him alone, and freely so.

An element of the man's mirrored image of perfection rests necessarily intermingled within the two-ness of a couple, a concept in line with Freud's (1914: 100) notion of the 'ego ideal': 'The development of the ego consists in a departure from primary narcissism and gives rise to a vigorous attempt to recover that state. This

departure is brought about by means of the displacement of libido on to an ego ideal imposed from without; and satisfaction is brought about from fulfilling this ideal’.

In order to keep the prized part-object relationship ongoing continuously, one wishes to make time stand still. The Counselor will later express to Laura, ‘Life is being in bed with you. The rest is just waiting’. Despite his efforts to maintain Laura as an idealized object outside of time but under his control, reality will break through. It is the reality quotient that erodes the stability of the dyad, making it uncontrollable and unknowable. An arduous task, the maintenance of the exclusiveness of the dyadic relationship implies an erasure of the past and denial of the unpredictability of the future.

Counselor: There aren’t any girls. There’s just you.

Laura: But there have been.

Counselor: A long time ago. I don’t remember.

Lacan’s maxims speak to the consignment of the woman to the realm of the Imaginary, as the Real could never be apprehended in its fullness: ‘There is no sexual relation. The woman does not exist; [she] is a symptom’ (Lacan 1972, 1975).

Search for the ‘perfect’ diamond: The necessary flaw

Rather than stay with Laura, The Counselor visits a diamond dealer in Amsterdam to purchase an engagement ring that he hopes will bind her to him. Here the film delivers the first of a series of reflections upon the nature of reality that are spoken to The Counselor in the form of advice or counsel by other characters; however, he is unable to take them in or use them to adjust his world view. The diamond dealer speaks of the flaws in the diamonds, that there is an inherent imperfection even in the most precious of stones. He states that something perfect is beyond anything which could materially exist. One needs a flaw to brush up against in order for something real to take shape.

Dealer: The truth is that anything you can say about a diamond is in the nature of a flaw. The perfect diamond would be composed simply of light.

In a moment of lucidity, The Counselor states, 'But there is no perfect diamond', though he does not further develop this argument. The Dealer tries to bring back his perspective by speaking of the notion of the hero, the idealized figure in different cultures; even the classical heroes had their hamartia (tragic flaw). He poignantly states, 'When gods were more human men were more divine'. He tells The Counselor that one must embrace a view of others, even those which would promptly be idealized, that allows space for complexity and fallibility. Even something which would seem to function merely as adornment, a diamond, would seem to contain a knowledge within it that may elude its owner. The Dealer states, 'The stones themselves have their own view of things. Perhaps they are not so silent as you think. They were piped up out of the earth in a time before any witness was, but here they are ... I suppose every diamond is cautionary'. The diamonds have witnessed the rise and fall of many generations, of empires come and gone, of good and evil. They contain the wisdom and perspective gained from seeing the world and the people in it with their flaws, over long periods of time.

The Counselor cannot, however, allow space for flaws in his view of Laura. To embrace her complexity, and thus her ultimate fallibility and humanness, would require the acknowledgement of realities too overbearing for him. He needs to keep her as a part-object in which he can place his good experiences, where they cannot be attacked or contaminated by the destructiveness within and without.

As LaFarge (2000: 70) informs on part-objects of the paranoid-schizoid position,

Splitting predominates ... and objects are not continuous over space or time. Part-objects are not experienced as part of continuing narratives There is no perspective ... from which things can be seen to develop, or to exist but be absent. Self and object are not felt to exist or act independently of one another, for parts of each are commingled with the other.

The film will reveal that The Counselor is often beyond advising; however, as The Dealer conveys one final piece of oracular wisdom, The Counselor turns toward the window and for a brief moment light pours upon his face.

Dealer: Is that not the meaning of adornment? To enhance the beauty of the beloved is to acknowledge both her frailty and the nobility of that frailty. At our noblest we announce to the darkness that we will not be diminished by the brevity of our lives. That we will not thereby be made less. ... You will see.

At Reiner's party: Manic defenses of omnipotence and omniscience

From the contemplative exchange in the gallery, the scene transitions to sports cars and valets, women dancing poolside in bikinis and a bartender tossing drinks, as The Counselor arrives at Reiner's house. Dressed in black, he marches purposefully through the party to meet Reiner. Throughout their discussion about the drug deal to come, certain cautions are raised and ignored. In particular, there are frequent allusions to Laura and Malkina, hinting at the complexity of their independent minds and possible influence. These are quickly shrugged off as unimportant and/or too frightening to examine directly, as Reiner and The Counselor retreat to a mutual reassurance that only their insulated dyad matters in this affair.

Reiner (speaking of Laura): Nice lady. I assume she's not privy to your newest business venture.

Counselor: She's not. And your lady? (speaking of Malkina)

Reiner: Yeah ... I don't know what she knows. I don't want to know. ...

Counselor: Well, there's nothing about Laura that I would want to fix.

Reiner: Maybe not.

Counselor: But you think she probably knows things about me that I don't know about myself.

Reiner: Jesus, Counselor. I'm not even sure what sort of question that is.

Counselor: Yeah. And you? Vis-à-vis your inamorata [Malkina].

Reiner: You don't want to know. I don't want to know.

The degree of denial and disavowal makes for a very tenuous grip on just how complex the mind of the other can be, even more since the two women in question (Laura

and especially Malkina) will play such crucial roles in the unfolding of future events. It is a case of the blind leading the blind. Their dialog speaks (metaphorically) to their inability to hear each other or anything of import which is outside the omniscience of their own dyadic exchange. The feeble cautionary statements Reiner makes do nothing to inform The Counselor of the perils ahead. They are shrugged off without serious examination. Even Reiner fails to hear the meaning of his own words or heed his own advice. He discusses with fascination and at length how the bolito can operate irreversibly to decapitate a man, as if he and The Counselor have shelter within the encapsulation of their dyad: 'The wire cuts through the carotid arteries and sprays blood all over the spectators and then everybody goes home'. Neither can take in what has been said, and both retreat to the all-knowing, yet uninvolved and protected role of 'spectator'.

At the bar with Westray/At the club with Reiner: The Counselor as non-receptive object

From the driver's seat of his silver Bentley, The Counselor calls Reiner and tells him in haste, 'I'm in'. He then follows Reiner's instructions to meet Westray to take the next steps. Awaiting him is a man who wears a cowboy hat and dark sunglasses over a black eye, inflicted through a 'confrontation' with a doorman. Here, we find yet another 'counselor' to The Counselor. Westray drops many sententious statements onto The Counselor, again advising him not to engage in the drug deal, as he clearly does not understand the dangers involved. Westray proudly boasts of his ability to control all the potentially harmful elements in his life, stating, 'The smallest crumb can devour us. You learn to let nothing pass. You can't afford to'. His omniscient statements ring hollow as those of a tin god, and yet they are unquestioned by The Counselor.

Westray: I can vanish. In a heartbeat. With my money ...I've pretty much seen it all, Counselor. And it's all shit. I could live in a monastery.

Counselor: Why don't you?

Westray: In a word? Women.

The irony is quite obvious, given how it is Westray's lust which leads to his demise, and he indeed does leave several 'crumbs' behind throughout the film of which he fails to take notice. In truth, The Counselor is more than willing to sit through the eloquent warnings of numerous characters, but his mind is not open. Instead, he only takes in what he can use to support the view that the deal will pay off. This stance of his kills any hope (however hidden) Westray and Reiner may have that he may actually engage with them, see past this feigned knowledge and bravado of theirs, and voice an opinion of his own.

Bion (1959) states that there is something fundamentally interpersonal about thinking a thought, for it cannot be done on one's own. His concept of beta-elements, 'sense-impressions related to an emotional experience' (Bion 1962/1978: 17), are an individual's connection with reality. When these impressions cannot be turned into thought by one's alpha-function, they must be evacuated, usually by projective identification. This defense is a staple of the paranoid-schizoid position; the projected part draws the other into action, while the projector remains connected to it. If the other is able to digest these projected beta-elements with his or her alpha-function, a thought can be derived from something more primitive and then shared in metabolized form. Something confusing and foreign can be understood, communicated, and incorporated. If not, if the projection is simply tossed back into the projector, one is left with confusion, impotence, and the sense of the other's impenetrability (Bion 1959, 1962/1978). In order to defend against this state of anxiety, one may resort to omniscience, which fundamentally serves as a substitute for thinking and a barrier against further insight or growth (Bion 1962).

Indeed, both Reiner and Westray use this stance of omniscience as they speak confidently and at length to The Counselor about dangers to which they themselves should be paying attention. The Counselor consistently refuses to take in what they are projecting. Instead, he responds with 'Jesus' or 'Why are you telling me this?'

This dynamic plays out again when Reiner tells The Counselor about Malkina performing a sexual act on his car (discussed in further detail below). He emphasizes that he had no idea what was going on, if he should find it sexy or not. What is undeniable is that he was changed by this confusing experience.

Counselor: Do you think she knew the kind of effect this might have on a guy?

Reiner: Jesus, Counselor. Are you kidding? She knows everything. ...

Counselor: Yes, but I mean why would you tell me this? ...

Reiner: I don't know. You're probably right. Maybe I wanted to see what you'd say. Maybe there's more to it than that. Maybe I'm scared. ...

Counselor: You're in love with her.

Reiner: I don't know what I am. Yeah. I suppose I am in love with her. You don't think that's cause for worry? It's like being in love with ... what? Ease full death? Fuck it. Fuck it, Counselor. Just forget the whole thing.

The Counselor refuses to engage any further with what Reiner is trying to communicate, and he shifts back to the concrete, detached topic of the drug deal, losing the connection Reiner was seeking.

Counselor: It's just that I don't know what it is that you're trying to tell me.

Reiner: I know.

Counselor: Does this have anything to do with the deal?

Reiner: I don't know. You're right. I shouldn't have told you. Just forget it.

Final exchange with Westray: Reality breaking down paranoid-schizoid defenses

After the Green Hornet is decapitated, The Counselor is suddenly implicated by the cartel in having had a hand in the disappearance of the drug shipment. Now targeted, he loses any further control he may have on his situation, and his attempts to make reparations are futile. The bolito has symbolically been put around The Counselor's neck and has started to tighten its grip; he has no way of removing it. He pathetically tries to reason his way out of the situation, but the parties he would need to speak with are beyond receiving anything he has to say, let alone change what they intend to do to him.

Westray: I had a call from our business partners. They wanted to talk to you.

Counselor: Do I want to talk to them?

Westray: I don't think so. In these circles talk has a slightly different meaning. ...

Counselor: There can't be such people.

Westray: Think again, Counselor.

It had not occurred to him that there may be people living in an antithetical universe to his 'all-good' concept, namely those who see the world as evil and destructive and need to respond to it in kind (see discussion of Malkina). In both of these split worlds, thinking is not an option. The Counselor is suddenly confronted with what was residing on the fringes of his idealized world all along, that which he has kept out of awareness. Now, he can no longer ignore the evil and destructive forces that exist at the other end of the split-object world. There is something nihilistic about the depressive position which has kept The Counselor from allowing any iota of its rancidity into the fabric of his dreamy, dyadic world. But, now it is operating relentlessly and ruthlessly out of his control.

Enlightening conversation with Jefe: Confrontation with the depressive position

After Reiner is hunted down and killed and Laura is kidnapped by members of the cartel, The Counselor desperately tries to reclaim his ideal object, which he fears may be lost to him. In a heartbreaking message left on her phone from the hotel, The Counselor expresses to Laura how central her place is within his inner object world.

Counselor: Baby, please answer. Please answer. I don't know where you are. And if I don't know where you are I don't know where I am. I don't. I was lost all my life. I can't be lost again. I can't, Baby. I can't. The world without you is nothing. Just nothing.

It is the hallmark of the depressive position to face grief and the forceful undoing of one's previous defenses (Klein 1940). Employment of manic defenses of omnipotence, denial, and undoing may temporarily assuage one's inevitable confrontation with reality, but these are inadequate to solve the problem that reality has imposed – good and bad exist together and the bad can destroy the good.

In the most moving scene of the film, The Counselor finds himself seated in the driver's seat of a parked car, feeling lost and utterly alone without Laura or the protection of the other with a shared plight. Symbolically, with the car windshield obscured by dirt, The Counselor is unable to see forward and desperately he looks for direction. He calls the Jefe, who breaks from a leisure game of billiards to speak with him. The Jefe neither provides a set of steps to bring back Laura, nor does he join The Counselor in his quandary; rather, he offers enlightening words, to which The Counselor is only minimally receptive. Faced with inconsolable grief, The Counselor makes desperate attempts to undo the horror of his situation, which are met with austere elucubrations hatched from Jefe's own experience of loss.

Counselor: There must be someone I could see.

Jefe: I am afraid that there is no longer such a person. That is a thing of the past. I am afraid that there is no one to see. ... I only know that the world in which you seek to undo your mistakes is not the world in which they were made. ... [The poet] Machado would have given every line he wrote for one more hour with his beloved. There is no rule of exchange here, you see. Grief transcends every value. A man would give whole nations to lift it from his heart. And yet with it you can buy nothing. When my son was lost to me I would not pray for that which I should most fervently have wished for. I could not.

Counselor: A speedy death.

It is the plight of the narcissistic part-object investment not to allow for the passage of time or development of whole objects to take place, lest one need abandon the illusion of omnipotence and face the demons of regret. As LaFarge (2000: 69) comments, 'Only in the realm of whole objects do we find the perspectives of time, development and complex causality. Only whole objects can be fully lost and mourned [and] afford a perspective in which two objects exist independently'. Indeed, the following exchange shows the stronghold this mentality can have over an individual who would rather die than give up the ideal object in which his vitality has been so fervently invested.

Jefe: [Y]ou stand at that crossing of which we spoke. You may dedicate your life to grief or not. The choice is yours. ...

Counselor: Why are you telling me this?

Jefe: Because you cannot accept the reality of your life. ... Do you love your wife so completely that you would take her place upon the wheel? ...

Counselor: Yes. Yes, damn you. ... Are you saying that this is possible?

Jefe: No. It is not possible. ... As the world gives way to darkness it becomes more and more difficult to dismiss the understanding that the world is in fact oneself. It is a thing which you have created, no more, no less. ... Your world ... will be gone.

The Jefe speaks of Machado's discovery of meaning in loss: '[Machado] was a schoolteacher and he married a very beautiful young girl whom he loved very much. And she died. And so he became a great poet'. With his concrete response, The Counselor peers into, but is unable to cross into the depressive position: 'I'm not going to become a great poet'. The Counselor is left alone and unsatisfied, without the protection of a dyadic pair, as the Jefe ends the conversation: 'And now I must go. I have calls to make, and then, if there is time, I will take a little nap'.

The snuff film: Crumbling world

At the end of the film, The Counselor is confronted with the ultimate outrage when the DVD of Laura's filmed murder is delivered to him. He drops the disk in horror, unable to handle the fullness of what has taken place. It is a moment of utmost despair, and yet one that the observing audience, the detached 'third', may have foretold; like the characters, we too were forced into a position of helpless omniscience. The Counselor's squalid existence at the end shows the ultimate triumph of reality over fantasy as presented in the opening scene. The paranoid-schizoid position gives way to a more complicated world that eludes the 'knowledge' contained in splitting. The depressive position is approached, but The Counselor is unable to comprehend or engage it. His self and the world he has created crumble, depriving him of any meaning to which he can

continue to cling. As Freud stated in *Mourning and Melancholia* (Freud 1917: 255), one is confronted with ‘the verdict of reality that the object no longer exists’.

The arc of Malkina

The world through binoculars: Introduction to Malkina’s paranoid-schizoid lens

Malkina introduces herself with majesty in two artistically spectacular desert scenes that frame the opening credits. On first glimpse, she rides elegantly upon a dark horse with her blonde hair blowing freely in the wind, as a cheetah sprints alongside. Striking are the grace, beauty, and splendor of the woman, the animal, and nature. Her boyfriend, Reiner, watches from afar through binoculars; the frame shifts to us too observing her through the lens. She operates from a distance and alone, not unlike the cheetah in chase.

The sequence plunges forward to shots of men at work in a Mexican garage. Darkness, grinding, and welding, with dogs barking, sparks flying, and wastes pouring to chaotic musical chords, give way once again to the bright vastness of nature and the beautiful Malkina. As the pulsation of the musical underscore intensifies, she sits perched as a lioness on a car, watching through binoculars as a cheetah encircles and pounces upon a jackrabbit. Reiner looks on from below, smiling and nodding in amusement. Malkina lowers the lenses and shoots a piercing glance toward him, mirroring the predator and prey.

Malkina experiences the world metaphorically through binoculars in narrow, focused, two-dimensional, and starkly absolute terms. People are here and then they are gone; her parents were thrown from a helicopter into the Atlantic Ocean never to return when she was three. One is predator or prey, the one who leaves or the one who is left behind. In a world with little place for vulnerability, Malkina identifies fully with the predator: the cheetah, the hunter, and the vicious killer. She orders the well-orchestrated and gruesome murders of the Green Hornet and Westray, each of which unfolds theatrically like a play, and she rides away from Westray’s detached head and lacerated fingers on the sidewalk with a decisive, horseback-like command: ‘Drive!’.

According to Kernberg (1998: 374), the most primitive type of identification with the aggressor is the ‘pathological, grandiose, aggressively infiltrated self’ that emerges from the improperly layered, underdeveloped superego. He informs that, when the earliest layer of superego precursors (primitive and persecutory) fails to be neutralized by a second layer of the early ego ideal, this can result in an absence of empathy or capacity for ethical self-regulation; this is a precursor to the malignant narcissistic and antisocial personality disorders. Klein describes the archaic superego, whereby ‘the child’s first imagos are endowed with tremendous sadism, stemming from the death instinct, and in childhood fears these terrifying imagos are reprojected’ (Sandler 1960: 141).

In Klein’s ‘normally’ developing superego, ‘as the whole object relation is more fully established the super-ego loses some of its monstrous aspects and approximates more to the view of good and loved parents. Such a super-ego is not only the source of guilt but also an object of love and one felt by the child as helpful in his struggle against his destructive impulses’ (Segal 1988: 75). Lacking that which is good and containing, Malkina’s superego has remained primitive, aggressive, and ‘monstrous;’ it is that of Kernberg’s ‘psychopath’ where ‘only power itself is reliable, and the pleasure of sadistic control is the major motivation system in a world clearly divided between the all-powerful and the despicable weak’ (Kernberg 1998: 374).

As Malkina will tell the Escort at the close of the film, ‘The hunter has a purity of heart that exists nowhere else. ... You can make no distinction between who he is and what he does. And what he does is kill’.

A drink with Reiner: Denial, splitting, and projection in the part-object relationship

As Malkina gazes out in intense silence upon the open prairie, purring cheetahs replace the musical fervor of the opening credits. Reiner interrupts with a drink. She tells him that he reminds her of someone who has died and whom she does not miss, likely her father.

Malkina: I don’t think I miss things. Things are here and then they are gone. I think to miss them is to hope they will come back. But they are not coming back. I’ve always known that. Since I was a girl.

Reiner: You don't think that's a bit cold?

Malkina: I think that truth has no temperature.

Malkina's concept of truth is dispassionate, as is her concept of relationships. Reiner is unable to see her intelligence and complexity; he kicks his head back like a horse pulled at the reins when she speaks of her notion on truth. Instead, he holds her as his latest catch and next in line behind the 'Miss Clarissa ... [of] the extraordinary body'. Malkina uses her sexuality to control Reiner. At his house, she straddles his lap and playfully toys with him, using her body to dominate. She studies and learns his flaws as The Counselor finds the flaw in the diamond; however, unlike The Counselor who ignores the flaw, Malkina uses it to her advantage to intercept the drug deal, and then she discards the source.

Poolside Exchange with Laura: Envy and spoiling the good object

Beyond a row of phallic-shaped sculptures and a splashing diver, Malkina and Laura lounge poolside in their first scene together, both with naturally drying hair and loosely draped towels. A closer look reveals Malkina's winding leopard-spotted tattoo from buttock to shoulder, metallic silver nail polish, gold tooth, golden teardrop earrings and bracelet, and oversized ring; Laura wears delicate pearl stud earrings and her new diamond engagement ring. Malkina learns with surprise that Laura does not know how many carats it is: 'You have got to be kidding me. ... Let me see it.... Take it off'.

Laura, in love, threatens Malkina's stark understanding of the world. How can one hold such a large diamond and not know its monetary value? The value of the diamond to Laura lies in its representation of The Counselor's promise to love her always. As Laura then speaks of her desire to marry in the church and her Catholic faith, Malkina glimpses the world of the depressive position and feels a momentary pang of loss. She knows little about the giving of oneself to something greater, such as a loving union or a religious group. Painfully evoked is a sense of family, belonging, and dependency that Malkina had torn from her as a child. Instead, she has learned to do without, defending herself with fantasies of self-sufficient power.

Malkina becomes overtaken by envy. Kleinian theory holds that envy is an attack upon the 'good breast,' for such goodness arouses intense and intolerable acute pain and hopelessness, from which an escape can be accomplished only through the fantasied destruction of the goodness itself; thus, the infant chooses to 'destroy' the breast, rather than remain helplessly dependent upon it (Mitchell and Black, 1995, Segal, 1988). Further, since 'a spoiled object arouses no envy', spoiling and devaluation function as defenses against the 'powerful projection of envious feelings into the object' (Segal 1988: 45).

Launching into an attack upon the 'good breast' of Laura's love, Malkina takes Laura's ring into her hands and then treats it with the highest level of detached scrutiny. She looks at it up and down, through and through, and declares that it is a three-and-a-half carat, Asscher cut with F or G color and at least a VS-2 clarity. Although Laura declines to know its monetary value, the damage has been done. Malkina goes on to attack the 'good breast' of religion, questioning Laura about confession, so as to deflate and devalue it. She sensually strokes Laura's arm, tempting her toward impure thoughts until she blushes.

Malkina: Mmm. Strange. Suppose you've done something really nasty.

Laura: ... You're embarrassing me.

Malkina: I can see. You're blushing. ... We'll talk about my sex life. ... Just rattling your cage. What a world.

Laura: You think the world is strange.

Malkina: I meant yours.

Unable to take in a world in which love, attachment, loyalty, and religion are valued above material possessions, Malkina dismisses Laura's world as 'strange'. She ridicules the need for attachment, thus for mourning, as well as the act of confession, which implies the experience of guilt and remorse. Malkina lacks these capacities firmly connected to the depressive position. Indeed, Malkina and Laura operate in two worlds that are unable to co-exist, just as the value of the diamond depends on the projections to which it is subject.

Tantalizing appearance for confession: Non-receptive, non-containing objects

Clad in dark sunglasses, tight pants, and noisily clicking heels, Malkina makes a conspicuous entrance into the church. She dips her fingers into the Holy Water and smells it, as a cheetah sniffing for scent markings, and then she discards it. Like the binoculars, Malkina's dark sunglasses represent an experience of the world through a paranoid-schizoid lens.

Upon entering the confessional, Malkina rests unsure that the priest will receive her, and so she pleads, 'All you would have to do is listen. To the sins'. Her fragile child-self has a deeply hidden yearning for dependent attachment, but it does not know how to make its appearance, lest it suffer further intolerable injury. Responding with seduction, provocation, and devaluation, Malkina proves herself to be too well-defended to tolerate the priest's attention to her. She asserts with condescension, 'I thought why not go to a professional'. When the priest attempts to counsel her that her sins may be forgiven, she seductively asks, 'What if I'd done something really bad?'. Teasingly she provokes him until he bolts from the booth, proving that he cannot contain her. Left behind is a hurt and fragile girl, who despite her longing to be embraced cannot find a way to connect.

As Rosenfeld (1971: 174) writes, '[T]he destructive narcissistic state is maintained in power by keeping the libidinal infantile self in a constant dead or dying condition'. Malkina keeps this infantile self out of reach, but not quite dead, as she maintains the hope that it may still be saved. Only in an abstruse and calculating manner can she approach this wish for the priest to find her, and her character defenses assure that she will fail.

Malkina's 'confession' represents an envy-driven attack upon the temptation from this 'good breast' of religion, as well as a test of whether the priest will be able to survive and contain her projections and reenactments. Bion (1959: 314) informs that projective identification is a way to 'investigate [one's] own feelings in a personality powerful enough to contain them'. If the other sought as container, or 'repository,' proves inadequate, then the angry feelings can become directed against 'all emotions including hate itself, and against external reality which stimulates them' (Bion 1959: 314). As the

priest hurries up the aisle blessing himself, Malkina shouts out angrily, 'Wait! I wasn't finished!', and she leaves the booth unsatisfied.

Dreamy act of sexual prowess upon a machine: Dehumanization of sex

As if looking through a mist, we experience with Reiner an act that blurs the divide between dream and wakefulness, with full meaning left unclear. Wearing a spotted leopard print dress with flaming bullet holes through the spots, Malkina drives Reiner's yellow Ferrari 328 GTS out onto a golf course, hands him her underwear, climbs onto the hood, and then launches into an act of sexual and acrobatic prowess upon the windshield. With legs spread wide in an exhibitionistic display, Malkina forces Reiner to experience her through the foggy glass. Seated passively and utterly stunned in the passenger seat, he looks up to the sky and then toward her, oscillating between overpowering fear and more guarded arousal. In her self-gratifying act, Malkina satisfies her sexual drives while avoiding human intimacy. She uses Reiner as an audience whereby she can display her prowess, while at the same time showing him that he is unnecessary; when she makes love to him, he is only a mechanical tool.

Sexual union is a complex human engagement. It is an act of regression that allows for primitive fantasy material to arise and infiltrate the experience of each individual and the couple together. This can present a problem for those mired in the paranoid-schizoid position. The Counselor and Laura are on one end, wrapped in white sheets in an ideal fantasy of merger; Malkina is at the opposite extreme, displaying and gratifying herself upon a beautiful, soulless and inanimate object. In her sexual act, Malkina declares her triumph and self-sufficiency, while defending against any wishes for an intimate partner who might reach her soul, and thus her wishes for human connection. Reiner offers little opportunity for this, given his self-absorption and talent for disavowing realities that he does not want to see. Malkina turns the sex act into a public masturbatory act. Fantasizing herself as her own source of nourishment, she shows that she does not need Reiner or her father. Having experienced her father's abandonment in her childhood through his death, she will not be left vulnerable again.

Attack sequences: Predator and prey

As the drug shipment is stolen and then stolen again, the action sequences quicken like the cheetah in chase. Whereas The Counselor freezes in disbelief as helpless prey when his idealized world collapses, and Westray flees in a state of false confidence, Malkina moves to quick and decisive action. She tracks and kills the fleeing Westray and confiscates his off-shore accounts, executing her new plan with the precision of the predator and the single-minded composure and 'purity of heart' of the hunter.

A meal with the escort: Pregnancy and the ideal object

The film closes with Malkina sitting down for an elegant meal with the Escort. While The Counselor flounders without Laura in darkness and filth, Malkina faces beams of light pouring in through large windows to the pouring of champagne. As they exchange a toast, the white table linens and flowers evoke the dreamy white sheets of the opening scene.

The screenplay reveals that Malkina is five months pregnant, expecting a boy. The father remains nameless and the unborn child is for Malkina her own creation. The film opened with the appearance of love between The Counselor and Laura, held 'safely protected' beneath the white sheets; now in striving to encapsulate within her womb a good and loving ideal object of her own, Malkina seeks to ameliorate the damage done to her by her father's abandonment. She expresses, 'I think that Freud is right in that a son who is worshipped by his mother will never doubt himself. But a contentious father can undo that. And the virtues of a dead father ... are limited only by the mother's imagination'. Still, Malkina's feelings about the pregnancy are conflicted, for her consumption of alcohol represents an attack upon the unborn child; the pure, good, and innocent object cannot be allowed to fully exist.

Malkina exposes more of her inner self to the Escort than she has to any other character, but she continues to disavow, devalue, and sexualize her dependency needs. Upon the Ferrari, Malkina straddled the glass that separated her from Reiner. Now, she and the Escort share a table and look face to face, with only champagne glasses between them. She shares what she would want in life: 'My own life. I own very little. Some jewelry. A few clothes. There are times when I imagine I would like my innocence back. If I ever had it'. She acknowledges her fury that her innocence was taken from her:

‘When the world itself is your source of torment then you are free to exact vengeance upon any least part of it. I think perhaps you would have to be a woman to understand that. And you will never know the depth of your hurt until you are presented with the opportunity for revenge. Only then will you know what you are capable of’.

Although the Escort attempts to be a receptive container for Malkina’s projections, he eventually retreats, as did the startled Reiner in the desert and the priest who fled the confessional. At the precise moment that Malkina communicates the depth of her despair and pain, the Escort says, ‘I think you have told me more than I wished to know’, and turns away. Like the others, he proves unable to contain and neutralize her monstrous, sadistic superego precursors. As of the film’s close, Malkina remains unsuccessful in finding someone who can do that for her.

Despite her magnificence as a predator, Malkina remains complicated and unfinished. In the closing scene, she describes that of her two pet cheetahs, only the male cheetah, Raoul, has survived: ‘I miss him. ... I miss watching him bringing down jackrabbits out on the desert at seventy miles an hour’. Even firmly entrenched in the paranoid-schizoid position, Malkina displays some capacity for mourning, which contrasts her statement at the start of the film that she does not miss anything.

There have been many shared drinks in the film, and often in places of darkness, but this is the first meal to be shared outside of the union between The Counselor and Laura. In the final words of the film, Malkina gives one last expression to her deprived inner state: ‘I’m famished’. We have seen Malkina repeatedly express her hunger and consistently be left unsatisfied. Now, with elegance, beauty, and overpowering beams of light, the stage is set. But, unfortunately, the meal will come and the emptiness will remain.

Crossings and irreconcilable worlds

Near the end of the film, we learn of a lone ‘traveler’ or ‘free rider,’ a dead body being carried around in circles along the drug trade in the fourth drum. This man is used as a mere weight to balance out the cocaine shipment in the other drums. With no destination, he represents the endless, repetitive cycling of the paranoid-schizoid position. Neither The Counselor nor Malkina demonstrate the necessary growth to cross the

boundary into the depressive position; however, unlike the ‘traveler,’ they show subtle evidence of progress and are able to glimpse it.

As the only two of the five main characters to survive, and despite their great involvement with the other characters, The Counselor and Malkina share surprisingly little dialogue with each other, limited to the following exchange:

Malkina: Hola, Guapo.

Counselor: Hey.

Indeed, these two worlds cannot come into contact with one another, for they represent opposite ends of a split-view of the world that is characteristic of paranoid-schizoid dynamics. The Counselor is immersed in a mindset that values an idealized ‘all-good’ dynamic with Laura. He is non-receptive to and actively rejects any reality that would challenge this concept. When he is confronted with the brutal and mindless impetus of the other end of the split, he is unable to display the flexibility necessary to allow this into his psychic economy without falling to pieces. He ends in despair. Our never learning his name gives further credence to his functioning in the realm of part-objects, rather than whole objects.

Par contre, Malkina is on the end of the split that denies the need for affection within human relations and coldly reduces interactions with others to the realms of sensuality or aggression. She is in a world where there is no object to be idealized. She is a power unto herself. There has been no reliable containment of her aggression or sexuality in the past. The priest cannot even stay to hear her sins. People and possessions are objectified, controlled, and eliminated as the situation dictates, without compunction or longing. She has learned from early on that people are not to be trusted.

The main intermediary between The Counselor and Malkina is Laura. Laura bears witness to the two contrasting realities of these characters, both containing an unsettling world view that may be difficult to fathom as fully real. Laura and her diamond are seen by these two figures in diametrically opposed lights. The Counselor idolizes and adorns Laura, an apotheosis that transcends value, as it imbues his own self with a much-needed narcissistic part-object; Malkina, instead, reduces the diamond to its grade and monetary

value and mocks Laura's naiveté and her wish to remain ignorant of the cost of the ring. Both Malkina and The Counselor deny the existence of elements of the opposite end of the pole, creating a rigidly maintained psychic structure that cannot allow for the entry of anything that would disrupt the surface. Thus, their world is spuriously more predictable, but quite impoverished.

To live in the paranoid-schizoid world, there is little place for ambivalence, grief, or containment of the bad by the good, and one tends to be either predator or prey. By adopting the all-good view, The Counselor puts himself in a position of weakness and becomes the prey. In a world in which both good and bad are forced to coexist, the 'good' that is contained within does not have the strength to stand up against the 'bad' that is relentlessly seeking to destroy it. Indeed, Malkina, fully identified with the predator, points to our 'faintness of heart' as humanity's ultimate flaw. In Cormac McCarthy's view, the death drive within humankind will outweigh any libidinal investment it may have in preserving itself, and identification with a predatory, destructive, and cruel object may be a compelling option in a world immersed in chaos and hell-bent on self-destruction.

We have observed the vast reach of Malkina's destructive fury. Her two cheetahs encircle Reiner's dead body in the dirt, and on her orders two joggers encircle and toss the bolito upon Westray's neck. Although her world cannot overlap with The Counselor's in a meaningful way, their paths do inevitably cross a second time. Malkina makes her final attack upon that which The Counselor holds closest to his heart, the lovely Laura. Delivered the snuff film that contains her gruesome murder, The Counselor falls to his knees. With tears pouring down his face and in a desperate fight for breath, he reads one single word, hand-written with marker on the DVD, which hits him like a bullet to the chest: 'Hola!'. This word, one that Malkina has said to him before, is the metaphoric 'crumb' she drops that eventually 'devours' him. Having crossed paths once and then crossed again, The Counselor and Malkina go their separate ways and fade off into the dark night. For Malkina, yet another man enters her world and then disappears. As she told Reiner in the desert to the flaring out of the sun beneath the horizon, 'There it goes'.

Conclusion

This paper has illustrated the pervasiveness of primitive defensive structures within the psychic realms of the characters in the film. Elaborations based on Kleinian theory indicate that the movement from paranoid-schizoid to depressive position constellations is fiercely defended against at every turn. The characters struggle with allowing space for uncertainty, fallibility, weakness, and grief. To do so would invite the split-off and projected parts of themselves (safely contained in others) and question the monochromatic way of negotiating others through mindless admiration, devaluing, or attack. The whimpering for containment hiding behind reified discourse is ever-present in the characters' constitution, yet any possibility of real human connection needs to be rejected, lest they be forced to challenge their defensive make-up and abandon the safer template offered by projective identification. However, time passes and the characters come into contact with the forcefulness of the other, their fates indicating that only death or the illusion of manic repair are antidotes to depressive position dynamics. Klein's theory helps outline the frailty lying at the core of individuals, and how containment can occur in glittery yet eminently fractured manners. This can leave one at the mercy of forces against which no known defense can be mustered, and the lack of internalized benign objects which can model adaptation to loss impedes any form of resolution. In the world of Malkina, The Counselor, Reiner, and Westray, the sense of tragedy of the human experience is one that is too painful to fully take in and process through thought and dyadic attunement. Rather, it must be lived out by way of a destructive enactment which, like the bolito's wire, takes on an inevitable course of action once it grabs hold of its prey.

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