

# The Black Sun: Symbol of the Unwelcome Child's Annihilation Terror in Pre-Natal Infanticidal Attachment

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## Whakarāpopotonga

E huri ana tēnei pepa ki taku rangahau kairanga mō te wheako roromi. Mai i te rarangatahitanga o te ariā tūhonotanga roromi, te whakapapa hinengaro e pā ana ki te kōhungahunga kōhungahunga me te mātai hinengaro mua-whānau whakapā atu ki te wheako o te kōhungahunga waingaio mua whānautanga, ka tūhuria te āhua matū o te rā pango me te tauira o Hine-nui-te-pō hai whakaputanga whakaaro kino mua whānautanga. E whakapae ana au i te wā e hapū ana, ka ara ake he honotahitanga o te kune waingaio me te whaea tenetene mai i ō rāua wheako whakawehiwehi ā, ka huri ki te herekore hai whai rautaki orange koia nei ka tahuri kē te kune ki te mate. Mai i tāku tirohanga kaiwhakaora hinengaro, tūroro hoki o mua, ka tūhura au i te putanga mai o te whakamatakutanga o Hine-nui-te-pō i roto i ngā moemoeā, ngā tohu mate, ngā whakaaro pohewa, ā, i ngā whakawhitinga ka whakaaro me pehea tā tātau pakanga i ēnei tūmomo tōpana patu-koiora.

## Abstract

This paper draws on my doctoral research into the experience of psychological infanticide. Weaving together infanticidal attachment theory, the psychohistory of infant murder, and pre-natal psychology regarding the experience of the unwelcome child before birth, I explore the alchemical image of the black sun and the Death Mother archetype as expressions of pre-birth annihilation terror. I argue that during pregnancy, the unwelcome foetus and unwilling mother form an infanticidal attachment centred on their shared experiences of helpless terror, and utilising mutual survival strategies of dissociation that orient the child towards death rather than life. From my perspectives as a psychotherapist and a former patient, I explore how terror of the Death Mother reveals itself in dreams, symptoms, fantasies, and in the transference, and consider how we might engage with such life-destroying forces.

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**Key words:** psychological infanticide; infanticidal attachment; Death Mother archetype; black sun; unwelcome child; unwilling mother; annihilation terror; baby farming

## Introduction

I acknowledge and thank the NZAP Education Fund for supporting my doctoral research from which this paper has eventuated. I also wish to acknowledge with deep compassion the predicament of the many women who became unwilling mothers of children they were unable to want or support, and whose grief, terror and shame is an archetypal story in its own right. Finally, I acknowledge the guidance of Williamina McCulloch (Minnie Dean), with gratitude and heartfelt thanks.

This paper draws on my research into the unwelcome child's experience of psychological infanticide. In my doctoral thesis I argued that during pregnancy, the unwelcome child and unwilling mother form an infanticidal attachment centred on their shared experiences of helpless terror, and utilising mutual survival strategies of dissociation that orient the child towards death rather than life (Sherwood, 2019). The alchemical image of the black sun, and the archetype of the Death Mother, represent this life-denying experience in the womb.

In my early 20s, at the precise age of my birth mother when she was pregnant with me, (although I did not know that at the time) I underwent a breakdown that brought my themes of psychological infanticide to consciousness. I have chosen to discuss aspects of my personal experience here, believing that lived experience brings a richness, depth and authenticity to theory. I feel vulnerable exposing my personal story, yet I also feel it is essential that survivors of psychological death speak out, describe the terrain, the traps, and the possible means of surviving the underworld. I intend that my journey may inspire hope for resurrection in patients, and in the clinicians who accompany them, and who must understand and embrace their role as guide for the patient who enters the land of the dead and hopes to return.

I begin with a definition of psychological infanticide and a brief explanation of infanticidal attachment theory. Next I explore the image of the black sun, and the concept of the Death Mother archetype. Throughout I illustrate the theory with examples from my personal myth and healing journey, revealing the pre-birth terrors of the unwelcome child and indicating a healing path.

## Psychological Infanticide

Brett Kahr (1993, 2007a, 2007b, 2012), who pioneered the infanticidal attachment theory that underpins my research, describes psychological infanticide as the result of the transfer of a death wish, either directly or indirectly, from caretaker to child. He states that this emotional murder allows physical survival but leads to an internalised state of deadliness, an infanticidal attachment with caregivers, and the terror of being killed.

I first recognised my own psychological infanticide as a result of a recurring dream that persisted in haunting me:

My grandmother takes me to visit a dead baby in a glass shrine. We enter the place

with reverence and a sense of mystery and holiness. My grandmother is revealing to me a previously unknown piece of my ancestry. I am curious about this baby who I know nothing about yet sense she is connected with me. My grandmother invites me to say a prayer for the dead infant. As I do so, I have a sense the child is listening and that I'm receiving some kind of grace. There's an aura of powerful presence emanating from her. Who is she and how is she related to me? Why do I feel such a strong and mysterious connection to her? Why does she seem so present when she is so little and dead? How did she die? Why are we venerating her?

I realised the dead baby was a part of myself and that in connecting to her I felt more connected to life. The questions I asked in my dream became guiding questions of my inner life. I began to ask further questions: what are the archetypal themes of the experience of psychological infanticide? What does it mean to feel you must be dead in order to be mothered? How does it alter the way you live and engage with life? Can it be healed, and if so, how?

Eventually, following the clue of this dead baby, my doctoral research led me into an underworld of desperate mothers, an unsupportive patriarchal system, and a painful history of the mass exploitation and murder of unwelcome infants, culminating in the 19th-century practice of baby farming. Throughout the 19th century, women who could not, or would not, care for their infants handed them over to baby farmers. Known as Angel Makers, baby farmers were representatives of the Death Mother archetype. Many profited from the systematic massacre of countless infants until adoption and child protection laws were enacted in the late 1800s (Hood, 1994; Rattle & Vale, 2011; Rose, 1986; Swain, 2005). Unfortunately, while adoption limited the likelihood of infanticide, it could not prevent psychological infanticides from occurring when unwelcome children received messages that they should not exist. My focus in this paper is not adoption. Rather, it is the infanticidal attachment that forms pre-birth when the unwelcome child experiences deathliness or deadness from which it is unable to escape. Pre- and perinatal research suggests that even before birth the unborn child may feel its life to be in danger, or even that it has died before it is birthed, and this has an impact on the experience of living (Grof, 1988; Piontelli, 2009; Verny & Kelly, 1991; Ward, 2006, 2017).

## Infanticidal Attachment

This theory describes the relational attachment dynamic that forms when a child attempts to survive psychological infanticide.

Throughout the history of psychoanalysis there has been speculation on the nature and aetiology of severe pathologies and death-oriented clinical presentations. Kahr (2007a, 2007b) proposes a theory of infanticidal attachment — a sub-category of disorganised attachment, which exposes the infanticidal themes and actions underlying many extreme states of psychosis and dissociation.

Some of Kahr's (2007a) proposed aetiologies of infanticidal attachment occur before birth in a womb experience that is either deadly or deathly. Some examples he includes are: threatened miscarriage, attempted abortion, death of a twin in utero, or being a replacement

child for a dead sibling. The central theme is actual or implicit death wishes *received* by the child.

Adah Sachs (2007, 2008, 2017) suggests further distinctions to infanticidal attachment theory, arguing that concrete (actual) infanticidal threats are more likely to lead to severe dissociative disorders whereas symbolic (implicit) threats may be more likely to lead to schizophrenia (Kahr, 2007b). In addition, Kahr (2007b) suggests there might also be a further consideration to explore between unconscious and conscious infanticidal attachments.

Outlining the evidence that suggests there is an infanticidal attachment, Kahr (2007a) describes internal states of deadness or deadliness, terror of being killed, feeling one does not exist, frozen states, and murderousness or suicidality. Such symptoms are both a protection from a world perceived as annihilating, and a desperate attempt to communicate the internal terror, psychic death, non-existence and hostage in the psyche to internalised murderers experienced in psychological infanticide.

In order to understand the universal context of infanticide, Kahr (1993, 2001, 2007a, 2007b, 2012) draws on the work of psychohistorian Lloyd de Mause (1974) who claims that the earliest modes of child rearing were based on infanticide and abandonment. He reveals that from earliest times unwanted infants were exposed to the elements, or abandoned to almost certain death, carelessly slaughtered or ritually sacrificed. De Mause claims the infanticidal mode was the first recognisable style of child rearing. The infanticidal history of child rearing, and the destructive effects of psychological infanticide on both the individual and on societies, has been further illuminated by child-oriented psychohistorians and researchers including Robin Grille (2005), James deMeyo (2006), Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (1984), and Alice Miller (1987, 1990, 1997).

It was only in the 18th century that there developed some tolerance of ambivalent feelings and the rise of a moral conscience with regard to killing infants, alongside the emergence of child-rearing modes that included some empathy and sensitivity to children (de Mause, 1974; Grille, 2005). Although more empathic modes of child rearing support mothers to form greater attachments to their children, infanticidal and abandoning practices continue as a form of intergenerational trauma (Grille, 2005; Yellin & Epstein, 2013; Yellin & White 2012). In our current culture it is accepted and even financially necessary that mothers abandon their infants to daycare so they can return to work. As psychotherapists we may question the impact on a society built on the disruption of the mother-infant bond.

Historically, when murder or direct abandonment were no longer morally acceptable, desperate mothers found other ways to dispatch their children, to baby farmers or foundling hospitals, both of which had notoriously high mortality rates (Rose, 1986; Styles, 2010). Infanticidal wishes were evident in the fee paid by mothers, many of whom had the expectation of never seeing the child again (Cossins, 2014; Hood, 1994; Rattle & Vale, 2011; Rose, 1986). Many baby farmers exploited these infanticidal wishes by starving, drugging, and neglecting children who died slow deaths, or they simply murdered them. Some baby farmers, for example Amelia Dyer, who had a lucrative practice in England for decades before she was convicted and hanged for child murder, had a specialty of smothering infants as they were being born. Pathologists of the time could not detect the difference between a stillbirth and smothering the baby before it had taken its first breath (Rattle & Vale, 2011).

Pinzon (1996), whose doctoral research also explores her family history of psychological infanticide, refers to the legacy of the collective unconscious — unspoken, unfelt or unremembered patterns that lead to the same responses; the historical memory of infanticide as the primary option for dealing with an impossible situation. The psychohistory of infanticide as a human truth occurring throughout time, place and culture has something essential to teach us about the way we kill off the most vulnerable, innocent and creative parts of ourselves and others.

In my thesis I suggested that infanticidal attachment begins in the relationship between mother and unborn child in the womb, and that infanticidal patterns of relating are already established before birth (Sherwood, 2019). The most powerful defence available between unwilling mother and unwelcome child is dissociation. There is a significant correlation between high levels of dissociation in women going through unwanted pregnancies and harm to their infants soon after birth. For example, Spinelli (2010) argues that the higher the mother's level of dissociation during pregnancy, the more at risk the child is of infanticide soon after delivery. Perhaps also there is a higher risk of a live child experiencing a psychological infanticide.

The internal world of the psychological infanticide is haunted by the infanticidal introject. Children internalise or introject their parent as a normal part of their development. When an attachment figure presents direct or indirect death threats, these internalised qualities are murderous (Kahr 2007a, 2007b, 2012; Yellin & Epstein, 2013; Yellin & White, 2012). Donald Kalshed (1996, 2013) states that the traumatised child internalises its experiences in unprocessed archetypal form, meaning they absorb the overarching thematic pattern rather than its limited human expression. The infanticidal introject internalised by the unwelcome child, and presiding in the psyche, is represented by the Death Mother archetype (Woodman, 2005). The experience of anti-life mothering, by whatever means, instils in the psyche a relationship with death as mother figure that seduces the child into believing its only orientation is towards death. Valerie Sinason (2017) articulates this deathly relationship, advising clinicians that when connection with an attachment figure is only felt in a near-death situation, it leads to extra levels of suicidality.

“The Death Mother energy feeds on humiliation and shame, powerlessness and the fear of annihilation” (Holmquist, 2015, cited in Sieff, 2017, p. 5). Consequently, the Death Mother drains vitality and paralyzes engagement in life (Harris & Harris, 2015; Sieff, 2017; Woodman & Sieff, 2015). Marion Woodman links the Death Mother energy to not being welcomed into life, and to feeling unwanted or wrong in the womb (Sieff, 2017; Woodman, 2005; Woodman & Sieff, 2015). According to Daniela Sieff (2017), “ultimately the Death Mother carries the wish that we, or some part of us, did not exist” (p. 5).

When the instinct for nurturing is blocked at the beginning of life the unwelcome child experiences the terror of impending or actual obliteration. This infant is walled up within, a tiny kernel of frozen life unable to take breath. The person continues to develop, and semblances of a self form scars round the dark place, the burial ground, the internalised black sun of an obliterated life. No tombstone is erected to suggest on the surface that a child has died here. Yet, as we saw earlier, the psyche may communicate evidence of this murdered infant self through dreams, and as we shall see, through symptoms and synchronicities.

Later in life, during times of crisis that may include separation, rejection, or loss, the

archetypal self-care system of the traumatised person intensifies, doing whatever it takes to isolate the self from the reality of loss and dislocation (Kalshed, 1996). Overwhelming combinations of annihilation terror and murderous rage may be unable to be contained and lead to terror in the transference as they spill into therapy and life. The self-care system becomes persecutory in its attempts to protect the self from further harm through isolating the person from reality. At its extremes this can develop into psychotic delusion or suicide attempts as the internal protector/persecutor determines to kill off the host rather than risk further possible harm to the self (Kalshed, 1996, 2013; Yellin & Epstein, 2013; Yellin & White, 2012). Let me illustrate this with my personal story.

My breakdown was precipitated by the loss of a relationship due to our different wishes about having children. Bereft, I began to feel and act as if I was a ghost. I believed I did not exist unless someone was thinking me into existence. I became terrified of being killed. I heard the voice of an internal mother urging me to die. I felt compelled to obey her instructions.

Although I was not able to articulate it at the time, the central dilemma that led to my hospitalisation was the belief that Mother was murderous, and in a twist of tortured logic, the only way to prevent myself from being murdered was to murder myself first. I attempted suicide. Lost in my internal terror, I could no longer distinguish between self and other, between internal and external reality.

I remember feeling exquisitely vulnerable and afraid in hospital, not believing I existed, fearing that if I did allow myself to exist I would be killed. I both longed for and needed a soothing mother at this time, and yet I could not risk letting a maternal presence near me for fear of being destroyed. It was as if in order to survive I had to die; in order to be mothered I had to be dead.

Much later, having recognised my psychological infanticide, with its profound sense of being eclipsed, I discovered Stanton Marlon's (2005) book *The Black Sun: The Alchemy and Art of Darkness*. This work validated my experience and led me into a symbolic exploration of psychological infanticide through the image of the black sun. Let us go on then to explore the black sun and solar eclipse in myth, history, literature, dream and symptom.

## The Black Sun and Eclipse

The black sun is an image of total solar eclipse. It reveals psychological themes related to the negation of light and warmth. The word eclipse comes from the Greek *ekleipsi*, which means abandonment (Anderson, 2017). In his brief history of eclipse, Ross Andersen (2017) asks, "what could be more traumatic than the abandonment of the sun?" (para. 7). The temperate sun, giver of light and warmth, grants life, and nourishes growth. As such, the sun is a symbol of the positive mother, whose eclipse signifies the anti-life qualities of the Death Mother. With the death of the sun comes the death of our world.

There is a popular misconception (an interesting word in this context) that viewing an eclipse is dangerous in pregnancy and to the unborn child (Krepp, 1992). The experience of eclipse in the situation of the unwelcome child and unwilling mother is a psychological infanticide in which the very foundation for life is dead. Before birth, and as infants, Mother is our world. As Winnicott (1965) states, in the first year of life there is not a separate mother

and a baby, rather the mother-baby are an inter-related unit. Without her, our very world and foundation are destroyed and our survival, our existence, is at great risk.

Dorothy Bloch (1979) elaborates on the effects of childhood fears of infanticide. She described anxiety, terror, autism, psychosis, suicidality and criminality. When one's being is negated, instinctive murderous energies may take over. Adopted people for example, who are more likely than average to experience negation of their being, have a twenty percent higher rate of murder, including murder of parents, and serial murders, than the general population (Kirschner, 1992; Wierzbicki, 1993).

The incredible force of the negation of life-affirmed by life-destroyed was powerfully demonstrated in Hitler's inversion of the swastika, which was originally a symbol of the sun's life energy representing vitality and wellbeing (Zimmer, 2017). Hitler's swastika represented the anti-life forces against him in childhood, and internalised by him, that negated the lives of millions of people. Inversion of life energy into the death realm is a theme of psychological infanticide.

The sun is often considered a masculine symbol of power, reason, vision and consciousness. Hence a solar eclipse in mythology and history had ominous portent, especially signifying the death of the king. In alchemical psychology this has suggested the death of the ego (Edinger, 1994). A psychological eclipse affects the development of healthy ego, personal sovereignty and self-realisation.

In more archaic mythologies the sun was considered feminine, the Great Mother, ruling over heaven and earth, the ovum producing and nourishing life (Krepp, 1992). In a solar eclipse the sun is obliterated, and this blotting out has its equivalent in the psychic annihilation felt by the child who experiences death wishes pre-birth. The eclipsed child does not exist, or is not allowed to exist in the realm of life. The eclipsed child lives in darkness and exile in an underworld of invisibility and formlessness, of non-self and non-being (Marlon, 2005; Ward, 2017).

Marlon (2005) says the black sun is the ultimate expression of the death force. Just as the sun's light is negated in an actual eclipse, tipping the world into an off-centre nightmarish darkness, the internalised eclipse caused by the Death Mother tilts the infant into a traumatic reality that continues to threaten existence through life.

Here is how writer Annie Dillard (1982) describes witnessing a total eclipse, eerily attuned to the psychic experience of the psychological infanticide:

The sun was going, and the world was wrong ... everything was lost ... my mind was going out; my eyes were receding the way galaxies recede to the rim of space. (p. 17)

As the eclipse became total she details the feeling of deathliness:

There was no world. We were the world's dead people rotating and orbiting around and around, ... our minds were light years distant, forgetful of almost everything. Only an extraordinary act of will could recall to us our former, living selves and our contexts in matter and time ... seeing this black body was like seeing a mushroom cloud. The heart screeched. It obliterated meaning itself. (p. 19)

In my own experience of eclipse, not only did I have the feeling of having been killed off, I suffered terrible migraines accompanied by a feeling of dread and impending doom, a crushing darkness that obliterates life. The migraines were so intensely painful I lost consciousness. It was as if I had been killed and then slowly was returned to life. This horrific form of extinction felt imposed by an overwhelming force against which I was helpless. Eventually, I learned to recognise that my migraines also communicated the resurrection theme that is the essence of healing infanticidal trauma.

My psychologically infanticided clients variously describe this annihilation as a black menacing cloud descending, an enveloping darkness that destroys the capacity to think or feel, a black void of nothingness, a black figure who crushes aliveness, being sucked into a black hole, and even a giant hand descending to crush the person. It may feel like a grave, being buried alive, entombed in a dark vault in which one will soon run out of space and air.

Marlon (2005) links the black sun with "a chronic, psychic atrophy that can sometimes be literally fatal" citing the case of Robert whose "black hole in the psyche" felt like cosmic black holes that draw all matter into themselves" (p. 37). Robert had dreamed of a black hole that swallowed up the world. Later he had disturbing images that included abortions, miscarriages, stillborn babies and monster or mutant births. He developed severe migraines and sensory disturbances, became ill with cancer and subsequently died. The images reported in Robert's case show a strong parallel with the causes and effects of psychological infanticide.

Returning to themes of the black sun in Western mythology and literature, an image emerges of a lost, shipwrecked or castaway self in a world turned upside down; visiting or inhabiting the underworld; being exiled from home and blinded or in the dark. These themes reflect the psychological world of the unwelcome child.

The theme of blindness reveals a loss of, or altered, vision, and dissociative states of unknowing as we face death up close. Michael Comenetz (2009) describes the blindness of the black sun as a practising of dying and being dead, like Socrates, "until he becomes unable to see life as others do" (para. 1). From the trauma-world of the Death Mother, one is indeed incapable of seeing life as others do.

I experienced myself as having crossed over into an underworld, a realm of ghosts. I could not be fully alive nor could I be fully dead. In this threshold place there was a deep pull to get back to the relationship with death, which is where I felt more fully oriented and was, I surmise, my earliest normality. I was one of the invisibles, exiled and cast adrift from any sense of home.

Through dreams, symptoms and journal reflections, fictions, and reveries I was gradually able to enter my underworld consciously. I wrote in my journal:

I begin my journey back down into the deep. One must never underestimate the land of the dead where you can lose your self in oblivion without the ability to think or act. Something, some part, must stay conscious and hold the thread, record the experience and return to the world sane and alive. The first time I went down into darkness I lost myself in a breakdown suffering the guilt of being alive, of having survived the death of my birth. Alone in the wilderness you are both lost and given up for dead. Given up for dead. Isn't that what happened to unwanted infants handed



over to baby farmers? Isn't that the psychic landscape of adoption? Paradoxically, I anticipate that surviving being given up for dead can provide a powerful revelatory connection with Self, and a connection to a wellspring of deep inner life. (2015).

Sieff (2017) states, "If a trauma-world is formed during childhood, it becomes our normality, whereupon we are unconscious of its impact on our lives" (p. 170). How much more so when the trauma-world begins before birth? This is a psychological blindness that continues to impose traumatic history and attachments in our lives.

Comenetz (2009) links blindness with the theme of the exile. In the tales of Odysseus, Helios the sun god responds to Odysseus's appropriation of the Sun's cattle with threats to disappear into the underworld to shine for the dead — an example of the inversion of the natural order. Odysseus also visits the dead and returns profoundly affected by their emptiness, just as the person with an infanticidal attachment style may appear eerily flat and dead.

In the Oedipus myth, claimed by Freud as the foundational myth of psychoanalysis, Oedipus is abandoned in an infanticidal act by his parents, and survives after being adopted by strangers (Sophocles, 1947). Oedipus's blindness occurs because he cannot know himself authentically. He makes terrible mistakes for which he punishes himself harshly, blinding himself as he himself has been symbolically blinded by the disruption to his self knowledge and context.

Blindness suggests how painful it is to see truth. In my dreams I began to witness what I had previously "known but not known":

There is a serial killer about. A feeling of menace, and also mystery. I see an infant being held out by a dark figure. She is being held out in space and she is not held safe. The scene turns and I witness her face, my infant self, looking terrified. I find it hard to look at her because it is so distressing. I reflect on the serial killer and begin to realise I am the murderer. (2016).

In this dream I faced into my early annihilation terror and the serial ways I continued to kill off the small, weak, vulnerable and unwanted parts of my self.

Blindness and exile are also linked in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, when God casts Satan (the light-bearer) into the "fiery gulf" of "darkness visible," reminiscent of the outraged Helios threatening to shine only for the dead in the underworld (Milton, n.d., p. 77).

The negating darkness and exile from the realm of life are also expressed in the first stanza of the poem *El Desdichado* (The Disinherited), by 19th-century poet Gerard de Nerval. The image of the black sun is included in his description of living death:

Je suis le Tenebreaux, — le Veuf — L'Inconsole,  
Le Prince d'Aquitaine a la Tour abolie:  
Ma seule Etoile est morte — et mon luth constelle  
Porte le Soleil noir de la Melencolie.

I am the man of shadows — the man in the shadows — the man of darkness — the man lost in the dark — the shadowy man you cannot see. I am the widower; I am the

Unconsoled, the disconsolate, the grief-stricken man. I am the Prince of Aquitaine ... I am the Prince with the abolished, shattered, stricken or blasted tower, or the Prince standing by that tower. My only star is dead, burnt out, extinguished (the noun is feminine). And my star studded lute, or my lute marked with constellations, or the zodiac signs; my lute carries, or is emblazoned with, the Black Sun of Melancholy or Melancholia. (cited in Holmes, 1985, p. 211).

This stanza illustrates the obliterated self of the mortally rejected child. He becomes lost in the shadows, bereft of relationship, inconsolable and unloved. His identity and status in the world have been destroyed and he has no foundation. His star — any sense of illumination or guidance — is dead; and his lute — his instrument, voice, or soul — is burdened with melancholy (Holmes, 1985). This image is richly, densely packed with ideas centred around mythic journeys into the realm of the dead. The black sun is a portal into the underworld from which de Nerval strove but failed to escape.

De Nerval links the black sun of melancholy with Dürer's engraving *Melencolia II*, which evokes the cold, dark, dead and paralysing inertia of Saturn. Yet *Melencolia* is female, her image reminiscent of Medusa, which has been considered a primary myth speaking to the healing of trauma (Bright, 2010; Levine, 2010), and in particular the healing of the Death Mother wound (Harris & Harris, 2015). I discuss the Medusa myth further in a later section. De Nerval became increasingly engulfed by psychotic terrors and depression. Unable to hold the thread and find his way out of the underworld, he killed himself in mid-life.

Blindness, dissociation and death are again linked when Andersen (2017) describes eclipse as a vision of the unknown. When one is eclipsed one is unknown, a non-self. Marlon (2005) goes further, exploring the complexities, mysteries and paradoxes of the black sun as an archetypal image of the non-self. Linked with depression, psychosis, cancer, murder, suicide and other destructive processes, the black sun has a malignancy that takes it utterly into the essence of obliteration. Yet this archetype of the non-self is also the unknown quantity which holds an "invisible design" of "sourceless possibility" (p. 214). In the transference, this obscure illumination that lights the path of healing is hidden within the original experience, and re-enactment, of pre-birth annihilation and the terrors that accompany it.

## Terror in the Transference

In therapy, the infanticidally attached person may be terrified of non-existence yet drawn into the black hole of this familiar place of dissolution. They may also be terrified of existing, for it is in the act of existing, of becoming visible and real — in birthing into embodied reality — that the psychologically infanticided person becomes most vulnerable to the terror of being killed. It is at this point in therapy that both therapist and client may walk a knife's edge between life and death.

When frightened, the psychologically infanticided person instinctively turns towards death. They may project their fears or murderous rage onto the therapist so that the therapist may fear violence from the patient or may experience violent feelings towards the patient. The sense of responsibility, anger, fear, terror and/or helplessness therapists feel with these

clients may be intense (Kahr, 2007a; Liotti, 2012; Sinason & Silver, 2019; Yellin & Epstein, 2013). They may feel like a mother with a newborn.

My own terrors included attempts to escape hospital care out of fears of being killed by staff; I was frightened that my psychotherapist was colluding with the hospital, handing me over to be murdered. When I left hospital I dissociated when I heard ambulance sirens, waking sometimes hours later hidden in the dark of a wardrobe; I disappeared into frozen states, unable to move or communicate. I frequently saw murderousness in my therapist's face.

To be fully alive and authentic in one's self one must face into the ways one has been sacrificed and has sacrificed one's self. I turn now to my healing journey as a means of exploring what needs to be healed and how it might be safely worked with.

## The Death Mother and Minnie Dean

Global myths and stories indicate that healing of psychological infanticide requires a descent and return from the underworld, a recognition of the cycle of eternal return, and a resurrection from death into the fullness of life (Eliade, 1954; Harris & Harris, 2015).

Through the fairy tale "The Stone Child," Clarissa Pinkola Estes (1997) shows that the healing journey of psychological infanticide involves surviving death, reigniting the flame of life inside the self, and growing a nurturing and wise inner mother who guides us through life and through which our creative potentials can be birthed and thrive. The journey involves facing into the fear and despair, becoming warmed by relationship with feelings, and building a sense of stability through a connection with the archetypal good mother

The healing work of infanticidal trauma involves relating to archetypal persons, or infanticidal introjects, in a way that both reveres them as powerful forces in the psyche and humanises them (Kalshed, 1996, 2013).

Harris and Harris (2015) describe the Medusa myth as a direct healing myth for the Death Mother archetype. A sovereign of female wisdom, the female mysteries and cycles of time and nature, Medusa represents universal creation and destruction in eternal transformation, making her part of the cycle of eternal return that I experienced in the death/rebirth cycle of my migraines (Eliade, 1954; Grof, 1988). According to Bonnie Bright (2010), the Medusa myth illuminates dissociation and disregard — key aspects of infanticidal trauma. The Medusa myth suggests a transformational journey through the lifelessness enforced by the Death Mother to the wholeness of the Sacred Feminine.

I instinctively, and later consciously, engaged with the Death Mother through an imaginal journey with New Zealand baby farmer Minnie Dean, who was hanged for child murder in 1895. I felt compelled to understand Minnie's life, motives and context. From different angles she represented a rescuer of abandoned children, and a woman who might neglect, abuse and kill infants. The therapist may hold all these roles for the client: the longed for rescuer who is also dangerous, a killer of the fragile Innocent who lies seemingly dead within. The inner murderous mother may be projected onto the therapist, or the therapist enlisted to save the baby client from a murderous mother part of the self; the therapist may even be invited to collude in killing the baby client.

I offer a caution before I describe my imaginal journey with Minnie Dean: imaginal engagement with archetypal forces may lead to psychosis if archetypal material overwhelms

one's grip on conscious reality. In researching psychological infanticide I initially experienced life-threatening physical symptoms, episodes of psychic disintegration and internal chaos, periods of extreme vulnerability and anxiety and a brief return of suicidal despair. I also experienced deathly synchronicities, for example, just as I embraced a sense of my own existence, a chair flew off a truck as I was driving on the motorway, smashing my windscreen at eye level. Had it broken through the glass it would have been fatal. This level of engagement needs to be well grounded, and supported by a therapist who understands the perilous nature of the journey.

As I introduce Minnie Dean, it is essential to clarify that the Minnie I write about here is imaginal, not a literal Minnie, just as the infanticide I'm exploring is psychological rather than literal. I do not presume to know the whole truth about the real Minnie Dean's story.

Minnie Dean was a baby farmer found guilty of the murder of two infants. More than a century later the question of Minnie's intent, and therefore the degree of her guilt, are still debated. This ambiguity was useful in my internal process as I engaged with the complexities of infanticidal attachments. In Minnie's case some children died under very suspicious circumstances. Others went missing, unable to be traced. Those left were well cared for.

Reading Lynley Hood's (1994) biography of Minnie Dean, I too was drawn into the question of Minnie's intentions — did she mean to murder the children or did their deaths happen unintentionally? This was of course my own psychological dilemma. But underneath this I was worried about the established fact of two dead infants. The reality of 19th-century history resonated with my personal history — in a different time, I could have been one of those dead children. Suddenly I had an historical context for the myth I had been living.

Moving to Oamaru in my mid-thirties led me into an unusual synchronicity of events. I was actively engaging with Minnie in my internal world. Now I also began working in Oamaru's historic Victorian precinct, which was like a live piece of history, with people practising traditional Victorian occupations and wearing Victorian dress. My life and history had interweaved. Living a Victorian life brought me closer to my imagining of Minnie's life.

Dressed in Victorian clothes, I rode the steam train imagining I was Minnie on her last journey, having picked up baby Eva Hornsby, with Dorothy Carter, already dead, stuffed in her hatbox. Eva also died on that train. In my imagination I was Minnie, knowing she had two dead infants in her hatbox. Keeping her composure. Stifling the frantic panic inside.

In my street there was a 19th-century cemetery. I began another imaginal dialogue with a deceased 19th-century infant named Susan. This was a way of engaging an imaginal relationship with the dead baby inside myself. During this time both the dead baby and the murderous mother were being given vital and vitalising attention in my psyche.

Reflection, and journals kept over a long period of time, revealed a persistent sense of annihilation around the time of my birthday when I felt I could not exist. In this time of darkness I yearned for a figure I called the child killer. Realising that I attempted to soothe myself by reaching out to a killer helped me to recognise the internal dynamic between unwelcome child and infanticidal mother. I wrote:

Wanting the solace of the child killer, wanting to destroy. No life. Opening the lid of a grave and letting out what? Life? Hope? Despair? Wanting to be killed. Wondering if I am the killer. When I thought about drawing my inner prison I realised how

womb-like it is, and how strong is the pull to get back there. And then thinking about being willed dead in the womb, that numbing of feeling of life — trying to resolve the situation of the child killer, whether for criminal intent or not the outcomes were the same, the pain is the same. (2015).

As I engaged with the presence of Minnie she came to symbolise for me the concepts of mother I needed to understand inside myself. At times it felt terribly risky to invite her inside my head and I intentionally kept her outside of me. At other times she was very much present inside my mind as part of myself — the aspects of me that were complex and conflicted about relationships between mother and infant, and that involved and included potential murderousness, abandonment, and neglect. Dialogues with Minnie enabled me to recognise and work through these aspects of myself.

Over time Minnie developed in her complexity as a person and took on a new role in my psyche as guide and advisor. Through our growing collaboration, trust and care were emerging. I experienced this blending of her and myself as similar to the attunement of a mother following the signals and needs of her child.

Through my relationship with Minnie Dean as representative of the Death Mother, I was engaged with the archetypal feminine wound in the psyches of desperate mothers and unwanted children. Unfolding the image of the black sun eventually revealed a mythology of the Sacred Feminine, a connection with earth, body, matter and soul that literally helped me to matter, and to manifest a place to root and to flourish. This offered a new vision of the potentials of the annihilating void. It gave me a perspective of the dark emptiness of oblivion as a womb place where something might be dreamed into being. This creative feminine mythology was a necessary counterpoint to the deep negation of the Death Mother.

Exploring the ways Minnie's story has reflected something of my own helped me shift my perception and broaden and deepen my insight as she enabled me to reflect on the collective story of women in trouble without support, and as she helped me to reflect on the murdered, murderous and ghostly aspects of myself. I eventually experienced a profound sense of wholeness, unity and healing as parts of me that felt abandoned, murdered, neglected and exiled were attended to with compassionate care. Equally abandoned and rejected nurturing parts were able to grow and become the caring, holding supports I needed. I also had to face into and accept with compassion the internalised murderous parts of me who had lived only in darkness.

This deep healing is reflected in another dream, which suggests healing of the feminine wound between mother and daughter:

I visit two simple old folk who are my original parents. Everything in their home, and they themselves are simple, homely, as if they are from another time, or outside time. In the house there is the palpable absent-presence of their "lost" daughter. The old man hands me two pieces of jewellery that belonged to her. I have the sense suddenly I am on the right path in my life. Then I am sitting with the old woman. She's behind me, telling me her stories and I lean back against her. She wraps her arms around me and holds me close. I can feel her voice resonating deep inside my body. It is the original voice from before I was born and I experience such a sense of belonging and

being at home. I rest in this homecoming. I tell her how I might cry as I tell her about this feeling of belonging. She responds and we are held in a deep warm embrace. (2017).

The result of my imaginal process was a shift from living enclosed within a personal myth of archetypal intensity to being more fully integrated in my human presence and an experience of the human dimensions of the world. The humanising of the psyche and the self in the world is described by Kalshed (1996, 2013) as the process and effect of the healing of archetypal wounds. My acceptance and humanising of the Death Mother ultimately resulted in a healing vision of the Great Mother:

I have a sense of inner/outer falling away. There are patterns of colour (violet, blue) and an intensely luminous light forming deep in my inner eye. I sense an orb of blue light around me, enfolding me as a little baby sinking into sleep. In this orb I feel the divine consciousness of the Great Mother. I feel connected to the Earth, deeply held by this mother and I feel her blue mantle of protective love spread over me, leaving a space for the blue orb field. I feel even younger, glimpse or sense myself as a cosmic embryo forming inside this blue egg of fluid/light. I realise there is a silver cord attached to me and coiling down into the earth. I feel even more warmly held and nourished by this deep connection to the Great Mother. Deeply loved. My consciousness expands and contracts, moving towards and away from actual sleep. I am content here in this breathing space of unfolding potential nourished by the divine love of all creation. (2017).

## Conclusion

There is hope for the healing and growth of people who live the effects of psychological infanticide through a compassionate understanding and care that these people's infant lives were sacrificed. Self-expression through art, creative writing and journaling points to some means of healing through imaginal engagement with images, dreams, symptoms, and dialogues with personified figures.

Psychological infanticide remains an extremely controversial and difficult experience to speak out about as many people wish to remain in denial about the infant's experience of an unwilling mother pre-birth. There is an understandable societal protectiveness against perceived blame of mothers, which can serve to re-silence the child. Unless we are aware of the power of this denial, clinicians working with infanticidal attachments will be drawn into a psychological re-enactment of it, resulting in further reinforcement of the original psychological infanticide.

Healing requires a steady infusion of positive, nurturing and validating mothering energies and support to journey through the underworld, face the Death Mother and return fully alive. Healing requires a positive experience of embodiment, and connection with living nature, grounding in relationship with Mother Earth. Symptoms need to be respected as the wisdom and communication of these murdered selves. Wounds are a part of life, and we cannot always expect to cure a symptom. Neither should we banish it, discounting and

invalidating these metaphorical communications from the infanticided soul.

As we face into planetary crisis and its many extinctions, can we recognise the relationships between our own annihilation fears and infanticidal introjects? Can we wake from the dissociative blindness we enter in our terror? Does the symbol of the black sun alert us to the ways we negate life? Holding a space for the mystery of the Sacred Feminine, we invite recognition of the need for nurturing life-giving energies to be valued and restored in our relationships between each other and on this planet, this Mother Earth who holds us all in her embrace, and without whom we will all be lost.

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