

Psychotherapy and Mystical Theology: Melanie Klein and Hadewijch of Antwerp in conversation

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Abstract

This article examines and compares the writings of the medieval mystic Hadewijch of Antwerp and the theories of the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein. Initially, both figures are presented in the context of the world and environment from which they wrote. Klein is then explored through three particular elements of her object relations theory: splitting, the paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position. Hadewijch's mystical theology is then explored through her poems, letters and visions; her world, where all is love and paradox, is presented through three main themes: the abyss, the Trinity and Christ. Hadewijch's place in the 20th Century is explored, as is Klein's situation in the 14th Century. Both these contexts are then brought together in the subjective world of the writer in the 21st Century to consider their relevance, compatibility, similarities and differences. Concluding thoughts bring together the psychospiritual evolution of our subjective world, from schism to holding the tension of opposites in paradox.

Keywords: Hadewijch of Antwerp, Melanie Klein, Psychospiritual Evolution, Mystical Theology

Introduction

Christian mysticism and psychotherapy focus on the healing of the human soul (mysticism) and/or psyche (psychotherapy). In this article, I will explore the bridge between the spiritual and the psychological using the writings of Hadewijch of Antwerp (Hadewijch hereafter) and Melanie Klein as a medium for surveying the borderlands between

these distinct yet strangely adherent traditions. But why Hadewijch and why Klein? Despite having known Klein longer, the story starts with Hadewijch.

I was initially attracted to Hadewijch's writings whilst reading Vision 7 entitled *Oneness in the Eucharist*, from which the following excerpt stood out:

With that, he came in the form and clothing of a Man, as he was on the day when he gave us his Body for the first time; looking like a Human Being and a Man, wonderful, and beautiful, and with a glorious face, he came to me as humbly as anyone who wholly belongs to another. Then he gave himself to me in the shape of the Sacrament, in its outward form, as the custom is; and then he gave me to drink from the chalice, in form and taste, as the custom is. After that, he came himself to me, took me entirely in his arms, and pressed me to him; and all my members felt his in full felicity, in accordance with the desire of my heart and my humanity. (Hadewijch, 1980:281)

The ecstatic and embodied experience in this vision, melding the spiritual and physical (Nelstrop, 2020:338), is an arresting image that spurred me to read more widely. Theologian Mark McIntosh, in his book *Mystical Theology*, examines Hadewijch's theology and the interplay between Jesus' suffering in physical humanity and the Divine-human encounter (McIntosh, 1998:174). He quotes from Hadewijch's Letter 30:

Oh yes! To feel heart in heart, with one single heart and one single sweet love, and continually have fruition of one full-grown love. And lastly, that one must ever know certainly, without any doubt, that one is wholly in the Unity of Love. In this state, one is the Father. (Hadewijch, 1980:118)

McIntosh reflects that this passage expresses: "loving responsivity of the creation within the self-surrender of God to God" (McIntosh, 1998:181). As with my embodied experience of Vision 7, I was deeply affected by this notion of us partaking in the surrender of God to God.

Hadewijch offers a constant invitation to live like Christ - "That cross which we must bear with the Son of the living God (Matthew, 12:38) is the sweet exile that we bear for the sake of veritable Love" (Hadewijch, 1980:63) - and to surrender into living the Trinity in the Unity of each of the three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, "that we may live in conformity with the Trinity, and that we may become united to the Unity of the Godhead" (Hadewijch, 1980:120). This call

to carry our cross like Christ, to live in Unity in the Trinity, took me, for reasons that will become clear, to thoughts of Melanie Klein's object relations theory¹ and the world of the developing infant.

Melanie Klein describes the infant's inner world as somewhat fraught and terrifying, due, in varying degrees, to the deprivation of love. These early experiences tend to remain unconscious; when we read about these dynamics, we can understandably feel a little unsettled. The question of love's place within the psychotherapeutic environment can be contentious. I've heard psychotherapists ask: Is it okay to love our clients? Central to the Christian mystical tradition is the tenet that only Love can heal: so if, as therapists, we question or dismiss the necessity of love in the therapeutic relationship, what are we left with? This is the world of Melanie Klein - as we will see, Klein richly describes the development of the subjective world of the infant in response to their environment.

Melanie Klein

Melanie Klein was born on 30th March 1882 in Austria, the youngest of four children. Her mother, Libussa, was the central figure in a neurotic, entangled family (Grosskurth, 1986). Klein suffered multiple bereavements early in her life: her sister Sidonie in 1886; father Moriz in 1900; brother Emanuel in 1902.

Soon after the loss of her brother, Melanie married Arthur Klein with whom she had three children. In 1914 her mother died; during this moment of crisis Klein read Sigmund Freud and started psychoanalysis with Sandor Ferenczi. Ferenczi believed that we become neurotic through a lack of love rather than an innate instinctual inner conflict. This deprivation of love as the basis of our suffering was to be central to Klein's object relations theory.

Ferenczi supported Klein in her desire to become a psychoanalyst. Klein moved to Berlin, commenced analysis with Karl Abraham and eventually, under invitation from Ernest Jones, settled in London. It was here where her most astute and intuitive ideas came to fruition. Klein remained in London until her death on 22nd September 1960.

¹ Klein's object relations theory emphasises the importance of early relationships, especially with primary caregivers, in shaping the psyche and personality. It explores how these early interactions form internalised images that influence future relationships (Klein, 1946).

Klein & Object Relations

Klein's object relations theory covers many aspects of child development and consequential adult manifestations of these psychic mechanisms or coping strategies. I will now consider three parts of her theory that I find useful clinically: *splitting*, the *paranoid-schizoid position* and the *depressive position*.

Splitting

Central to Klein's theory is the theme of splitting: "I attribute to the ego² from the beginning of life a need and capacity not only to split but also to integrate itself" (Klein, 1958:245). Splitting is the essential nature of humans to developmentally create a split between 'good' or 'bad' creating a binary world in order to cope with our competing instincts for life - love, feeding and warmth from a mother - and death.

According to Klein, splitting starts in the first few months after birth: "...the first object being the mother's breast which is split into a good (gratifying) and bad (frustrating) breast; this splitting results in a division between love and hate" (Klein, 1946:99). This innate tendency for the child in the earliest months to split the object is taken further by magnifying one characteristic - the good, nourishing breast - to such an extent that it swamps any other characteristics, bad or otherwise. The bad object - the bad, withholding breast - is also magnified. Consequently, the bad is all bad and the good totally benign (Hinshelwood & others, 1993:123). Klein goes on to say that the object cannot be split without the ego consequently being split as well (Klein, 1946:101).

This internal and external split, where the caregiver holds all the goodness, means that the child must take in the bad, wrestling with the idealisation of the caregiver and the denigration of the self. Psychoanalyst, Ronald Fairbairn, calls this the *moral defence* - as "the child would rather be bad himself than have bad objects" (Fairbairn, 1943:59). In Klein's words: "Idealisation is bound up with the splitting

² Klein used the term 'ego' less precisely than Freud often using it interchangeably with the term 'self' - in Klein's words: "The ego, according to Freud, is the organised part of the self, constantly influenced by instinctual impulses but keeping them under control by repression; furthermore it directs all activities and establishes and maintains the relation to the external world. The self is used to cover the whole of the personality, which includes not only the ego but the instinctual life which Freud called the id." (Klein, 1959, p. 249)

of the object, for the good aspects are exaggerated as a safeguard against the fear of persecution” (Klein, 1946:101).

Assuming the mother has been able to hold the child’s bad projections and also to project her goodness back into the infant, the baby will begin to integrate both the good and bad parts of the mother and the self, reaching a state of ambivalence or what Klein terms the depressive position (Klein, 1935:271). More on this later.

Where this mechanism fails in some way, the splitting is linked with increasing idealisation of the mother to keep it far away from the persecutory, potentially annihilating, bad object. In adult life, this mechanism can cause a lack of ability to differentiate between good and bad objects, with a particular ability to idealise bad objects (Segal, 1974:27). Splitting continues to function in a modified form throughout life.

Paranoid-schizoid Position

Melanie Klein considered the paranoid-schizoid position to be a developmental stage in the earliest months of a child’s life, related to a collection of defences, anxieties and object relations - both internal and external - used to take in (introject) and retain good feelings and repel and push away (project) bad feelings. There is only good or bad, no neutral ground (Gomez, 1997:37). The paranoid-schizoid position will be present in adults to a greater or lesser extent depending on developmental influences - ideally ‘good enough’³ parenting - through childhood into adulthood.

Klein’s view was that infants often experience overwhelming levels of anxiety due to the traumatic nature of birth, general frustrations and hunger. She surmises that the fledgling ego attempts to alleviate its anxiety through splitting, projection and introjection. As already discussed, this happens both internally to the self and externally to the caregivers: “Omnipotence and idealisation are important aspects of this activity; bad experiences are omnipotently denied whenever possible and good experiences are idealised and exaggerated as a protection against fear of persecution” (Bott Spillius & others, 2011:63).

³ Donald Winnicott’s concept of “good enough parenting” refers to a caregiving approach where parents provide adequate support, meeting the child’s needs without striving for perfection. This balance fosters resilience and healthy development by allowing children to experience and manage minor frustrations (Winnicott, 1965).

Klein suggested that the paranoid-schizoid position dominates in the first three months in an attempt to order the seeming chaos of their existence. What is important to the baby at this point is to create order rather than a precise view of reality. The unknown feels unsafe and the divisive nature of the paranoid-schizoid position leaves no space for ambivalence. The issue with experiencing goodness without the presence of any badness is that the child must experience the other side of this split and contends, often alone, with experiencing badness without any good - a purely evil malevolent external force. This force, which Klein termed 'persecutory anxiety', is a central feature of the paranoid-schizoid position.

This persecutory anxiety is not something that ever leaves us completely. Regardless of how attentive and integrated our own parents might have been, we have to live with this seemingly external persecutory force. Due to survival being the driving instinct of the paranoid-schizoid position, it is inherently self-serving and obdurate. In the grip of the paranoid-schizoid position we are fearful and have little sense of anyone else and their needs; our sense of what is true is of no interest and we lack personal responsibility. We blame others for anything that is wrong or we disappear into self persecution and shame (Gomez, 1997:40).

Whilst we all experience this state in adulthood to some extent, should the position go unbridled and unprocessed, we are left in a binary world moving between extreme states. The degree to which this happens is dependent on the individual.

Depressive Position

According to Klein, in the earliest months of the infant's life, if the environment is favourable, the child will begin to experience the goodness of the parents and his own creative/libidinal urges as stronger than his own destructive impulses and the badness of his parents. This could be interpreted as the child having a tendency both towards integration and towards splitting, in some way similar to the life instinct (integration) and the death instinct⁴ (splitting). From the beginning of life the infant experiences moments of integration. When this state of integration becomes more stable and present, Klein

⁴ The death instinct, or Thanatos, is a psychoanalytic concept introduced by Freud, referring to an unconscious drive towards destruction, aggression, and a return to an inanimate state. It opposes the life instinct (Eros), which drives survival, reproduction, and creativity (Freud, 1920).

suggests that a new phase in development has been reached - the depressive position.

The depressive position is not by any means a permanent way of being, it is a position of relative dominance (Gomez, 1997:42). In the depressive position, the child perceives both its inner and outer worlds more accurately - they are able to be in a state of ambivalence and recognise the part objects (good, bad and so forth) not as separate beings but as parts of the complex beings about which they have a range of complex thoughts and feelings.

As the relationships to the child's caregivers become more integrated, they experience a parent's absence as loss of the good rather than a sadistic attack of something bad. They will experience feelings of grief and guilt, not just their more aggressive impulses. Lavinia Gomez adds:

As splitting diminishes, different experiences fit better together. The bad is less bad, but by the same token, the good is less good. The myths of the lost Garden of Eden, the land flowing with milk and honey, evoke powerfully the mourning that we have all had to go through, leaving a sense of bliss and innocence which is real but lost forever. (Gomez, 1997:42)

It is this departure from the land of milk and honey - the good being less good - that is felt more acutely than the bad being less bad. This loss of the good - albeit a good of fantasy - is the depressive part of this stage. Ultimately, we end up with a deeper sense and experience of what is real; however, we must experience pain and loss to get there.

Particular to this stage of development and the emergence of a new reality is the changing of the infant's relationship with their primary caregiver. In seeing the mother or father as a whole individual they must contend with the reality of them having a life of their own and their having relationships with other people. The capacity to have a sense of the mother as a permanently loving object, whilst also feeling hate towards her, is central to the working through of the depressive position.

This working through of the depressive position continues throughout our lives as we oscillate between our split world of the paranoid-schizoid position into a world of ever more ambivalence in the depressive position. These two positions exist in a dialectical relationship and our growth in the depressive position is ultimately a project which is never fully complete.

Love & Hate

Klein suggests that our capacity for love and reparation is complementary to our capacity for hate and aggression. As already explored, our capacity to contain these complex states evolves as we develop from the outset of life. In Klein's words:

The baby's first object of love and hate - his mother - is both desired and hated with all the intensity and strength that is characteristic of the early urges of the baby. In the very beginning he loves his mother at the time that she is satisfying his needs. (Klein, 1937:306)

The infant feels that the breast "possesses everything that he desires and that it has an unlimited flow of milk and love which it keeps for its own gratification" (Klein, 1956:213). This gratification, however temporary, grants a sense of security that enhances the gratification itself.

As the nuances of this primary relationship develop through the life of the infant, the remnants of both met and unmet needs will remain in our psyche and our nervous systems. As such, the impact the primary caregiver will continue to have on our later lives, in terms of our unconscious relational expectations, will not be obvious. Klein again: "For instance, a woman may apparently have estranged herself from her mother, yet still unconsciously seek some of the features of her early relation to her in her relation to her husband or to a man she loves" (Klein, 1937:307).

The complexities of these unconscious urges, both loving and hating, will be acted out in later life with the hating side becoming a source of danger and the loving a place of safety. Integral to love, in Klein's view, is the presence of unconscious guilt, stemming from the hate we might feel for someone we love. These feelings are too painful so we tend to keep them in the shadows; however, they will be expressed in many disguised ways such as withholding intimacy, passive aggressive behaviours, control or avoidance. Equally, these feelings of hate might be turned on the self in shameful narratives or more physical types of self-abuse such as addiction, self-harm or in the most extreme cases, suicide. In order to counterbalance this guilt and our sense of being bad for having these feelings, Klein suggests that "some people have so strong a need for general praise and approval lies in their need for evidence that they are loveable, worthy of love" (Klein, 1937:309). This comes from a fear of not being able to love truly and sufficiently or to contain their aggression to the loved other.

Hadewijch of Antwerp

Hadewijch is an enigmatic figure. The paradoxical and sometimes baffling nature of her inner world and her written texts makes it difficult to categorise or create a narrative to her mystical theology. This paradox and mystery is what makes her writings so enticing as its enigmatic and interpretative nature does the work of bringing us closer to God in divine Love or *minne*⁵. Hadewijch lived within a community of Beguines⁶, most probably connected to Antwerp or Brussels. Her oeuvre encompasses letters to other Beguines, poems in stanzas, visions and poems in couplets.

What do we know of her life? Given Hadewijch's knowledge of French courtly love poetry⁷ and her grasp of French and Latin, she is assumed to be of a noble lineage. It is evident from her writings that she became the mistress within her Beguine community. Later in life it appears she was met with some opposition from within her community. Sadly, we do not know how or where Hadewijch died; given the persecution and isolation which characterised her latter years, we are fortunate these manuscripts have survived.

Hadewijch's Mystical Theology

Love or *minne* is Hadewijch's central and cosmic theme. The variety and somewhat wild nature of Hadewijch's writings makes it hard to pin down the many faces of *minne*. To Hadewijch, *minne* is the meaning of existence; the spiritual food that sustains her in everything. *Minne* is not meant to be intellectually understood and analysed, rather to be

⁵ Bernard McGinn states that *minne* is Hadewijch's all embracing theme (McGinn, 1998:201) - "...everything on earth must be set ablaze by the flame I felt within. Love is all!" (Hadewijch, 1980:106) Hadewijch encourages her followers, in her letters, to live the Trinity, and that gives us a clue to the ineffable nature of what *minne* is to Hadewijch. We shall return to this later.

⁶ Women who were called "Beguines" were from every social class and could be of almost any age. Self-supporting and single or widowed, these women stood out for their spiritual and personal independence. They lived alone as hermits, in small houses or in much larger communities known as beguinages. Their life would focus around prayer, attending church, ministry and community service. Not being members of a veiled community they were free to earn money and were often astute in business matters. (Swan, 2014.p.11)

⁷ French courtly love poetry, popular in the Middle Ages, idealised romantic love, often between a noble knight and an unattainable lady. It emphasised chivalry, loyalty, and emotional suffering. The poetry, typically composed by troubadours, celebrated refined passion, devotion, and the lover's moral and spiritual elevation through longing.

experienced and explored in relationship with God. It is both present in its actuality yet ineffably indescribable: “The thing has no form, no manner, no outward appearance. It can only be tasted as something actual; It is the substance of my joy” (Hadewijch, 1980:186). I will now consider three main themes of Hadewijch’s theology: the abyssal, the Trinitarian and the Christological.

Abyss

For Hadewijch, living in the suffering and virtues of Christ brings us to the experience of the abyss, where our soul meets God in *minne*. Hadewijch speaks of the abyss variously as the abyss of humility, abyss of wisdom, abyss of Love. This abyss is a paradoxical place of wounding and loving by the Divine:

Here the soul that loves Love cannot defend itself;
We must sustain her kingdom and her power,
However we fear to go to ruin in love;
This is unknown to aliens;
So the higher the palace of desire is,
The deeper yawns the abyss. (Hadewijch, 1980:163)

This wounding and departing is confusing for the soul. Paul Mommaers likens this confusion to “staring blindly at the gift and losing sight of the giver” (see Mommaers in Hadewijch, 1980:xix). In the abyss, we are called to surrender over, again and again, all the comfortable deceptions, ideals and denigrations we have about ourselves that keep us in an illusory state of separation from God and from each other.

Knowing God through his unknowability is central to the abyssal nature of Hadewijch’s *minne*. Hadewijch dwells in the paradoxical nature of this unfathomable abyss, at points describing fear of the abyss through an inability “to fathom the deep abysses that for those unacquainted with them are so terrifying to know” (Hadewijch, 1980:294). Despite the fear for the uninitiated, she encourages her fellow beguines to let go into the sweetness and depths of this abyss in *minne*: “Alas! When Love is so sweet, why do you not fall deep into her?” (Hadewijch, 1980:56)

In vision 12, Hadewijch describes how she saw ‘Someone’ sat still above a round disk, below which an abyss of such “unheard-of depth and so dark that no horror can be compared to it”. This disk was of perfect gold and precious stones and below, “on the darkest side, where it ran so fearfully, like fearful flames which devoured heaven and earth

and which all things perished and were swallowed up” (Hadewijch, 1980:293). She proceeds to describe her experience of being consumed into the unknown depths of the Divine before being received in union:

And in that very instant I saw myself received in union by the One who sat there and in the abyss upon the circling disk, and there I became one with him in the certainty of unity...In that abyss I saw myself swallowed up. (Hadewijch, 1980:296)

Paul Mommaers recognises how Hadewijch’s union with the Divine in love, grounds her even more in her embodied humanity: "This beloved who lifts the mystic wholly into himself never takes away her human being; on the contrary, he establishes her more and more in human existence" (see Mommaers in Hadewijch, 1980:xv). This paradox of experience beyond the material, which nevertheless grounds us in our embodied human experience is a key theme throughout Hadewijch’s writings.

Trinitarian

Hadewijch takes her Trinitarian mysticism from Augustine’s presentation of the Trinity as understanding, memory and love of the human mind (Augustine, 1991:377). In Letter 22, Hadewijch expands upon this theme:

He gave us his Nature in the soul, with three powers whereby to love his Three Persons: with enlightened reason, the Father; with the memory, the wise Son of God; and with the high flaming will, the Holy Spirit. (Hadewijch, 1980:97)

As we wait for the moment when love reveals itself (Mommaers & Dutton, 2004:86) in the moment of Divine Unity, Hadewijch encourages us to experience and live all aspects of *minne* by living the virtues exhibited by God when he lived, unexalted as man on the earth. In the manner of the Son, desiring Love under the guidance of reason; in the manner of the Holy Spirit, doing the pure will of God in our works and love; in the manner of the Father, consistently living in fruition of one full-grown love (Hadewijch, 1980:117).

Hadewijch brings this to a point of surrender: she writes to a fellow Beguine that “We must, without sparing, lose all for all; and learn uniquely and intrepidly the perfect life of Love, who has urged on both of us to her work” (Hadewijch, 1980:57). In this abandonment into the Trinity, there is an eternal flowing between the Trinity and unity. Furthermore, this drive towards unity is precisely what differentiates

us. Through an eternal flowing and surging “all persons divine or human are most distinctly who they are in being drawn ‘out’ of themselves through yearning towards communion with the other” (McIntosh, 1998:175).

Hadewijch uses Trinitarian mysticism to explore the dimensions of love throughout her works and it is this experience that Hadewijch lives so fully. She follows Christ’s virtuosity in Humanity and dwelling in Love in her unity with the Divine so evident in her visions.

Christological

We are encouraged by Hadewijch to love as Christ did on earth by following the virtues he taught and by which he humbly lived. Hadewijch reminds us that we can only conform to Christ in his Divinity by confirming in his Humanity. Hadewijch’s visions on her path towards Divine union are replete with images of Christ. Her devotion to Christ appears in Vision 10 as a call to live as God and man, a call to follow Christ’s example and to suffer:

Behold, this is my bride, who has passed through all your honors with perfect love, and whose love is so strong that, through it, all attain growth!" And he said: "Behold, Bride and Mother, you like no other have been able to live me as God and Man! (Hadewijch, 1980:288)

As Bernard McGinn states, this call to share in Christ’s suffering is not to transcend to some higher goal of purely spiritual satisfaction of God in this life. Human suffering, in particular the absence of God, is fundamental to true mystical consciousness (McGinn, 1998:219). This receiving of joy in suffering is central to Hadewijch’s teaching on Divine love: Christ suffered to show us that we must suffer, that all human suffering has been taken into God within Christ’s, nothing rejected or ignored.

Hadewijch’s meditation on Christ opens up the field of interpretation of Calvary. Is it that at Calvary God has abandoned Jesus - “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27: 46) - or that Christ became identified with our human suffering? Is it only in the inherent self-obsession of our fearful ego and the material limits of that experience, that the infinite love of God is apparently absent? This need to experience our despair and lostness is the only way Christ could save us from it - how can we be rescued and healed from something *he* did not know? And being rescued out of such seemingly endless pain is the

point of it all: in dying, we are resurrected as God's Humanity was in Christ.

Christ's passion is central to this 'single fruition' as the death, resurrection and ecstatic return, unified with the Incarnate Son, are expressed in the hungerin of the Trinity. The mutual abandonment into each other of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit enacted out in the kenotic death of Jesus, in the paschal mystery, is the entrance point of the soul into the divinity of Trinitarian self-giving (McIntosh, 1998:178). The more we are drawn into the kenosis of Jesus, the closer we come to the source of that self-giving. In this way we discover ourselves through the Son in the Father as per John's gospel: "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). This union is expressed ecstatically by Hadewijch in Letter 30:

Oh yes! To feel heart in heart, with one single heart and one single sweet love, and continually have fruition of one full-grown love. And lastly, that one must ever know certainly, without any doubt, that one is wholly in the Unity of Love. In this state one is the Father. (Hadewijch, 1980:118)

This union with God in Love does not exclude suffering: it embraces Christ's suffering and offers us a signpost to our own resurrection. This mystical call towards union might first be experienced as an awakening, possibly some kind of transcendent experience or an interior locution but that is often not the case. Many of us will be called towards God out of the depths of our deepest suffering.

This process of suffering or falling apart which Christ underwent, accompanied with his virtuous nature, is what Hadewijch calls us to surrender to. This falling apart is necessary in our humanity - Thomas Merton calls us "to be nailed to the Cross with Christ, so that the ego-self is no longer the principle of our deepest actions, which now proceed from Christ living in us" (Merton, 1968:56). We find ourselves and the Divine within suffering. This unity in suffering approaches Hadewijch's experience of finding unity beyond the pain where the soul and the Divine meet in *minne*, in the "unfathomable" abyss. (Hadewijch, 1980:294)

Hadewijch in the 21st Century

Hadewijch vastly predates the academic classification of psychology; this does not mean that her writings are devoid of psychological insight. She writes from her subjective experience of the healing power

of God's love or *minne* and how that love unravels and challenges her, along with all her assumptions and spiritual proclivities. Consider Hadewijch's poem 'Love's Seven Names', in which she creates, through her naming of Love's final name as *hell*, a constructive ambiguity whereby the coming together of Love and hell remains unresolved:

To be wholly devoured and engulfed
In her unfathomable essence,
To founder unceasingly in heat and cold,
In the deep, insurmountable darkness of Love.
This outdoes the torments of hell (Hadewijch, 1980:357).

Much like Klein, her writing is disruptive and challenging and necessarily so. I can feel the part of me that wants to resolve this paradox of love being hell. That is the call of Hadewijch - can I sit with the contention and allow both to be true? Klein's model of the paranoid-schizoid position encapsulates this innate human desire to resolve paradox by creating false binaries, a process she terms splitting. Can I have feelings of hate for someone whilst also holding loving feelings for them, without one overriding the other? In Klein's world, this is the journey towards working through the depressive position. We approach a more authentic way of relating and being in the world, where we can sit with our anxiety and the tensions of these apparent opposites. Richard Rohr writes:

Travelling the road of healthy religion [and psychology] and true contemplation will lead to calmly held boundaries, which need neither be defended constantly nor abdicated in the name of "friendship." This road is a "narrow road that few travel upon these days" (Matthew 7:14). It is what many of us like to call "the third way" that emerges only when you hold the tension of opposites. (Rohr, 2013:23)

Examining Hadewijch's courtly love poetry, it is possible to see the presence of Klein's paranoid-schizoid position, particularly in the appropriately named poem *The Madness of Love*:

For no one will understand
What distress he suffers
Until he surmounts his distress
In the madness of love. (Hadewijch, 1980:206)

Courtly love poetry is not of *satisfied* love but of love perpetually *unsatisfied*, and it is this on which Hadewijch models her expression of longing for God. Writer and cultural theorist Denis de Rougemont writes of romantic love, referring to the myth of Tristan and Iseult as a love of *unhappy mutual love* (de Rougemont, 1956:52).

Klein's model of splitting the loved object into good and bad objects, followed by the eventual working through of the depressive position, involves a painful and slow letting go of the splits that have represented safety for the infant. This process of movement from splitting to whole-object relating continues in our adult relationships and throughout our lives. Professor Don Carveth states that the paranoid-schizoid position is necessary for romantic love to exist: "We all know that you go crazy when you fall in love. But who would want a life without this craziness?" (Carveth, 2016b).

From the paranoid-schizoid position, in Carveth's 'craziness' and Hadewijch's 'madness of love', we must then work through the painful process of surrendering this idealisation. We can then see the other and be seen ourselves as whole objects full of love, empathy, and joy, as well as envy, sadism, and anger. This distinctly Kleinian movement could be seen as a corollary of the courtly love story and the Love as *hell* of Hadewijch's mystical theology.

This *unhappy mutual love* in Klein's world sets the tone for our relational expectations of love. For Hadewijch, this apparent deprivation is about disbelief in the total acceptance and infinite capacity of God's love - a disbelief that is based on our experiences of love in human relationships. We must work through and unravel these inherited relational patterns and experiential assumptions about love and its limits. Hadewijch explores this development in her poem 'Under the Blow', as she expresses that suffering is inevitable on this path:

To whom he has allotted the torments of love
To give them fruition of Love's nature;
Before the All unites itself to the all
Sour bitterness must be tasted. (Hadewijch, 1980:175)

It could be understood that this 'sour bitterness' is the world of our expectations of love formed in our childhood relationships. We assume that our unmet needs will continue to be unmet, and that the needs that have been and continue to be met will always be met in the same way.

Klein and Hadewijch both realise that we must let go of the things we think we know in order to heal and love more deeply.

Klein in the 14th century

Taking Melanie Klein back in time to Hadewijch's world of the 14th century, where all is Love or *minne*, arguably returns Klein's object relations theory to the pool from which it emerged. Klein's theory paints a world of anxiety and consequential defensive manoeuvres necessarily developed in response to a deprivation of love. The extent to which our maladaptive strategies develop is dependent upon our primary relationships and how we experienced love and nurture.

As already explored, the infant's world is, first of all, one of splitting; for Klein it is in our anxiety and deprivation of love that we first of all learn to cope by splitting our world between good and bad. In Hadewijch's world where all is Love, a predominant feature of the landscape is also the appearance of apparent opposites; but here, these appear not in the false binaries of splitting but of paradox. This contrasting similarity is what brings together these two theoretical approaches to love.

The life instinct and death instincts are the basis of Klein's central idea of splitting. Returning to Vision 12 of Hadewijch, particularly with reference to the opening and closing disk on which 'Someone' sits and under which lies an abyss of darkness and horror to which nothing can be compared, I am recollected to the life and death instinct - our desire to both create and destroy. Hadewijch describes these contrasting aspects of her experience of God:

And the disk, seen from above, was set with all kinds of precious stones and in the colour of pure gold; but on the darkest side, where it ran so fearfully, it was like fearful flames, which devoured heaven and earth and in which all things perished and were swallowed up. (Hadewijch, 1980:293)

It could be understood that this illuminating beauty and devouring abyss that Hadewijch describes is the source of these drives (life and death) and thus the source of our splitting. Hadewijch makes no attempt to resolve these creative and destructive aspects of God. Hadewijch brings this to our attention right at the place where we meet God in union:

She also had profound knowledge of each Person of the Trinity, in the Unity that was the very deep abyss beneath the wonderful, terrifying disk on which sat the One who was to receive the Bride. (Hadewijch, 1980:295)

Here Hadewijch invokes the Trinity in Unity. This is where Klein's movement - from splitting to holding the tension of opposites in a more ambivalent state in the depressive position - illustrates the psychological dimension of this spiritual movement towards God.

Klein's paranoid-schizoid position is an attempt to create certainty from a paranoid or anxious state. By making things good or bad we try to fix things, make them (people, places, circumstances etc.) immovable, which temporarily gives us some relief from our anxiety. This originates in our thoughts and in fantasy. It takes us out of our bodily experience of feeling - it could be understood that the mind/ego is saying "these feelings of anxiety, dread, anger, shame etc are too painful and 'I' (the self-obsessed ruminating and fearful mind) am going to take over from here". We therefore, at a very young age, begin to use our thinking to defend against feeling. In psychotherapy we ideally learn to feel our feelings in a safe and holding way and to understand that our thoughts and feelings do not define us. We learn to use our intellect to organise our emotional experience rather than defending against undesirable feelings (Maroda, 1994:17). We become more embodied, more human. This is Hadewijch's stance too: Paul Mommaers writes in the preface to Hadewijch's collected works:

This beloved who lifts the mystic wholly into himself never takes away her human being; on the contrary, he establishes her more and more in human existence. (see Mommaers in Hadewijch, 1980:xv)

This progression in becoming more embodied and in reorganising our inner world correlates with Klein's depressive position as we learn to bear uncertainty. Psychiatrist and theologian Gerald May writes, "What is going on is a kind of *deconditioning*, in which the choiceless bondage to habitual patterns is being replaced by free flowing availability and responsiveness to the real situations of life" (May, 2004:131). We begin to realise and accept how little we can control and how little we know in what Nicholas of Cusa termed *learned ignorance*⁸.

⁸ In the introduction to Nicholas of Cusa's selected works, Lawrence Bond describes the essence of his writings on learned ignorance: "Absolute truth is

In this movement from splitting to paradox to transcendence nothing has objectively changed; what has changed is our subjective experience of these tensions. This crossing over point between the psychological and spiritual is where Klein and Hadewijch meet and depart. We must embrace our suffering and our bliss, our love and our hate and recognise all are of God. If we idealise and objectify God, constructing him solely in accordance with what is satisfying to our needs, we also ignore the necessity of our own suffering. We are returned to the embodied mystical theology of Hadewijch and that which Klein implicitly draws us towards as we psychologically progress. Was Christ ever more embodied in his humanity than in his darkest moments of suffering, sweating blood in the garden of Gethsemane and crying out to God on Calvary? It is here, in this suffering, that we are healed and loved so completely by God.

This trusting in God's sustenance and love frees up our thinking mind to let go of these fearful narratives and fantasies and to engage in the mystery and paradox of life - to let go into the healing and creative power of God's love, which is imbued with creation and destruction. There are echoes here of the primitive maternal experience of the infant detailed in Klein's splitting - the mother both providing and denying - and the eventual working through of the depressive position whereby we are able to know deeply that we are loved in both the providing and the denying; that we can love the hated object and be loved by them in their hostility. Klein and Hadewijch weave in and out of each other - they speak of similar notions in different languages and with different lenses.

Differences

The most distinct difference between Klein and Hadwijch is the absence of God in Klein's psychoanalytic model. Whilst she does acknowledge that the infant has an "innate awareness of the existence of an object of incomparable goodness" (Carveth, 2016a), Klein stops short of naming this object as divine. It could be understood that psychotherapy is about removing the blocks to love and that the spiritual path is where love takes over, at the door of God's mystical

humanly incomprehensible and the truest knowledge - the highest learning - is to know that one is ignorant. Knowledge of one's own ignorance, however, is able to be the occasion for reaching beyond both knowledge and ignorance to coincidence of knowing and not knowing" (see Bond in Cusanus, 1997.p.19).

healing action in what Thomas Keating calls the ‘divine therapy’ (Keating, 2009).

We are being called to respond in love to the immense power of God - his loving embrace nurtures in us the reciprocal active loving embrace focused towards Him. In essence God is loving us so that we can love him with that very same love. There is a vast subjective expanse between this embrace and the Kleinian world of the infant; however, it is precisely this difference that makes it so hard for us to surrender over into God. With Klein, through splitting and the associated positions, the infant attempts to order their world. As discussed, this order is precisely what Hadewijch is asking us to let go of into the loving embrace of God.

The defensive manoeuvres of the infant, in Klein’s model of the psyche, attempt to order our inner world only to have to move to a less ordered and more real way of being in the world. A state where we can prepare to surrender ever more deeply to the unknown, to God’s plan in love. Richard Rohr talks of a movement from order to disorder to reorder akin to the birth, death and resurrection of Christ (Rohr, 2022:xi). In order, we are prone to eliminate any disorder and diversity, creating a narrow and cognitive rigidity; in disorder we are closed off from any primal union or meaning; in reorder we transform the working together of order and disorder. This is the world of symbolism and three dimensions, what Carl Jung called the *transcendent function* where we “unite and transcend opposites, leading to new syntheses and integration” (McLean, 2023:25).

Conclusion

Klein and Hadewijch express similar subjective experiences in different ways. For Klein a road of fantasy and falsely-resolved binaries and splits builds up behind us, a road along which we must work back through. As we progress, these falsely-resolved binaries of the Kleinian world unwind into Hadewijch’s paradoxical world, freeing us to hold the tension of apparent opposites and engage in the eternal mystery.

On this returning path, back through the grief and longings of our psychodynamic landscape, formed through our relational history and deprivations of love, the road narrows and falls away behind us. We can only venture back through what we have experienced and how that has formed us, letting go of all the assumptions - however well they

might have served us - to a place of deeper reality, ultimately ending in union with God. Klein charts the landscape through which we must return and her theories give us some important waypoints for the return journey. Klein and Hadewijch describe, in their own unique ways, the growth and evolution of our subjectivity to a place of ever deeper objective truth and reality.

Whether I reflect on the differences or similarities between them, all roads seem to converge and diverge at a coincidental point where love heals and, through its deprivation, causes psychic pain. This friction between the presence and negation of love is the root of our suffering, it is the spark that ignites the journey, it is the dwelling place of God and it is our truest humanity. It is the Cross. It is only through the Son, through Christ's embodied humanity that we can come to the Father (John 14:6). As we move from the split world of Klein to the more subjectively-evolved paradoxical world of Hadewijch, we are ultimately working through Christ's journey on the cross. Both Klein and Hadewijch recognise the primacy and importance of love and *minne* in organising our subjective inner world. Love is the central theme that weaves them together - they are distinct threads in a unique pattern, a pattern whose intricacies I have only glimpsed.

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