

*James Joyce and the Internal World of the Replacement Child**Introduction:*

My hope with this podcast is that it might increase awareness of the trauma of being a replacement child. I am illustrating this with the example of James Joyce as he seemed to overcome the debilitating effects of this early trauma and survivor guilt by using his writing the way dreamwork is used in psychoanalysis—observing his inner world from the outside and re-imagining things in a more sympathetic way.

James Joyce was a replacement child, born less than a year after his parents lost their first child. His parents were shattered at losing their first son and Joyce would have been born into their grief. His father said the loss was never to be spoken about, which is how many families dealt with such a loss. Later his father said Joyce had ‘usurped the cot of his brother’. The term ‘usurper’ is a devastating image. What could be worse? It implies he should not exist when the other child had died. The term appears throughout Joyce’s novels and in the famous first scene in *Ulysses*, in the Martello Tower, ‘usurper’ is the last word uttered by Stephen as he walks away.

We don’t know how much Joyce was consciously aware of his brother’s death, but his emotional struggles were strikingly similar to my two psychoanalytic patients who had lost siblings in early childhood. A dominant feature was that they all had crippling nightmares. These were nightmares of monsters and dead babies. Joyce, when 34, asked desperately, “Can you tell me what is a cure for dreaming? I am troubled every night by horrible and terrifying dreams: death, corpses, assassinations in which I take an unpleasantly prominent part.”

The survivor guilt in some who lost siblings in infancy is profound and terrible. The playwright, David Storey, in a harrowing book addressed to his brother who died when Storey was still in the womb, describes his daily sense of terror and his need,

like James Joyce, to immerse himself in writing. The poet Louise Gluck writes that her dead sister has been a constant presence. Freud himself suffered lifelong self-reproach for having had death wishes towards his dead brother and presumably also survivor guilt.

Feelings of guilt, so common in the replacement child, are compounded by a fury at the mother who becomes inaccessible in her grief—a ‘dead mother’ turned to stone, and often a mother preoccupied with producing more babies. Joyce’s mother had another 14 and Freud’s mother went on to have four daughters and another son. Shakespeare’s mother lost three daughters and the psychoanalyst, Donald Silver, interpreted Sonnet 143 as a plea by Shakespeare to his mother when he says:

Turn back to me, And play the mother’s part, kiss me, be kind.

If the mother turns to stone in her grief, (and we have the image of Hermione, in Shakespeare’s *Winter’s Tale*, turned to stone after her son’s death) the surviving infant is cut adrift, uncontained, and left at the mercy of their imagination.

Imagining they caused the tragedy, the child uses defences that can further isolate them and perpetuate their fears. For my patients, as with Joyce, a deep sense of guilt coloured everything. This was not a depressive position guilt. There was no compassion to be had. It was an unshakeable conviction that they are bad, and dangerous even, and will ultimately be condemned. My patients felt they should hide and, like Joyce, they were living in exile. They came into analysis wanting to know what it was about them that was bad and pushed away any suggestion that perhaps they weren’t bad. To imagine differently risked collapsing in grief.

In the analysis, the first task was, quite concretely, to persuade my patients that the loss of a sibling in early childhood was a devastating trauma that was still affecting them and, in addition, contrary to their fears, they had not caused the sibling’s death. The guilt they felt was survivor guilt. These were highly intelligent and talented women in their 40s who still had terrifying nightmares and the fixed belief

they had murdered. It was slow work for them to accept how significant the loss had been, as though their whole identity was threatened. One patient said: 'you say I *think* I am lethal, but I *know* I am'. The other patient, an avid reader and writer (and poet) like Joyce, on seeing Melanie Klein on my shelves began reading Klein. This transformed things as she began, somewhat unnervingly for me, quoting Klein to me from the couch about the young child's murderous feelings towards mother's other babies and the concept of innate guilt. It was a revelation and a relief to her that it is normal to have murderous wishes. Miraculously her nightmares began to cease. In a poem to me, she wrote:

Through that parchment soul I shall resolve my foetus' guilt.

(Already dead babies no longer flail against the surface of my dreams).

Closely linked with the trauma of losing a sibling is the concept of the 'dead mother', a concept now well recognised but strangely little discussed in relation to the 'replacement child', even though Andre Green wrote: 'the most disastrous depression is that which follows the death of a child at an early age.'

James Joyce, contemporary with Freud, read all of Freud but found little relief.

Oedipal guilt is different from survivor guilt. Freud was himself a replacement child whose mother withdrew emotionally when her second son died. Freud seems never to have recovered from this experience nor to have fully understood its impact. He did not have Melanie Klein's knowledge of the infant's internal world. It is tragic to see both Freud and Breuer diagnosing 'Anna O' in Oedipal terms as a 'hysteric', overlooking the pre-Oedipal significance of the death of her two sisters.

Many famous writers and artists lost siblings in childhood and immersed themselves in their art. Among these were Picasso, Matisse, Van Gogh, Dali, Kafka, Ibsen and Beethoven. Particularly disturbing are both Adolph Hitler and Vladimir Putin: Putin lost two brothers before he was born and Hitler lost five, all of whom were buried in a cemetery seen from his bedroom.

Many psychoanalysts lost siblings but still it seems little discussed. Neither Freud nor Ernest Jones addressed the fact that Joan Riviere's parents lost a son a year before she was born. And Guntrip wrote, at length, how he felt let down by both Fairburn and Winnicott, neither of whom recognised the impact of his brother's death.

What is it about this trauma that keeps it largely unrecognised? Many families deal with their loss by 'not talking about it', and it is as though the psychoanalytic community is doing the same. There are some classic works on the subject* but, in my experience, it is not something we routinely ask about with patients.

Although James Joyce never spoke openly about his lost brother, his autobiographical novel, *Ulysses*, revolves around a couple, Molly and Bloom, whose life was blighted by the loss of their baby son. The Joyce character, Stephen Dedalus, has all the hallmarks of a replacement child, referring to himself as a 'changeling', split between 'the true Irish son and the fraudulent outsider'.

Both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are primarily a study in guilt but, as with the replacement child who believes they caused the sibling death, no evidence of guilt is found. The guilt they feel is survivor guilt. In *Finnegans Wake* it is extraordinary how much the focus is on searching for evidence of wrongdoing. But here Joyce is parodying this quest. Among the liveliest parts of both novels are Joyce's courtroom scenes which are very funny and very poignant. Joyce was immersed in his writing, the same way one is in dreamwork in psychoanalysis, externalising the fear and guilt into his characters so they could be parodied and re-imagined in a more realistic and sympathetic way.

He delights in making wild lists of sins and blame, incriminating anybody and everybody. His is a Monty Pythonesque touch, an unequalled picture of the inner persecutory world. How better to battle with his nightly 'daimons'. The hallucinatory *Circe* chapter in *Ulysses* is a wonder. Over a hundred pages long, it

catalogues every sin and human failing. The courtroom scene is full of accusation and wild excuses. Written in a frenzy, Joyce calls it a 'vision animated to bursting point': 'I am working like a galley slave', he says, 'an ass, a brute. I cannot even sleep.'

The accused in *Ulysses* is the ostracized and bereaved father, Leopold Bloom, but in intensity it feels like Joyce himself. Bloom is pictured as 'barefoot with apologetic toes turned inward' giving a 'bogus' statement in his defence. The 'mob' (i.e. the internal gang) throw everything they can find at him and cry 'Lynch him! Roast him!'

Bloom declares his innocence (interestingly, he blames a fantasy brother---the lost brother perhaps):

This is midsummer madness, he says, some ghastly joke again. By heaven, I am guiltless as the unsunned snow! It was my brother Henry.

The *Circe* chapter is described by Marilyn French as 'a paradise of paranoia'. She says:

The chapter is like a medieval last judgment, in which everything in the hierarchical universe....arises to accuse man. Everything joins forces to hound our heroes.

The section is endless and exhausting. Digressions are everywhere, as are lists. Joyce's lists are magnificent, what Samuel Beckett called 'the comedy of exhaustive enumeration'. In *Ulysses* the lists evoke the endless childbirths of Joyce's childhood, as well as all our sins. However, by contrast, in *Finnegans Wake*, lists offer comic relief, a recitative, away from interrogation.

What is so striking is how loving and inclusive the mood of *Finnegans Wake* is compared with the guilt and isolation of *Ulysses*. In *Ulysses* Stephen rails at his dead

mother, calling her 'ghoul, chewer of corpses'. 'Let me live!', he cries out. The ultimate cry of the replacement child, perhaps.

But in *Finnegans Wake* the rage has disappeared. Instead we have a remarkable portrait of the mother/wife, Anna Livia Plurabelle. Edna O'Brien calls her a 'mythic eve, haloed in the dusk of wonder'. No longer persecuted by the dead mother, *Finnegans Wake* brings her back to life, as the most attentive and protective beauty, and there to explain and excuse her husband's indiscretions. In reality, Joyce could not talk about his mother after her early death but, throughout *Finnegans Wake*, the mother Anna Livia is a constant stabilising and caring presence, described in tender and intimate detail. It is true that she had 111 children, reminding us again of the endless babies of Joyce's childhood, but here she is busy distributing presents to them. And, speaking of lists, we are given all their names and all their presents!

It is not clear whether Joyce's nightmares continued all his life, but perhaps locating *Finnegans Wake* in the world of the dream was an attempt to control them. His intense involvement writing often late into the night could be Joyce trying to get the better of his own internal world—he would craft his own dreams:

'I reconstruct the nocturnal life as the Demiurge [Creator] goes about the business of creation', he said.

Through re-imagining, Joyce found relief. He had also found a new sense of belonging, so important for a replacement child. He was no longer the intruder/usurper. Away from Dublin he developed a circle of devoted friends, had a family of his own and a remarkable wife, Nora.

In my book I have wanted to convey the many obstacles that Joyce overcame and the humanity and the poetry in his works. It is a psychoanalyst's dream to witness the kind of maturing that we see in Joyce. After his lifelong struggle escaping an internal world of guilt and persecution, there is a magical shift in him to a new lightness and compassion, devoid of hate and anger.

Ulysses is famous for the internal dialogue where there is no separation between narrator and character---an intrusive identification, with Joyce entering into his characters. In *Finnegans Wake*, however, he is on the outside. His imagination now has the freedom of the dreamworld---the great freedom of the unconscious. A passionate man, he tirelessly creates a new language, wanting to obscure the emotion that always threatens to overwhelm him. But at the same time, throughout it all, he has fun.

Anthony Burgess exclaims about the *Anna Livia* section, saying:

It remains one of the most astonishing pieces of audacity in the whole of world literature, and the audacity comes off. The language is cosmic, yet it is the homely speech of ordinary people. ...The heart bows down.

And overwhelmed by its extraordinary music, Joyce's friend, Mercanton, wrote:

[It is] like a ... mystical chant, so sharp, so spare, so shimmering, such as I had perceived in no other poetry.

I think the psychoanalyst would recognise the lyrical passages in *Finnegans Wake* as the poetry of a son who has internalised, and been sustained by, the music of his mother's voice---a music heard already in utero.

Seamus Heaney, in deep admiration, encapsulated the new freedom that Joyce achieved---Joyce who had been crippled by his exceptional memory for everything. Heaney calls him the 'great and true liberator' and has Joyce say: 'Let go, let fly, forget!'

At the end of *Finnegans Wake*, in a state of physical decline, Joyce found comfort imagining his return from exile to Dublin and the longed-for reunion with his beloved parents. The final pages are immensely peaceful and moving. They are like a mother, gentle with her child. As a farewell to this world, he 'lilts':

Be happy, dear ones! May I be wrong! For she'll be sweet for you as I was sweet when I came down out of me mother. My great blue bedroom, the air so quiet, scarce a cloud. In peace and silence. I could have stayed up there for always only ... let her rain for my time is come. I done me best when I was let. Thinking always if I go all goes ... How small it's all! And me letting on to meself always. And liting on all the time. I thought you were all glittering with the noblest of carriage. You're only a bumpkin ... Loonely in me liveness. For all their faults. I am passing out. O bitter ending! I'll slip away before they're up. They'll never see. Nor know. Nor miss me.

*Further reading on the Replacement Child

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