

## Oh Split, Where Art Thou

Splits are so deceptively easy and most complex to apprehend. The polarizations of good and bad, evil and love or other examples of splits can fill up an entire emotional space. The culture hits us over the head with its most obvious splits: lore and lawlessness, institutional care versus rugged individualism, are difficult to understand as to how they relate to one another.

In groups, I am reminded of a patient who presents a life of suffering and hard luck. Nothing seems to go right for this patient and she lives on the verge of the threat of suicide. You are compelled to treat her gently for you fear something disastrous can happen if you are not finely attuned to her.

One such patient was presented in a group. By and large, the members were sympathetic. I hated the patient's guts. I felt controlled and dominated. I wasn't about to express these feelings in role-playing but did confront the patient on her axiom of survival. Pain led to contact, which was covering over a fear of annihilation. The suffering could act as a sadistic tool or a painful rage to keep the listener in line.

The presenter reflected upon her relationship to her sister who had a series of recent hospitalizations. She was responsible and hated her guts for this imprisonment. Upon voicing her hate, she felt far more free to work with her patient, the suffering bloody one.

I am also reminded of another member who was mentioned in another essay. His brother, on life support and having at best a few weeks to live, completely threw him into a state of chaos and disorganization. He hated his brother who was the favorite one in the family. The brother lived with the patient's mother until he was in his late thirties. He was her plaything. He could not exist or separate himself from her existence.

The brother, the presenting member, saw nothing in common that he had with his brother. Yet, upon reflection, he had to admit that he felt as castrated as his brother. He could be sweet and accommodating but was unable to feel his body in one piece. He does not remember a time that his mother enjoyed his emerging sexuality. Both in their way were vying for their mother's love. The member being accommodating and seemingly removed. Yet they could not separate from their mother for all their hatred was directed at each other rather than toward the possessive mother.

The secret split hides the trap that we have set for ourselves. Our hate, mess, our fear of separation. To separate, you must find the piece of the hated polarity and integrate it into ourselves. We do not have to act it out but we must own it and accept that it lives inside of us.

I know for myself that I have taken the splits that exist in me for granted. My recent emotional crisis has shaken the very foundations of my existence. I was forced to see that my now sick mate was always carrying a piece of me.

I believe that the issue of splitting becomes a very deceptive one. Hate is easier to bear than the pain of ambivalence and a painful integration. The splits represent the symptom of our time and in it lies the hope for some unification as well as the fear that our polarization will become a way of life.