

THE NEUROTIC'S INDIVIDUAL MYTH

BY JACQUES LACAN

FOREWORD

"The Neurotic's Individual Myth" was given as a lecture at the Philosophical College of Paris, organized by Jean Wahl, late Professor at the Sorbonne. The text was distributed in 1953 without the approval of Dr. Lacan and without his corrections.

The desire of The Psychoanalytic Quarterly to publish a translation of this lecture led me to make the necessary corrections. The present version, which has been reviewed by the author, will take the place, then, of the revision which he announced in 1966 in his *Écrits* (French edition, p. 72, n.1) and which was never carried out.

I ought to emphasize to the American reader that this presentation, which is more than twenty-five years old, should be regarded as the rudiments of later developments in the thought of Dr. Lacan: these are the first trials of a concept of structure in keeping with analytic discourse.

JACQUES-ALAIN MILLER

I am going to discuss a subject which I must characterize as new and which, as such, is difficult.

The difficulty of this lecture is not especially intrinsic to it. It comes from the fact that it deals with something new which I became aware of both through my analytic experience and through my effort, in the course of teaching what is styled a seminar, to investigate the fundamental reality of analysis. To abstract this new element from that teaching and from that experience so that you can appreciate its implications involves quite special difficulties in a lecture.

That is why I ask your indulgence in advance if perhaps there seems to be some difficulty in your grasping, at least on first contact, the matter under discussion.

Translated by Martha Noel Evans, Ph.D.

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I

Psychoanalysis, I must recall by way of preface, is a discipline which, among the sciences, appears to us in a truly singular position. It is often said that psychoanalysis is not, strictly speaking, a science, which seems to imply by contrast that it is quite simply an art. That is erroneous if one takes it to mean that psychoanalysis is only a technique, an operational method, an aggregate of formulas. But it is not erroneous if you use this word *art* in the sense in which it was used in the Middle Ages to speak of the liberal arts—that series going from astronomy to dialectic by way of arithmetic, geometry, music, and grammar.

It is most assuredly difficult for us to comprehend today the function and implications of these so-called liberal arts in the lives and thought of the medieval masters. Nevertheless, it is certain that what characterizes these arts and distinguishes them from the sciences that are supposed to have emerged from them is the fact that they maintain in the foreground what might be called a fundamental relation to human proportion. At the present time, psychoanalysis is perhaps the only discipline comparable to those liberal arts, inasmuch as it preserves something of this proportional relation of man to himself—an internal relation, closed on itself, inexhaustible, cyclical, and implied pre-eminently in the use of speech.

It is in this respect that analytic experience is not definitively objectifiable. It always implies within itself the emergence of a truth that cannot be said, since what constitutes truth is speech, and then you would have in some way to say speech itself which is exactly what cannot be said in its function as speech.

Moreover, we see emerging from psychoanalysis certain methods which in themselves tend to objectify ways of acting on man, the human object. But these are only techniques derived from that fundamental art of psychoanalysis, inasmuch as it is constituted by that intersubjective relationship which, as I said, is inexhaustible since it is what makes us human. That, nevertheless, is what we are led to try to express in a form that conveys

its essence, and that is why there exists at the heart of the analytic experience something that is properly called a myth.

Myth is what provides a discursive form for something that cannot be transmitted through the definition of truth, since the definition of truth must be self-referential and since it is only insofar as speech remains in process that it establishes truth. Speech cannot contain itself nor can it contain the movement toward truth as an objective truth. It can only express truth—and this, in a mythic mode. It is in this sense that one can say that the concretization in analytic theory of intersubjective relationship, that is, the oedipus complex, has the value of a myth.

I bring you a series of experiential facts which I will present as examples of those formations we observe in the living experience of the subjects we accept for analysis, neurotic subjects, for instance, and which are familiar to all those for whom the analytic experience is not entirely alien. These formations require us to make certain structural modifications in the oedipal myth, inasmuch as it is at the heart of the analytic experience, which correlates with the progress we ourselves are making in understanding the analytic experience. These changes permit us, on a second level, to grasp the fact that underlying all analytic theory is the fundamental conflict which, through the mediation of rivalry with the father, binds the subject to an essential, symbolic value. But this binding always occurs, as you will see, in conjunction with an actual debasement, perhaps as a result of particular social circumstances, of the father figure. [Analytic] experience itself extends between this consistently debased image of the father and an image our practice enables us more and more to take into account and to judge when it occurs in the analyst himself: although it is veiled and almost denied by analytic theory, the analyst nevertheless assumes almost surreptitiously, in the symbolic relationship with the subject, the position of this figure dimmed in the course of history, that of the master—the moral master, the master who initiates the one still in ignorance into the dimension of fundamental human relationships and who opens for

him what one might call the way to moral consciousness, even to wisdom, in assuming the human condition.

If we proceed from the definition of myth as a certain objectified representation of an epos or as a chronicle expressing in an imaginary way the fundamental relationships characteristic of a certain mode of being human at a specific period, if we understand it as the social manifestation—latent or patent, virtual or actual, full or void of meaning—of this mode of being, then it is certain that we can trace its function in the actual experience of a neurotic. Experience reveals to us, in fact, all sorts of instantiations which fit this pattern and which, strictly speaking, one may call myths; and I am going to demonstrate this to you in an example I think will be familiar to all of you who are interested in these questions, one which I will borrow from one of Freud's great case histories.

These case histories periodically enjoy a renewal of interest in academia, but that did not prevent one of our eminent colleagues from revealing recently—I heard it from his own mouth—something like contempt for them. Their technique, he said, is as clumsy as it is antiquated. One could, after all, maintain that position if one considers the progress we have made in our awareness of the intersubjective relationship and in our limitation of interpretation to the relationships established between us and the subject in the immediacy of the analytic session. But should my interlocutor have gone so far as to say that Freud's cases were ill chosen? To be sure, one may say that they are all incomplete and that many of them are analyses broken off midway, fragments of analysis. But that in itself ought to move us to reflect and to ask ourselves why Freud made this selection. All that, of course, if one has confidence in Freud. And one must have confidence in him.

It is not enough to say, as the person whose remarks I have reported to you continued, that this [incompleteness] certainly has at least one heartening aspect: that of demonstrating that one small grain of truth somewhere suffices to allow it to show through and emerge in spite of the obstacles posed by the pre-

sensation. I do not consider that an accurate view of things. In fact, the tree of daily practice hid from my colleague the forest which rises up from Freud's texts.

I have chosen "The Rat Man" to present to you, and I think I am now in a position to justify Freud's interest in this case.

II

The case concerns an obsessional neurosis. All who are concerned with psychoanalysis have heard about what we consider to be the source and structure of this neurosis, specifically the aggressive tensions, the instinctual fixation, etc. Progress in analytic theory has provided as a basis for our understanding of obsessional neurosis an extremely complex genetic elaboration; and it is certain that some element or some phase or other of the phantasmatic or imaginary themes that we habitually meet in the analysis of an obsessional neurosis will also be found in a reading of "The Rat Man." But this reassuring effect that familiar, popular ideas always have for those who read or learn may mask for the reader the originality of this case history and its especially significant and persuasive character.

As you know, this case takes its title from a totally fascinating fantasy which has, in the psychology of the attack that brings the subject to the analyst, an obvious function as precipitating factor. This story of a punishment which has always been strongly spotlighted—indeed, it enjoys real celebrity—includes the thrusting of a rat stimulated by artificial means into the rectum of the victim by means of a more or less ingenious apparatus. His first hearing of this story produces in the subject a state of fascinated horror which does not precipitate his neurosis but rather actualizes its motifs and produces anxiety. There ensues a whole elaboration whose structure we shall examine.

This fantasy is certainly essential to the theory of the determinism of the neurosis, and it can be found in numerous themes throughout the case history. But is that to say that its only

interest lies in this fantasy? Not only do I not believe that, but I am sure that, with a careful reading, one will perceive that the principal interest of this case lies in its extreme particularity.

As always, Freud emphasized that each case ought to be studied in its particularity, exactly as if we were completely ignorant of theory. And what constitutes the particularity of this case is the manifest, visible character of the relationships involved. The particular value of this case as a model derives from its simplicity, in the same way one may speak of a particular example in geometry as having a dazzlingly superior clarity when compared with a demonstration where, by reason of its discursive character, the truth remains veiled in the shadows of a long sequence of deductions.

Here is what constitutes the originality of the case, as will appear to any reasonably attentive reader.

The constellation—why not? in the sense astrologers use it—the original constellation that presided over the birth of the subject, over his destiny, and I would almost say his prehistory, specifically the fundamental family relationships which structured his parents' union, happens to have a very precise relation, perhaps definable by a transformational formula, with what appears to be the most contingent, the most phantasmatic, the most paradoxically morbid in his case, that is, the last state of development of his great obsessive fear, the imaginary scenario he arrives at as a resolution of the anxiety associated with the precipitation of the outbreak.

The subject's constellation is made up, within the family tradition, by a narration of a certain number of traits which characterize the parents' union.

It should be noted that the father was a subordinate officer at the beginning of his career and that he remained very "subordinate," with the note of authority, but slightly absurd, that that implies. A kind of belittlement by his contemporaries permanently follows him, and a mixture of bravado and flashiness makes of him a typecast figure that shadows the amiable man described by the subject. This father finds himself in a

position to make what is called an advantageous match; his wife occupies a much higher station in the hierarchy of the bourgeoisie and brings to him both their means of livelihood and even the job he holds at the time they are expecting their child. The prestige is, then, on the mother's side. And one of the most frequent forms of teasing between these people who, as a rule, get along very well and who even seem bonded by a real affection, is a kind of game which consists of a dialogue between them: the wife makes a kidding reference to a strong attachment her husband had just before their marriage to a poor but pretty girl, and then the husband protests and affirms each time that it was a passing fancy, long ago and forgotten. But this game, whose very repetition implies perhaps that it includes its share of guile, certainly profoundly impresses the young subject who is later to become our patient.

Another element of the family myth is of no small importance. The father had, in the course of his military career, what one might modestly call *troubles*. He did neither more nor less than gamble away the regimental funds which he held by virtue of his office. And he owed his honor, indeed even his life, at least in respect to his career, the figure he could continue to cut in society, only to the intervention of a friend who lent him the sum he had to refund and who became, then, his savior. This incident is still spoken of as a truly important and significant episode in the father's past.

This is how the subject's family constellation is represented. The story emerges bit by bit during the analysis without the subject's connecting it in any way with anything presently happening. It takes all the intuition of Freud to understand that these are essential elements in the precipitation of the obsessional neurosis. The conflict *rich woman/poor woman* was reproduced exactly in the subject's life when his father urged him to marry a rich woman, and it was then that the neurosis proper had its onset. Reporting this fact, almost at the same time the subject says: "*I'm telling you something that certainly has no*

connection to all that has happened to me." Then, Freud immediately perceives the connection.

What, in fact, becomes visible in a panoramic overview of the case history is the strict correspondence between these initial elements of the subjective constellation and the ultimate development of the phantasmatic obsession. What is this ultimate development? In accordance with the mode of thought characteristic of obsessions, the image of the punishment at first engendered all kinds of fears in the subject, in particular that this punishment might one day be inflicted on the people most dear to him, notably either on that idealized figure of the poor woman to whom he devotes a love whose style and particular importance we will examine shortly—the very sort of love which the obsessional subject is capable of—or, yet more paradoxically, on his father who, however, was dead at that time and reduced to a figure he imagines in the other world. But the subject finally found himself drawn into behavior which demonstrates that the neurotic constructs of the obsessional sometimes end by verging on the constructs of insanity.

He is in the position of having to pay the price for an object whose nature is not immaterial, a pair of glasses that he mislaid during the army maneuvers at which time the story of the punishment under discussion was told to him and the present crisis was precipitated. He requests the immediate replacement of his glasses from his optician in Vienna—for all this takes place in the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, before the beginning of the war of 1914—and the latter sends him by express mail a little package containing the object. Now, the same captain who told him the story of the punishment and who impresses him strongly by his display of a taste for cruelty informs him that he must reimburse a Lieutenant A who is in charge of the mail and who is supposed to have paid out the sum for him. It is around this idea of reimbursement that the neurotic occurrence reaches its final development. In fact, the subject makes a neurotic duty of repaying the sum, but under certain, very precise conditions. He imposes this duty on him-

self in the form of an internal command which surges up in the obsessional psyche in contradiction to its original impulse expressed in the form, "*do not pay.*" Instead here he is, bound to himself by a kind of oath, "*pay A.*" But he realizes very quickly that this absolute imperative is not at all adequate, since it is not A who is in charge of the mail, but a Lieutenant B.

That is not all. At the very time when all these lucubrations are taking place in him, the subject knows perfectly well, we find out later, that in reality he does not owe this sum to Lieutenant B either, but quite simply to the lady at the post office who was willing to trust B, an honorable gentleman and officer who happened to be in the vicinity. Nevertheless, up to the time when he puts himself in Freud's care, the subject will be in a state of extreme anxiety, haunted by one of those conflicts so characteristic of the experience of obsessionals and which centers entirely on the following scenario: since he swore to himself that he would reimburse A so that the catastrophes foreseen in the obsession would not happen to those he loves the most, he must have Lieutenant A reimburse the generous lady at the post office, and, in his presence, she must pay over the sum in question to Lieutenant B and then he himself will reimburse Lieutenant A, thus fulfilling his oath to the letter. This is where he ends up, through that logicity peculiar to neurotics, led by the internal necessity controlling him.

You cannot fail to recognize in this scenario—which includes the passing of a certain sum of money from Lieutenant A to the generous lady at the post office who met the payment, then from the lady to another masculine figure—a schema which, complementary in certain points and supplementary in others, parallel in one way and inverted in another, is the equivalent of the original situation, inasmuch as it weighs with an undeniable weight on the subject's mind and on everything that makes of him this figure with a very special way of relating to others we call a neurotic.

Of course, this scenario is impossible to follow. The subject knows perfectly well that he owes nothing either to A or to B,

but rather to the lady at the post office and that, if the scenario were fulfilled, she would be the one who, in the long run, would be out her money. In fact, as is always the case in the actual experience of neurotics, the imperative reality of the real takes precedence over everything that torments him so greatly—torments him even on the train that takes him in exactly the opposite direction from the one he ought to have taken in order to accomplish, with respect to the lady at the post office, the expiatory ceremony which seems so necessary to him. Even while saying to himself at each station that he can still get off, change trains, return, he still goes toward Vienna where he will put himself in Freud's hands; and, once the treatment is begun, he is content quite simply to send a money order to the lady at the post office.

This phantasmic scenario resembles a little play, a chronicle, which is precisely the manifestation of what I call the neurotic's individual myth.

Indeed, it reflects, in a mode that is no doubt incomprehensible to the subject—but not absolutely so, far from it—the inaugural relationship between the father, the mother, and the friend, this more or less dim figure in the past. Clearly, this relationship has not been elucidated by the purely factual way I have presented it to you, since its significance derives only from the subjective apprehension that the subject had of it.

What gives a mythic character to this little phantasmatic scenario? It is not only the fact that it re-enacts a ceremony which reproduces almost exactly that inaugural relationship, as it were, hidden there, it also modifies this relationship in accord with a certain propensity. On the one hand, we have originally the father's debt to the friend; I failed to mention that he never found the friend again (this is what remains mysterious in the original story) and that he never succeeded in repaying his debt. On the other hand, there is a substitution in the father's story, substitution of the rich woman for the poor woman. Now, within the fantasy developed by the subject, we observe something like an exchange of the outside terms of each of these

functional relations. An investigation of the fundamental facts involved in the obsessional attack shows, in fact, that the object of the subject's tantalizing desire to return to the place where the lady at the post office is, is not at all this lady, but a person who, in the subject's recent history, incarnates the poor woman, a servant girl he met at an inn during maneuvers in the midst of that atmosphere of heroic ardor characteristic of the military fraternity and with whom he indulged in some of those bottom-pinching tactics in which those generous sentiments are wont to overflow. To discharge his debt, he must in some way pay, not the friend, but the poor woman and, through her, the rich woman who is substituted for her in the imagined scenario.

Everything happens as if the impasses inherent in the original situation moved to another point in the mythic network, as if what was not resolved here always turned up over there. In order to understand thoroughly, one must see that in the original situation, as I described it to you, there is a double debt. There is, on the one hand, the frustration, indeed a kind of castration of the father. On the other hand, there is the never resolved social debt implied in the relationship to the figure of the friend in the background. We have here something quite different from the triangular relation considered to be the typical source of neurotic development. The situation presents a kind of ambiguity, of diplopia—the element of the debt is placed on two levels at once, and it is precisely in the light of the impossibility of bringing these two levels together that the drama of the neurotic is played. By trying to make one coincide with the other, he makes a perennially unsatisfying turning maneuver and never succeeds in closing the loop.

And that is indeed how things subsequently turn out. What happens when the Rat Man comes to Freud? In an initial phase, Freud is directly substituted in his affective relations for a friend who had been playing the role of guide, counselor, patron, and reassuring guardian, saying to him regularly after his confession of his obsessions and anxieties: *"You never did the evil you think you did, you're not guilty, don't worry about*

it." Freud, then, is put in the friend's place. And very quickly, aggressive fantasies are unleashed. They are not related uniquely—far from it—to the substitution of Freud for the father, as Freud's own interpretation persistently tends to show, but, as in the fantasy, to the substitution of the figure called the *rich woman* for the friend. Very quickly, in fact, in that kind of momentary madness which constitutes, at least in profoundly neurotic subjects, a veritable phase of passion in the analytic experience itself, the subject begins to imagine that Freud wishes nothing less than to give him his own daughter who becomes in his fantasy a person laden with all earthly riches and whom he imagines in the rather peculiar form of a person with glasses of dung on her eyes. We find, then, substituted for the figure of Freud, an ambiguous figure, at once protective and maleficent, whose masquerading in glasses indicates, moreover, a narcissistic relationship with the subject. Myth and fantasy reunite here, and the experience of passion connected with the actual relationship to the analyst furnishes a springboard, along with the bias of the identifications it includes, for the resolution of a certain number of problems.

I have taken here a quite individualized example. But I would like to emphasize what is a clinical reality that might serve as a guide in analytic experience: there is within the neurotic a quartet situation which is endlessly renewed, but which does not exist all on one level.

To schematize, let us say that when a male subject is involved, his moral and psychic equilibrium requires him to assume his own function—he must gain recognition as such in his virile function and in his work, he must gather their fruits without conflict, without having the feeling that it is someone else who deserves it and that he has it only by fluke, without there being any internal division that makes the subject the alienated witness of the acts of his own self. That is the first requirement. The other is this: an enjoyment one might characterize as tranquil and univocal of the sexual object, once it is chosen, granted to the subject's life.

Now, each time the subject succeeds, or approaches success in assuming his own role, each time he becomes, as it were, identical with himself and confident that his functioning in his specific social context is well-founded, the object, the sexual partner, is split—here in the form *rich woman or poor woman*. What is truly striking in the psychology of the neurotic—all we need do is enter, no longer into the fantasy, but into the subject's real life to put our finger on it—is the aura of abrogation which most commonly surrounds the sexual partner who is the most real to him, the nearest to him, with whom he generally has the most legitimate ties, whether in a love affair or in a marriage. On the other hand, a figure appears who is a double of the first and who is the object of a more or less idealized passion which is pursued in a more or less phantasmatic way, in a style analogous to that of romantic love, and which grows, moreover, into an identification of a fatal kind.

Conversely, if the subject makes an effort in another aspect of his life to find the unity of his feelings again, then it is at the other end of the chain, in the assumption of his own social function and his own virility—since I have chosen the case of a man—that he sees appearing beside him a figure with whom he also has a narcissistic relation insofar as it is a fatal relation. To the latter he delegates the responsibility of representing him in the world and of living in his place. It is not really himself: he feels excluded, outside of his own experience, he cannot assume its particularities and its contingencies, he feels discordant with his existence, and the impasse recurs.

In this very special form of narcissistic splitting lies the drama of the neurotic; and in connection with it, value accrues to the different mythic formations which I have just given you an example of in the form of fantasies, but which can also be found in other forms, in dreams for example. I have numerous examples in the narrations of my patients. It is through these that the subject can really be shown the primordial circumstances of his case in a manner that is much more rigorous

and vivid to him than the traditional patterns issuing from the triangular thematization of the oedipus complex.

I would like to quote another example and show you its congruity with the first. To do this, I will take a case very close to the Rat Man case history, but which has to do with a subject of another order—poetry or literary fiction. It concerns an episode from Goethe's youth that he narrates in *Poetry and Truth*. I am not bringing this in arbitrarily—it is in fact one of the most highly valued literary themes in the Rat Man's confessions.

III

Goethe is twenty-two years old, he is living in Strasbourg, and then there is the famous episode of his passion for Frederica Brion which he remembers with nostalgia well into his old age. This passion enabled him to overcome the curse put on him by one of his previous loves, Lucinda by name, against all amorous attachments to other women and, in particular, against kissing on the lips.

The scene is worth describing. This Lucinda has a sister, a little too shrewd to be honest, who is busy convincing Goethe of the devastating effect he is having on the poor girl. She pleads with him both to go away and to give her, the sly little minx, the token of the last kiss. It is then that Lucinda surprises them and says, "*May those lips be cursed forever. May evil befall the first one to receive their tribute.*" It is clearly not without good reason that Goethe, absorbed then in the infatuations of swaggering youth, takes this curse as a sanction that will henceforth bar the way to all his amorous undertakings. He tells us then how, elated by the discovery of this charming girl, Frederica Brion, he succeeds for the first time in overcoming the prohibition and feels the ecstasy of triumph following on this fear of something stronger than his own self-imposed, internal prohibitions.

This is one of the most enigmatic episodes in Goethe's life,

and no less extraordinary is his abandonment of Frederica. As a result, the *Goethesforscher*—like the Stendhalians and the Bossuetists, that very singular breed of people who attach themselves to one of those authors whose words have given form to our feelings and who spend their time rooting around in papers left in closets in order to analyze what the genius left behind—the *Goethesforscher* have concentrated on this fact. They have given us all kinds of explanations which I will not catalogue here. One thing is certain: that they all smack of that kind of philistinism inseparable from such research when it is pursued in the usual way. It cannot be denied either that there always is, in fact, some obscure concealment of philistinism in the manifestations of neurosis, for it is such a manifestation we are dealing with in Goethe's case, as will be shown by the observations I will now set forth.

There are a number of enigmatic features in the way Goethe approaches this adventure, and I would almost say that the key to the problem can be found in its immediate antecedents.

To be brief, Goethe, living at the time in Strasbourg with one of his friends, has long been aware of the existence in a small village of the open, kind, friendly family of Pastor Brion. But when he goes there, he surrounds himself with precautions whose amusing aspect he relates in his autobiography; actually, when one looks at the details, one cannot help being astonished at the truly contorted structure they reveal.

First of all, he thinks he must go there in disguise. Son of a *grand bourgeois* from Frankfurt, distinguished among his comrades by his smooth manners, his impressive dress, his air of social superiority, Goethe disguises himself as a theology student in an especially seedy and torn cassock. He sets out with his friend, and they are full of laughter on the way. But of course he is very vexed as soon as the reality of the visibly dazzling charm of the young lady against the background of that family setting makes him realize that, if he wants to appear at his handsomest and best, he must change as quickly as possible out

of this astonishing costume which does not show him to advantage.

The justifications he gives for this disguise are very odd. He invokes nothing less than the disguises the gods put on to come down among mortals—which, as he himself emphasizes, seems clearly to indicate (even allowing for his adolescent mentality) something more than self-conceit—something bordering on florid megalomania. If we look at the details, Goethe's text shows us what he thinks about it. By this way of disguising themselves, the gods sought above all to avoid vexation, and, to put it bluntly, it was for them a way of not having to take the familiarity of mortals as insulting. What the gods risk most when they come down on a level with humans is losing their immortality; and precisely the only way of avoiding that is to put themselves on their level.

It is indeed something like that we are dealing with here. It is demonstrated even more clearly when Goethe turns back toward Strasbourg to put on his finery again, not without feeling, a little late, how indelicate it was to have presented himself in a form that was not his own and thus to have deceived the trust of those people who welcomed him with charming hospitality; one has a real sense in this narration of a truly *gemütlich* atmosphere.

He comes back, then, toward Strasbourg. But far from following through on his wish to return to the village ceremoniously arrayed, he arrives at nothing better than substituting for the first disguise another that he borrows from a servant boy at an inn. This time he will appear in a disguise that is even stranger, more out of place than the first and, on top of it all, in make-up. To be sure, he treats the whole thing as a game, but this game becomes more and more significant. In fact, he no longer places himself on the level of a theology student, but slightly below. He plays the buffoon. And all of this is deliberately entangled with a series of details which create in all those who collaborate in this farce a sense that what is happening is closely linked to sexual behavior, to the courting display.

There are even certain details that take on importance, if one can put it that way, from their inaccuracy. As the title *Dichtung und Wahrheit* indicates, Goethe was aware that he had the right to organize and harmonize his memories with fictions that filled in the gaps which no doubt he was powerless to fill in otherwise. The ardor of those I mentioned earlier who follow the tracks of great men has demonstrated the inaccuracy of certain details which are all the more revelatory of what one might call the real intentions of the entire scene. When Goethe presented himself made-up and in the clothes of a servant boy, enjoying at length the resultant misunderstanding, he also delivered, he says, a christening cake that he had likewise borrowed from the boy. Now, the *Goethesforscher* have demonstrated that for six months before and for six months after the Frederica episode, there were no baptisms in that locality. The christening cake, traditional gift to the pastor, can only be Goethe's fantasy and, as such, thus assumes in our eyes its entire significance. It implies the paternal function, but precisely inasmuch as Goethe specifies that he is not the father, but only the one who delivers something and who has only an external relation to the ceremony—he makes himself the petty officer, not the principal hero. In the end, the whole ceremony of his concealment actually appears not only as a game but much more profoundly as a precaution which can be placed in the category of what I called before the splitting of the subject's personal function in the mythic constructions of the neurotic.

Why does Goethe act this way? Very obviously because he is afraid—as what follows will show, for this affair will henceforth do nothing but fade. Far from lifting the spell, releasing the original curse by daring to transgress its sanction, Goethe only deepened his fears—one perceives this in all kinds of substitutive forms, the idea of substitution being introduced into the text by Goethe—with respect to the fulfillment of this love. All the reasons one might give for this—desire not to get involved, to protect the poet's sacred destiny, even perhaps the difference in social standing—are only cleverly rationalized forms, the

surface of an infinitely deeper current which is, in fact, the flight from the desired object. We see again, when he confronts his goal, this splitting of the subject, his alienation from himself, strategies by which he provides a substitute for himself on whom the deadly threats are to be carried out. The moment he reintegrates this substitute into himself, it is impossible to reach the goal.

Here I can give you only the general thematic analysis of this adventure, but you ought to know that there is also a sister, Frederica's double, who is there to complete the mythic structure of the situation. If you go back to Goethe's text, you will see that what may appear to you in this sketch to be a construction is confirmed by other diverse and striking details, even including the analogy suggested by Goethe with the well-known story of the Vicar of Wakefield, a literary, phantasmatic transposition of his own adventure.

IV

The quaternary system so fundamental to the impasses, the insolubilities in the life situation of neurotics, has a structure quite different from the one traditionally given—the incestuous desire for the mother, the father's prohibition, its obstructive effects, and, around all that, the more or less luxuriant proliferation of symptoms. I think that this difference ought to lead us to question the general anthropology derived from analytic doctrine as it has been taught up to the present. In short, the whole oedipal schema needs to be re-examined. I cannot undertake that now, but I cannot refrain from trying to introduce here the fourth element at issue.

We submit that the most normalizing situation in the early experience of the modern subject, in the condensed form represented by the conjugal family, is linked to the fact that the father is the representative, the incarnation, of a symbolic function which concentrates in itself those things most essential in other cultural structures: namely, the tranquil, or rather, symbolic, enjoyment, culturally determined and established, of the

mother's love, that is to say, of the pole to which the subject is linked by a bond that is irrefutably natural. The assumption of the father's function presupposes a single symbolic relation in which the symbolic and the real would fully coincide. The father would have to be not only the *name-of-the-father*, but also the representative, in all its fullness, of the symbolic value crystallized in his function. Now, it is clear that this coincidence of the symbolic and the real is totally elusive. At least in a social structure like ours, the father is always in one way or another in disharmony with regard to his function, a deficient father, a *humiliated* father, as Claudel would say. There is always an extremely obvious discrepancy between the symbolic function and what is perceived by the subject in the sphere of experience. In this divergence lies the source of the effects of the oedipus complex which are not at all normalizing, but rather most often pathogenic.

But saying that does not advance us very far. The following step, which brings us to an understanding of what is at issue in the quaternary structure, is this—and it is the second great discovery of psychoanalysis, no less important than the symbolic function of the oedipus complex—the narcissistic relation.

The narcissistic relation to a fellow being is the fundamental experience in the development of the imaginary sphere in human beings. As an experience of the ego, its function is decisive in the constitution of the subject. What is the ego, if not something that the subject at first experiences as foreign to him but inside him? It is in another, more advanced, more perfect than he, that the subject first sees himself. Specifically, he sees his own image in the mirror at a time when he is capable of perceiving the image as a totality but when he does not feel himself as such but as living rather in that primal incoherence of all his motor and affective functions which lasts for the first six months after birth. Thus the subject always has an anticipatory relationship to his own realization which in turn throws him back onto the level of a profound insufficiency and betokens a rift in him, a primal sundering, a *thrownness*, to use the

Heideggerian term. It is in this sense that what is revealed in all imaginary relationships is an experience of death: an experience doubtless inherent in all manifestations of the human condition, but especially visible in the life of the neurotic.

If the imaginary father and the symbolic father are most often fundamentally differentiated, it is not only for the structural reason I am presently outlining, but also by reason of historic, contingent circumstances peculiar to each subject. In the case of neurotics, one frequently finds that the figure of the father, by some accident of real life, has been split. Either the father has died prematurely and had his place taken by a step-father with whom the subject easily falls into a more fraternal relation, quite naturally established on the level of that jealous virility representing the aggressive dimension of the narcissistic relation. Or the mother has disappeared and the circumstances of life have opened the family group to another mother who is not the real one. Or the fraternal figure introduces the fatal relationship symbolically and, at the same time, incarnates it in reality. Very frequently, as I have indicated, a friend is involved, like the mysterious friend in "The Rat Man" who is never found and who plays such an essential role in the family legend. All of that results in the mythic quartet. It can be reintegrated into the subject's history, and to disregard it is to disregard the most important element in the treatment itself. All we can do here is to underline its importance.

What is this fourth element? Its name is death.

Death is perfectly conceivable as a mediating element. Before Freudian theory stressed in the existence of the father a function which is at once a function of speech and a function of love, Hegel, in his metaphysics, did not hesitate to construct the whole phenomenology of human relationships around death as mediator, the third element essential to the progress by which man becomes humanized in his relationships with his fellow man. And one might say that the theory of narcissism, as I just set it forth, explains certain facts which otherwise re-

main enigmatic in Hegel. After all, in order for this dialectic of the death struggle, the struggle for pure power, to be initiated, death must not be actualized, since the dialectical movement would cease for lack of combatants; death must be imagined. And, indeed, it is this imagined, imaginary death that appears in the dialectic of the oedipal drama; and it is also this death that is operant in the formation of the neurotic—and perhaps, up to a certain point, in something that goes far beyond the formation of the neurotic, specifically the existential attitude characteristic of modern man.

It would take little pressure to make me say that what functions as mediation in actual analytic experience is something similar to speech, to symbol, called in another language, an act of faith. But certainly, this is neither what analysis requires nor what it implies. What is at issue, rather, is on the order of the last words uttered by Goethe; and you may trust it was not for nothing that I brought him up as an example.

Of Goethe, one can say that, by his inspiration, his living presence, he impregnated and animated Freud's thought to an extraordinary degree. Freud confessed that it was his reading of Goethe's poems that launched him in his medical career and, by the same stroke, decided his destiny; but even that is little enough compared to the influence of Goethe's thought on Freud's work. It is, therefore, with a phrase of Goethe, his last, that I will express the wellspring of analytic experience, with those well-known words he uttered before he plunged open-eyed into the black abyss—“*Mehr Licht*” (*more light*).

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