

7 Philo, or the Obsessional and His Desire

BY SERGE LECLAIRE

From the time that a passionate girl had cursed and sanctified my lips (any consecration entails both) I had superstitiously kept myself from kissing, lest maidens suffer fatal consequences.—Goethe, Dichtung und Wahrheit

A veil, transparent and impenetrable, separates the obsessional subject from the object of his desire. Whatever he may call it—a wall of glass, of cotton, or of stone—he feels it to be (as he tells us) a *glass shell* isolating him from reality.

He will spend an evening with the one he loves without ever holding her in his arms. His hand, heavy as a rock, cannot be brought to encircle her waist; his garrulous lips will never reach hers; and if in an adventurous moment he holds her in any way, it will only be to see her charm vanish and his desire quickly fade away. More un pitying than a wall is the spell that has been cast. As with the curse evoked in the epigraph, a word has assuredly arisen from an abyss to consecrate. For the obsessional neurotic this word is always connected with desire. So it is with the grave obsessional, and with him we recognize more clearly the impasse of desire in the petrified speech of the symptom, speech frozen by the spell.

Here we will limit the field of our research to the obsessional neurotic, already known through his character and described in his world—a completed model of man in his essential prematuration.

In the eyes of his friends, nothing is particularly distinguishing about Philo—they are surprised to learn that he is seeing a psychoanalyst. “You,” they say to him, “whose reflection and wisdom are exemplary; how can it be?” It is true that Philo appears to be wise, and people have great hopes for him. He is

close to thirty, a bachelor. I will say very little about his history, since I have only chosen to relate a fragment of his discourse here.

He is the middle child in a family of five children. His parents died almost fifteen years ago, one shortly after the other. His problem is deciding what to do with his life. To appreciate his dilemma, one must imagine all the options that an individual can weigh without making a choice. At the tenderest age, he tells me, wanting to appear witty, he already did not know which breast to choose.¹ Matters have not changed: teaching or the oil business, the priesthood or marriage—it does not matter as long as someone else makes the decision. He only retains the privilege of exposing his doubt (to whoever wants to listen) and also the privilege of contesting, annulling, the other’s decision. It is one of his three great passions; the others were having someone love him and failing in a task.

From a long clinical observation, we report only a fragment of one session: it concerns the tie that joins Philo to his mother.

Did Philo hate his father, did he wish to share his mother’s bed, was he jealous of his brothers? Yes, without a doubt. But how, in particular? Here analysis becomes more arduous.

Am I wrong to think that the fundamentals of the Oedipus complex have already become commonplace? The desire of the little boy for his mother, of the little girl for her father—the rivalries that are the correlates of these passions are invoked even outside psychiatric circles as arguments and no longer as questions.

And yet, if we stop to consider this idea of the little boy’s desire for his mother, remembering that yesterday it was still a new idea, we find that questions emerge and that they are the same as those raised at a time when this idea was scandalous.

Freud’s notion was quickly absorbed and accommodated to the needs of an actively expanding intellectual commerce. “Attachment to the mother” became its convenient conceptual formulation; the idea is a nice one, and no one deprives himself of its use. The homosexual, we know, remains attached to his mother; the schizophrenic is too attached; the obsessional was, unthinkingly; the pervert, too precociously; and so on. Too much or too little, positively or negatively, attachment to the mother is now commonly cited in case histories.

These were my reflections on the fascination of newly received ideas when Philo said to me recently that he had not succeeded in breaking off this attachment to his mother and that it had marked a recent attempt at a love relation.

Speech presented before the Group for the Evolution of Psychiatry, November 25, 1958, and first published as “Philon ou l’obsessionnel et son désir,” in *Evolution psychiatrique* 3 (Paris: Privat Didier, 1959), pp. 383–411. Republished in Serge Leclaire, *Démasquer le réel* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971), pp. 147–67.

1. [The French *sein* (“breast”) is pronounced like *saint* (“saint”), so that when spoken, “which breast to choose” could also be understood as “which saint to follow.”]

My ear, the true one, opened up.

Surely Philo had known for a long time, and well before he undertook his analysis, that wanting to enter the priesthood was characteristic of men who have not been able to resolve an excessive attachment to their mother. Once the question appeared to be resolved by this knowledge, he hardly ever posed it again. At most it was invoked as an argument or explanation.

On this occasion, I heard it differently, and I sent the word "attachment" back to him in an interrogative tone. "Yes," he continued, "I wanted to speak of the privileged character of everything that ties me to my mother." The idea of tying pleased me, and I reformulated my question: "How are you tied?"

Here is the sequence that my question elicited. I transcribed it on the spot—this is exceptional—because I was alerted by the exclamation he uttered before answering. There was a brief silence as he hesitated to tell me the thought that had just emerged. He excused himself for this thought and then added, "Shit! As though that were any of your business!"²

This is not Philo's habitual mode of expression. He continues: "It begins with the look; it's like a communion, a symbiosis. Yes, in her look there's a second look. It is as though she had found in me the satisfaction she did not find in my father. As though I had been necessary to her. . . . There was a secret agreement, a complicity. The word that comes to me is secret 'intimacy.'

"But"—and here the voice trembles with emotion—"it is above all a true relationship on both sides.

"This idea of being a priest, to the extent that I took it seriously, it was as though she had transmitted it. We were able to see how mad it was, she as well as I. Wasn't it the letter, where I questioned everything, that weakened her? Did she feel that her son was in perdition?"

He stops for a moment, as he often does, to say something that will subtly cut through this sequence: "I am saying just anything. . . . Perhaps this will permit me to end up by knowing what I am saying." And he continues: "This letter was like the announcement of my shipwreck, the confession of the failure of the common enterprise. I no longer have any goal. . . . Yes, I no longer have my unique goal of being the only thing necessary to my mother."

A brief passage follows that I cannot report; somewhat literary, its theme is the same: his mother as unique object. And he continues:

"I like speaking this way. Here I find myself pleasing, I enjoy, I feel myself, I listen to myself. It's sterile, this complacency. But that also pleases me: when I

2. [*Comme si ça te regardait* translates literally "As though that were looking at you." The importance of looking is manifest in what follows.]

reveal myself, I am concerned with pleasing. I wanted to please my mother, all of that comes back to me. To be my mother's lord and vassal; she loves me, I love her; we are secretly united in a passionate look. My beloved is mine, and I am all hers. It's the serpent who bites his own tail, I am turned back upon my own penis."

"Analysis pleases me," he finally adds, "because I have the opportunity to speak about my father, to reveal both of us. But what comes back to me is the phrase: 'Is that any of your business?'" Thus he closed this sequence with a more courteous variation of its opening sentence.

I propose this fragment of an analysis as a reference point. It is hardly edited, and I have added no interpretation for the moment. From a strictly technical point of view, it would be best to analyze the exclamation that began it. But this technical point will not concern us here. We will look first at the "content" of this fragment, since it articulates in a relatively clear and accessible way what I will now call the *nodal complex of the obsessional*.

Philo, like most obsessionals, was *his mother's favorite son*. He has maintained, through all the difficulties of his life, an unshakable and secret self-confidence. This is the Eden of some of his fantasies, the wondrous garden of imaginary voyages, the sanctuary in the middle of multiple fortifications. Anyone who violates this place is threatened with death. This is the nostalgia of an unspeakable happiness, of an exceptional and perfect jouissance. If today he is banished forever from this universe that lies at the heart of the mythical rose, then he must have committed some crime.

Who is Philo? A subject predestined to be distinguished from his counterparts, from his brothers, by some sign of destiny, this for his unhappiness as well as for his happiness. He is in one sense, as Goethe said, the gods' favorite. This is how the obsessional secretly sees himself; Philo is no exception.

If by malice or by ruse, as we read in fairy tales, we approach this sanctuary, under cover of a psychoanalysis, what do we find there? Philo said it: "She loves him, he loves her, they are secretly united in a passionate look." Let us not respond by saying that we are seeing here a mere figment of a fertile imagination. If we tell him that, he will break down in tears in the most unexpected way, so despairing and violent that we will be as much if not more surprised than he is. Our astonishment will make us stop short, as though faced with one of these miracles that create the dialectic of fairy tales. Philo insists, "It's totally true, on both sides." And then again, "It's none of your business."

The obsessional is most often a being of facade and decoy; he is secretive and we all know it. He reveals himself, discusses, and reasons without appearing to concern himself with how the other will respond, provided, of course, that this

other does respond. Hearing a response, he is indifferent, an egoist, a lifeless being. And yet, how many times does he repeat to whoever wants to listen that his nerves are exposed, that he is very sensitive and more intuitive than the dullards around him? This we can see clearly in his fathomless chagrin, the ridiculous, puerile, unexpected sobbing that arises whenever someone doubts the sacred reality of his sanctuary.

Here we touch on the dimension of sacrilege. Of course, we all think that we have largely overcome these fears of the abyss and have left them to a few primitives, to the superstitious, and to dreamers. And yet if our enlightenment had so fully freed us from the fright of being sacrilegious, why—I ask myself—are we so interested in the idea of “attachment to the mother”? We even have the idea of the “mother-child relationship,” more comforting with its glow of innocence than the incest of the tragic context. Let us nevertheless pursue our investigation.

When Philo speaks, he never considers the possibility of “sleeping with his mother.” Why? I do not think that it is because the terms are too crude—he has often used these terms and many more vulgar—but more simply because this expression, which we believe designates the fact of incest, does not correspond to his experience.

What he does talk about is “a communion, the happy effusion of a look.” Certainly we could pause here before the delightful picture of the infant looking intently at his mother holding him on her lap. But this would not suffice and would move us away from Philo’s words. He speaks about a “second look” and tells us clearly that it is his father’s.

Having already experienced it, I can imagine what passes through our knowledgeable minds: father, Oedipus, Oedipus complex, jealousy, aggressiveness, better to hide, and so forth. But I prefer to follow Philo’s words to us: “It is as though she had found in me the satisfaction that she did not find in my father.” The question explicit in this second look is what a mother expected from a father, literally, “what she did not find in my father.”

Here we can find the true knot of the situation: (1) *Mama was waiting for something*, (2) *something that Papa can give her*, (3) *which he does not give*. The problem concerns a mother’s disappointed expectation, which led her, he tells us clearly, to a turn toward her son, “as if she had found in me the *satisfaction*.” As Philo formulates it, there is a defect in his mother’s satisfaction with her husband, and it is from this defect that the rest follows: communion by the look, complicity, secret intimacy.

It appears to us now that what is primordially at the center of the sanctuary is

the *unsatisfied desire* of the mother, as it appears in her communication with the child.

Finally, a major factor that constitutes the veritable key to the obsessional position is the remark “As if I had been necessary to her.” We know that there is nothing in the obsessional’s world that escapes from the constraint of necessity. There is no pleasure that is not necessary, from “needed” vacations to a constraining schedule. “It is necessary that” or “I must” constitute the common denominators of the obsessional’s activity. “My unique goal,” Philo says, “is to be the only thing necessary to my mother.” More classically, there is in Racine’s *Bérénice* the role of Titus, which Philo quotes:

*I made it a necessary pleasure
To see her every day, to love her,
to please her.*

We could continue to analyze the other phrases from Philo’s discourse, and we would find there other subjects for reflection: for example, the problem of vocation, the doubt with which he questions the secret pact, the image of the serpent who bites its tail. I believe, however, that our very sketchy remarks are sufficient for the time being to let us begin to articulate the nodal complex of the obsessional.

At the center we find *the mother as desiring*. This should never be forgotten, especially if one is intrigued by the treasure hunt that the obsessional proposes. There are dozens of reasons why a mother may not be satisfied, and if this dissatisfaction is not sufficient to make an obsessional, it is still essential. To make a really good obsessional, it is necessary that the child be *marked*, as Philo often told us, by the indelible seal of the mother’s *unsatisfied desire*.

This is the first ineffable experience in the history of the obsessional. This is the moment when the history of the rest of the world stops for him. He leaves our time to enter into the indefinite duration that marks the time of his microcosm. After all, this is easily conceivable: it is quite gratifying to be the object of one’s mother’s interest, to be the elected object of her love even before the wish has been articulated. The obsessional is satisfied beyond all common measure, even before he has desired and languished.

Freud affirms that this history of the obsessional, contrary to that of the hysteric, begins with a precocious sexual satisfaction difficult to recall. Within the context we have just described, where the child is the chosen love object of his mother, all physical contact takes on an erotic sense, especially washing up, not to mention the specifically perineal and anal concerns. I am not inventing:

the obsessional on the analyst's couch can imagine the most exquisite rape and sees himself delivered into the arms of an attentive, young, and maternal nurse.

Such is the nature of the precocious sexual experience that marks the obsessional and is constantly found in him. Analysis cannot fail to discover this behind the alibis of secondary experiences, the denegation, and the protestations of disgust or repulsion. When I say "discover" I do not mean it in the sense of a forgotten event. No—with this secret the tabernacle dissolves, and the moment of ineffable grace rejoins the living flux of forgotten memories.

It is not easy to get there: you have to be as quick as you are tenacious, when an opening presents itself. In the session we have quoted, the first words show a fear and an anger that are not feigned: "Shit! As though that were any of your business!" Do not believe that these words are there by pure coincidence. What is literally in question is a look. Besides, the emergence of this familiar theme marks the beginning of most of our interviews. First, Philo feels that my look is open and reassuring, and this gives him the sense of being indebted to me. Second, he responds with a fixed and fleeting facial expression, of the kind he thinks an analyst should have. My greeting remains for him a question and an assurance but also a threat. His way of representing this situation is shown by a recurrent dream that he also daydreams about: "Someone approaches me, fixing me with his look. It's a man. Again and again I force myself to push him away, but he continues approaching. I begin to hit him repeatedly in the face; the more I hit him, the more he closes in on me, like a punching bag moved by a spring. He seems to be insensitive and he has a sarcastic smile. Anxiety invades me. . . ." At that moment he wakes, trembling.

Is this the scornful look of his older brother fixed on the good little boy, or better yet, the indefinable look of his father passing through a pleasant exterior and penetrating him as something cold and unpitying? I do not know; these are no doubt the two models of the look of an Other whom he cannot attain.

Without having made any effort to resolve things, I have only reported what Philo told me.

We will now attempt to account for this analytical fragment theoretically.

I am not sufficiently naive to pretend that this extract from a session contains in itself the entire theory of the obsessional's desire. I do believe that this example can clarify some matters for us. Also, I am not audacious enough to believe that my own clinical experience alone is the base for the theoretical articulation I am proposing. I remain convinced that clinical experience can be fertile only to the extent that it tests a working hypothesis.

Before continuing I will outline briefly the concept of Oedipal development

on which I found my work. Not that this is very different from the one we all know, but certain nuances and precisions articulated by J. Lacan have opened the Oedipal schema to a larger and stricter clinical application.

The Oedipal complex, we may say, gives an account of the evolution that, little by little, *substitutes for the mother, taken as the central and primordial character, the father, as principal and ultimate reference*. Having thus defined the general movement of this evolution, we will distinguish three phases.

At first, the mother as desiring is the central character. The subject identifies with the *object* of the mother's *desire*. Being unable to grasp the complexity of such a desire, the child seems to retain a simplistic schema: "To please mother, it is necessary and sufficient, whether boy or girl, *to be the phallus*." I recall in passing that the phallus is not reduced to the physical aspect of a signified reality, but that it already has for the child, as it does for the mother, a signifying and symbolic value. Such is the situation at first: "To please mother, it is necessary and sufficient to be the phallus."

The next step is the most important and the most complex. It is at this stage that most of the accidents that generate neurosis occur. We will summarize it in its normal evolution. The subject rather quickly has the sense that the mother is not satisfied with the first solution, and he detaches himself from his identification (with the phallus), which appears to him to be unsatisfying. The dissatisfaction and persistence of the mother's desire point him toward *something else*. What is this *something else* (*otherness*)? This is the crucial enigma that the mother's desire poses for the child. Through it a reference or a symbol that has captured the mother's desire appears in the child's life, even before its nature is specified. In this way a *third person* presents himself to experience. Is this to say that this *third person* appears especially as a person? No. The most scrupulous analysis shows that this third person, this father, appears especially *as a being to whom one refers* (to honor or to scorn) and to whom one refers as to a law. In everyday practice, we hear "Papa said . . ." or "I am going to tell Papa," words that had been spoken by a mother having difficulty with authority. Now, this father, before being depriving or castrating or what have you, appears to the child as a reference and even as the mother's master. If it happens that the symbolic phallus, *signifier of desire*, is going to function in the mother's reference to her man, in the eyes of her child and in his imagination, then the father must appear as depriving and as castrating in regard to the mother and not to the child himself.

This is what we have to grasp in order to be at ease in relation to the castration complex. In this second stage of the Oedipus complex, the child should gain access to the father's law, defined as the place of the *symbolic*

phallus, through the mediation of the mother's desire. The mother's desire appears to take this phallus away and to keep it. The father is revealed *as refusal and as reference*. This is also the moment when the object of desire appears in its complexity as an object submitted to the law of the other. J. Lacan says that this stage reveals "the relation of the mother to the father's word."

The third stage is simpler. The father is not only the bearer of the law; he also possesses a *real* penis. In a word, the father is the one who has the phallus and not the one who *is* it. For this stage to take place, it is assuredly necessary that the father be neither too impotent nor too neurotic. In this third stage the father is discovered to be the real possessor, and not merely the symbolic place, of a penis.

The evolution is completed with the formation of a new identification and the emergence of the ego ideal. For the boy as well as for the girl, this is the moment where one renounces all vestiges of the first identification with the "phallus that pleases Mama." The child becomes like a big person, either the one who has the phallus or else the one who does not and who thus will await it from a man.

Thus the father, as the place of the phallus, replaces the mother as the principal and normative subject in the evolution. The mother, no longer the central character she was, takes on the role of mediator. The child's question is not "to be or not to be" the phallus, but rather to have it or not to have it.

What was the fate of Philo during these stages, and how did he become the person we have come to know?

There is no doubt that he retains his deepest and dearest memories from the first stage; it is as though he is still living there. If he does not say, "To please my mother it is necessary and sufficient that I be the phallus," he is not very far off when he says, "My unique goal is to be the only thing necessary to my mother." All that matters is to please her, and that is how he finds his own pleasure.

Without even looking at his dreams for evidence of his total identification with the phallus, we listen as he describes himself reacting in certain situations by blushing in a kind of diffuse and warm congestion that makes him tighten and become totally stiff. This reaction, this way of being whole, like a monolith, is not limited to muscular activity. I do not have the time to go into everything in Philo's being that demonstrates the satisfaction inherent in this primal phase of identification with the object of his mother's desire; that would make a very long list.

Certainly this patient is nostalgic for this first stage, and his nostalgia maintains him in a dream that he cannot get rid of. It is no less certain that he has not

attained the third stage where, released from this massive identification, he would possess a phallus. In a word, he does not feel himself to be a man. At thirty he is still a little boy, submissive, asking for things politely, always excusing himself, feeling sorry for his outbursts. He does not feel any resemblance between himself and those men who have women: he isn't there yet, and he almost hears a voice telling him, "when you are grown up." Thus he revolts, protests, and argues his superiority, his intelligence, but nothing is done; he feels good; he is not yet "grown up," and he feels himself to be neither the possessor nor the master of his sex.

What happened, then, during the second stage, when he ought to have been opened to desire and the law through his mother's mediation? It seems almost too obvious to need saying: instead of encountering dissatisfaction, the natural correlate of a primal identification with the phallus, instead of a dissatisfaction that could drive him to look at the relation between his mother and the enigma of the father, Philo encountered his mother's satisfaction.

Why? Very simply because his mother shifted her desire over to him, with all the unconscious and disturbing tenderness of a woman neurotically unsatisfied. It is hardly necessary to provide the details concerning the moral rigor of the father, his charm, his goodness, and his charity, all of which muffle a virility that is exercised parsimoniously and with regret because it is considered to be sinful. Philo summarized with these words: "It is as though she had found in me the satisfaction that she did not find in my father."

Thus I recall our hero's way of describing and evoking the privileged experience that fulfilled him beyond all measure and for which he retains the most profound nostalgia. Since then he has lived as though he were in a prison and as though he loved the prison. His mother, who ought to have been the mediator and have shown him the way, imposed herself on him as the goal and object. The circle was closed in an exquisite effusion just when the path of desire was beginning to open.

Within the perfect sphere inscribed by the maternal look, this path is unendingly sterile and exhausting. Everything will now have to pass through this protecting veil. Philo hears his father's word as an echo, and he grasps his father's look only in a photo.

We will find Philo's desire imprisoned in this small enchanted world.

We have to recall here the specificity of desire in relation to need and demand. If we say that the attainment of an object and the experience of satisfaction with it are proper to need and that demand aims at the defective being of the Other, then desire is proper to the imaginary and is conceived as the significant mediation of a fundamental antinomy.

Philo, like any other child, had mixed relations with his mother, in terms of his needs—for he is far from being autonomous at this point—as well as of his demands. The recognition of being is the fruit of a long patience. While Philo, like his counterparts, lived in this *double expectation*, he entered into the *imaginary field of the mediating, questioning, exacting desire* of his mother. She, trapped in the net of her child's desire, was solicited again, in secret, and felt the emergence of her own desire and her particular dissatisfaction.

These are the general conditions, easily recognizable, through which the developmental short-circuit that founds obsessional neurosis comes to pass. The mother answers her son's hope with a manifestation of her own desire. The burgeoning desire of the child, just barely emerging from the exactions of need or the awaiting of the demands, finds itself all at once disengaged, confirmed, and better yet, satisfied.

The obsessional's desire, precociously awakened and promptly satisfied, will bear, more than all other desire, the stigma of its prematuration. It will retain above all else the character of the elementary exactions of need. It will also bear the indelible mark of the dissatisfaction inherent in any demand.

So much for general terms; let us return to Philo's analysis. Like many other obsessionals he imagined all kinds of stories when he was young; his dream life and his desire were nourished either by events in his experience or by the still obscure laws of the world of "grown-ups." A hero's exploits or a humiliated captive's suffering excited more than just his imagination. In his games he exhibited on the one hand all sorts of prowess, and on the other he liked to be stepped on by his young friends, vaguely conscious of surpassing the limits of innocence that are proper to children.

Thus he spoke to me one day of an edifying tale about which I had, in my floating attention, some difficulty in figuring out whether it came from some commonplace picture book or from the first book he read. It was the history of Gonzago-who-died-a-martyr-among-the-barbarians. I will not tell more of this marvelous and terrifying story, because I understood quickly that the happy Gonzago was a venerated ancestor who had really lived, suffered, and died some six score years ago.

Since he had spoken very little about this, I asked him. Responding, he recognized that Gonzago was secretly his hero. When he was five he thought naively that he would have to travel by foot to these faraway countries where barbarians live and where one can be martyred. He thus forced himself into long walks to prepare for this trip. At first the long walks astonished the family, but later, after the secret was revealed, everyone was rather amused.

Philo, the chosen, did he not have a calling?

Let us look at the sources of this childhood dream. Philo's father was an honest man, wise and reasonable when need be, but he was also the ancestor and devotee of this hero. Remembering his hero, this man named his last son Gonzago. Was he also in his youth attracted by the risk of adventures in faraway lands? Several indications permit us to believe this. In any case, he became a husband and a father who followed above all else the cult of virtue.

This was what Philo's mother loved in him. Through her husband she knew and venerated the descendant of the martyr. To the very estimable and honest "contingency" that her husband was for her, she added the dream of a Gonzago of light and death. From this conjuncture children were born. The parents accepted this virtuously, and each of the children compensated in his or her own way for this hybrid paternity.

Thus little Philo, who was the most gifted of the children, knew through the myths of the tribe and through family albums how to recognize the true object of the passion of such a reasonable and modest mother. His instinct did not deceive him. And this mother could recognize in her little Philo the true son of her desire. The secret complicity is to be found there.

Through his beloved mother, Philo had always sought happiness if not pleasure. He was, first, her "thing"; he was there to please her, "everything a mother could want." We will say abstractly that this is the phallus, or more concretely, something that should be found on the father's side. But he discovered soon, with the intuitive certainty of a child, the dream that his mother employed to make her law and to nourish her life: that of the martyred hero.

And then, to please mama by trying to find the *paternal reference*, Philo made the martyr his imaginary companion. His burgeoning desire found an immediate profit in the occasion. He found it even more so in living *the same dream* as his mother. United in this same dream, they soon became the true spouses of this honest family: they shared the same ideal; their desires, like their dreams, were the same. Philo, borne on by a blessing, entered into the great fantasy that is the life of the obsessional: model child and incestuous son, *he realized his desire in sharing his mother's*—both of them were satisfied.

It remains for us to question the fate of the *demand* for Philo. Sharing the dream, the desire and, in a way, the bed of his mother, was he for all that *recognized* as a subject in the eyes of others? Certainly not; at the most he was recognized in the eyes of his mother, so blind when it came to other things!

He was certainly a satisfied child, relatively happy, although profoundly anxious. The recognition accorded by a blind mother could not suffice. Little by little he began to take notice. The esteem of teachers for the good pupil that he was long deceived him, and he wished to be always a good pupil. But the time

came when this situation was difficult to maintain: the teachers could not share in the desire of Philo and his mother, and they left him to make his way, to make a choice.

Philo asks questions and seeks at any price to be recognized and guided. Hardly does he find a counselor—and he finds a lot of them because he tries to make everyone into one—than he scornfully reproaches the counselor's ignorance of his fantasy. But if, on the contrary, the perspicacious counselor tells him to get out on his own, he becomes disquieted. He is finally satisfied if he succeeds in seducing the counselor, for he knows very well the power of his charm.

Here we should remember (to understand something of this inexhaustible ploy that we see in other Philos) that in dreaming of Gonzago, *Philo did not expect that his mother would dream with him*, but on the contrary, that she would reveal to him what she had *found that was better than this dream*.

The one who should have recognized Philo—to help him to disengage himself from the first traps of his desire, to make of him, after all, a little man—was his father (the living martyr). His mother, however, did not make this very easy; rather, she opposed it with much well-intentioned zeal! Instead of this recourse, this truly vital opening, the response Philo knew was only the luster of his mother's desire. This desire is a dream in which to commune in the sterile satisfaction of a shared wish.

So much so that since this first privileged experience, he can no longer pretend to be recognized without evoking the pleasure that followed the first recourse. He can no longer demand without having desire emerge. No aspect of the demand escapes the fantasmatic exuberance of the most violent desire, the one that was prematurely fulfilled.

Thus we can say that for Philo, *the demand*, the fundamental movement of a being toward recognition, *is lived exclusively by him in a mode proper to desire*. It follows naturally that desire—become the fantasmatic substitute for the quest after being—is condemned by this confusion to be eternally inaccessible. Finally, desire thus confounded is strongly marked by the natural component of need, and it is manifested in the obsessional with the character of necessity, impatience, and insistence, all of them bearing the character of need.

Here we find the ambiguity of the obsessional's desire; captive of the existential questioning that is below the surface, his desire is impotent to recover its autonomy and its value as mediator between need and demand; sterile, it proliferates in the great dream that is his life. It is manifested in the wild search for an other who *can recognize him and at the same time free his desire*. This we perceive through his passions and his symptoms. Philo doubts, fails passionately; this surprises us, it draws attention and makes the one who is trapped in the

interest he wants to evoke ask himself questions; it is there that pleasure and hope are hidden. It would seem that he has no other way to break his enchanted sphere, the glass ball of his dream, than to reveal himself constantly: to show himself (buttocks or sexual organ) as a doubter, an unfortunate, a subtle dialectician, a paradoxical failure, in the secret hope that finally an *other*, man or god, but a true one, will manifest himself, will intervene to recognize, wake him from his dream, render him free to desire, even if this is in punishing him.

But, if it is true that hope exists, the wish that says so cannot be entirely sincere. Philo is too cunning. He already knows that there is a perfect Master, uncontested, the one and only, Death, and yet, even though he knows that in recognizing him he will be saved, he wavers on that too, and to escape, *he plays dead*, offering himself hypocritically even before having lived: "Why would you take me," he says to him in his dream, "when I am already dead?"

This is not all. To live solely on desire is not unthinkable, on the contrary; it is simply a little trying. Philo sometimes wants, like all these happy funnymen, and he wants to bring forth, to live and to exhaust the adventure of a nice desire, certain then to find another, even more interesting. But this is out of the question. Living such an adventure presupposes above all the possibility of approaching—however weakly—another warm and living being.

And this is precisely what the world of the obsessional cannot sustain. Philo and his mother, mythically united in Gonzago, have given birth to a people of docile shadows, of couples endlessly repeated. But they have separated themselves (this is the very reason for their union) from every other subject, from all the other beings of desire. Philo has never left the orbit of his mother's desire; it has not crossed his mind that his father or any other subject can live with desire, can nourish dreams different from his.

But there is no desire that can sustain itself in the isolation of a solitary daydream. Thus the masochist feeds his passion with the dream of what his sadistic partner will do to him, even if he is disappointed. More simply, someone who wants a woman will wish to be the object of her dreams; if the two dreams only rarely coincide, they are no less necessary to the life of the desire. At a time when men were gallant, passionate courting was conceivable only where the lover was assured that the object of his flame was playing the role of a frightfully reticent woman. Do we imagine today gallantly courting a liberated woman?

This is the way we should understand the formula that *the other is necessary to sustain desire*. Philo, on the other hand, is captive of his unique passion and is *fundamentally ignorant of the other as desiring*. And yet, in order for his own desire to live, the other is necessary. In this impasse he will make use of anything at all to create a *fancied other, the illusory support of a sterile desire*. *To give to the*

inanimate object the appearance of life, to make it live and die, to care for it, then to destroy it, such is the derisory game to which Philo is reduced. The obsessional's object is invested with this essential function of otherness.

Without an industrious activity to sustain it, the dream may well evaporate, and Death then threatens to bear witness to the truth. *In order to avoid this ruin, the obsessional ceaselessly takes up the exhausting work of reducing the living to nothing and of giving to others the impression of an ephemeral life.*

This impossible quest for the other remains the most notable characteristic of the obsessional's desire.

Thus the circle is closed: the desire that was prematurely satisfied is substituted for the demand; it remains isolated in a solitary daydream peopled with shadows, calling ceaselessly to the other, excluded yet necessary.

This is how Philo's desire manifests itself in the analysis.

We will have to conclude now.

Someone may ask, what advantages are there in formulating these things as you have done? I answer that for me there are two advantages, one theoretical, the other practical.

Theoretically, there is great value in taking up the problems of libido and desire in a specifically psychoanalytic way.

From the perspective of research, the analysis of such a case permits us to specify and to confirm the fundamental problems of obsessional neurosis. The precocious "disintrinsication" of the drives in the obsessional's history is confirmed and illustrated by the premature libidinal satisfaction that blocks the circuit of the demand, where this circuit is the only rational support for that which comes from the death drive. Doubtless if we followed this path, we would be able to articulate the enigma of the obsessional's time, a time captivated by desire. The study of the obsessional's desire has in passing shed light on the question of death.

In a more immediate theoretical perspective, the reference to and progressive elucidation of the fundamental concepts of desire and libido ought to permit us to situate better some notions in current usage: whether it is a question of topographical references, to specify the *constitutive relations of the ego and desire*, or whether it is a question of the dynamic references in the properly *libidinal dimension of transference*.

From the point of view of practice, and I suppose that this is what interests us most immediately, the formulation of our central theoretical questions in terms of desire can be very useful.

This situates us firmly on the level of neurosis and renders us attentive to the mixed field of desire and demand that constitutes the obsessional's transference. An appeal to "desire" is better than a reference to the theory of transference or to the structure of the ego, since these latter are abstract and will make us have

recourse to book knowledge. Desire is there, living, disquieting or seductive, present in the tension of the therapeutic exchange; it is the weave of discourse, the substance of fantasy and dream, the essence of transference.

In concerning ourselves with desire, we are on the level of a specifically therapeutic problematic.

Now—as is well known—if every neurotic patient poses a question of his therapist, if he addresses him fundamentally with an implicit demand for recognition, the obsessional does it in his own way. His demand is particularly difficult to resolve because it is intentionally confused. Our analysis gives the therapist the means to orient himself in the field of this demand for help. He ought to be attentive to the fact that for the obsessional there is no demand that is not marked with *the seal of desire*. In vulgar parlance—but also literally—wanting to be recognized has become for him wanting to be screwed. And he invests everything in his effort to make it happen.

For the therapist to avoid being duped, is it sufficient never to respond or to respond obliquely, as the experienced psychiatrist and psychoanalyst do instinctively? If this attitude is essential, I do not believe it to be sufficient.

The psychoanalyst must also bear witness [to desire] in the guise of a response. He must be the one who greets the demand serenely and who can support this appeal to being without at the same time compulsively annulling it by an imperative reduction to some secondary reason. Finally, he must use his talent for discrimination and know how to introduce a cleavage between demand and desire, between the world of the law and that of the dream. For this he must have a sharpened instrument that is sturdy and responsive in following the contour of the joints that tradition speaks of, prosaically, evoking the art of meat cutting.

Around the *phallic symbol, the signifier of desire, the central reference and mediator in the practice of our art*, we must distinguish without fail the *real phallus* of Philo's father from the *imaginary phallus* of Gonzago, to distinguish the *negativity* of the absence of the martyred hero from the *negation* of the paternal presence, to distinguish *being it* from *having it*, all the while being cognizant of their linkage, not confounding the demand for recognition with the desire to sleep with someone.

This distinction is essential—and not only that, of course—if we are to avoid believing that it is necessary to open the doors of the prison where the unhappy Philo is crouched. If we believed in the image of the prison, we would enter into the game of his desire and his dream. Knowing how to discriminate helps us, on the contrary, never to forget that this *glass shell* is only an onerous egg.