

The Shell  
*Renewals of*  
and  
*Psychoanalysis*  
the Kernel

Volume I

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envisioned as having *not yet entirely lost* the partner for whom he is, as it were, mourning in anticipation. So, when the subject learns from the analyst, in a repetition of the initial trauma, that his secret lover *must* be attacked, he has no choice but to push his fantasy of mourning to its ultimate conclusion: "If my beloved is to lose me forever, he will not survive this loss." This certainty restores peace of mind to the subject, a picture of what recovery might look like. The cure will be complete the day when the "object" makes the supreme sacrifice. . . .

SIX

## "The Lost Object—Me": Notes on Endocryptic Identification

*N. Abraham and M. Torok, 1975*

The soul that in life did not its divine right  
Acquire, has not, even in Hades, repose.  
Hölderlin, *To the Fates*

### THE HAUNTED ANALYST . . .

So speaks the poet. Yes. The "divine right," the work born of the rediscovery of oneself, comes into being only if one asserts one's value, only if one succeeds in being acknowledged. Recognized, acknowledged by oneself to oneself before the whole universe. Sometimes the "whole universe" is represented by the psychoanalyst. Before the analyst the "divine right" is created or gradually unveiled. Would that analysts could understand it, accept it, rejoice in it as we rejoice in poetry! But how many are the roads leading there and how many the traps along the way. Do analysts have an ear for *all* "poems" and for *all* "poets"? Surely not. But those whose message they failed to hear, those whose deficient, mutilated text they have listened to time after time—the riddles with no key—those who left their analysts without yielding up the distinctive *oeuvre* of their lives, these people return forever as the ghosts of their unfulfilled destiny and as the haunting phantoms of the analyst's deficiency.

Who among us is not battling with specters that implore Heaven and demand of us their due, while we are beholden to them for our own

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salvation? Just think of Freud and his Wolf Man. From 1910 well into Freud's extreme old age, the case of this enigmatic Russian—bewitched by some secret—never stopped haunting him, drawing from him theory upon theory because he could not discover the key to the poem. This too was our situation before the enigma of the great poetics, not of a single individual but of an entire and extended family, rightly or wrongly called by the collective name “manic-depressive psychosis.” It has been a long while since the two of us joined forces to establish its semantics and to formulate its prosody. Let us bring to you, after a very long and groping search, inspired by our many ghosts, a few examples and outlines drawn from our clinical practice. It would be presumptuous indeed to allege that we have reached our goal. Yet it would be false modesty to deny our suspicion that we are finally entering an open road.

We begin by giving a brief summary of our most recent efforts and leave for later the delineation of some errant “shadows” they have helped set free.

#### ... AND THE CRYPT ON THE COUCH

The image of the phantom does not come to us accidentally as a term for the analyst's torment.<sup>1</sup> This image points to an occasion of torment for

1. This image of the “phantom”—meant at first to indicate a rift (inflicted upon the listening analyst by some secret of the patient that could not be revealed) which creates a formation in the unconscious of the listener—lent itself to a variety of theoretical elaborations. The analyst, attuned to the dictates of the couch, is surely, in some respects, comparable to a child maturing on the psychic nourishment received from his parents. Should a child have parents “with secrets,” parents whose speech is not exactly complementary to their unstated repressions, the child will receive from them a gap in the unconscious, an unknown, unrecognized knowledge—a *nescience*—subjected to a form of “repression” before the fact.

The buried speech of the parent will be (a) dead (gap) without a burial place in the child. This unknown phantom returns from the unconscious to haunt its host and may lead to phobias, madness, and obsessions. Its effect can persist through several generations and determine the fate of an entire family line.

Could this be the “mysterious” primary repression hypothesized by Freud? It is too early to provide an answer. All the same, the clinical impact of the *phantom* is becoming clearer. In this text (March 1973), the image of the phantom simply represents a specific malaise of the analyst; it has since been transposed into a metapsychological concept, a matter for new research and renewed analytic listening. It has been further expanded in a seminar, held since February 1974 at the Paris Psychoanalytic Institute by Nicolas Abraham, on Dual Unity and one of its consequences: the *metapsychological phantom* (see “Notes du séminaire sur l'Unité Duelle et le Fantôme,” in *L'écorce et le noyau* [Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1978;

patients as well—a memory they buried *without legal burial place*. The memory is of an idyll, experienced with a valued object and yet for some reason unspeakable. It is memory entombed in a fast and secure place, awaiting resurrection. Between the idyllic moment and its subsequent forgetting (we have called the latter “preservative repression”),<sup>2</sup> there was the metapsychological traumatism of a loss or, more precisely, the “loss” that resulted from a traumatism. This segment of an ever so painfully lived Reality—untellable and therefore inaccessible to the gradual, assimilative work of mourning—causes a genuinely covert shift in the entire psyche. The shift itself is covert, since both the fact that the idyll was real and that it was later lost must be disguised and denied. This leads to the establishment of a sealed-off psychic place, a crypt in the ego. Created by a self-governing mechanism we call *inclusion*, the crypt is comparable to the formation of a cocoon around the chrysalis.<sup>3</sup> Inclusion or crypt is a form of anti-introjection, a mechanism whereby the assimilation of both the illegitimate idyll and its loss is precluded.

#### LIVING IN A CRYPT

The “shadow of the object” strays endlessly about the crypt until it is finally reincarnated in the person of the subject. Far from displaying itself, this kind of identification is destined to remain concealed. We consider it useful to complement Freud's metapsychological formula, in “Mourning and Melancholia”—which shows “the ego in the guise of the object”—by its opposite, in order to signal an initial clinical finding: *the “object,” in its turn, carries the ego as its mask*, that is, either the ego itself or some other façade. This one is an imaginary and covert identification, a crypto-fantasy that, being untellable, cannot be shown in the light of day. The identification concerns not so much the object who may no longer exist, but essentially the “mourning” that this “object” might allegedly carry out because of having lost the subject; the subject, consequently, appears to be painfully missed by the “object.” Clearly, an identifying empathy of

will be included in the second volume of the American edition], pp. 393–425). Further applications can be found in the following articles: Nicolas Abraham, “Notes on the Phantom”; and Maria Torok, “Story of Fear” [See also Abraham's interpretation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* with his addition of a sixth act: “The Phantom of Hamlet or the Sixth Act,” all three in this volume].

2. See “The Topography of Reality,” in this volume.

3. See our article “Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection *versus* Incorporation” [in this volume].

this type could not say its name, let alone divulge its aim. Accordingly, it hides behind a mask, even in the so-called "periodic states" of manic-depressive psychosis. The mechanism consists of exchanging one's own identity for a fantasmic identification with the "life"—beyond the grave—of an object of love, lost as a result of some metapsychological traumatism. Lacking a better term, we will call this mechanism *endocryptic identification*.

A fantasy of identifying empathy! What does it mean? Consider the fantasy first. We hold that fantasy is never the simple translation of a psychic process; quite the opposite, it is the illusory and painstakingly reiterated proof that no process whatever has or should take place. Only in this sense can fantasy, as we see it, refer to a metapsychological state of affairs. Having established this, we can clarify the status of the identification now recognized as endocryptic. To state that endocryptic identification is the work of fantasy alone means that its content amounts to maintaining the illusion of the topographical *status quo*, as it had been prior to the covert transformation. As for the *inclusion* itself, it is not fantasy. Inclusion attests to a painful reality, forever *denied*: the "gaping wound" of the topography. It is therefore crucial to establish the following. The melancholic's complaints translate a fantasy—the imaginary sufferings of the endocryptic object—a fantasy that only serves to mask the real suffering, this one unavowed, caused by a wound the subject does not know how to heal.

That is in short our argument. Clearly the poetics born of the crypt gives rise to as many poems as there are individual *cryptophores*. A great many creations of a decidedly nonmelancholic appearance also turn out to come from the same school. "Melancholy," in fact, seems to occupy a rather limited area of the potential uses authorized by the concept of intrapsychic crypt and endocryptic identification. In point of fact, these concepts were familiar to us long before we found them appropriate to circumscribe manic-depressive psychosis. For years we have been talking about "preservative repression," "unutterable libidinal experiences," and "covert identification." Now that the nature of melancholic identification is at last clearly expressed, quite a few other equally enigmatic modes of being have crystallized for us around the same ideas. In addition to the manic-depressive, let us mention two other forms of being, commonly called "fetishism" and "neurosis of failure." It seems to us that these inventions of the mind also rest on some "gaping wound," opened long ago within the ego and disguised by a fantasmic and secret construction in place of the very thing from which, through the loss, the ego was severed. In all cases, the goal of this type of construction is to disguise the wound because it is unspeakable, because to state it openly would prove fatal to the entire topography. Individual cases differ only as to the

shape of the wound and the particular form of the arrangement invented so as to reveal nothing.<sup>4</sup>

#### SOME MODEL CRYPTS

##### "Victor" and "Gilles," or How to Keep?

"I'll bash your head against the wall; that'll cure you of loving me." This sentence, never uttered but put into action, was an ending. It was preceded by another sentence that did not have to be said either: "I'll bash your head against the wall if you tell anyone what we did together." No more was needed to cut off speech. To say everything once and for all, only one recurring theme was left: contrition-failure, failure-contrition. "No, I should not have!" "I can't control myself!" Words laboriously illustrated by deeds.

Victor is middle-aged. "I am neurotically unsuccessful," he says right away. "Yet, I'm like any other man, married, with children, and a powerful job. Yes, power, giving orders! . . . that's what I'd like most. But I can't bring myself to act on it. Something always makes me side with my subordinates. I am always on the verge of getting into a fight with my superiors. It ends in dismissal." He is aware of it and contrite, but the analyst is perplexed. Acts and words occur before her eyes, and she obviously understands nothing.

From the start, the battle with repression is missing, the neurotic compromise that certifies the existence of an "I." Above all, the transference onto the analyst is lacking. In its absence, what is said seems empty of any present content: timeless words directed at no one. The present, if it exists—and we are justified in doubting that it does—is the indefinitely reiterated account of day-to-day failures and the regret over having sunk so low. No accusations, no projection; everything is taken on almost too conscientiously. Boredom sets in, stagnation. . . .

If the analyst thinks for a moment that she should feel affected, that she is going to be involved in some repeated experience, in some affective recollection, she is greatly mistaken. Whatever she does know, she did not learn from associations, but by drawing her own conclusions. At this rate, she would have been better off becoming a detective. For, how on earth could a "boat ride" at age eleven, with an elder brother of seventeen, have caused an almost fatal illness for the patient the following day? There

4. [The order of the following case studies was altered for the purposes of this translation at Maria Torok's request; several other minor changes were also made as a result.—Ed.]

are complaints about his wife who, according to him, is jealous, shrewish, possessive, frustrating. Another question: if she is this way, how could he have stood her for so long? Yet, he seems to desire her intensely on occasion, his potency never letting him down. "When I see her in the bathroom in certain positions, I *cannot hold back*. Why doesn't she tolerate the least bit of interest on my part for anyone else, man or woman? She is jealous even of the reading I do. Does she expect me to succeed professionally? No sooner do I achieve something than she despises it. She wants me to be hers, totally and only hers. During intercourse she readily accepts all positions, except the one I want most."

Does Victor enjoy suffering? humiliation? Nothing in the analytic relationship leads one to believe this. Does he perhaps say all of this, after an oedipal fashion, to pacify his father? If this were the case, the analyst would have no reason to fret. And then there is the brother: "He was so mean and so stupid. When he got engaged, he gave me such a thrashing, I had to stay in bed for three days—which, by the way, kept me from taking part in the festivities."

The detective surfaces then. Was the patient possibly in love with his brother to the point of provoking him, out of frustration, at the moment he was being unfaithful? The analyst, however, is not supposed to have the faintest idea about anything. . . . Then, one fine day comes the account of one of the numerous car accidents Victor has had, an accident which almost cost the life of a young friend who was with him. "I only had a concussion, but after the coma I could no longer find my young friend. Dazed and confused, I sleepwalked from house to house in the village where I had been taken in, asking: 'Where is the little one? Where is little Viki?'" Finally! The detective can be dismissed. The analyst reassumes her function. With hindsight she finally hears, behind the dreary everyday of failures and regrets, the sounds of the love Victor attributes within himself to his brother Gilles. And he himself *is* this older brother, even in the coma. That much is now clear. Strange paradox of action. The elder one searches for the younger one. In real life was it not the reverse? Gilles, the elder, had "jilted" Viki, first to act macho, then to marry a woman. Gilles, once his guardian angel in school, his pride in front of everyone, this handsome fellow, virile and muscular; Gilles, the delight of their mother, who could be tough with their father; Gilles the pure, the ultimate, with a temper worthy of Jupiter. Yes, Victor *was* this ideal brother *in secret*; he was this brother while driving with his young friend; he continued to be him, even in the coma and the subsequent daze, as he desperately searched for his young friend after having regained consciousness. According to his fantasy, the little one lived on in the big one whom Victor has become, as remorse, as a lack.

But why the accident? This lack of attention on a deserted road? . . .

There lies the question mark of Victor's whole life. He *is* Gilles, sure enough, that much we now know, but he is Gilles in order to upset him and to defeat him all the time: that is what "Gilles," his lover, deserves for having rejected him.

Our understanding is at long last open. What appears now and later on is "*Gilles in love and contrite, remorseful* at not being able to stop loving and then at being unfaithful." Meanwhile, Victor deserts himself by taking up residence in a Xanthippe-like woman, his nagging and quarrelsome wife. She will say to "Gilles," the big brother, all that "Victor," the little one, has on his mind. As far as "Gilles" is concerned, "Gilles" his lover, Victor recoups him as well by *becoming* "Gilles" for "Victor." . . . Yet, it is a shaky solution. He contemplates divorce. But how could he go through with a divorce if, with his wife gone, he would have to give up Victor, whom she embodies? Day by day, he and she thus jointly defeat "*Gilles*" and his *ego ideal*—the recognized cause of their traumatic separation. Does he expect to get ahead in business? We are going to thwart him. He wants to look at women? He's going to have a hard time. Blocked in all acts of life, "Gilles" remains, "Gilles" will not leave. His wings clipped, he will not fly from the hiding place Victor has set up for him. One day the analyst announces: "Victor does not want Gilles to make it, to go out with women; he straps him down, he wants to keep him for himself." This moment marks a turning point. Recollections ensue, then the contours of transference.

Why did it take years to unmask "Gilles" in Victor's guise? For the simple reason that there is no cryptic identification that does not emanate from a crypt, an inclusion, or from an *unspeakable scene*. The scene took place, we learn bit by bit, during a boat ride. This ride recalls once more the image of an impassable wall: "I'll bash your head against the wall if you say a word," says the analyst. It is not yet Victor who recounts the scene but "Gilles," with reserve, embellishments, and omissions. In the boat, between his legs, leaning back on his penis, is little Victor. The day after his account there is no longer a serious illness, as there was after the event, but a dream. "He is disemboweling a chicken while pulling on its esophagus and windpipe [*trachée-artère*]. But the chicken won't relinquish life [*n'arrive pas à mourir*]. It becomes his little daughter. He wants desperately to take her life [*lui donner la mort*] so she will no longer suffer. No use." Yes, Gilles can "wind up" (ejaculate, windpipe) [*cracher par terre*, spit on the ground; *trachée-artère*, windpipe], but little Victor has to swallow (esophagus) his orgasm. His own penis is really only a "little girl" whose "life" (love) [*la mort: l'amour*] cannot yet be had. This was the situation when Victor's orgasm was taken abroad by Gilles—right up to the latter's return immediately preceding his marriage. Only at age sixteen and a half, after having received his brother's thrashing, did the

aggression of despair finally set off the process of puberty in Victor. Being unable to dislodge "Gilles" (whom he has become) from his twofold and incompatible position of being both his lover and his ego ideal, Victor spends his life attacking him by attacking himself, by thwarting him—in *his own* endeavors prescribed by their shared ego ideal. Similarly, the ostensible spitefulness he has felt against his wife for not wanting to perform *coitus a tergo* is in fact "Gilles's" belligerence. As for Victor, he can only gloat over it in his heart of hearts. "It serves him right, that betrayer, who used to love me so much and then left me." "Gilles" fantasizes about wild orgies, . . . but alas, they don't work out. "Fortunately," hoots little Victor up his sleeve.

We now understand that, were it not for the aggression directed at the elder brother, Victor would remain crestfallen in his identification with a fantasmic object, who is supposedly in mourning for him. The fact that this did not happen was due to a special situation. In Victor's case, another conflictual element is present in addition to his fantasmic identification with his elder brother; this element works as a neurosis would. His brother's ego ideal and his own are one and the same for Victor. It was precisely this ideal inherent in Gilles that once separated them, and which explains why every attempt to realize this shared ideal brings with it a large measure of aggressivity directed against the ideal. Hence the illusion, but only the illusion, of a masochistic or self-destructive neurosis. Hence also the relative ease of a pseudoanalytic dialogue. Indeed, there is obviously a conflict, but it is not where it first appears to be.

### The Afflicted Dead

The following case is quite different. No conflict is visible between the cryptophoric subject and the object of the crypt. The two of them are accomplices in secretly hating the outsiders who long ago separated them. Together they should live and die.

At the time of her suicide attempt, she had just given birth. It was a miracle that she could be saved. A few years spent in a sanatorium, then came a lengthy and unwieldy analysis. Themes of self-deprecation, worthlessness, void, internal rotting, refusal to get medical care; all of this alternated with periods of bravado, contempt, feelings of superiority filling the universe. A psychiatrist might describe her in this way. As for the analyst, being unable to understand, he too is reduced to much the same thing. Listening to her, he fixes on an enigma: when the little girl was still too young to go to school, her "irresponsible father" deserted the family for some obscure reason and was gone forever. Is he still alive? This question remains without an answer to this day.

The analysis begins in an atmosphere of elation. Here the patient

finds again the "warmth of the fire" that had fed her bygone dreams. "Someone is happy and full of hope." If only the analyst had heard it this way from the start! He would have been spared having to grope for several years, not fruitlessly to be sure, but yet running the risk of serious errors. "Someone is happy." Is it really the young woman or somebody else? Her father, perhaps. . . . This is how we would formulate the question today. Short of this, the analyst is disoriented. He looks for the transference, or at least for the role he is meant to play. To no avail. He does not yet suspect that it is possible to disguise under one's own traits a fantasy person endowed with entirely fictitious greatness and torments. No wonder than that afterward the analyst's words bounce off like peanuts thrown against a wall, without making the least difference. The dreams are monotonous: cuts, dislocations, scattered limbs. Are the ideas tormenting the patient ideas of castration? Or is she cut off from her father? Or castrated by her mother? Or filled with hatred of some people or the analyst? It might appear so. Still . . . nothing bodes. Whose are these *scattered limbs*? Does the patient have to recover a lost object in her own name, an object that might be projected onto the analyst, or one that the oedipal mother, for instance, might have taken away from her? . . . Very much the stuff of fairy tales with no other effect, all in all, than the benefit of a stable and secure relation. But then, whose are these *scattered limbs*? The turning point comes, illuminated by other cases, as soon as the hypothesis of mourning arises—a cryptic mourning, however, fantasized as the incessant affliction of *an other*. Retroactively, it is easier to clarify the meaning of the patient's attitudes, repeatedly alternating between depression and vigor. How in fact could she have transferred onto the analyst the feelings of a little girl looking for her father, when, in fact, she *lived entirely* on the concealed fantasy that she *was* herself her father, weeping over her, suffering because he is bereft of her; the father who, forever disconsolate, accuses himself of the worst of crimes, since he had to be subjected to the punishment of losing her; being her father who, taking on giant proportions and equipped with every guile, flies, in "manic" moments, to his beloved darling, being absolutely confident that nothing will stop him. In these exalted moments, she runs from dealer to dealer, trying to add a precious doll to her collection: her father thirsting after her is looking for her, is going to find her. Once she finds the "little specimen," her eagerness to acquire it knows no bounds and pushes her into nearly criminal acts. This must be the force of love.

In sum, she *was* her "father," but *without* giving any sign of it in her demeanor, which remained most feminine, or in her professional pursuits. Still, if the analyst had known about the mechanism of endocryptic identification, he would have understood it quickly. When quite small, the patient would daydream: "Someone was charged with child murder and I

realized finally that the defendant was myself." Was it not the lost father who, in the little girl's fantasies, endured the mother's accusations? The analyst's office is called funereal. To be understood: it is a lifeless abode for the beloved girl, long dead for her father's desire. One day, she walks past an "escalator" with her child (her father was seen near an escalator for the last time): a sudden impression that the child is going to be "devoured" by the machine. "I felt my arms fall crushed." This is what it was like for her father to lose *his* little lover. Yes, all these statements could have guided the analyst, had he not been sacrificing to prejudices such as that of the "I."

In endocryptic identification, the "I" is understood as the lost object's fantasied ego. On the couch, even more than in life, the "I" stages the words, gestures, and feelings—in short, the entire imaginary lot—of the lover who mourns for his forever "dead" object. As the patient recounts her experience of the escalator for the *n*th time (where her arms fell crushed), the analyst finally states that all the "fallen arms" and "scattered limbs" of her dreams and fantasies represent her father's inconsolable suffering: his arms are as if cut off, not having his little girl to carry.

From then on, the incorporated father becomes "decorated" onto the analyst, so to speak. Witness this dream: "A quack doctor cuts off one of his arms when he loses his daughter." "As a sign of mourning," says the analyst, the "quack."

This is the end of the endocryptic identification. As confirmation the young woman sketches a drawing hastily on the back of an album, a relic of her father. The drawing is entitled "Aida." Here, the characters of the drama find their places. Aida is the imprisoned daughter dying of starvation. A living corpse, she waits for her former lover to come and deliver her. This reworking of identities occurs inside the crypt still, but the edifice is swaying. Soon enough it will give way to a genuine recollection: "It's shameful, it's disgusting," shouts the neighbor in unison with the mother. "These women are tearing her father away from the child." No need to fill in the blank between the shame inflicted on the father and his subsequent disappearance. Henceforth the crypt is unlocked, the battle for the father approaches in the open. From this moment on, the infantile conflict reappears as it was before the loss, before the entombment.

### The Wolf Man's Secret

Recently we felt that it was necessary to violate with impious hands the hypothetical "grave" the Wolf Man carried within him. We did so in order to uncover—behind the utterable memory of the Wolf Man's seduction by his sister—the memory of an earlier, secret seduction to which his

sister herself must have been subjected by their father. To be sure, the Wolf Man was only vicariously a melancholic. His crypt did not in fact contain *his own* illegitimate object (as would be the case with a genuine "melancholic"), but someone else's: his father's daughter. The Wolf Man's wound does not seem to be—as Freud was inclined to think—the loss of his own object, the sister, but that he was unable to participate in the initial scene of seduction (which, we believe, was narrated and relived with him by his sister), and could not tell anyone about it, so as to legitimize it. The disappointment at not having been the one seduced by his father might make him resemble hysterics (in the Freudian sense) who are never quite seduced enough; the impossibility of exposing his disappointment without bringing down the whole world around him apparently forced him to transform his vindictive tendencies into an intrapsychic secret. Otherwise, he might have lost his other wish as well—the wish of supplanting his sister in the initial scene. The solution he later found to squaring this circle, as we established it, was—let us admit—quite ingenious.<sup>5</sup> With the ideas related to the account so marvelously illustrated by his sister, he managed to create a crypt in his ego. In the crypt, he also carefully preserved the words taken from the account, words which proved truly magical since they were good both for making statements and for producing pleasure. Thus preserved, the words were readily available. To use them, all he had to do was apply them innocently in a different sense and construct—by means of astute homonyms—quite another scene, not in the least resembling the encrypted one. This new scene, though altogether different, was no less effective in producing pleasure. One of the words seems to have been the Russian verb *teret*, first used to mean "to rub" (the penis is understood) and then applied, for the requirements of his case, in the altered sense of: "to polish," "to shine." The woman rubbing the penis became, in the new scene translated from the old one, a woman polishing the floor. Thus a fetishistic image was created from a fetish word whose initial meaning had been forgotten: shine-gleam-glisten.

### The Man of Milk and His Fetish

All of us analysts must have had a Wolf Man or other similar cases on the couch. Let us briefly draw on one from our practice. A middle-aged man

5. See N. Abraham and M. Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986; original French edition 1976), part 2, pp. 27–40. That chapter is a contribution to the psychoanalysis of dreams and phobia. It elaborates the secret content of the Wolf Man's "crypt" and the manner in which it returns in his famous nightmare. The chapter was originally a lecture given in Paris on 15 January 1974 to commemorate the centenary of Sandor Ferenczi's birth.

has had a lengthy analysis with a colleague: some improvement. Has feelings of inadequacy, not always justified. A persistent fear of impotence, mostly unfounded. Married, the father of a large family. He is consistent and effective in his professional life, but has difficulty playing his role in public and asserting himself in accordance with the demands of his position. What is "wrong" is "in the head" and sometimes "in the body."

Listening to him, one wonders how solid common sense can coexist with cranky fantasies devoid of any apparent link to a tension in his own psychic topography. The same is true of his sometimes fantastical feelings that are out of place and never fail to surprise him, though they have been habitual with him since childhood. A few themes recur over the years in the flood of enigmas he pours out while on the couch. It takes some time to understand that he speaks and lives someone else's words and affects. Whose? As will be established later, they are those of his encrypted father. It is now possible to grasp the theme of the cemetery, apparently visible to the analyst through the window, but not within view of the patient. For good reason, since the patient himself lives in this tomb. A lethargic beauty is waiting in a glass coffin, always expecting to be awakened by a magical kiss. Why is the patient dead, if indeed he is dead? Because he is a monster. "Here comes the monster," people say when he comes forward with a wish. But what kind of wish? Who will find out? He has a strange mytho-maniac theme: Once upon a time in South America he was a front-wheel drive champion [*traction avant*, literally: front-pull drive—*Trans.*]. He doesn't understand it. Is he mad to be so convinced of the truth of his own fantastic account? "Am I mad?" and then he says, "a goatherd, goatherds, milking, goat's milk." (*Traction* [pulling] refers to drawing milk [*traite: traction: pulling*] and goat's milk in French [*lait de chèvre*] refers homophonically to *leche*, the word for milk in South America, thinks the analyst.)

This confirmed a hypothesis the analyst had formulated several months earlier: the father's physical and mental demise and the older sister's psychosis have something to do with each other. This relationship is in *pulling the teat* [*traction sur le pis*]. "Punch, the puppet," the patient says, "I could never stand him. He jerks and jumps about. I especially hate the pasty paint smeared all over his head and that white stuff dripping down" (*leche . . .*). These must have been the words the sister had used in telling him about her "scandalous encounter" with their father's penis. Presumably, this took place on a South American farm during a family trip. A recurring dream: a game of billiards, one billiard ball hits another, the second one a third on the rebound. Yes, that is it precisely. He is hit on the rebound. And when he wants to play with himself, one name—*Letitia* [*lait, milk*—is enough: he falls in love with and marries a woman on whom he often performs cunnilingus (*leche* [*lécher: lick*]). The magic

word *leche* (i.e., sperm), the outcome of the "front-pull" on the penis, had led to a sexual practice which is apparently the opposite of its original model. Cunnilingus constitutes a dreamlike staging of the secret magic word *leche*.

The analyst only learned about this toward the end when he also learned about another key, the one explaining the way in which the endo-cryptic identification with the father became manifest. First, the patient subjected the analyst to lengthy and insidious testing. (Would the analyst be able to hear everything? Would he feel sympathy for the father who considered himself a monster? Could he listen without spurning the father, without condemning him to death, so as not to repeat what the father had done to himself?) The patient finally revealed that his father had gone nearly blind by refusing medical care and that, to end it all, he had slashed his wrists. Many things are clear now: for example, the patient's recurring experience of losing his sight in large areas of his visual field—manifestly not because of scotoma or negative hallucination, as one might have thought, but as a result of his identification with his father's blindness—precisely when coming to the analyst's office. . . . This was a case of the patient's empathetic identification with the fantasied remorse of his "guilty" father. It also caused the patient's truly unjustified panic at having scratched his wrists while doing odd jobs. The effect of the same empathy was that (unaccountably for himself and, for a long time, for the analyst) he experienced "affects" that were not his own. Now we understand that they were in fact his father's affects, his ruminations, his remorse, his fantasies, his desires—all imagined or surmised by the son. The patient's long walks led him invariably to the same spot. Once there, an internal dialogue, always the same, emerged in him: "Is there somebody here?"—"No, there's nobody. . . . We're alone." At a clearing, he had the impression of being a character in a fairy tale: *Sleeping Beauty*.

One day, anxious before entering the door to the analyst's office, he had the sudden impression that there was someone inside. This is the meaning of the fantasy he was acting out: *father* (the patient) *is going to see his daughter* (the analyst). A recollection came: the sister gone mad showed her clenched fist while her other hand moved up and down. The father could not stand it. Beside himself, he shook her. Shortly afterward, she was institutionalized. "What did your father feel then?" asked the analyst. Then, for the first time after a very long period of analysis, the patient burst out in tears. "My father must have been so awfully miserable," he said in his own name this time. Officially, he has revealed nothing, but he understands that his drama is known. The father could not stand his daughter's gesture, whose tragic and ironic meaning he alone was supposed to understand: she replayed the secret scene, clenching the father's penis in her hand while he caressed her. It is now clear why the

patient thinks his mother is so "cold." Yes, his father (who he believes himself to be) deserves a wife who behaves like an "ice statue" toward him. He brought another dream for confirmation. "A gang of shady characters [*toute une faune*]. There was going to be a brawl. I was stifling, I was stifling." Father is a goat [*faune*], but the scandal has to be stifled. If the scandal is stifled inside, shut up in a crypt, only the word of the desire returns with an altered meaning: the word thing, the sole survivor of a topographic catastrophe. A silent witness to the unspeakable *leche(r)*, lick—yes—and all can continue to live.

#### FETISH: THE SYMBOL OF WHAT CANNOT BE SYMBOLIZED

Many points of this type of analysis seem instructive with respect to certain received ideas. If, according to Freud, a fetish is to be understood as a penis attributed to the mother who in reality is devoid or deprived of it, then the meaning of this deprivation can be made more precise: *the lack of the penis is actually linked to the son's and the mother's parallel fate, since both of them are excluded from an illegitimate libidinal scene.* The "fetish" and its counterpart, "the mother's penis," are invented to compensate for the mother's lack of pleasure and the son's loss of his ideal, even though the topographical status quo is being maintained, so that the son should not have to renounce his own pleasure. In fact, were it necessary to accept "castration" (which we define as the lack of sexual pleasure due to an irreparable exclusion from the libidinal scene), lethal aggressiveness would be unleashed, pushing the young subject (now inseparable from the wronged mother) into revealing and thus annihilating the illegitimate scene, along with its participants. But by the same token, what has secretly become his own libidinal ideal, his own *raison de vivre*, would also be annihilated. How to find a way out of this impasse? Through the creation of an internal or *narcissistic* public, so to speak, for one's own "hysteria" (which varies according to age), a kind of self-to-self "hysteria." In this case, all that survives of the relationship to others is the dynamic repression, not of the desire for pleasure, but of the desire to speak out. Apart from this relational residue, everything can work in seclusion; for the fetish to be effective, there need be no witnesses, except to test its opacity. The analyst who "will never understand" has no other apparent function than to bring to the fore the constant temptation to speak out while permitting the cryptophore to verify, day in day out, that the crypt itself remains unscathed.

Let us return to the split in the ego that Freud finally posited in 1938 to provide an explanation for cases like the Wolf Man's. These belated

yet new findings need only one final complement in our view. The split manifests itself, according to Freud, in a "double tendency" which feeds the patient's words during analysis in such cases. There is a conformist tendency that lacks adequate affective charge and an enigmatic tendency that translates, in a cryptic manner, the identification with one of the participants in the scene. This second tendency—as we saw in our patient's case (the Man of Milk)—is entirely parallel to and independent of the first, and, when it eludes rationalization, is usually expressed in incomprehensible terms or in the description of "feelings" that are being experienced as inappropriate. We would speak of melancholia if this were the case of a fantasmic empathy with someone who is bereaved by the loss of the subject (i.e., his beloved). But, in our patient's case, the subject was simply a witness and excluded from the idyll. Since the idyll, now his libidinal ideal, was not his own to be exposed or put to use, the subject created a symbol, the alloeme of the *word* of his desire, made into a thing and dramatized: the fetish word, strictly speaking. What creates the symbol here is not related to prohibition, as in a neurosis, but to the intrinsic impossibility of having recourse to it. The impossibility itself bears no name and, therefore, becomes one with the word indicating the impossible desire. This is the structure of the symbol *leche*. As for *cunnilingus*, the fetishistic act, it is not symbolic in this case, but instead works as a veritable *symbol-cover*. The magic word (i.e., the genuine symbol), the subject's authentic and full creation, remains concealed by the fetish. The triple complement of such a hidden symbol (the desire to participate in the illegitimate scene, the desire of aggressive intrusion, and the desire to speak out) is not at all the latent counterpart of some manifest discourse, since this discourse is, in turn, concealed *behind* acts, dreams, and symptoms disguising the symbol which originates in a different world, a world that cannot be symbolized. The analyst's work is not to condone the concealment, but rather to draw forth the word of desire, to recognize it as a symbol precisely—as an exceptional work of crisis and for this reason the more valuable—as *the symbol of what cannot be symbolized.*

The splitting of the ego Freud noted thus gains in precision. The enigmatic trend issues from the crypt or the inclusion just like the magic word itself. As for the conformist trend, it results from the wish to conceal the symbol, the product of the crypt, and includes, however paradoxical this may seem, the description and the transformations of the fetishistic act as well as everyday trivialities.

Returning to the Wolf Man, we had no idea until later that he had been attracted, not only by the squatting position of the floor scrubber, but also, through some semantic contagion, by the sight of a "shining nose." For confirmation, it will suffice to read carefully Freud's essay *On Fetishism* (1927). It is easy to guess that with this "shine on the nose" the

Wolf Man is alluding to the word *teret* ("to rub," "to shine")—the very symbol of his interred desire. The ailments of this same nose—pimples, holes, blackheads—symbolize the desire to break into the scene, while the choice of the nose as their place (the nose betrays lies) tells of the desire to speak out. This is a good example of the covert and threefold purpose of the fetish-work, which was fated to remain obscure. Only after having been deciphered, understood, and appreciated can it restore to its creator his own "divine right"—hiding under enigmas, yet demanding the light of day.

#### VARIETIES OF ENDOCRYPTIC IDENTIFICATION

Both the Wolf Man and the Man of Milk created their crypts not because they knew of an illegitimate sexual scene, but to overcome a double impossibility: they could neither transform the scene into a disclosable ideal nor expose it for fear of destroying their libidinal ideal. This kind of contradiction is not characteristic of neurosis, as it were. An apparent renunciation replaces the betrayal of the libidinal ideal and any wishes for revenge. Preservative repression saves the consensus, while the fetish, a most ingenious conceit, reduces the danger of a "cosmic cataclysm" to a harmless oddity capable of reviving desire.

There is another form of crypt, the crypt of the blameless and guiltless object who left the subject after the idyll for a good reason, or as it were, in spite of himself. This object has been totally good, absolutely perfect, and no one should suspect its secret love. Rather than lead to an impossible mourning, the loss of such an object—*always regarded as innocent of desertion*—produces an endocryptic identification free of any aggression, at least as far as the partners themselves are concerned (if not the outside world). This is the crypt psychiatrists might call "melancholic."

Altogether different is the fate of those who personally benefited from an unutterable favor. Not being able to put their loss into words, or to communicate it to others and resign themselves through grief, they choose to deny everything—the loss as well as the love. There is no alternative but to deny everything, shut everything up in themselves, the pleasure and the suffering.

The variety of such cases is infinite. There are those who, at the time of the loss, suffered a disappointment in their object of love, in its sincerity or value. Their crypt is under double lock and, due to a tragic split, they desperately try to destroy what is dearest to them. These people are deprived of even the hope of ever being acknowledged.

In some cases, a trend of covert aggression, directed against the object, survives in the deserted partner alongside the endocryptic identification. This creates a useful arrangement for the purposes of analysis, because the presence of the patient's own aggression directed at the object—at first disguised in a "failure syndrome"—facilitates the opening of the crypt.

#### UNLOCKING THE CRYPT: BEFORE AND AFTER

We have sketched three very different cases of inclusion. In all three, we were disoriented by the unnoticed action of a covert identification that led to apparently unintelligible words and behavior—apparently unintelligible to psychoanalytic listening. Only after showing our receptiveness to this mode of being can the inclusion slowly give way to real mourning, namely introjection. Three successive movements can be distinguished in this lengthy process.

The first movement coincides with the onset of the analytic relationship. Without abandoning their endocryptic identification, the subjects secretly project the *child* partner of their crypt onto the analyst. *Secretly*, it is important to emphasize; in the manifest analytic relationship none of this must show. The partners' faithfulness to each other shows only in the regularity of the sessions and a certain degree of animation. This first segment is followed by a very long period of seeming stagnation, but it is in fact used surreptitiously by patients to study the listening capabilities of their analysts, i.e., their prejudices (and not their desire, as would be the case in objectal neuroses). During this whole phase, the patients' regular return to the couch has the same libidinal significance for them as the regularity of their physiological functions: breathing, bowel movements, menstruation. These are symbolic recurrences of the interred experience. The diseases affecting these functions (asthma, colitis, painful periods or their cessation, involution, etc.), if they communicate anything at all, *speak to the subject only and not to others* (as would be the case, for example, in conversion hysteria). The illness tells the subject: "The return is here, but it is an illness." This return is the mirror image of what happens on the couch—when coming to the sessions and speaking are considered as suffering or torture by the patient. By means of this translation into words, that is, through the expression of pain, the self-to-self affliction can enjoy a respite as soon as the analysis begins.

The second movement takes place when the secret projection of the child onto the analyst gives way to the equally secretive "decorporation" of the cryptic object. The impulse for this change may be quite contingent.

But, above all, it is the task of interpretation to lay open, at the right time, the endocryptic identification. The false "I" will then be reconverted into the third person, while patients are given to understand that it is possible to evoke the prodigal love of their objects without subjecting them to shame or losing them morally—the more so since the transgression itself implies an authentic and privileged encounter with the depths of the object's psyche that the patient will henceforth attempt to understand.

The great danger during this second phase is that, on opening the crypt, the object may be implicitly or explicitly condemned by the analyst; what is required instead is the capacity to mourn the object, that is, the capacity to acquire for oneself the libidinal resources the object had hitherto retained. Saying in this context, "You want to *seduce* me," or "You're making a *seducer* out of me," or "It's time to forget all that" does not feel like a trivial comment to patients, but like an irreversible verdict, capable of upsetting everything. If, on the contrary, rather than shaming the object, the narcissistic value (for *both* partners) of the entombed experience is acknowledged—with the crypt unlocked, its treasure laid out in the open and recognized as the unalienable property of the subject—the third and last movement will be set in motion, by way of a new impetus, with the task of overtly undertaking the final battle with the oedipal party—the last hurdle on the way to fructifying the interred treasure.

At the close of this all too rapid overview of some effects of inclusion and of endocryptic identification in particular, let us express the hope that these concepts will lighten the very difficult task of listening to some patients. We also hope that we have increased their chances of being heard and that the treasures which lie buried in crypts will become the delight of their owner and can be made to work to the benefit of us all.

## SEVEN

## The Topography of Reality: Sketching a Metapsychology of Secrets

*N. Abraham and M. Torok, 1971*

In these remarks we have chosen to put aside the various meanings of the term "reality," whether they are derived from law, philosophy, or even the sciences. All these meanings, taken independently, would in fact be foreign to our own science, psychoanalysis. Yet, the notion of reality is one we encounter daily in our practice, albeit in a disguised, even unrecognizable form. For us, as analysts, it is this very masking and denial which, more than anything else, attests to the presence of that which has the status of reality for our patients—a reality, needless to say, to be avoided. In consequence, we analysts can speak of "reality" only insofar as the patient's very refusal of it designates it as such. *In this sense and in this sense only can "reality" claim to become a metapsychological concept.* Reality can then be defined as what is rejected, masked, denied precisely as "reality"; it is that which *is*, all the more so since it must not be known; in short, Reality is defined as a *secret*. The metapsychological concept of Reality refers to the place, in the psychic apparatus, where the secret is buried.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, the opposition between apparent and hidden, manifest and latent desire and its disguises, has been a major theme of psychoanalysis since its inception. This type of opposition does not, however, necessarily lead to the idea of a secret or of a "reality" intended to be secret.

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1. When considered as a metapsychological concept, the word "reality" needs to be capitalized, especially since all other forms of reality presuppose and derive from it. The metapsychological Reality of the secret is a counterpart to the reality of the outside world; the negation of the one entails the refusal of the other.