

THE SON AS THE OBJECT *a* OF THE FATHER

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If a man, rather than being valued by his father, has been rejected, and has raised the relation of father's 'beloved son' to the rank of an ideal that he attempts to produce his whole life long, then this shows us, by virtue of its very absence, the importance in the structure of the child's place as precious object, the object *a* of the father. This place is highlighted in certain tragedies, for instance, in Euripedes' *Medea*, in which her children, her two sons, are sacrificed because they are objects *a* for their father Jason. ('This is the way to deal Jason the deepest wound'¹, she says). Medea has indeed understood how for a man there is a knotting of a symbolic dimension, that of the transmission of his name, of his inheritance, to his descendants, even if they are adopted, and a libidinal dimension, that of paternal affection and love. In this intertwining resides the mystery of the relation of father to son, a mystery² exacerbated because it is at the heart of this bond that takes place the operation of castration, an operation of language³ whose agent is the real father.

The case of Mr. T.⁴ evokes by its absence the child's place as a precious object of the father. This place is all the more real in his case, in that for him it is inscribed as a 'there is not', which indicates the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father. The dimension of succession, entwined with that of castration,⁵ does not exist between his father and himself. His essential means of compensating for this 'There is not...' is to reconstitute this bond ideally.

His story can be described as a set of four terms: the child-martyr and the favourite child; the just person and injustice. The first two terms are included in a repetition that affects three generations and founds a world governed by injustice.

THREE GENERATIONS

I shall begin with this repetition.

Phase one: Mr. T.'s maternal grandmother had an illegitimate daughter whom she had her husband legally recognise. She then had a second daughter with her husband, that is, a legitimate child, Mr. T.'s mother. She always, however, preferred the love-child to her second daughter, who was submissive to her all her life and who was never able to detach herself from her. Mr. T.'s mother was thus her mother's scapegoat.

Phase two: Mr. T.'s mother, unloved and the object of her mother's injustice, herself repeated this pattern. Stuck to her mother, she was unable to give her up, even for her marriage. When Mr. T. was eighteen months old, her husband left her, pregnant with a second son who was to be her favourite. The latter died at a very early age, but this little brother became Mr. T.'s ego-ideal (*i(a)*), the 'favourite child', while he himself occupied the place of the 'child-martyr' in the real for his mother and maternal grandmother, but also, as we shall see, on the occasion of his only encounter with his father. The 'child-martyr' is the syntagm in which we can situate the subject as object *a*, incarnating, in the real, the object of the bad *jouissance* of the Other.

Phase three: Mr. T. had two sons: the first, Marc, by adoption, and in whose case recognition was as mutual as it was spontaneous. He was the son of the woman Mr. T. was to marry eighteen months after the death of his mother, and whom he brought up for eighteen months (the fixed repetition of these eighteen months, his age when his father abandoned him, makes it a sort of figure of his destiny). Marc was in the place of the 'favourite son'. Regarding his paternity of his second son, Thomas, whom he officially recognised three months after his birth, Mr. T. still had doubts eight years later. It seems that he then had a vasectomy. When we saw him in the hospital, he claimed that he was being persecuted by Thomas and his mother, to the point of not being able to see his son alone. We thus, once again, in Mr. T.'s generation, have the antagonistic couple of the chosen, favourite son and the abandoned child, or martyr, who is not symbolically recognised.

Let us now look at how these four terms are distributed throughout his life, up till the age of sixty when we met him in hospital. Their function will then become apparent.

THE CHILD-MARTYR AND HYPOCHONDRIA

Until he joined the army, which separated him from his mother, at the age of twenty, Mr. T. was in the place of the child-martyr. He was his mother's scapegoat, just as the latter had been that of her own mother. His maternal grandmother, 'instigator of the abomination', used to beat him with a stick. Mr. T. considers her, his first persecutor, to have been responsible for his parents' separation and for the injustice of which he was the victim in his childhood. But his place as 'child-martyr' was branded on his very flesh on his sole encounter with his father at the age of five, just after the death of his little brother. His father, who had not come to the child's funeral, took him back with him and locked him in the pigsty. When he went home to his grandmother, he was terrified and had only time to say: 'I was sca-sca-sca-scar-pig-pig', meaning 'I was scared of the pigs', before there fell, in a flash, like a mask upon his face, an impetigo that ate away at it for the next three years. In 1943 there were no antibiotics, and he was treated, burnt in fact, daily, with 90° alcohol. He was put into quarantine, his head shaved and bandaged, with no eyelashes or eyebrows, abandoned by everyone without a word. After the war a doctor successfully treated him. From his explanation of how he caught his illness we can see that this episode⁶ has the value of an elementary phenomenon: it is instantaneous, intrinsically entwined with language, contained in a statement and linked to the initiative of a ferocious Other. We do not know what part delusion plays in his description of this impetigo placed like a mask on his face. But we do know that he had to stop working because of his hypochondria, and that the latter began very early on in his life, linked to maternal persecution: he had migraines, strange pains in his body, his arteries got blocked, his penis was too small... 'I always thought there was something abnormal about my body', he says.

This episode of the impetigo is thus the culmination of his identification with the 'child-martyr', a real identification supporting the *jouissance* of the Other, poles apart from the *agalma* or precious object the child represents for his father as the result of an entwining between the Name-of-the-Father and paternal love, that we evoked earlier.

THE FAVOURITE SON

This idealised figure originated in Mr. T.'s little brother who died and was adored by his mother. The favourite son was already present in the preceding generation (his

maternal aunt). The mode of compensation for the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father favoured by this paranoid subject is the establishment of a father-son love relation, such as he himself never knew, and in which he takes the place of the 'beloved son'. On one occasion, as we shall see, he takes that of the father, as opposed to the son, in a mirror-relation. The best years of his life, in which hypochondria and 'acute' paranoia remain in the background, are filled with this relation that centres his life. In the army, for instance, with the lieutenant colonel; or at work, as the director's secretary. In his opinion, he was 'like a son'. 'I was loved', he says, which evokes a discrete erotomania that never, however, took on a sexual or abusive tone. This bond is, for him, a stabilizing one. Now at the age of sixty, his psychosis having got worse over the years, Mr. T. hopes to reestablish a similar relation with an innkeeper from the 'Allier department', an evocative name if ever there was! (In French it evokes being allied with someone).

He encountered this figure of the 'favourite son' once again, after his little brother, in the person of Marc, his wife's son. 'The child had tragically lost his father at the age of three. He called me Daddy straightaway. We formed a whole,... we immediately hit it off', says Mr. T. The child was apparently the cause of Mr. T. and his mother's marriage, and on their separation, it was from him that Mr. T. was unable to tear himself away: '...an emptiness in me... I no longer heard the word Daddy at my side'. This emptiness was intense enough for him to have to be sent straight to hospital, which was his first hospitalization. Two years later, he was made redundant, lost his place as 'favourite son' of the boss and was in a very bad way: he went to hospital six times in fifteen years and his hypochondria got worse over the years. His experience of paternity only exacerbated the latter (he had to stop working), and triggered a delusion about paternity still present today.

THE JUST PERSON AND INJUSTICE

Mr. T. has always felt he is 'a just person' in a world of injustice. But in 1995, suffering from hypochondria and with a delusion about his son Thomas, he attended a court trial for a 'child-martyr'. This led to the idea of a mission consisting of avenging child-martyrs. From then on, convinced of his right and duty to help justice, he began to denounce his *alter-egos* during his visits to the psychiatric clinic where he was being treated for his bodily afflictions. He ended up denouncing a neighbour working on the black market, and when the police came to ask him to sign his complaint, he lost his head. He felt insulted, unjustly accused, imagined this was a plot against him by his son's mother who was his persecutor at the time. He saw a flash, heard a voice, 'this will be the end', and seriously attempted to commit suicide.

DISCONTINUITY AND TRIGGERING

During the presentation, it was not possible to determine the moment of triggering with certainty. We might have been tempted, considering his delusion about paternity, to situate it at the birth of his son, Thomas, but was he not already delusional at the time of his divorce with Marc's mother, whom he accused of sexual anomalies and excesses, and which sent him to hospital the first time? And after all, could his psychosis not have been 'triggered' at the age of five, on his encounter with his father which was followed by the impetigo and a probably delusional period?

What is sure is that there were four main discontinuities in his life:

- 1) His encounter with his father, characterized by the elementary phenomenon, that

is, the impetigo, and the materialization of the 'child-martyr'.

2) His entering the army and the separation from his mother which prompted a long period in which he was the 'favourite child' of a man.

3) His marriage and encounter with his own 'favourite child'.

4) His divorce and losing his job, which marked the beginning of a difficult, unclear period in which his condition got worse and he committed several *passages à l'acte*.

These discontinuities are not only historical events. They correspond to ruptures in the arrangement of the four terms⁷ that define the subject's structure, that is: the 'child-martyr' (the object *a*); the 'favourite child' (*i(a)*); the 'just person' (*I*, the signifier of the ideal ego) and the 'injustice in the world' (Φ_0 , the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father, the absence of law in the world). Each arrangement implies a symptomatic, more or less stable way of interconnecting the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary.

SYMPTOMATIC KNOTS

There are thus four periods:

1) **Martyrdom** (from the age of five to twenty), centred on the relation of 'being the "child-martyr" of the Other' (the mother, the father, the grandmother), accompanied by elementary phenomena, persecution and hypochondria.

2) **Father-son love** (from the age of twenty to forty-four), centred on the relation of 'being the favourite son of a father' (the colonel, the director, his boss), also inscribed in a mirror relation with Marc, his adopted son.

3) **Hypochondria and delusion** (from forty-four to fifty-six). This is a disturbed period in which he was often in hospital, had a delusion about paternity and his hypochondria got worse. It is a period in which the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic were not entwined in a way that held for him.

4) **Denunciation**, for the last two years. This position, which depends on the Ideal of the 'just person', is centred on a relation to an Other that is not singular but global, social: 'being the just person who fights the injustice done to the child-martyr'. It leads him to commit dangerous *passages à l'acte*.

THREE POINTS

I would finally like to make three points:

1) The interview highlights what is a fixed point in each register. In the register of the Real, the thread running through his life is his real identification with the 'child-martyr' (the object *a*). The fact that there was a sort of naming by the father at the age of five is clearly of no small importance. In the register of the Symbolic, the fixed point is the ideal of the just person supported by the constant paranoid conviction of attaining this ideal. In the register of the Imaginary, it is his hypochondria that "awards"⁸ him a body that is painful but nonetheless exists.

2) Symptomatic knots are not all equivalent. His best find, which stabilised him and

made him happy, was that of father-son love. It was his own personal invention to situate this ideal couple in the place where, due to the abandonment by the father and the foreclosing rejection of the son, there did not, for him, occur the strong, symbolic and libidinal relation binding father to son that we talked about earlier. We can write this *sinthome*⁹ that he establishes in the place of the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father, as an 'open sentence'¹⁰: a son (x) is loved by a father (y). The subject is either in x or in y for twenty-four years, different people taking the place of the other variable in the couple. When this sentence is not yet or no longer written, it is the 'child-martyr' that takes over the subject.

3) This gives us an idea of what the role of transference can be in the treatment of a paranoiac. It can stabilise the subject in a relation in which love keeps *jouissance* at bay. The subject makes himself the object of a discrete, non-sexual, erotomania on the analyst's part, which, in practice, can be difficult to handle.

ENDNOTES:

¹ EURIPEDES, *Medea and other plays*, London, Penguin Classics, 1963, p. 42.

² In *Seminar XI*, J. Lacan stressed the mystery of the relation of father to son in his commentary of a dream related by Freud in his *Interpretation of Dreams*: "Father, can you not see that I am burning?"

³ LACAN, J., *Le Séminaire, Livre XVII, L'envers de la psychanalyse (1969-1970)*, Paris, Seuil, 1991, p. 149.

⁴ I refer to a case presentation that took place at the USNB, in the ward of Pr. Goudemand, at the request of Dr. E. Fleury. I would like to thank Carine Decool for her detailed notes that were of great help to me.

⁵ LACAN, J., *Le séminaire, Livre XVII, L'envers de la psychanalyse*, op. cit., p. 141.

⁶ Not the impetigo itself, of course, but the way he relates its occurrence.

⁷ LACAN J., "Kant avec Sade" (1963), *Écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1966, p. 774, J. A. Miller gave a commentary of this passage in his DEA seminar.

⁸ An expression used by J. Lacan in "Radiophonie", *Scilicet* n° 2/3, Paris, Seuil, 1970.

⁹ A concept invented by J. Lacan in his seminar *Joyce le sinthome (1975-1976)*, that refers to a symptomatic way of keeping psychosis at bay.

¹⁰ Russel's propositional function, invented by Frege in 1879.