



PREAMBLE IV

Typical symptoms, singular meaning

In *Poetry and Truth*, Goethe recounts his earliest memory: he had opened the window of his room and was throwing out, piece by piece, tableware that his parents had recently purchased. In his analysis, Freud compares this behavior to similar behaviours observed in his own patients. After verifying the dates, he concludes that this incident corresponds to the arrival of a newborn in the family. This is an example of a symptom with a generalisable meaning.

When discussing Dora's enuresis, Lacan states that it is "the stigma... of the imaginary substitution of the child for the father... as impotent.¹" In doing so, he generalises the meaning of this fairly common symptom.

These are two examples of interpretative standards that we must set aside when a subject comes to see us.

A woman separated from her husband leaves the best parts and eats only the edges of a slice of roast. This compulsion first manifests itself on the day she tells her husband that she will no longer engage in marital relations with him—that is, the day she renounces what is "best."² Here, it is not a matter of an interpretative standard but of a meaning particular to this patient. However, in the same text, Freud shows that obsessional neurosis can be read as a private religion. In making this statement, he once again moves from the singularity of the case to the universality of the structure.

Similarly, for any obsessional individual, we could say that he is like La Fontaine's frog, trying to grow as big as the ox, at the risk of bursting, so consumed is he by the gaze of the other³. Likewise, one could say of the hysteric that "identification... pertains to desire... to lack taken as an object, not to the cause of the lack."⁴

¹ Lacan J., Seminar XVII, *The other side of psychoanalysis*, 2007, p.96.

² Freud S., (1907). Obsessive actions and religious practices, Standard Edition Vol IX, p.120

³ Lacan J., Seminar XXIII, *The Sinthome*, 2016, p.9.

⁴ Lacan J., Introduction à l'édition allemande d'un premier volume des *Ecrits* » in *Autres Ecrits*, Seuil, Paris, p. 557.

These are Lacan's clinical indications on generalisable elements of the hysterical or obsessive structure.

Thus, the question arises regarding the articulation of these three facets of the meaning of the symptom: the generalisable meaning of certain typical symptoms, which may not necessarily belong to the same structure; the symptomatic elements that are specific to one structure or another, as we elaborate them in our clinical practice; and finally, the singular meaning, which can only be deciphered within the analytic discourse itself.

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