

Fetishism

Over the last few years I have had the opportunity to study analytically a number of men whose object choices were governed by a fetish. We need not suppose it was because of their fetish that these people came for analysis, for while its devotees recognize it as an abnormality, they rarely feel it to be the symptom of an illness; on the whole, they are perfectly happy with the fetish, and even extol the way it simplifies their love life. As a rule, then, their fetish came to light only incidentally during analysis.

The details of these cases cannot be published for obvious reasons. Nor, therefore, can I demonstrate the role played by accidental circumstances in the choice of fetish. The most remarkable case in this respect was one in which a young man had elevated a certain 'shine on the nose' into a fetishistic prerequisite. The surprising explanation for this was that the child had been brought up in England but had then come to Germany, where he almost completely forgot his native language. The fetish, which stemmed from earliest infancy, needed to be read not in German, but in English; the 'shine [*Glanz*] on the nose' was actually a 'glance at the nose', so the fetish was the nose - which, incidentally, he could endow at will with this particular sheen, invisible to others.

What analysis revealed about the meaning and purpose of these fetishes was the same in every case. It emerged so spontaneously and seemed to me so compelling that I am prepared to anticipate the same general solution for all cases of fetishism. If I now state that a fetish is a penis substitute, this will no doubt come as a disappointment. I hasten to add, then, that it is a substitute not just for any penis, but for a specific and very special one, one which is of

great significance in early infancy but which is subsequently lost. That is to say, it should normally be renounced, but it is precisely the purpose of a fetish to prevent this loss from occurring. To put it more plainly, a fetish is a substitute for the woman's (mother's) phallus, which the little boy once believed in and which - for reasons well known to us - he does not want to give up.¹

What has happened, then, is this: the boy has refused to acknowledge the fact that he has perceived that women have no penis. No, this cannot be true, because if women have been castrated, then his own penis is in danger, and the piece of narcissism, with which nature providently equips this very organ, recoils at the thought. In later life, an adult might experience a similar panic on hearing the cry that king and country are in peril, and it will have similarly illogical consequences. If I am not mistaken, Laforque would say in this case that the boy 'scotomizes' his perception that women have no penis.² A new term is justified if it describes or highlights a new fact, but this is not the case here; the oldest piece of psycho-analytical terminology, the term 'repression', already refers to this pathological process. If, within this process, we wished to distinguish the fate of the idea more sharply from that of the emotion, and to reserve the term 'repression' for the emotion, then the correct term for the fate of the idea would be 'denial'. 'Scotomization' seems to me particularly unsuitable because it implies that the perception has been completely erased, with the same effect as if the visual impression had fallen on the retina's blind spot. On the contrary, though, our case reveals that the perception remains and a very energetic action has been undertaken to maintain the denial. It is not true that the child's belief in the female phallus remains unchanged after he has observed a woman. He both retains this belief and renounces it, in the conflict between the force of the unwelcome perception and the intensity of his aversion to it, a compromise is reached such as is possible only under the laws of unconscious thought, the primary processes. In his psyche, yes, the woman still has a penis, but this penis is no longer the same thing as before. Something else has taken its place, has been appointed its successor, so to speak, and this now inherits all the interest

previously devoted to its predecessor. But because the horror of castration has been immortalized in the creation of this substitute, this interest also becomes intensified to an extraordinary degree. The repression that has taken place leaves behind a further *stigma indelebile* in the form of an aversion towards real female genitals, common to all fetishists. Now we have an overview of what the fetish achieves and how it is maintained. It remains a mark of triumph over the threat of castration and a safeguard against it; it also spares the fetishist from becoming homosexual, in that it endows women with a characteristic making them acceptable as sexual objects. In later life, the fetishist believes his genital substitute offers yet another advantage. Other people are unaware of its significance and so do not withhold it from him; the fetish is easily accessible and the sexual satisfaction it provides is readily available. What other men have to pursue and strive for presents no such problems for the fetishist.

Probably no male is spared the horror of castration at the sight of female genitals. Admittedly, we cannot explain why some men become homosexual as a result of this experience, others ward it off by creating a fetish, while the vast majority overcome it. It could be that, of all the various contributory factors, we do not know yet which ones determine the less common pathological outcomes; we shall just have to content ourselves with being able to explain what has happened, without, for the time being, worrying about explaining why something has not.

It seems reasonable to expect that the organs and objects chosen as substitutes for the missing female phallus will be those already used to symbolize the penis. This may well be the case often enough, but it certainly is not the decisive factor. The process involved when a fetish first becomes established seems reminiscent, rather, of the way memories are blocked out in traumatic amnesia. Here, too, the patient's interest stops in its tracks, so to speak, if indeed it is the last impression prior to the uncanny, traumatic one that becomes fixed as the fetish. Thus feet or shoes owe their prominence as fetishes, at least in part, to the fact that the curious boy looked at women's genitals from below, from the legs up; fur and velvet are

— as we have long suspected — fixations on the sight of pubic hair, which should have been followed by the longed-for sight of the female member; pieces of underwear, so commonly adopted as fetishes, capture the moment of undressing, the last point at which the woman could still be regarded as phallic. But I do not wish to claim we know for certain how fetishes are determined in every case. I do, however, strongly recommend the study of fetishism to anyone who still doubts the existence of the castration complex, or anyone who can believe that dread of the female genitals has some other cause and derives from, say, a supposed memory of the trauma of birth. For me, however, the elucidation of fetishes held a further theoretical interest.

Recently I arrived, by pure speculation, at the formula that the essential difference between neurosis and psychosis was that in neurosis the ego, at the behest of reality, suppresses a piece of the id, whereas in psychosis it is impelled by the id to detach itself from a piece of reality; later I returned to this theme once again. Soon afterwards, though, I had cause to regret having been so presumptuous. The analysis of two young men showed me that each of them, at the ages of two and ten respectively, had failed to acknowledge — 'scotomized' — the death of a beloved father, and yet neither had developed a psychosis. Here, then, a patently significant piece of reality had been denied by the ego, just as the fetishist denies the unwelcome fact of female castration. I also began to suspect that analogous occurrences are by no means uncommon in infancy, and I took this to be proof that my characterization of neurosis and psychosis was wrong. Of course, one possible way out remained open; my formula would just need to have been restricted to a more advanced level of differentiation in the psychic apparatus — the child was free to do something which, in an adult, would lead to serious harm. Further investigation, however, led to a different resolution of the contradiction.

As it turned out, the two young men had no more 'scotomized' their father's death than fetishists do female castration. Only one current in their psyche had failed to acknowledge the father's death; there was another that took full account of this fact. The

wishful attitude and the realistic attitude existed side by side. In one of the cases, this split formed the basis of a moderately severe compulsion neurosis, in every situation in his life he would waver between two assumptions – one that his father was still alive and was holding him back from doing what he wanted, and the opposite one, that he had the right to consider himself his dead father's successor. Thus I can persist with my expectation that had this been a case of psychosis, one of these two currents – the realistic one – would actually be missing.

To return to my description of fetishism, let me say there are many further substantial pieces of evidence for the fetishist's dual attitude towards the issue of female castration. In particularly ingenious cases both the denial and affirmation of castration are incorporated within the structure of the fetish itself. This was the case with a man whose fetish consisted of a modesty girdle of the kind that can also be worn as a swimming costume. This piece of clothing completely concealed the genitals and the difference between them. According to analysis, it signified both that women were castrated and that they were not, and, furthermore, it allowed for the assumption of male castration, because all these possibilities could equally well be hidden beneath the girdle, the first incarnation of which, in infancy, had been a fig-leaf on a statue. A fetish such as this, doubly determined by an antithesis, naturally proves particularly resilient. In other cases the duality manifests itself in what the fetishist does with the fetish, either actually or in fantasy. To emphasize only that he worships the fetish does not tell the whole story; in many cases his treatment of it clearly amounts to an enactment of castration. Here, if he has developed a strong father-identification, he tends to adopt the role of the father, because it was to him that the child ascribed the act of castrating women. Affection and hostility towards the fetish, corresponding to the denial and acknowledgement of castration, combine in unequal proportions in each different case, so that one or the other is more clearly discernible. In this light, perhaps we can understand, albeit from a distance, the behaviour of men who like to cut off women's plaits and ponytails, where the need to act out the denied castration has

pushed its way to the fore. This action fuses together the two incompatible beliefs – that women still have a penis, and that women have been castrated by the father. Another variant of – and ethnopsychological parallel to – fetishism may be seen in the Chinese custom of deforming women's feet and then revering the deformed foot as a fetish. It would seem Chinese men wish to show their gratitude towards women for having submitted to castration.

We can conclude by stating that the normal prototype of a fetish is the man's penis, just as the prototype of an inferior organ is the woman's actual little penis, the clitoris.

(1927)

Notes

1. This interpretation was published, without substantiation, as early as 1910 in my study *A Childhood Memory of Leonardo da Vinci*.
2. Let me correct myself, however, by adding that I have very good reason to believe Laforgue would say no such thing. We know from his own account that 'scotomization' is a term derived from the description of dementia praecox, not from any attempt to transfer psychoanalytical concepts to the psychoses, and that it is not applicable to processes of development or neurosis formation. He is very careful in his written account to make this incompatibility clear.
3. 'Neurosis and Psychosis' (1924) and 'The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis' (1924).

Negation

The manner in which our patients present their associations during analytical work gives us occasion for some interesting observations. 'Now you'll think I want to insult you, but I really don't mean to.' This, we realize, is a thought being rejected as it emerges, by means of projection. Or: 'You ask who this person in my dream can be. It's *not* my mother.' This we amend: 'So it is your mother.' In our interpretations we take the liberty of disregarding the negation and seizing on the pure content of the thought. It is as if the patient had said: 'My first thought was, it's my mother; but I have no desire to admit this.'

Occasionally we can get sought-after information about unconscious repressed material by a very easy method. We ask: 'So what would you say is absolutely least likely in this situation?' What do you think was furthest from your mind at that point? If the patient walks into the trap and tells us what he would find most incredible, he almost always gives the truth away. Compulsion neurotics who have already been initiated into an understanding of their symptoms often provide a nice counterpart to this experiment. They say: 'I've got a new compulsive idea. My immediate thought was, it could mean such and such. But no, surely that can't be true — otherwise I couldn't have had that thought.' The interpretation of the new compulsive idea that they reject with this argument picked up from the treatment is, of course, the correct one.

The content of a repressed idea or thought can get through to consciousness, then, on condition that it is *negated*. Negation is a way of acknowledging the repressed, indeed it amounts to a lifting of the repression, although not, of course, an acceptance of

what is repressed. Here we see how an intellectual function differs from an emotional process. Only one of the consequences of the process of repression — that of the ideational content not being allowed into consciousness — is undone with the help of negation. The result is a kind of intellectual recognition of the repressed while the essential element of the repression remains in place.¹ During analytical work, we often produce a further very important and somewhat strange variant of this situation. We manage to overcome even the negation and bring about a full intellectual acknowledgement of the repressed — but still without lifting the repression itself.

Since it is the task of the intellectual function of judgement to affirm or negate the contents of thoughts, these remarks have led us to the psychological source of this function. 'To negate something in judgement is basically to say: "This is something I'd rather repress." Disapproval is the intellectual substitute for repression — its 'no' is a hallmark of repression, a kind of certificate of origin like 'Made in Germany'. By means of this symbol of negation, thought frees itself from the restrictions imposed by repression and appropriates material without which it could not perform its function.

Essentially, it is the function of judgement to make two kinds of decision. It has to decide whether or not a thing possesses a certain property, and whether or not an imagined thing exists in reality. The property to be decided on might originally have been good or bad, useful or harmful, or, expressed in the language of the most archaic, oral drive impulses: 'I want to eat this, or spit this out.' In more general terms: 'I want to take this into me, or keep it out of me,' that is: 'I want it inside me, or outside me.' As I have explained elsewhere, the primal pleasure-ego wants to introduce into itself everything good and expel from itself everything bad. That which is bad, that which is alien to the ego, that which is outside, are initially identical as far as it is concerned.²

The other kind of decision that it is the function of judgement to make — whether or not an imagined thing exists in reality (reality-testing) — is a matter for the reality-ego, into which the primal

pleasure-ego ultimately evolves. Now the question is no longer whether what is perceived (a thing) should be taken into the ego, as a or not, but whether something already present in the ego, as a mental image, can also be rediscovered in perception (reality). We see that, once again, it is a question of *inside* and *outside*. That which is non-real, merely imagined, subjective, exists only on the *inside*; other things, real things, are also there on the *outside*. In this development, adherence to the pleasure principle has been set aside. Experience has taught that what matters is not only whether a thing (an object of satisfaction) possesses the property of 'goodness', and so merits being taken into the ego, but also whether it is actually there in the outside world, and so can be appropriated whenever the need arises. To understand this development, we have to remember that all mental images stem from – are reproductions of – perceptions. Originally, then, the mere existence of the idea of a thing is a guarantee that the thing actually exists. The opposition between subjective and objective does not exist from the start. It comes about only because thought has the capacity to bring back something once perceived by reproducing it as a mental image, with no need for the external object still to be present. The first and immediate aim of reality-testing, then, is not to discover, in real perception, an object corresponding to the mental image, but to *rediscover* it, to ascertain that it still exists. Another feature of the faculty of thought leads to a further widening of the gap between the subjective and the objective. The reproduction of a perception as a mental image is not always a faithful copy; it can be modified by omissions or by the fusion of various elements. Here the job of reality-testing is to assess the extent of these distortions. Clearly, though, what led to the actual inception of reality-testing was the loss of objects that had once brought real satisfaction.

Judging is the intellectual action which determines the choice of motor action, puts an end to pausing for thought, and leads the way from thought to action. I have discussed pausing for thought elsewhere, too. It should be regarded as a trial run of an action, a 'feeling out' involving a low expenditure of motor discharge. Now let us think: Where has the ego previously employed this kind of

feeling out? Where did it learn the technique it now applies in thought processes? It was at the sensory end of the psychic apparatus, in connection with sense perceptions. Perception, according to our hypothesis, is not an entirely passive process, rather the ego periodically invests small amounts of energy in the perceptual system by means of which it samples the external stimuli, withdrawing again after each such exploratory advance.

Studying the phenomenon of judgement gives us perhaps our first insight into the way an intellectual function evolves from the play of primary drive impulses. Judging something is an expedient progression from the primal act, governed by the pleasure principle, of incorporating it into or expelling it from the ego. Its polarity seems to correspond to the opposition we have posited between two basic groups of drives. Affirmation – as a substitute for unification – belongs to Eros; negation – the successor to expulsion – belongs to the destruction-drive. A general desire for negation, the negativism of some psychotics, can probably be regarded as indicating a drive disintegration caused by withdrawal of the libidinal components. But judgement is able to perform its function at all only because the creation of the symbol of negation provides thought with its first measure of independence from the effects of repression and so from the constraints of the pleasure principle.

Fully consonant with this view of negation is the fact that during analysis we never find a 'no' in the unconscious, and recognition of the unconscious by the ego is always expressed in negative formulations. There is no stronger evidence that the unconscious has successfully been uncovered than when the patient reacts with the words: 'That's not what I was thinking,' or 'I wasn't thinking (have never thought) any such thing.'

(1925)

Notes

1. This process is also the basis of the well-known phenomenon of 'tempting fate'. 'How nice that I haven't had one of my migraines for so long!'

This, however, is the first sign of an attack, which we have already sensed approaching, but without wanting to believe it yet.
2. Cf. my comments in 'Drives and Their Fates'.

Note on the 'Magic Notepad'

If I mistrust my memory – neurotics, as is well known, do this to a striking degree, but normal people have every reason to do it as well – I am able to complement and confirm its function by making a written note. The surface on which this note is preserved, a black-board or a sheet of paper, is then, so to speak, a materialized part of the apparatus of memory which I otherwise bear invisibly within myself. I need only notice the place where the 'memory' thus captured is stored, and I am able to 'reproduce' it at will at any time, certain that it has remained unchanged, and that it has escaped the distortions that it might have undergone in my memory.

If I wish to make abundant use of this technique in order to improve my memory function, I notice that I have two different procedures at my disposal. First of all I can choose a writing surface which preserves the note entrusted to it intact for an indefinite period of time, which is to say a sheet of paper on which I write in ink. When I do that, I receive a 'lasting trace of memory'. The disadvantage of this procedure lies in the fact that the receptiveness of the writing surface is soon exhausted. The sheet is filled, it has no more room for additional notes, and I find myself obliged to use another sheet that is still blank. The advantage of this procedure, which leaves a 'lasting trace', can also lose its value for me, if my interest in the note has expired after a period of time, and I no longer wish to 'keep it in my memory'. The other procedure is free of both shortcomings. If, for example, I write in chalk on a board, I have a receptive surface which can preserve traces for an unlimited period of time, and I can destroy the notes on it the moment they cease to interest me, without having to throw away