

A CONNECTION BETWEEN A SYMBOL AND A SYMPTOM - (1916)

Experience in the analysis of dreams has sufficiently well established the hat as a symbol of the genital organ, most frequently of the male organ. It cannot be said, however, that the symbol is an intelligible one. In phantasies and in numerous symptoms the head too appears as a symbol of the male genitals, or, if one prefers to put it so, as something standing for them. It will sometimes have been noticed that patients suffering from obsessions express an amount of abhorrence of and indignation against punishment by beheading far greater than they do in the case of any other form of death; and in such cases the analyst may be led to explain to them that they are treating being beheaded as a substitute for being castrated. Instances have often been analysed and published of dreams dreamt by young people or reported as having occurred in youth, which concerned the subject of castration, and in which a round ball was mentioned which could only be interpreted as the head of the dreamer's father. I was recently able to solve a ceremonial performed by a woman patient before going to sleep, in which she had to lay her small top pillow diamond-wise on the other ones and to rest her head exactly in the long diameter of the diamond-shape. The diamond had the meaning that is familiar to us from drawings on walls [graffiti]; the head was supposed to represent a male organ.

It may be that the symbolic meaning of the hat is derived from that of the head, in so far as a hat can be regarded as a prolonged, though detachable head. In this connection I am reminded of a symptom by means of which obsessional neurotics succeed in causing themselves continual torments. When they are in the street they are constantly on the look-out to see whether some acquaintance will greet them first by taking off his hat, or whether he seems to be waiting for their salutation; and they give up a number of their acquaintances after discovering that they no longer greet them or do not return their own salutation properly. There is no end to their difficulties in this connection; they find them everywhere as their mood and fancy dictate. It makes no difference to their behaviour when we tell them, what they all know already, that a salutation by taking off the hat has the meaning of an abasement before the person saluted - that a Spanish grandee, for example, enjoyed the privilege of remaining covered in the king's presence - and that their own sensitiveness on the subject of greeting therefore means that they are unwilling to show themselves less important than the other person thinks he is. The resistance of their sensitiveness to explanations such as this suggests that a motive less familiar to consciousness is at work; and the source of this excess of feeling might easily be found in its relation to the castration complex.