

A MYTHOLOGICAL PARALLEL TO A VISUAL OBSESSION (1916)

In a patient of about twenty-one years of age the products of unconscious mental activity became conscious not only in obsessive thoughts but also in obsessive images. The two could accompany each other or appear independently. At one particular time, whenever he saw his father entering the room, there came into his mind in close connection an obsessive word and an obsessive image. The word was 'Vaterarsch' ['father-arse']; the accompanying image represented his father as the naked lower part of a body, provided with arms and legs, but without the head or upper part. The genitals were not indicated, and the facial features were painted on the abdomen.

It will help to explain this more than usually absurd symptom if I mention that the patient, who was a man of fully developed intellect and high moral ideals, manifested a very lively anal erotism in the most various ways until after his tenth year. After this had been got over, his sexual life was once again forced back to the preliminary anal stage by his later struggle against genital erotism. He loved and respected his father greatly, and also feared him not a little; judged by his own high standards in regard to asceticism and the suppression of the instincts, however, his father seemed to him a person who stood for debauchery and the pursuit of enjoyment in material things.

'Father-arse' was soon explained as a jocular Teutonizing of the honorific title of 'patriarch'. The obsessive image is an obvious caricature. It recalls other representations which, with a derogatory end in view, replace a whole person by one of his organs, e.g. his genitals; it reminds us, too, of unconscious phantasies which lead to the identification of the genitals with the whole person, and also of joking figures of speech, such as 'I am all ears'.¹

The placing of the facial features on the abdomen of the caricature struck me at first as very strange. But I soon remembered having seen the same thing in French caricatures.¹ Chance then brought to my notice an antique representation, which tallied exactly with my patient's obsessive image. According to the Greek legend, Demeter came to Eleusis in search of her daughter after she had been abducted, and was given lodging by Dysaules and his wife Baubo; but in her great sorrow she refused to touch food or drink. Thereupon her hostess Baubo made her laugh by suddenly lifting up her dress and exposing her body. A discussion of this anecdote, which was probably intended to explain a magic ceremonial which was no longer understood, is to be found in the

fourth volume of Salomon Reinach's work, *Culte, Mythes, et Religions*, 1912. In the same passage the author mentions that during the excavations at Priene in Asia Minor some terracottas were found which represented Baubo. They show the body of a woman without a head or chest and with a face drawn on the abdomen: the lifted dress frames this face like a crown of hair (*ibid.*, 117).

¹ Cf. 'L'impudique Albion', a caricature of England drawn in 1901 by Jean Véber, reproduced in Fuchs, 1908.²