

The Letter No 8

THE HATRED OF THE FATHER IN PERVERSION*

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It is often difficult if not impossible to talk publicly about one's own clinical cases, especially when this involves talking of intimate details that the psychoanalyst has been entrusted with and is expected to keep to himself. However, nothing prevents him from using his clinical experience to discuss material, clinical or literary, which has already been published, nor from giving his own interpretation of this.

In this paper, I will use the case of Oscar Wilde and attempt to give a clinical interpretation of it. We have all the necessary information on him for a detailed reading that will enable us to develop some hypothesis on perversion in general. An axis will serve as the guide of this research, namely via the way in which the functions of the father intervene in this case to determine it in every single aspect. This will be useful in expounding the pervert's typical attitude towards the challenge of castration.

Let us begin by saying that this takes place insofar as castration does not intervene to give a structure to the 'place of the Other' (*le lieu de l'Autre*), especially of the first Other in the life of the child - that means his mother. The pervert is constantly forced to take on the challenge personally. At times it is so important in his life as an adult that it dominates the entire clinical picture. From this we can also refer to and develop the Freudian hypothesis which asserts the disavowal of castration to be at the origin of fetishism and hence also, at least implicitly, that it is paradigmatic of the defence mechanism present in perversion. Repression, though not absent, does not work at all like in the neurotic. I will try to give you an idea of how we could elucidate and give an interpretation of the defence mechanism which takes place in perversion

* This paper was delivered on 9th December 1995 at the School of Psychotherapy, St. Vincent's Hospital. The text given here represents a transcript of a recording and so retains much of the character of a spoken rather than a written text.

and which determines its scenario. The hypothesis I would like to develop is that the specificity of the perverse reaction that the subject will put into place depends on the way in which the 'father issue' was introduced in his life. However, this does not contradict the generally admitted opinion, which can be verified clinically, that perversion is the result of the law of the mother who did not 'suffer' the sanction of a third agency or authority which is that of the father. The pervert will be fine as long as he can live in a universe which is solely maternal, and reject the paternal influence, if possible for ever. He will thus be able to stay away from the limits of his subjectivity which are symbolic but which at the same time cause pain (*faire mal*). In French the word *le mal* has different meanings, - already yesterday evening we spoke about *le mal*.¹ As well as evil, it means harm, hurt, disease, illness, pain, ache etc. The pervert is forced to enact one or more at a time of those multiple forms of *le mal*, of pain or of evil. To avoid hurting himself (*de se faire mal*), he will do all he can to create a double life, of which Dorian Gray's story is an appropriate example. I will come back for a little while to it and try to show how in fact it is like a model for perversion.

Dorian Gray manages to introduce a 'division' between himself and his double and hence an equivalent of castration but in the real, - which will be all the more necessary since it is not assured symbolically. Thus he was able to establish a separation between two worlds and between two faces. But note that the separation does not hold, nor is it tight enough. He constantly runs the risk of being himself taken away like by an avalanche or ground-swell (*larne de fond*). This is, at least, how we could illustrate the ravaging and devastating effect of an unbounded drive which is not subject to a sanction. It is the direct consequence of what we said about the place of the Other, insofar as it is not structured by a third agency.

Dorian Gray and Oscar Wilde, by the invention of this character, discovered something rather remarkable - a double being, with an alter-ego who will 'suffer' the effects of time, so that his outer being, or face, can remain young and maintain its beauty; the other face, the hidden face, becomes the stage for an astonishing inscription of ugliness. This

¹ The text of Dr. Michels' lecture of the previous evening precedes this one in this issue of *The Letter*. (Ed).

dichotomy of the character reminds us of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. One is able to keep up appearances in society and in his professional life, while the other is the hidden face which doesn't reveal itself to outside looks. His aim is 'to hide', as his name indicates. *Dorian Gray* is the attempt to introduce a dichotomy between art and life, between an outer face and an inner face, a distinction which disappears in their confusion, and in the end provokes their inversion. One could well ask if this is an allusion to what sexual inversion actually means. We will come back to this question later. Dorian Gray wonders about what is real and what is not, he wonders whether art is more real than life. His slow and patient construction of a mask will end with a complete, a crashing failure. The fall of the mask will be fatal. What is so astonishing is Wilde's intuition of what the end, the 'conclusion' of his own life will be.

If on the one hand Dorian Gray is able to hold a mask *vis-à-vis* the outside world, on the other he himself will not be able to prevent himself from falling victim to it. He cannot pretend to have not seen that time leaves marks behind, which on another level are indelible. He does all he can, with a most tenacious determination, to hide the portrait - the other side of himself. He starts to be suspicious of those who surround him. He even puts a bolt and bars in front of the door that leads to the room with the portrait. He knows there is a real danger that his secret will be discovered, - the danger of a social and maybe even a real death, and this is what eventually happened to Wilde. The image of the barred door highlights the extent to which some aspects of the hero's life, and of Wilde's too, had to be concealed. Not only had they to be concealed from the outside world, they could absolutely not be addressed. They had to be barred, completely barred - but in the real, because of the failure of their symbolic inscription. Where the mask (*persona*) refers to society, in the hidden portrait, a representation of the unconscious body image (whose function in the pervert differs from the one in the neurotic), a grimace is inscribed. This splitting of the personality is referred to an authority, an agency (*une instance*) that we could qualify as moral and which seems to be all the more tyrannical, the more the paternal function has failed. In other words, it has something to do with what we call the Super-ego.

The word 'conscience', meaning moral conscience, comes up from time to time in the text. This novel could be seen as a statement about the type of conscience accessible to its hero and author. The close relationship between the two, the hero and the author, is one of the major issues debated about, nowadays, in the field of literary criticism. The author tries to transfer - (yesterday night already, we spoke about this very typical literary transference) - the author tries to transfer on the literary level not only what he cannot express, or say in a different way, but also and above all, what could not be inscribed in his life. Understanding transference is also very useful for the clinical approach to the perversions.

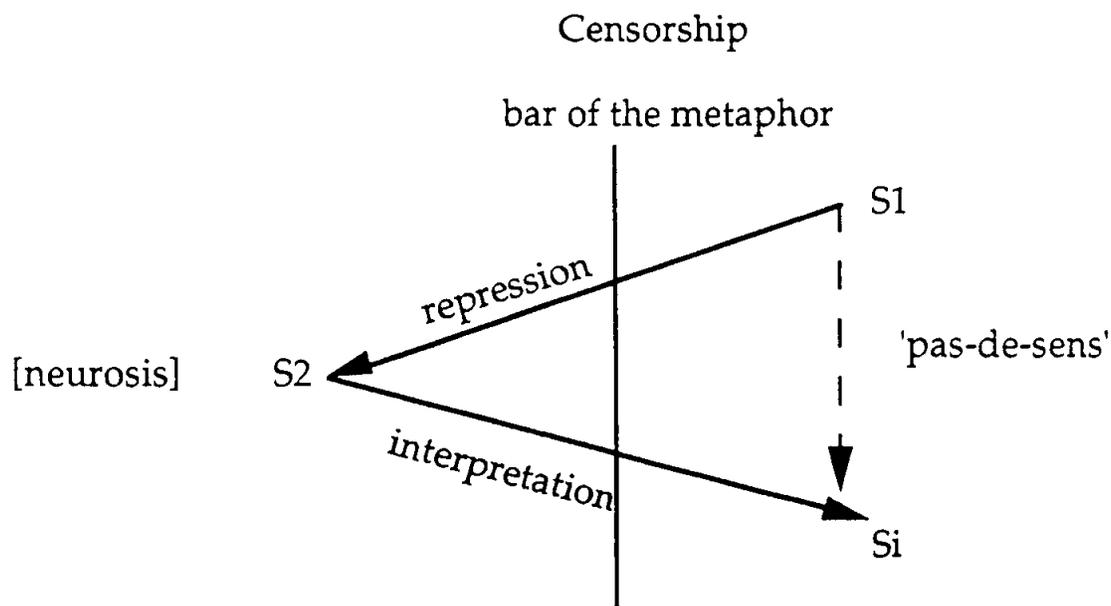
This novel is a very precise example of the attempt to literally and literarily inscribe a symbolic agency which turned out to have failed completely. The character of 'Dorian Gray' emerges as a permanent challenge to 'social censorship'. This term appears in the text in reference to those women who for him, for his beautiful eyes, did not hesitate to infringe it. In this context censorship intervenes as the instrument of the splitting of the ego (rather than of the division of the subject) into a public and a hidden face, into a mask and a grimace. In neurosis too, censorship plays a major, but quite different, role. It is at the origin of repression; though remaining permeable and more or less flexible depending on the structure and subjectivity in question. Here instead, censorship must be and must remain impermeable, - tight like the barred door, insofar as no other defence system works. Is it only a matter of the failure of repression?

The grimace is the result of the incorporation, under the influence of the censorship of the dirty, nasty, ugly, hateful features of the father - of his 'sins' (another term which appears from time to time in the text). The grimace says the truth of the father; not the truth itself, of course, which only belongs to God, - only the psychotic has access to that kind of truth, to an 'absolute truth', insofar as it is not referred to the 'paternal metaphor'. Here a subjective truth is at stake, as a result of the splitting of the ego. The grimace reveals the truth of the father although, on the other hand, it remains completely unavowable for all that. This is why disavowal is the main concern of Dorian Gray and of the pervert. This paradox is so intense that it determines his transgressive behaviour, allowing him no way of coming back to what he has done, and which sometimes is way

beyond any possible conciliation. This literary example illustrates Freud's hypothesis of 'the disavowal of castration' as specific to the defence mechanism of the pervert. It is not an exaggeration to say that the quest for beauty corresponds to a vital need of escaping from a profound ugliness, which is almost constitutional and thus indelible, linked to what we could call the 'father's fault'.

The paternal function was from the very beginning closely linked with the dimension of ugliness, both physical and moral, - an ugliness which had to be removed at any cost, even by giving up life itself. This attitude had the meaning of a 'suicide equivalent' (*equivalent suicidaire*), which in Wilde's case was not similar to Mishima's, though he killed himself socially and symbolically. What does this mean? He destroyed his social status and his role as a father, forcing his wife to change both her name and those of their children. He himself no longer had either the force or the symbolic resources to survive that.

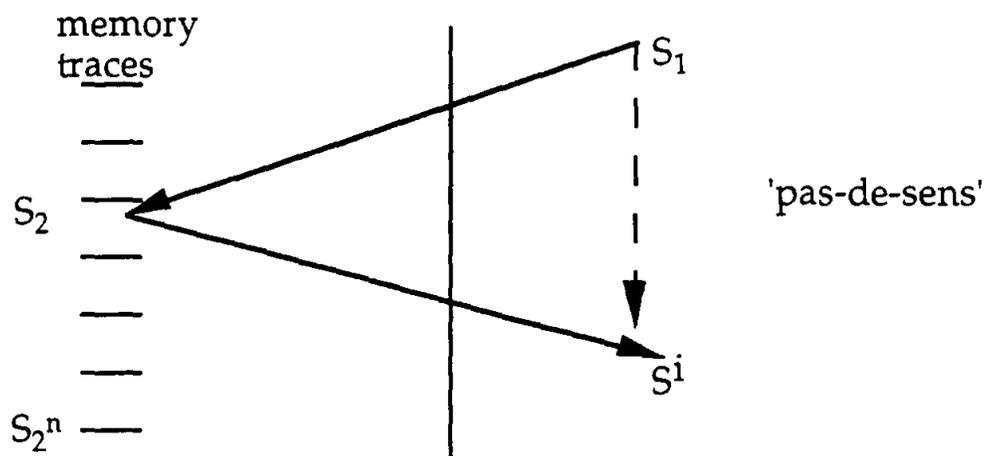
I will try to give you, now, an idea of the difference between the defence mechanism in neurosis and that in perversion. In the *Interpretation of Dreams* Freud showed how repression can be understood. I will begin by drawing a schema.



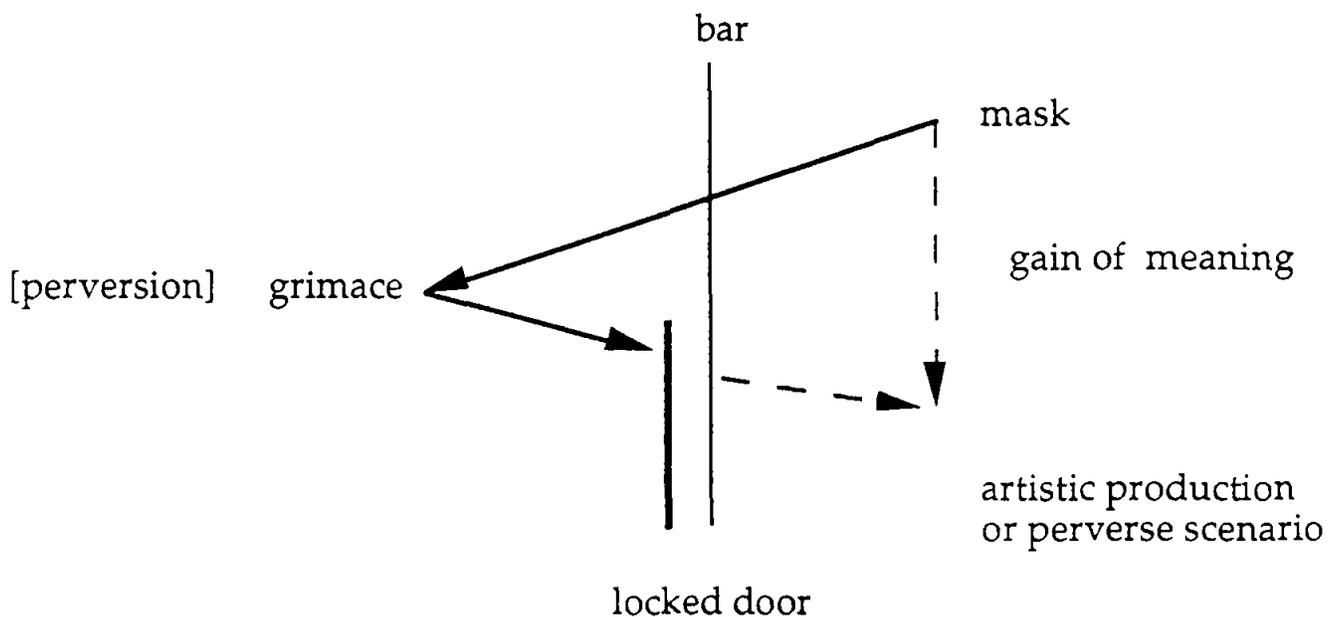
The bar in the middle represents what Lacan would call the bar of the metaphor, and which Freud, in a different context, called censorship. To the signifier S_1 , which belongs to the 'manifest' content of a dream, corresponds a signifier S_2 in the 'latent', on the other side of the bar. The latter has to be crossed twice, firstly by repression ($S_1 \rightarrow S_2$) and secondly by interpretation ($S_2 \rightarrow S_i$).

The three positions (S_1, S_2, S_i) of the signifier are indispensable for the rise, the spark (*éfincelle*) of the metaphor. For a time Freud identified S_1 with S_i and thought that he had to reestablish the meaning of S_1 in terms of S_2 or as a function of S_2 : $S_1 \rightarrow f(S_2)$. The step $S_1 \rightarrow S_i$ corresponds to what Lacan calls *pas-de-sens*, which can be translated as 'steps of meaning', but also - since *pas* is a negation - as 'loss of meaning'. Both significations are closely linked together.

You could also say that by repression something, a signifier S_1 , is inscribed on the other side of the bar as S_2 , and so inscribed under the authority of the censorship. Interpretation is the only chance for a subject to get rid of this sometimes tyrannical authority and to find his own *pas*, to find his own rhythm. A signifier could be represented by a line or trait, as a differential trait (*trait de différence*), which corresponds to the inscription of a trace, that is, a memory trace (in Freudian terms). This leads us to the reconstitution, on the left side of the bar, of the schema of the psychic apparatus, as developed in Chapter VII of the *Interpretation of Dreams*. If repression has to do with an inscription, its effacement is the result of an interpretation.



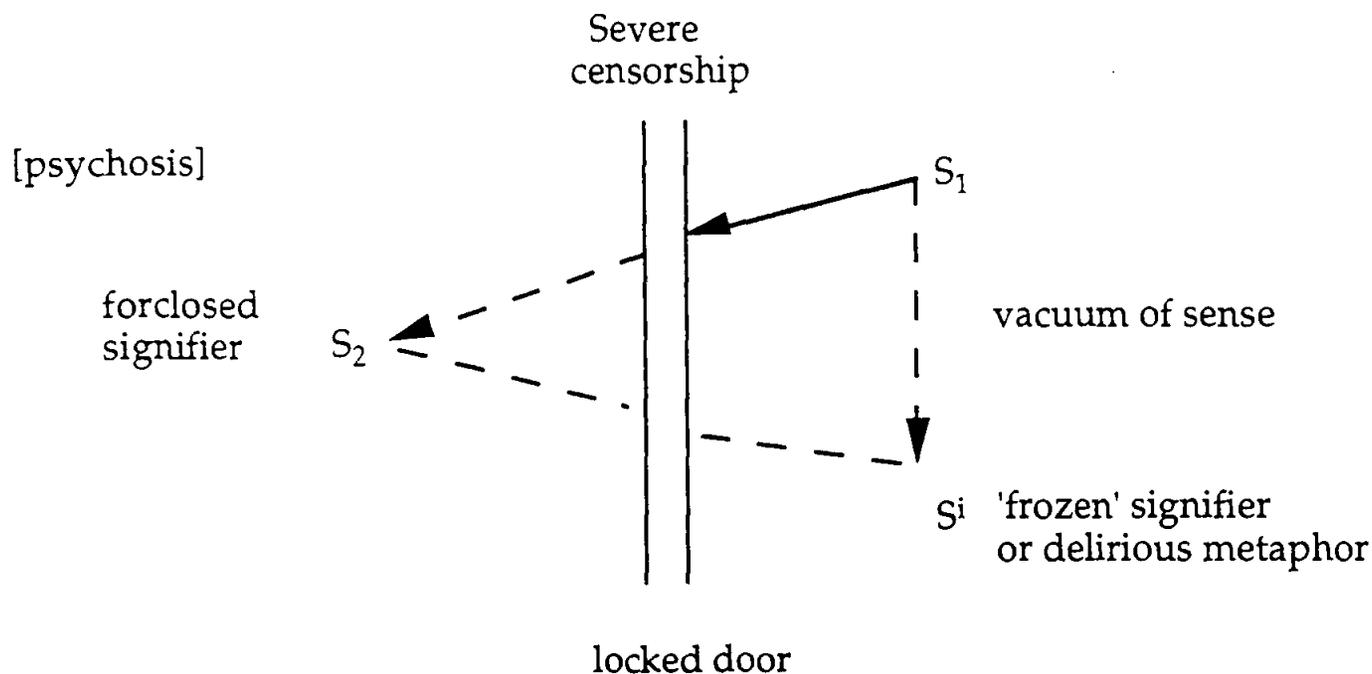
In neurosis a certain type of exchange, and trade even, takes place in both directions. That means that a boundary necessarily exists, but it is a permeable one. In perversion we don't know exactly how things go on. There is necessarily a censorship, since there is no alternative to it. For the neurotic it determines the only possible access to unconscious desire. For the pervert the outer face has to remain smooth, almost polished; it is the function of the mask. But nothing can be inscribed here. An inscription only occurs, as far as this novel is concerned, at the level of the grimace, as a physical and moral ugliness of the hero.



This schema evokes the idea that the bar can be crossed in one direction, but remains impermeable in the other one. This is the reason why the door in the novel has to be barred so tightly; otherwise there could be a real danger, even a danger of death, as happened to Wilde. In the neurosis the second crossing of the bar corresponds to the return of the repressed (*retour du réprimé*), whose consequence is a 'loss of meaning', which the pervert has to avoid by all means. In his case, repression takes place, but there seems to be no way back, no return of the repressed. Nevertheless, in order to find a way out, the pervert is looking for a different kind of

inscription. He is so successful in art, because it permits him to jump over this bar, to transgress the boundary, represented by the locked door. On the level of the mask, turned to the outside world, something else takes place, an artistic or literary production, which makes sense in a social and cultural context. It is one possible way out, which is not self-destructive. Literature, above all, is one way of inscribing, with a highly symbolic signification, despite the impermeability of the bar. This generates a 'gain of meaning'. The pervert teaches us in his way, that at least a double inscription has to occur, on both sides of the bar and in different registers.

Let's just mention the importance of censorship for another clinical structure. Freud gave a very interesting illustration of what is going on in psychosis: censorship can be so severe that words and even sentences are erased. The vector $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$ runs against an almost 'absolute' bar, beyond which nevertheless a virtual inscription takes place, - we have to admit it. It returns under the form of a 'frozen', isolated signifier S_i , with no apparent link to the rest of the chain.



No loss of meaning occurs, but a rather dangerous vacuum of sense appears between S_1 and S_i . It determines the 'discordance' typical of the

psychotic discourse, which at times is so difficult to understand, because words, and indeed whole sentences are missed, and especially the medium between one signifier and another. Under certain circumstances, the psychotic is able to fill up this vacuum with a delirious metaphor. Forclosure means here the absence of inscription (of the *name-of-the-father*) on the left side of the bar, as a consequence of the severe repulsion of S_1 .

The pervert has to look for his own way to inscribe a splitting, hence a difference so as to finally cause the intervention of law. But what law is at stake? The more the law has not been clearly established, the more severe is the intervention of censorship. For that purpose the pervert needs a scenario, to inscribe in the real what is lacking on the symbolic level. But this causes him pain. His scenario in its structure is the equivalent of the imaginary matrix of the neurotic phantasy transposed, however, onto a different register. But this transposition, or transference, is what is so difficult for him. He does not elaborate his scenario directly but often only does so after several deviations, and at times sorrows, which carry with them a more or less profound transformation of his life. It is important to remember that a scenario sometimes requires a long and patient elaboration, which involves all the energy of the subject; the consequence is a complete transformation of his life, with no way to come back.

There seems to be a profound contradiction between the establishment of a perverse scenario and the quest for the law. Nevertheless, Wilde's example will show us just how much the two can be closely linked to one another. Not all scenarios go so far. It is also true that it wasn't at all Wilde's intention to go so far in following the course that he took. Something in him pushed him to do so, something whose power and violence he had surely underestimated. If on the one side he had found himself in the position of the victim of the legal system in a puritanical and Victorian England, hypocritical and sexist, on the other, with each of his movements on his way covered with thorns, he contributed to determine it totally. He did not suffer a fate, as one would be tempted to say but he built it and finally chose it reluctantly and willingly, against his will (*malgré lui*), but nevertheless of his own free

will (*de son plein gré*). His choice was both voluntary and involuntary. It was certainly the feeling of guilt that pushed him to act, the guilt of having done something wrong, of having transgressed a prohibition. But there was also something else, something deeper which had more serious consequences: it was as though he was pushed to take on his own account 'the father's fault', and also to account for it.

Indeed his father, a famous surgeon and ophthalmologist in this town, had been accused by one of his patients of having abused her while she was under anaesthesia. At that time this caused a scandal that the mother of Wilde (he was still very young) was able to stifle, by bringing the person in question to trial for calumny. She won the case. The fact that she won that case was to have heavy consequences for Wilde's future, because it encouraged him, a generation later, to go to court. However, during his years at Trinity College, he was confronted with the unfriendly comments of his fellow students. Moreover, it was more or less known that his father had had several children outside his marriage. These facts, which Wilde had to learn very progressively, were all the more difficult to symbolize because they were not addressed openly. That was his tragedy - nobody spoke about it openly, not just outside, in society but also and above all in the family. We know from clinical work that an issue which is not addressed openly is very hard for a child to symbolize; for example, the death of a member of the family, and especially when the so-called 'fault' of the father is at stake.

Wilde had to reconstruct all of this information gradually. And we can also suppose that he did all he could to totally erase it from his memory. His exaggerated aestheticism and his concept of art followed this path: to create a place free of memory. That was his aim - to create a place free of the memory of any lasting inscription. However he could not totally ignore, as the story of *Dorian Gray* reveals to us, that this creative, artistic activity implied another aspect which was totally destructive. We are going to see how this took place in him. It is important to bear these facts clearly in mind because it is against this background that later on the drama of his life was going to explode.

In brief, it was on one word that Wilde stumbled, the word being 'sodomite', (which moreover was badly written as 'somdomite'), in an

unsealed letter, that the father of his lover, the Marquess of Queensbury, had delivered to the guardian of his club. As Wilde had been absent for three weeks, he only discovered the letter on his return. His first question had been: Did someone read it? The answer was negative. He could have stopped there; he could have accepted it and waited to see what would have happened next. But for Wilde things had gone too far already, in the previous years, which meant that there was no way back for him. He was understandably afraid that someone had discovered the content of the letter, but this doesn't explain everything. The word in question had immediately the function of what Lacan would call 'master signifier' (*signifiant maître*) which progressively reorganized his entire discourse and triggered off the enactment of a wide scenario and also a 'wild' scenario in front of the courts, on three occasions and which ended with Oscar Wilde being convicted and sentenced to the maximum penalty provided for in law, - two years of hard labour.

Something which is often forgotten but which was essential for the logic of the whole process and which justifies the primary importance given here to the function of the father, was that as a consequence Wilde did not see his children anymore, that his wife adopted her maiden name again and also gave it to the two sons, Cyril and Vyvyan whom she had with Oscar. His paternal rights were taken away from him, by decision of the court. To be more precise his function was legally taken away from him right at the moment when he was close to taking it on, at least partially. He was just about to take on the 'fault', not only of his father but of fathers in general, that is, their 'perversion'. You know that this was Freud's initial theory about the genesis of the neurotic symptom, in particular, the hysterical one. While in the neurotic things take place on a phantasy level, in Wilde's case they had to be enacted. What happened with the names of his children clearly shows the level on which things were happening and allows us to put forward the hypothesis of the *inversion of the inscription*. Wilde had established the model of this inversion in *Dorian Gray* and even predicted its deeply destructive, if not deadly consequences. Could we go so far as to say that this *inversion of the inscription* is a consequence of a sexual inversion?

What we are concerned with here is the inscription of the *name-of-the-father* on the symbolic level. This gives us an idea of what the stakes are in the perverse scenario. As in the case of Wilde and many others we can add that writing is an attempt to replace a missing inscription, that of the *name-of-the-father*, by a literary or cultural one. Artistic production, therefore, could be considered as an enacted 'paternal metaphor', but it also has another face, a more destructive one. That means that at times 'creators' are very destructive, and this is an essential aspect of their work and life.

It is also important to know whether Wilde really tried to defend himself against the accusation of being a 'sodomite' or if, on the contrary, against his conscious will and without really being aware of it, he was not rather claiming a status as a 'sodomite'. I don't know, but at least we have to ask the question. We are faced here with two sides of the same issue which, while they are not completely separate, must for all that be distinguished very precisely. To simplify things we could say that there is an unconscious side and a conscious one, which in the neurotic start to develop a solid trade and exchange with one another and enable him to set up and to develop his own economic system of *jouissance*. In the pervert, on the contrary, this exchange is profoundly disturbed. Wilde of course refused to be qualified in the way that the Marquess of Queensbury had done. However, in defending himself he revealed himself and entered into a mechanism which carried him away. If he had wanted everybody to know he couldn't have found a better way to do it. If he turned to the law, it was to cause its intervention, to punish himself and hence satisfy his deep feelings of guilt but also, on the other hand, to introduce the symbolic order. It exists, of course, in perversion but it seems to be tied essentially to the intervention of the censorship. It has to be absolutely established and sometimes because of this the pervert seems to be very moral, like in *Dorian Gray*, as I already stated yesterday evening. It is so important that there is a real and severe censorship established and Wilde did everything he could to make the law intervene in the real of his life and so to re-establish a symbolic authority which he had transgressed so 'wildly'.

So it was the sodomy issue, from the moment it was clearly called by its name, that reorganized the entire past, particularly all that was linked to

the father and which had not been symbolized. This is the reason why this issue, the question of sodomy, can be seen as a principle - the principle that we have named *inversion of the inscription* whose effects can only be destructive. One of the consequences is that the subject finds himself in an unrelenting universe, in which no forgiveness is granted. There is no way to come back, on a symbolic level, to what has happened in the past, because the principal time factor is erased, as are the names and even the process of naming. What I want to say is that with the emergence of the sodomy issue, the subject, whoever he is, loses his means of finding his place in the generations, because there is no longer any generation.

I don't know if the book *Sade mon prochain* by Pierre Klossowski is translated into English - a book written right after World War II and which is still today one of the best books about Sade, quoted by Lacan in his famous paper *Kant avec Sade* and considered as a major reference concerning sadism, in its literary as well as its clinical context. What is so interesting in this very small book is the hypothesis that the whole system of the Marquis de Sade is based on one point, which is the sodomy issue. It is more than a challenge, it is a provocation of what the law could be: provocation understood etymologically as a 'call for' law. Therefore the Sadian hero has to provoke it in his victims, by making them suffer: only their terrified voices could give the law any consistency.

Wilde did his very best to settle his account with his father and with the fathers, that is, with their role and function. At first sight, it seems that it was his lover, Lord Alfred Douglas, who used him to start a trial against his father. However, if you analyse the situation more closely, the opposite is true as well; Wilde took advantage of this conflict to institute a trial, which in the end turned out to be a trial for and against (both readings are possible) the paternal authority, via the mediation of someone else. Their ways crossed at one precise point, that of the *hatred of the father*; the only way for both to address this function, and perhaps the only way to have any access to it. The paternal function was the most severely threatened by the sodomy accusation, having potentially at least the consequence of the disappearance of the generation, which is the principle of any measure of time. It was as if there was an absolute necessity to address a legal authority, to reestablish the law. This is what

Wilde did. But his hatred pushed him towards an incitement with uncontrollable effects. The two mothers had their share of responsibility in all this. Wilde's one encouraged him to face the judges and to go on doing so, at a moment when he would have done better to stop while he still had the possibility of doing so. She did not live long after her son's conviction. She died when he was still in prison.

Without a doubt, at one point Wilde chose to face his story and what some call 'fate'. But did he know he was going to lose, to ruin himself and everything which was close to him? Clinical experience teaches us that even if someone is aware of the devastating consequences of his acts, this is not necessarily enough to prevent him from doing it; at times even the opposite is the case. Therefore, one must not believe that nowadays the fear of 'Aids' suffices to restrain the subject who has decided, consciously or not, to destroy himself. Why did Wilde decide at a certain point of his life, at a very precise moment, to start the dreadful machine that was going to crush, to grind him and his family?

He really had a very complex relationship with his name and names in general. What I called hatred of the father is in fact a *hatred of the name*. When he was in prison he wrote: 'I have inherited a famous name'; but this name, after his father had been accused, had become too heavy to bear. So how would he take on this heritage? What was he to do with this name? It was his main concern, but he could never have formulated it in these terms. On the contrary, he did all he could to avoid these questions, above all by means of an overrated investigation of art and aestheticism. Wilde's situation would have been much different, at least so we can suppose, if he had not had children or if, maybe, he had decided at one point to change his name. But what exactly happened in his real life? The judge deprived him of his father-function, his wife and children changed their name, as already stated. He himself, when released from prison and in his exile in France, adopted another name, that of Sebastian Milmoth, the name of the wandering Jew; it is also the name of the hero of a novel written by a relative of his mother's family. All he did contributed, *nolens volens* to the elaboration of a vast scenario in front of the court, with the consequence for him of being punished and so undergoing, 'suffering', the sanction of the law. A scenario of such capital

importance needs a very long preparation which takes many years and can take place only once in a lifetime. The hatred of the name can be considered as its virtual and unconscious organiser; and its aim was to get rid of the hated name in order to inscribe it differently. The fictional name which Wilde adopted belonged to the maternal side, so that the result for him and his children was an inscription in a maternal line or filiation. He was successful in introducing the sanctions of time and law, but the price was too high for him and for those who were closely related to him.

The neurotic too, by transmitting the *name-of-the-father* has to change it, but this process takes place on a symbolic level. The end, or the last period, of his analysis, which corresponds to a logical and not a chronological time, turns necessarily around this crucial pivotal point. The pervert by his enactment tries to inscribe in the real what has so completely failed in the symbolic. But the symbolic itself can be defined only by its failure, to which the pervert has no access, except by way of the destruction of all that he holds dear. His quest for an absolute answer - which only death, and sometimes religion, can give - is typical. His scenario can be considered as a legal one, as an appeal for a judgement without appeal, that is, for a final judgement.

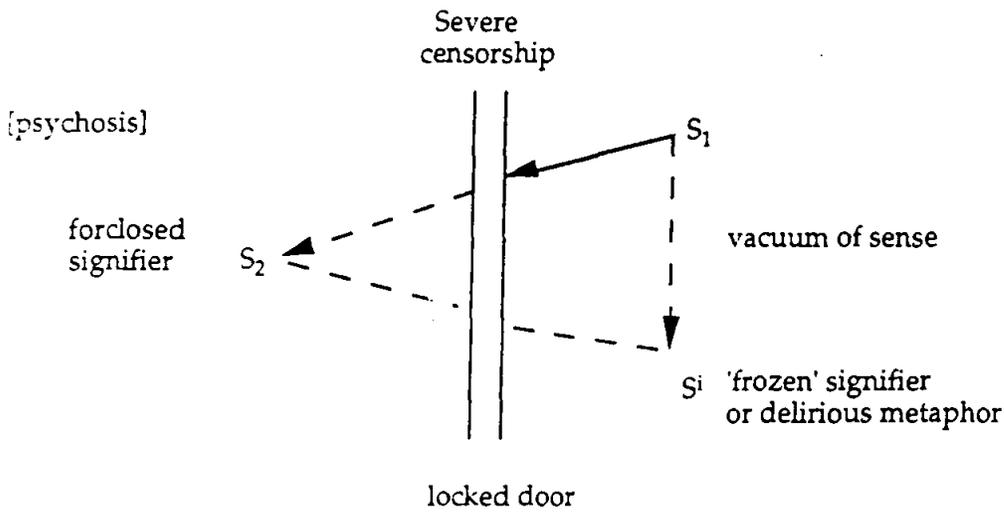
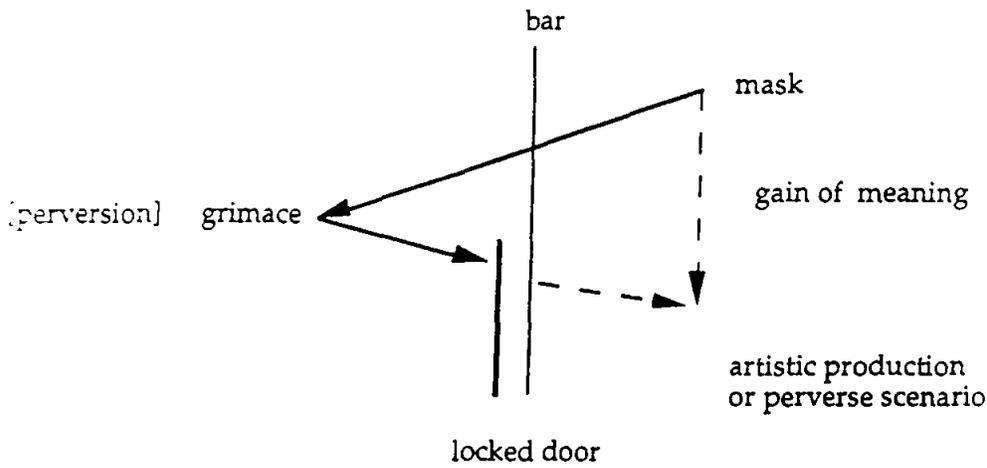
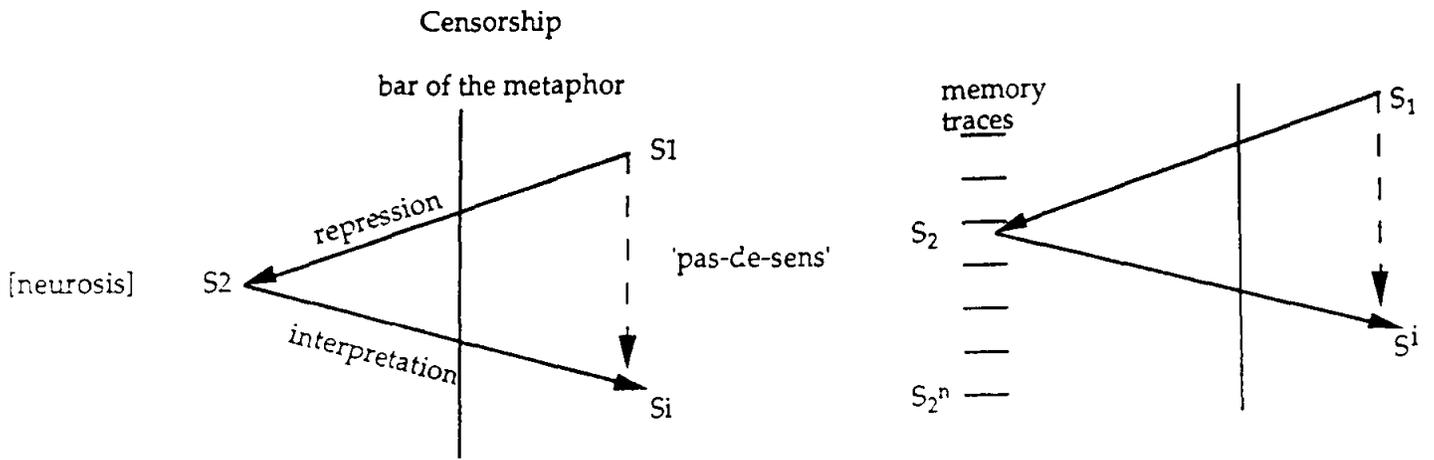
For Wilde, the result of his action was a disaster. The principal actors in his scenarios died during a short space of time one by one: his mother, his wife, the Marquess of Queensbury, and a few months later Wilde himself. But what about his children? Cyril felt that he had to compensate for his father's 'fault', which for him was more than obvious. After his father's death, he had to retrieve and rehabilitate the honour of the name; but being the eldest son it was as if he had to be sacrificed. He was prepared to give up his life for his country and for his King; and this is what he did in 1915, at the very beginning of the Great War. He had to enact the hatred of the father and of the name, with the intention of saving it. Therefore he not only had to die, but to deprive the name of what is essential, that is, its transmission to the generations, and so to finally erase and destroy it. This fundamental contradiction was his father's legacy, which he merely brought forward and continued.

Vyvyan, as the second son, found another way out. He did what is always the most important thing: he decided to wait and see. He waited

almost forty years, the time of one generation, before he was able to write and to publish a book: *Son of Oscar Wilde*. It was his version and interpretation of the same heritage and above all it was his way of taking it on his account, paying for it, but this time symbolically.

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