

The Symptom and the Truth

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Giovanna is the main character in the novel *The Lying Life of Adults*.¹ The protagonist, a teenager, overhears her parents talking about her. Her mother sees her as irresponsible and is indignant about her poor performance at school, something that does not seem to trouble Giovanna. Her father, however, says with disgust that “*she is becoming like Vittoria*”, to which her mother adds: “*No, Vittoria is monstrous.*”

Encountering this phrase in adolescence, uttered by a beloved father, disturbs Giovanna, as it resonates with the fantasy that animates her symptom: she moves from being an object of adoration to a waste object in relation to her father. Giovanna sees him as an object of adoration, without much depth/thought about who he is as a person. This vivacious father, who positions himself as her partner in relation to her mother, confirms his indifference towards her, by having an affair with the mother of one of her friends. It is for this woman who will soon be his wife, that the father withdraws his gaze. The evidence that solidifies this degradation in the father’s gaze is the valuable bracelet that should have been hers but was instead given as a gift to his lover.

In Seminar XIV, Jacques Lacan notes “Freud doesn't doubt the reality of the original scene, but for him the essential thing lies elsewhere; one only needs to read him to know this: it's necessary to know how the subject can verify this scene – verify it with his whole being. The subject did this through his symptom.”²

Giovanna begins her research of this truth with the questions: Who is Vittoria? Why the tone of contempt? What does she have in common with this repugnant figure? Is it true, *am I like Vittoria?*

While looking through the family photo box, she notices that one face is always erased, blurred. Where a face was expected, there was a stain.

The nonexistent signifier, which exists as a mark, accessed by her in family photos, is sufficient to produce intense effects.

Patricia Bosquin-Caroz, in her presentation at this congress, reminds us: “We cannot tell the truth about jouissance; nor can we tell the whole truth.”³ Giovanna, while searching for the truth—as to whether or not she is like her paternal aunt Vittoria, whether or not she is a monster — gradually consents to the impossibility of telling the whole truth. She realizes, from her experience of investigating her own family and

¹ Ferants, E., *The Lying Life of Adults*, trans. A. Goldstein, Europa Editions UK, 2020.

² Lacan, J., *The Seminar, Book 14: The Logic of Fantasy*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar. Portuguese edition, (Translated by author).

³ Bosquin-Caroz, P., “VARITY. Variations of Truth in Psychoanalysis.” *Presentation of the NLS Congress Theme 2026*.

herself, the impossibility of answering the question, "*What is the real truth about who I am?*" She investigates, and asks her friends, her parents, her aunt, but it is only through the return of the repressed that she verifies the truth of her own symptom.