

## **Obsession**

Obsession. An obsession is a preoccupation with an idea, a behavior, or an anxiety. Preoccupation is intended as a neutral term, simply to describe a condition, yet in effect preoccupation designates, here, a neurotic condition in which the victim has lost the ability to control his reactions. The present author can advance, from his own small arsenal of neuroses, a condition which troubled him in his twenties, and which could, if he had not been lucky, have negatively affected his whole life. We will see what 'lucky' means in this case.

The preoccupation in question took this form: when the writer left his home, each afternoon, to drive to the University, he would be beset by the anxiety that he had not locked the door of his house. His reaction to this suspicion grew increasingly in the days following the first episode. He would begin to anticipate the onset of the neurosis long before he was to drive to school. Quite naturally a vicious circle formed itself— anxiety, neurotic reaction, return to check door, eventual departure, tentative relief, then reprise of familiar symptoms a day or two later. Eventually the victim devised a new strategy for minimizing harmful consequences—late arrivals, time spent dithering, awkward instances of compulsive inspection at times when the car and the door were not in question. It cannot be said that there was a finale to this drama, only that the drama itself faded away. But the memory of it did not fade away.

What did not fade was a strong realization that the autonomy of my neural system was not completely under my control. If this was the case I needed stronger interior fortification against unexpected messages from the center of my body. To this day I am cautious when I sense the onset of compulsive behavior.