Senatspräsident Schreber, or Reading Insanity

Lars Sjögren

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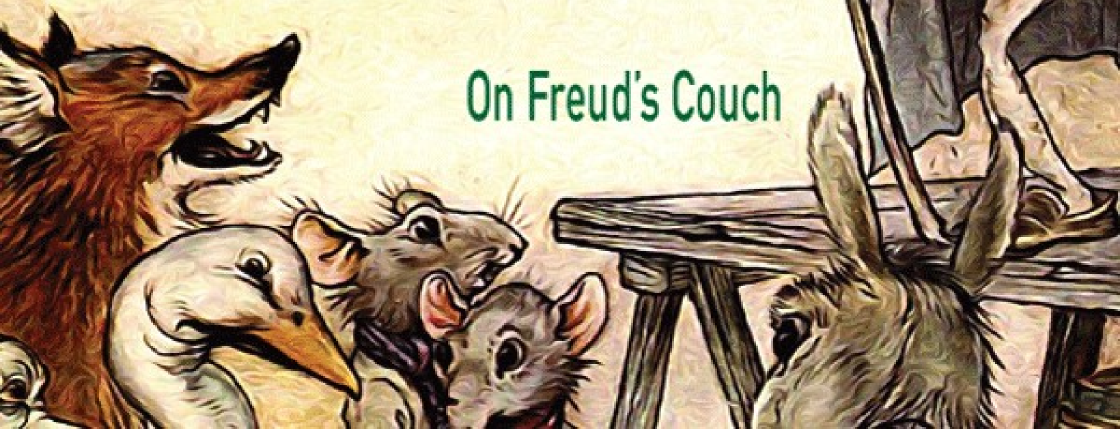

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There is a paradox in talking about the "Schreber case." In psychoanalysis, the term *case history* means an account of a meeting between a psychoanalyst and an analysand, but Paul Schreber never set foot in Berggasse 19 where Freud had his practice. There is no evidence that he was ever in Vienna. Neither is there any evidence that Freud knew anything about Schreber before the summer of 1910 when he read Schreber's book. Schreber, in his turn, was a very well-read man but made no references to Freud's works. In 1911 Freud

published his paper, “Psychoanalytische Bemerkungen über einen autobiographisch beschriebenen Fall von Paranoia” [“Psycho-analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)”], hereafter called “Notes.” At that time he did not know that Schreber had died shortly before this in a mental hospital in Dosen outside Leipzig.

“Wer kennt schon den Dr Schreber?” (“Who has ever heard of this Dr. Schreber?”) ran a headline in a Leipzig newspaper in 1884. The Dr. Schreber I came to know, and the one Freud knew, is a book, *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkrankes (Memoirs of my Nervous Illness)* —hereafter called *Memoirs*—first published in 1903. Freud read his Schreber in the summer of 1910 during a classical culture trip to Sicily. He was not one to idle away his free time.

How can a book be a case if a case history relates a meeting between two people? An interesting question. If we examine the Freud cases presented in the book you are just now reading, you will find that they deal with his own patients. Freud was personally acquainted with Little Hans, whose analysis he only supervised. But Schreber—how can he be a "case"? Schreber was a book to Freud, and with this in mind we ought to put his "Notes" into the same category as his paper on Leonardo da Vinci (1910b), based on Giorgio Vasari's biography, as his paper on Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* (1928), or his study of the author Wilhelm Jensen's novel *Gradiva* (1907).

We can speculate over the order of these things, but that is the way it is and therefore I write this contribution to an anthology

comprised of Freud's cases. By so doing I do not escape the question: Can a book be a case? Or can a "case," an analysand, be seen as a text? Do psychoanalysts and literary critics have related occupations?

The Reader as Co-Author

In Chapter 10 of the book, *Retelling a Life,* the analyst Roy Schafer (1992) addresses this problem under the heading 'The Sense of an Answer." It is an excellent article just because it does not give clear answers to the questions about the interpretation of the text and the patient. On the contrary, it asks a whole string of questions. Some of the answers may seem obvious and even extreme, but I know Roy Schafer well enough—as a text, not as a person — to know that this attitude is part of his method of provoking thought, his own and

others'. He knows that there are no definitive answers. In his presentation, he emphasizes what he considers to be similarities between psychoanalysis and literary interpretation. He points out that the psychoanalyst is occupied with a kind of text, the analysand's verbal testimony—and hardly anything else. He writes that there are times when a patient protests against the situation by becoming healthy. So far, so good. But what can be said about his idea that a text does not come to life until it has been interpreted? By this, Schafer does not mean specifically psychoanalytical interpretation. He says that fiction has no predetermined text. The determination starts with the reading, which is always interpretative. The reader becomes a co-author of the text. Fiction begins in this meeting, which has a shifting content from case to case.

Another thing good texts have in common is that they impart to the reader a remedial perspective on reality; this gives them a therapeutic function. By the very act of writing the author informs us that via language we can intervene in our lives and thus influence them. Language in itself is an instrument for change, writing in itself a compensatory act. Participating in this act in a capacity as co-authoring reader is liberating, both for the reader and for the text. Here there is a parallel to the psychoanalytical meeting. I also see these ideas of Schafer's as a completely new aspect of the concept of catharsis.

A psychoanalytical meeting is arranged between two people in such a way that they have some chance to gain an insight into the unconscious and bring some—small, to be sure—part of it into consciousness. The chief

instrument for this task is transference, the projection of unconscious fantasies, the analysand's and the analyst's. The analysand is encouraged to express his fantasies as freely as possible. The analyst is assumed to be able to keep his fantasies under control at the same time as he tries to use them in the service of understanding. Two contributions on the part of the analyst appear to be indispensable if the analytical situation is to be maintained: that he puts himself at the disposal of the other's transference fantasies and stimulates their verbalization, and that he tries to make his own transference fantasies conscious without verbalizing them to the other in their original version. This is not a matter of hush-hush but of respect for the analytical mandate.

Freud’s initial reaction to the transference phenomenon was to see it as a disturbing factor. By enduring the “disturbing” transference and examining it more closely, Freud in his characteristic way developed the disturbing element into a core instrument for the work of psychoanalytical understanding. This became a practical and theoretical goal for succeeding generations of analysts.

If, then, the interplay of mutual transference is the heart of psychoanalytical work, what happens when the “patient” is a book, as Schreber was for Freud? Nothing prevents the psychoanalyst from developing and working through his own fantasies as a response to the contact. Again, so far, so good—stimulating the reader’s imagination can be seen as every author’s intention. Freud’s transferences to his

texts transformed into “cases” are in themselves a chapter to be investigated, especially because he himself did not dig deeper into the question. Through the obscurity, one can discern the common spheres in which Freud’s unconscious creates figures in the company of Little Hans, of the Rat Man, of the Wolf Man. Inspired by this point of view, I intend later in my presentation to speculate about some aspects of Schreber’s *Memoirs* where Freud meets himself via a figure, Schreber, who has taken the step from science and poetry to paranoia. Our most interesting doubles are not identical to us in every detail!

But the unadulterated text, whose creator is not present in person, that which according to Roy Schafer comes to life when it is interpreted —can it accommodate a transference? Can it be

the patient (from the Latin *patiens,* the sufferer, but also one who copes, endures, and is patient and thus possesses brotherly love— all these the virtues of love according to St. Paul)? In other words, does the text carry with it an unconscious that can cause trouble?

Well, a text is partly a product of a lot of fantasizing and this fantasizing is a product of the author's accumulated experiences. If our words are allowed to retain the roots leading into our inner selves (and heaven knows the noisy daily media is constantly scraping away, squealing, at these roots), their meanings for us are condensed as years go by. In this way the author's transference is present in the text. What distinguishes reading from the psychoanalytical situation is that the psychoanalyst offers himself as a transference object for the one present in the

room and then tries to understand what the transference is accomplishing within himself and between him and the other forbearer. Besides this, from his vantage point he tries to give reports on the course of events. We are dealing with two people in the same room, two subjects who together have each other as objects. But can I reasonably say that a literary text has me, the reader, as an object and that it, the text, is the subject? No matter how lively the text, the paper and the print are and remain things.

What I nevertheless do dare to state is that every author writes with an imagined reader in view, even if he denies it. Usually this is a matter of an inner receiver, a condensation composed of the author's experiences, longing and fear, love and hate. Transference comes in here, transference to this inner receiver. A rough

draft of aesthetics with a psychoanalytical foundation may consist of an effort to understand the influence a work has on me as a reader, starting from my response to the condensed transference that has been passed on to me during the reading. Then the richness of the condensation of the inner receiver, active in the minds of authors like Dante and Shakespeare while they were writing, would be a starting point for understanding how they were able to touch so many readers so deeply.

In the case of Schreber there is no doubt about who was the intended main receiver of his *Memoirs*. It was no one less than God.

Schreber and God the Father

With that we are back with Schreber and with God—a rather special God, as we shall see.

The two are one—or rather, it might be said of Schreber's *Memoirs*, they deal with his struggle to be one with God and with his fearful torments along the way.

Let us move from God the Father to Paul Schreber's earthly father, not an insignificant person in this context. Daniel Gottlieb Schreber was born in Leipzig in 1808—the year of Fichte's "Address to the German Nation," held in Berlin during the French occupation; of Goethe's *Faust,* of Kleist's *Penthesilea*. He was a prominent doctor, famous throughout the German-speaking world, author of a series of works on medical gymnastics and child raising. The Schreber associations that flourish today in Germany are, however, occupied not with health gymnastics but with garden plots. Those of you readers who devote your happy leisure time

hours to such projects should be aware that the source of your creation was Daniel Gottlieb Schreber. Think what you will of him—and his posthumous reputation covers the whole scale from affection to hate—he was an extremely enthusiastic man.

He had five children. Christened Daniel Paul, the son who was to occupy Freud's thoughts, was born in 1841. The story of his illness, the source of the rich literature about him, began in 1884. Daniel Paul Schreber, at that time a court judge in Chemnitz in Saxony, stood for parliament that year as a candidate of the National Liberal party. It was on that occasion that the newspaper asked the question I have already cited about who Dr. Schreber really was. In 1866, when Schreber was 24 years of age, Saxony had been invaded by Bismarck's

troops and became part of the North German Confederation, which in time became the German Empire, which in time became the Third Reich, the 12-year millennium, which in turn became what it is today, a great power making a comeback, which we watch perhaps admiringly or fearfully.

Bismarck is not an insignificant person in Schreber's story. Schreber's *Memoirs,* his madness, is triggered by his longing to be united with the father figure and his terror of such a union, and it continues to revolve around that theme. The father figure may be God, the sun, or his doctor, Dr. Flechsig. This is the core of his drama and this is what above all captured Freud's interest. Freud was fascinated by a man's relation to his father; indeed, his view of it was revolutionary. Herein lay his greatness,

but also his limitation, since the mother figure in Freud's thinking is constantly eclipsed by the father's enormous shadow. Our understanding of women often has to be distilled out of statements that originally concerned men.

If the father Schreber was authoritarian and pushy, sometimes capricious, and intolerant of opposition—and there is a great deal of evidence that he was, even if some researchers have smeared his reputation too much—then, for Germany, Bismarck was a father with similar characteristics. The goal of the National Liberal party had once been to be the spokesman for a liberal middle class that Germany did not have, to our misfortune and its own. Logically enough, the party little by little evolved into supporting the union of the Empire on conditions set by Bismarck and Prussia. In view of the

ambivalence that can be discerned in the history of the party, it is understandable that Daniel Paul chose it to be his forum. In his madness, his longing to be one with God was constantly at war with his effort to achieve independence. His conflict becomes so powerful that union with God became possible only through torture, laceration, and humiliation.

Schreber lost the election to the Social Democratic candidate. This was the start of his first psychotic breakdown. He was invaded by hypochondriacal fantasies so serious that he had to be admitted to the university clinic at Leipzig, where the above-mentioned Dr. Flechsig was the chief medical officer. After 6 months Schreber was considered cured. He and his wife expressed their profound gratitude to Dr. Flechsig.

In June 1893 Schreber was appointed Presiding Judge of the Court of Appeals in the capital of the country of Saxony, Dresden. This occurred during a period when the whole of the German legal system was being remodelled and made uniform; the previous Saxonist law was to be reshaped and become a part of German parliamentary law. When one reads Schreber's *Memoirs* and becomes acquainted with his insanity, one sees that the question of authority and autonomy comes up again and again; his hallucinations are constantly concerned with the attempt by outside powers to invade his body and overpower his reason. As the genius he was, Schreber had received his appointment at a relatively early age. In spite of his presidency he was the youngest member of the court

administration. The father question was a tangible issue in his life.

Paranoia as Breakthrough and Breakdown

Schreber now broke down for a second time. Together with people like Rebecca West in Ibsen's *Rosmersholm,* perhaps he belonged to the species Freud characterized as "those who are wrecked by success."

This time it was more serious: when Schreber was again admitted under the care of Dr. Flechsig, he was already developing a paranoid imagination. He was given the diagnosis dementia paranoides. Six months later he was moved from the university clinic in Leipzig to the mental hospital Sonnenstein. That name is not uninteresting considering what significance the sun was to have in Schreber's

vision of the world. He remained in Sonnenstein until 1902 and it was there that he wrote his *Memoirs*. The book was published in 1903 and was primarily intended as a plea for the defense by a person who regarded himself, perhaps rightly, as exposed to forensic psychiatric injustice. The defense plea was effective. The compulsory commitment was revoked.

Schreber was now living as a free man, reunited with his adopted daughter, who had taken the place of the no fewer than six children his wife had lost through miscarriage. These miscarriages offer a special perspective on Schreber's hallucinatory world, which is crowded with small figures in the process of performing what Schreber calls *"miracles."* These consist mainly of the small figures trying to invade or destroy his body. Are these the lost

children demanding their lives and avenging their losses? This detail—it certainly is more than a detail!—may also help us to understand a fundamental argument in his writing: God shall impregnate him and he shall give birth to a saviour of the world. The unfruitful shall be compensated beyond all measure.

So he lived, well adjusted on the surface, under the surface insane, in just the way characteristic of certain paranoid individuals who develop a system of ideas side by side with ordinary everyday life. Often this “parallel reason” is woven around a drama of a persecutor who must be ensnared and rendered harmless. The discrepancy between surface and content points up the interesting relation between creativity and paranoia. They have structural

similarities, which often meet within the same person.

Our strain of paranoia sharpens our attentiveness, forcing us to weave the coherence of “parallel reason” over the gap where the persecutor can be expected to come into view and thus escape the threat of ignorance. Sometimes art or science is the result of the weaving. Each of us has his own personal persecutor. Yet they are all related. The fabric of art and science is woven again and again. The pattern varies; the warp is the same. The extensive, tangible paranoid system seldom gives the observer a liberating experience of the kind Roy Schafer is talking about when he sees the act of reading as a therapeutic experience; meeting a work of fiction is participating in a linguistically reparative action. As opposed to

fiction, the paranoid system is a terminal station where nothing happens except that, at best, the psychotic thinker gets a moment's peace.

Now, not only was Schreber diagnosed a paranoid but the term *dementia paranoides* was also used. *Dementia* is linked to dementia praecox, the name for schizophrenia at that time, a mental state characterized less by the paranoid's outwardly directed search for the enemy than by a scorched earth tactic after a retreat of defeated troops. The constructions a very psychotic person builds up in order to re-populate his scorched world can be difficult to understand even as paraphrases of our common reality. They are so extremely private that they run the risk of fortifying loneliness by populating it. It is conceivable that Schreber's diagnosis went too far. His book is bizarre but it

was not written by a person who has totally fragmented and coded his world.

On the contrary, in his *Memoirs* Schreber produced a massive piece of work for his own self-understanding and cure. Without this achievement he might not have gotten his years of freedom. But his freedom was not stable enough to withstand the disasters that struck him four years after his discharge. In May 1907 his 92-year-old mother died; in November his wife had a stroke followed by aphasia. Fourteen days later Schreber was again admitted to the mental hospital where he remained until his death in 1911. The notes in his hospital journal describe him as hallucinating and difficult to reach. His memoirs may have continued, but we will probably never know anything of them.

Schreber's Theories and Freud's

Schreber introduces his *Memoirs* by stating that the human soul is located in the nerves of the body. There are several sorts of nerves, among them those he calls “the nerves of understanding.” Schreber is always ready to invent words when it is necessary—a quality he shared with Freud. Every nerve of understanding taken by itself is supposed to contain the person’s entire mental individuality. He is thus moving within the “part for the whole” perspective we know from many traditions of ideas, the same that was embraced by Wilhelm Fliess and others during the period of his and Freud’s shared scientific passion when psychoanalysis was born.

When Schreber develops these ideas, “nerve” proves to be simply a synonym for “soul” or “spirit.” So God consists not of a body

but only of nerves. The nerves have the capacity to be transformed into every object in the created world. In this capacity of theirs they are called “rays.” The divine creator’s source of power lies in these transformed rays.

This thinking has obvious similarities to Freud’s libido theory, the foundation stone of his metapsychology. The libido is a transformable energy; it has its “vicissitudes,” to use Freud’s own expression. His first comprehensive presentation of his ideas, his first metapsychological experiment, was the so-called “Project” of 1895 (Masson 1985), rather close in time to Schreber’s *Memoirs* and also a part of Freud’s correspondence with Fliess. In this paper Freud uses purely neurophysiological language. Later he changed to other theoretical models, using three spatial formulations like “id / ego /

superego" throughout. 'The subconscious" is a phrase Freud abandoned, but he had a sketch made of "the psychic apparatus" in which "the unconscious" is placed under "the conscious." We find spatiality in Schreber, too; his hallucinations throughout deal with bodies, space, and movement. Freud strove to construct a metapsychology that would replace metaphysics. Schreber constructed a metaphysics that was to explain what he had been subjected to. Both of them sought their form within the natural science of the time. A crucial difference is that Freud saw his models as provisional, assigned the task of helping thought to move on, while the paranoid Schreber thought he was witnessing absolute certainty, the terminal station of thought. The difference has to do with their degrees of anxiety and containing

capacity. Freud's disquiet was enough to drive him on but not great enough so that he had to lock it in. Schreber's anxiety was unendurable, requiring unshakable frames in the form of a firmly built cosmology, an attempt at terminal storage.

According to Schreber the sun through its rays is one of God's most important instruments for reaching human beings. Well, these might be the words of a psalm. But—and this is many times more interesting—on the first pages of the first chapter of his book Schreber informs us right away that *"die Sonne seit Jahren in menschlichen Worten mit mir spricht"* ("For several years the sun has been speaking to me in human accents"); here lies the borderline between psalmistry and insanity, for he means altogether literally what he is saying. Didn't St.

Francis do the same thing? Didn't Our Lord appear before Moses as pillars of cloud and fire that spoke to him? There is a crucial difference. Francis wanted to send a joyous message, which he felt concerned us all. Moses gave Israel's people a mission that ultimately affected all mankind. Certainly Schreber also had a mission, but he was so occupied by his own person that the literalness in what he was saying constantly threatens to wrap the message around himself. The messages from Moses and St. Francis broaden our horizons. When we study Schreber's message, we share his cell. It provides insights, is at times shamefully entertaining, but it does not lead to liberation.

In this transition from nerve rays to speech we find another interesting parallel to Freud's idea construction—the observation is mine and

not Freud's. Until the end of his life Freud continued his construction of a metapsychology that used biological, topographical, and mechanical models. But the most important instrument in psychoanalysis is dialogue and consequently language. In the theoretical model the superego is somewhere at the top (like the sun and the primitive god!), but what it does in practice is speak—forbidding, encouraging, threatening, appealing, loving, hating.

God/the Sun speaks incessantly to Schreber, mostly in a sardonic, contemptuous, patronizing tone. He talks what Schreber calls *Grundsprache,* a somewhat old-fashioned German, which is semantically related to Big Brother's Newspeak in Orwell's *1984* ("War is peace," etc.). God says "reward" when he means "punishment," "poison" instead of "food,"

‘juice” instead of “poison,” and so on. One reason for this confusion is the ongoing conspiracy against Schreber from his chief medical officer, Dr. Flechsig. Flechsig performs as nerve, ray, and soul. In time, after Schreber imagines that his physician has died, he is seen as one of those *“flüchtig hingemachte Männer’* (“cursorily improvised men”) with whom Schreber populated his world after a disaster had emptied it of all life.

The Life of the Vampires

Schreber’s world is crowded with such improvised figures performing “miracles.” According to the semantics of basic language this word, too, must be understood as its opposite. Schreber’s body was subjected to all kinds of attack: decomposition, evisceration, suffocating spasms, and, especially, what he

calls “soul division.” The well-read Schreber may have encountered this expression in August Strindberg, who in 1887 published an essay with that title in his book *Vivisection*—his prime example is Rebecca West, the same Ibsen character who fascinated Freud. Initially the one seeking to bring about Schreber’s soul murder is Flechsig. He does this by himself appropriating the rays intended for Schreber. In order to do this he has to start an almost vampire-like relationship with his patient. He uses the latter’s intellectual capacity only to let Schreber lie *(“liegen lassen”),* a recurring and extremely anxiety-ridden concept of Schreber’s. While carrying out his depredations, Flechsig is driven by the Faustian motive of achieving immortality.

If one uses a thought process that was not included in Freud’s arsenal but was in Melanie

Klein's, this hallucinatory vampire relation may be seen as a form of jealous projective identification and reintrojection, which can only be understood as having its origin in the earliest relation to the mother. This whole dimension, however, is missing from Freud's reading of Schreber.

At the beginning of the *Memoirs* God is portrayed as an inglorious figure—in his language, in his views, and in his attitude to human beings. He is infinitely distant and unable to enjoy the company of living beings. He understands only corpses. This is why Schreber tries to sit stock still for hours at a time. Nevertheless, at the start God tries to shield him from Flechsig's conspiracies. When Flechsig's soul at some point breeds by sub-dividing in such quantities that it covers the whole sky like a

net, preventing God's rays from reaching Schreber, God carries out a raid, destroying them so that only one of Flechsig's souls remains.

For Schreber longs for a union with God. The unpleasant realization that dawns on him, however, is that if he is to reach his goal he must give up his masculinity through a castration (the German word, *Entmannung,* has other meanings difficult to translate) performed by Flechsig.

The Grandiose Solution

Gradually Schreber begins to work out a solution to his terrible dilemma. By accepting his *Entmannung* and becoming a woman, he can receive God's rays and become pregnant with a new and better species to populate the earth after the disaster that has already wiped out all living

things and replaced them with *flüchtig hingemachte Männer.*

One can say—and that is approximately what Freud does, though in other words—that Schreber tries to establish a “pure” paranoia with the help of a functioning split between the persecutor Flechsig and the good God. This split fails. The separated parties approach each other, and God is infected, primitivized, degenerating into the same wickedness as Flechsig, an evil spectacle with a large measure of foolishness. When you read Schreber’s presentation of the Lord, the Most High, you ask yourself whether it is God who is mocking Schreber or the reverse. Through this unholy mixture of good and evil, Schreber winds up in the psychotic bewilderment we call schizophrenia, where the good and evil objects are paired, becoming

monstrously bizarre. In this confusion the threat of castration or loss of identity become almost too much. “Almost,” since Schreber, by affirming his femininity, succeeds in making himself so attractive to God’s rays that they are attracted to him in great numbers. God becomes powerless, drained of energy!

He thus becomes not only the bearer of the Messiah, but he also makes the Father powerless. Many women will recognize this debatable method of winning double points. For the despairing Schreber this was a way out of the dilemma. He accepts his “Entmannung” and transforms the negative classification “non-man” into the positive classification “woman.” In this way he idealizes femininity and triumphs over God the Father.

The Inevitable Homosexuality and Its Fate

Now I have pointed out that Sigmund Freud is not Melanie Klein, in other words that he was a man and not a woman who could beget certain kinds of ideas about Schreber. It is time to move on to what Freud actually had to say about Schreber.

Freud focuses on the two main elements in Schreber's psychotic world: his transformation into a woman and his role as God's favorite. He sees it as his duty to show that these two elements hang together. He establishes that Flechsig and, later, God will take on the role of persecutor in Schreber's hallucinatory world. At first he tries to present this paranoid relation in a simple formula: "The hated persecutor was once loved and respected." In order to understand the origin of this idea in Schreber's case, we would have to have more information about his

family's background. Freud regrets that Schreber's family had obviously censored those passages in the *Memoirs* in which he openly comments on his family relationships.

Nevertheless, it is clear to Freud that the purpose of the persecution delusion is to motivate the paranoid's own emotional swings from love to hate. After his first breakdown, characterized by hypochondria and cured after 6 months with Flechsig, Schreber was full of gratitude to his physician. The second and much more serious breakdown was preceded by a dream in which Schreber saw himself as a woman in a state of constant sensual pleasure. Freud interprets the dream as a sexualized longing for the good father figure Flechsig.

This longing is frightening because of its homosexual bias; therefore, Schreber's second period of illness, the one described in his book, is marked both by his homosexual longing and by his struggle against it. Its main theme is the fantasy of being a woman and being sexually abused, ultimately by God. As we have seen, Schreber nullifies the narcissistic outrage his "Entmannung" implies by transforming it into a triumph. In omnipotent communion with God, Schreber succeeds in becoming reconciled with his persecutor.

The third chapter of Freud's "Notes" is called "On the Mechanism of Paranoia" and is an attempt at a general understanding of paranoia. Freud is of the opinion that its core is an unacceptable homosexual desire. The most important cause of this homosexual desire is

more universal than is paranoia itself, because it is naturally related to the normal, very early stage in our development that Freud calls the narcissistic. As infants we make ourselves, or parts of ourselves, into objects of our libidinous requirements. The narcissistic structure is homosexual by definition since it is borne by a libido, directed to ourselves, to a person of the same sex. When we start out, we are all in this homosexual relationship. When we go on past the narcissistic state, this homosexuality meets different fates.

Three Ways Out of the Primal Narcissism

Three years later in his article on narcissism, Freud (1914d) went more deeply into these ideas. Now much later, during the last few decades, the question of healthy and unhealthy narcissism has been the focus of

psychoanalytical thought. In his book on Schreber's book, Freud confines himself to considering three forms of development:

1. Homosexuality is sublimated to a faculty for close contact with people of the same sex.
2. The development of manifest homosexuality.
3. Various forms of blocking threatening homosexual impulses.

If we start from men, which Freud always does when he is not expressly speaking of women, the homosexual impulse may be briefly expressed this way: "I love him." If the paths to sublimation or manifest homosexuality are closed, the impulse may seem so threatening that it must be blocked. Freud notes some ways by which it can be warded off. One of them is

paranoia; that was Schreber's way. I will return to that shortly. Another way is erotic mania, which transforms the key sentence above into "I don't love him but her." Don Juan's seduction compulsion, his pedantic cataloguing, may be interpreted as an unremitting, demonstrative control of a homosexual impulse: "Look at how many women I have captured—one thousand and three in Spain alone! Who could suggest that I have homosexual desires?"

Another way is pathological jealousy, which manipulates the key sentence this way: "*I* don't love him; *she* does." The homosexual interest is now concealed behind a curtain of aggressivity aimed at the supposed rival. Behind the curtain of hate and suspicion, the erotic contact with the man to whom the jealous one feels his illicit attraction is unconsciously cultivated. The

pleasing attraction is secretly fueled by the jealous one's intensive commitment and attention. Still another way out is megalomania, which can also be detected in Schreber. The dangerously charged sentence "I love him" is denied and rejected, replaced by "I love no one but myself." The amount of libido directed toward one's own self becomes overpowering. The result is excessive self-esteem.

Striving for Self-Cure

The paranoid way out of the dilemma presents us with a more complex timetable. The key sentence with its homosexual threat was, as we remember, "I love him." In the paranoid process the next stage is prescribed by the defence mechanism we call reaction formation: "I don't love him; I hate him." This phrasing in its turn becomes problematical and goes through

an additional transformation via a new defence, projection: “It is not *I* who hates him, it is *he* who hates me.” So Freud has provided a basic sketch not only for the dynamics of paranoid psychosis but also for our ordinary paranoia, including the ethnic.

We can interpret the initial change to hate as one of several possible ways of hiding the forbidden sentence “I love him.” But how are we to understand the projection “It is not I who hates, it is he”? Freud thought of the father as the original object of Schreber’s love. Dr. Flechsig entered this previously prepared space in Schreber’s inner world, the beloved father’s place. Freud regarded both the father and Dr. Flechsig as having been good figures originally. It can be difficult to have to hate someone who has served one well; this is one of the

complications in the series of paranoid changes Freud uncovers, which I have described above—it ranges from “I love him” to “I hate him because he is persecuting me,” with all its connecting links. Thus in Freud’s thinking there is the implication that anyone who takes the paranoid path in his unconscious regards it as easier to endure the conflict of ambivalence and the constant presence of persecution than to endure a homosexual longing, which includes a castration threat. Now “easy” is not at all a word to use in this context. Reading Schreber’s book provides its cheerful moments but on the whole it is a tour through circles of an inferno.

According to Freud the specific for paranoia is the change via projection: “It is not I who hates him, it is he who hates me.” But when at end of the third section of his book on

Schreber's book, Freud seeks to go more deeply into his view of the central mechanism of paranoia—projection—the result is poor. Freud promises to return to the subject in a later paper. He never published a paper on projection. It is very probable that he wrote one in 1915 when he authored twelve metapsychological papers during one of his creative sweeps. Most of these, however, he rejected himself.

Lacking deeper insights into projective blocking, he tries to understand paranoia from his well-known concept of "repression." This had been the guiding light for his understanding of hysteria, but it was of little help to him in his exploration of paranoia. For this reason I will not go into detail about this aspect of Freud's reasoning in his "Notes." I will content myself with giving an account of the extremely

productive interpretation he achieves when, from his experience with the dynamic element in "the return of the repressed" in neurosis, he demonstrates that the psychotic illusion also contains an effort at self-cure. The basic sequence in psychosis, according to Freud, may be arranged in this way: when the psychotic experiences pain in his contact with the world, he sets in motion a drastic withdrawal of his libido. The result of this is that the world is emptied, and the psychotic is faced with a catastrophic void. We all live in conflict between the price of closeness and the price of loneliness. For the psychotic this conflict is a matter of life and death.

Faced by the new threat, which has arisen when he withdrew his libido, the threat of total abandonment, the psychotic seeks to re-populate

the empty world with the constructions of his own we call hallucinations: he tries to build a world on his own terms. In his book Schreber gives poignant examples of how he tries to repopulate this cleansed world. When his wife fails to arrive at a planned visit to the mental hospital, the pain drives him to annihilate her in his mind. Since she can not be trusted, she may not exist any more. In the vacuum after her, he places one of his *"flüchtig hingemachte Männer."* This figure is Schreber's own creation so it is reliable. But because it is a part of himself, it is still another sign of his consuming loneliness. Thus is built the psychotic circle of omnipotent cleansing, hallucinatory peopling of the deserted country, and increased loneliness.

In defiance of his fragile theoretical assumption—the mechanism of repression—

Freud propounds a revolutionary idea that changes the direction of the common views of psychosis. Freud regards hallucinations, illusions, and the almost incomprehensible actions linked to them—everything usually seen as the illness itself—as an effort toward healing, toward self-cure. There is an ominous foreboding about these efforts because the psychotic continues to feel the tension between annihilation and megalomanic control. In psychoanalysis we have adopted this way of looking at things, and after Freud it has become deeper and more complicated. Out of this train of thought the essential question was born: What happens when a hallucinatory mental life, which is an attempt at self-cure through the establishment of a world of one's own, however peculiar it may be, is suppressed by medication?

The question is all the more topical the more those who hold an exclusively biological point of view in psychiatry come to recapture temporarily lost ground. It is an issue that ought to go on being of concern. Very much a topic current today, but it was already resident in the interpretation Sigmund Freud was able to develop when in 1910 he met Paul Daniel Schreber's "cursorily improvised" world.

Annotated Bibliography

There is an extensive literature on Daniel Paul Schreber's life and work, on his father's life and work, and on Freud's analysis of his work. Here I will touch on only a quantitatively small portion of it; the most important of the part I am familiar with. For those who wish to go still deeper into the subject, I recommend the current

and extraordinarily detailed reference list in the book by Zvi Lothane I comment on below.

The origin of it all is the book Daniel Paul Schreber published in 1903 and whose complete title is; *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkrankes nebst Nachträge und einem Anhang über die Frage: "Unter welchen Voraussetzungen darf eine für geisteskrank erachtete Person gegen ihren erklärten Willen in eine Heilanstalt festgehalten werden."* The English translation, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness,* was most recently published by Harvard University Press in 1988.

This remarkable document might have disappeared into oblivion if it had not been brought to the attention of the world by Sigmund Freud who, in 1911, published

Psychoanalytische Bemerkungen über einen autobiographisch beschriebenen Fall von Paranoia (Dementia paranoides).

The discussion of the “Schreber Case” was revived from a completely different angle than Freud’s when the psychoanalyst William Niederland began in the 1950s to publish a series of articles that were collected in 1974 in *The Schreber Case: Psychoanalytic Profile of a Paranoid Personality.* (A new enlarged edition was published in 1984.) Niederland had taken the trouble to read Father Schreber’s books on child raising, orthopedic gymnastics, and his special blend of the two: the use of apparatuses to make the child sit and lie straight, not to masturbate, and so on. In Niederland’s version, the image of Father Schreber is of a constantly interfering, sadistically controlling,

simultaneously seductive figure, well calculated to creating in his son the fear, longing, bewilderment, and highly private systems that are the marks of paranoia. Niederland thinks he is able to see the father's orthopedic and gymnastics apparatuses—reproduced in his book—turning up as instruments of torture in Daniel Paul's hallucinatory world. His version of the background to Schreber's paranoia was to be the model for succeeding authors, including myself when I wrote my book *Sigmund Freud: Mannen och verket* (Sigmund Freud: The Man and his Work).

William Niederland himself was in no way a participant in the anti-psychiatric movement of the 1960s and 1970s and its ideological links to the youth revolution then in progress. But his data and his conclusions fit into the pattern of

the strong protest of the time against a society that created illness, a society in which the family was the core. Several writers took up the family Schreber as a shocking example of an environment that can create psychosis. The greatest impact was delivered by Morton Schatzman in his book *Soul Murder,* published in 1973. Schatzman follows to the limit the thesis that Father Schreber was the instigator of his son's psychosis, criticizing Freud for excluding that aspect. Another of his goals was to contribute to the critical examination of the child-raising ideology of that time, which he finds lacking in Freud's presentation. He has been criticized for exploiting Niederland's data. A modern defence of Schatzman may be found in a book published in 1980 by the Dutch sociologist Han Israëls. It was published in

English in 1988 under the title *Schreber: Father and Son*. I will not go into more detail about Israël's book since I do not think it adds anything substantial to the discussion of Schreber.

On the other hand, it would be a mistake to ignore the most recent and up to now the most comprehensive and well-documented contribution to Schreber literature, Zvi Lothane's *In Defence of Schreber: Soul Murder and Psychiatry,* from 1992. Lothane is a psychoanalyst and professor of psychiatry in New York. For his 500-page book he has read not only most of the primary and secondary material on the subject but has also gone to sources such as Father Schreber's collected works, all the published articles of both Schreber's physicians, Flechsig and Weber,

Schreber's hospital journals, and so on. His book is indispensable for anyone who wants to go more deeply into the subject, but the reader runs the risk of getting lost in details, which from time to time conceal the main thesis Lothane is presenting and which the reader gets an inkling of as soon as he reads the title.

Lothane's defence applies to both Father Schreber and his son. His research has not provided him with sufficient evidence to support his theories about the illness-producing father. He sees Moritz Schreber as a victim of a myth. It is consequently evident that he is hard on Schatzman but is considerably more gentle in his criticism of Niederland, although it was he who provided all of the basic data on the image of Moritz Schreber as a sadistic domestic tyrant. Neither does Lothane have any hard words to

say about Freud, although his next defence, concerning Daniel Paul Schreber, seeks to undermine both the basis for Freud’s reasoning—that Schreber was a paranoid psychotic—and Freud’s conclusion—that Schreber’s condition had its roots in repressed homosexuality. Lothane reasons as though he wants to exonerate Freud from an accusation, which may mean that he has not understood Freud’s view of homosexual desires as a general phenomenon that get their specificity from the individual’s way of dealing with them.

On the basis of his exhaustive research, Lothane sees in Schreber a man who is painfully engrossed by his love, his losses, and his legitimate striving for redress. Instead of a primal psychotic, Lothane sees a seriously depressive, masochistic person who is being

subject to actual persecution and soul murder, not by his father, for that can not be proved, but by his physicians, by his wife, and by his mother, for this can be seen in the hospital journal as well as in other places. Schreber's paranoid tendency, which brought about his diagnosis, developed secondarily (according to Lothane) as an understandable reaction to the treatment he had to undergo when he was involuntarily interned in a mental hospital. Schreber was a victim of psychiatric assault, and his book is a defence paper written by a professional lawyer.

But do not the *Memoirs* bear the mark of a lunatic's work? Lothane leaves open the question of to what extent Schreber in his book is setting forth an arranged insanity. Schreber may have been more the master in his own

house than is indicated by a reading of his book, which is psychoanalytically sophisticated but naive from the point of view of literary criticism. In any case Lothane seems convinced that an attitude other than that of those around him could have helped Schreber more, though when he makes this statement he seems to be assuming a combination of anti-depressive medication and psychotherapy that simply did not exist at that time.

A favorable interpretation on my part of the fact that Freud is spared the criticism that logically should follow Lothane’s change of Schreber’s diagnosis might sound like this: Lothane wants first and foremost to point to the diagnosis of paranoia as an instrument of the psychiatric tyranny Schreber was subjected to. But Freud was not involved in that tyranny; he

was not involved at all with Schreber as a person. He analyzed a text and that text is paranoid, whether it is produced by consciously metaphorical writing or by a genuine delusion. Consciously metaphorical writing must also have its origins in genuine layers of the author's unconscious if it is really to meet a receiver. If his text conveys insanity, it does so in contact with the author's genuinely insane sides. If one accepts this train of thought, it is possible to see a text as a perfectly valid starting point for analyses of the type Freud carried out from Schreber's *Memoirs*. The text is psychoanalyzed but not its author—in the way it is done in a certain type of psychobiographies, rightly criticized—for the perfectly obvious reason that the analyst has access to the whole text but not on that account to the whole author. Naturally

the analyst does not have access to the "whole analysand," even if they meet for many years. That the outcome of the text analysis may—and ought—to be questioned is another matter.

Zvi Lothane does not present this line of reasoning, and it may not be his. On the other hand, it is mine, and it is linked to one of the main themes in my Schreber article: the question of the requirements for psychoanalyzing a text.

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