

Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)

I Case History

'I HAVE suffered twice from nervous disorders', writes Dr. Schreber, 'and each time as a result of mental overstrain. This was due on the first occasion to my standing as a candidate for election to the Reichstag while I was Landgerichtsdirektor¹ at Chemnitz, and on the second occasion to the very heavy burden of work that fell upon my shoulders when I entered on my new duties as Senatspräsident in the Oberlandesgericht in Dresden.'(34.)

Dr. Schreber's first illness began in the autumn of 1884, and by the end of 1885 he had completely recovered. During this period he spent six months in Flechsig's clinic, and the latter, in a formal report which he drew up at a later date, described the disorder as an attack of severe hypochondria [379]. Dr. Schreber assures us that this illness ran its course 'without the occurrence of any incidents bordering upon the sphere of the supernatural'.(35.)

Neither the patient's own account, nor the reports of the physicians which are reprinted at the end of his book,² tell us enough about his previous history or his personal circumstances. I am not even in a position to give the patient's age at the time of his illness,³ though the high judicial position which he had attained before his second illness establishes some sort of lower limit. We learn that Dr. Schreber had been married long before the time of his 'hypochondria'. 'The gratitude of my wife', he writes, 'was perhaps even more heartfelt; for she revered Professor Flechsig as the man who had restored her husband to her, and hence it was that for years she kept his portrait standing upon her writing-table.' (36.) And in the same place: 'After my recovery from my first illness I spent eight years with my wife—

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1 [Judge presiding over an inferior Court.]

2 [The Appendices to Schreber's book, covering nearly 140 pages, include three medico-legal Reports by Dr. Weber (dated December, 1899, November, 1900, and April, 1902), Schreber's own Statement of his Case (July, 1901) and the Court Judgement of July, 1902.]

3 [He was, in fact, 42 at the time of his first illness (p. 7) and, as Freud himself tells us on p. 46, 51 at the time of his second.]

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years, upon the whole, of great happiness, rich in outward honours, and only clouded from time to time by the oft-repeated disappointment of our hope that we might be blessed with children.'

In June, 1893, he was notified of his prospective appointment as Senatspräsident, and he took up his duties on the first of October of the same year. Between these two dates¹ he had some dreams, though it was not until later that he came to attach any importance to them. He dreamt two or three times that his old nervous disorder had come back; and this made him as miserable in the dream as the discovery that it was only a dream made him happy when he woke up. Once, in the early hours of the morning, moreover, while he was in a state between sleeping and waking, the idea occurred to him 'that after all it really must be very nice to be a woman submitting to the act of copulation'. (36.) This idea was one which he would have rejected with the greatest indignation if he had been fully conscious.

The second illness set in at the end of October 1893 with a torturing bout of sleeplessness. This forced him to return to the Flechsig clinic, where, however, his condition grew rapidly worse. The further course of the illness is described in a Report drawn up subsequently [in 1899] by the director of the Sonnenstein Asylum: 'At the commencement of his residence there² he expressed more hypochondriacal ideas, complained that he had softening of the brain, that he would soon be dead, etc. But ideas of persecution were already finding their way into the clinical picture, based upon sensory illusions which, however, seemed only to appear sporadically at first; while simultaneously a high degree of hyperaesthesia was observable—great sensitiveness to light and noise.—Later, the visual and

auditory illusions became much more frequent, and, in conjunction with coenaesthetic disturbances, dominated the whole of his feeling and thought. He believed that he was dead and decomposing, that he was suffering from the plague; he asserted that his body was being handled in all kinds of revolting ways; and, as he himself declares to this day, he went through worse horrors than any one could have imagined, and all on behalf of a holy

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1 And therefore before he could have been affected by the overwork caused by his new post, to which he attributes his illness.

2 In Professor Flechsig's clinic at Leipzig. [See Editor's Note, p. 7.]

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purpose. The patient was so much pre-occupied with these pathological experiences that he was inaccessible to any other impression and would sit perfectly rigid and motionless for hours (hallucinatory stupor). On the other hand, they tortured him to such a degree that he longed for death. He made repeated attempts at drowning himself in his bath, and asked to be given the "cyanide that was intended for him". His delusional ideas gradually assumed a mystical and religious character; he was in direct communication with God, he was the plaything of devils, he saw "miraculous apparitions", he heard "holy music", and in the end he even came to believe that he was living in another world.' (380.)

It may be added that there were certain people by whom he thought he was being persecuted and injured, and upon whom he poured abuse. The most prominent of these was his former physician, Flechsig, whom he called a 'soul-murderer'; and he used to call out over and over again: '*Little Flechsig!*' putting a sharp stress upon the first word (383). He was moved from Leipzig, and, after a short interval spent in another institution,¹ was brought in June 1894 to the Sonnenstein Asylum, near Pirna, where he remained until his disorder assumed its final shape. In the course of the next few years the clinical picture altered in a manner which can best be described in the words of Dr. Weber, the director of the asylum.²

'I need not enter any further into the details of the course of the disease. I must, however, draw attention to the manner in which, as time went on, the initial comparatively acute psychosis, which had directly involved the patient's entire mental life and deserved the name of "hallucinatory insanity", developed more and more clearly (one might almost say crystallized out) into the paranoid clinical picture that we have before us to-day.' (385.) The fact was that, on the one hand, he had developed an ingenious delusional structure, in which we have every reason to be interested, while, on the other hand, his personality had been reconstructed and now showed itself, except for a few isolated disturbances, capable of meeting the demands of everyday life.

Dr. Weber, in his Report of 1899, makes the following remarks: 'It thus appears that at the present time, apart from

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1 [Dr. Pierson's private asylum at Lindenhof.]

2 [In his Report of July, 1899.]

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certain obvious psychomotor symptoms which cannot fail to strike even the superficial observer as being pathological, Herr Senatspräsident Dr. Schreber shows no signs of confusion or of psychological inhibition, nor is his intelligence noticeably impaired. His mind is collected, his memory is excellent, he has at his disposal a very considerable store of knowledge (not merely upon legal questions, but in many other fields), and he is able to reproduce it in a connected train of thought. He takes an interest in following events in the world of politics, science and art, etc., and is constantly occupied with such matters ... and an observer who was uninstructed upon his general condition would scarcely notice anything peculiar in these directions. In spite of all this, however, the patient is full of ideas of pathological origin, which have formed themselves into a complete system; they are more or less fixed, and seem to be inaccessible to correction by means of any objective appreciation and judgement of the external facts.' (385-6.)

Thus the patient's condition had undergone a great change, and he now considered himself capable of carrying on an independent existence. He accordingly took appropriate steps with a view to regaining control over his own affairs and to securing his discharge from the asylum. Dr. Weber set himself to prevent the fulfilment of these intentions and drew up reports in opposition to them. Nevertheless, in his Report dated 1900, he felt obliged to give this appreciative account of the patient's character and conduct: 'Since for the last nine months Herr Präsident Schreber has taken his meals daily at my family board, I have had the most ample opportunities of conversing with him upon every imaginable topic. Whatever the subject was that came up for discussion (apart, of course, from his delusional ideas), whether it concerned events in the field of administration and law, of politics, art, literature or social life—in short, whatever the topic, Dr. Schreber gave evidence of a lively interest, a well-informed mind, a good memory, and a sound judgement; his ethical outlook, moreover, was one which it was impossible not to endorse. So, too, in his lighter talk with the ladies of the party, he was both courteous and affable, and when he touched upon matters in a more humorous vein he invariably displayed tact and decorum. Never once, during these innocent talks round the dining-table, did he introduce subjects which should more properly have been raised at a

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medical consultation.' (397-8.) Indeed, on one occasion during this period when a business question arose which involved the interests of his whole family, he entered into it in a manner which showed both his technical knowledge and his common sense (401 and 510).

In the numerous applications to the courts, by which Dr. Schreber endeavoured to regain his liberty, he did not in the least disavow his delusions or make any secret of his intention of publishing the *Denkwürdigkeiten*. On the contrary, he dwelt upon the importance of his ideas to religious thought, and upon their invulnerability to the attacks of modern science; but at the same time he laid stress upon the 'absolute harmlessness' (430) of all the actions which, as he was aware, his delusions obliged him to perform. Such, indeed, were his acumen and the cogency of his logic that finally, and in spite of his being an acknowledged paranoic, his efforts were crowned with success. In July, 1902, Dr. Schreber's civil rights were restored, and in the following year his *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken* appeared, though in a censored form and with many valuable portions omitted.

The Court Judgement that gave Dr. Schreber back his liberty summarizes the content of his delusional system in a few sentences: 'He believed that he had a mission to redeem the world and to restore it to its lost state of bliss.¹ This, however, he could only bring about if he were first transformed from a man into a woman.' (475.)

For a more detailed account of his delusions as they appeared in their final shape we may turn to Dr. Weber's Report of 1899: 'The culminating point of the patient's delusional system is his belief that he has a mission to redeem the world, and to restore mankind to their lost state of bliss. He was called to this task, so he asserts, by direct inspiration from God, just as we are taught that the Prophets were; for nerves in a condition of great excitement, as his were for a long time, have precisely the property of exerting an attraction upon God—though this is touching on matters which human speech is scarcely, if at all, capable of expressing, since they lie entirely outside the scope of human experience and, indeed, have been revealed to him alone. The most essential part of his mission of redemption is

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¹ [See footnote 3, p. 23.]

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that it must be preceded by his *transformation into a woman*. It is not to be supposed that he *wishes* to be transformed into a woman; it is rather a question of a "must" based upon the Order of Things, which there is no possibility of his evading, much as he would personally prefer to remain in his own honourable and masculine station in life. But neither he nor the rest of mankind can regain the life beyond except by his being transformed into a woman (a process which may occupy many years or even decades) by means of divine miracles. He himself, of this he is convinced, is the only object upon which divine miracles are worked, and he is thus the most remarkable human being who has ever lived upon earth. Every hour and every minute for years he has experienced these miracles in his body, and

he has had them confirmed by the voices that have conversed with him. During the first years of his illness certain of his bodily organs suffered such destructive injuries as would inevitably have led to the death of any other man: he lived for a long time without a stomach, without intestines, almost without lungs, with a torn oesophagus, without a bladder, and with shattered ribs, he used sometimes to swallow part of his own larynx with his food, etc. But divine miracles ("rays") always restored what had been destroyed, and therefore, as long as he remains a man, he is altogether immortal. These alarming phenomena have ceased long ago, and his "femaleness" has become prominent instead. This is a matter of a process of development which will probably require decades, if not centuries, for its completion, and it is unlikely that anyone now living will survive to see the end of it. He has a feeling that enormous numbers of "female nerves" have already passed over into his body, and out of them a new race of men will proceed, through a process of direct impregnation by God. Not until then, it seems, will he be able to die a natural death, and, along with the rest of mankind, will he regain a state of bliss. In the meantime not only the sun, but trees and birds, which are in the nature of "bemiracled residues of former human souls", speak to him in human accents, and miraculous things happen everywhere around him.' (386-8.)

The interest felt by the practical psychiatrist in such delusional formations as these is, as a rule, exhausted when once he has ascertained the character of the products of the delusion and has formed an estimate of their influence *on* the patient's

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general behaviour: in his case marvelling is not the beginning of understanding. The psycho-analyst, in the light of his knowledge of the psychoneuroses, approaches the subject with a suspicion that even thought-structures so extraordinary as these and so remote from our common modes of thinking are nevertheless derived from the most general and comprehensible impulses of the human mind; and he would be glad to discover the motives of such a transformation as well as the manner in which it has been accomplished. With this aim in view, he will wish to go more deeply into the details of the delusion and into the history of its development.

(a) The medical officer lays stress upon two points as being of chief importance: the patient's *assumption of the role of Redeemer*, and his *transformation into a woman*. The Redeemer delusion is a phantasy that is familiar to us through the frequency with which it forms the nucleus of religious paranoia. The additional factor, which makes the redemption dependent upon the man being previously transformed into a woman, is unusual and in itself bewildering, since it shows such a wide divergence from the historical myth which the patient's phantasy is setting out to reproduce. It is natural to follow the medical report in assuming that the motive force of this delusional complex was the patient's ambition to play the part of Redeemer, and that his *emasculat*ion was only entitled to be regarded as a means for achieving that end. Even though this may appear to be true of his delusion in its final form, a study of the *Denkwürdigkeiten* compels us to take a very different view of the matter. For we learn that the idea of being transformed into a woman (that is, of being emasculated) was the primary delusion, that he began by regarding that act as constituting a serious injury and persecution, and that it only became related to his playing the part of Redeemer in a secondary way. There can be no doubt, moreover, that originally he believed that the transformation was to be effected for the purpose of sexual abuse and not so as to serve higher designs. The position may be formulated by saying that a sexual delusion of persecution was later on converted in the patient's mind into a religious delusion of grandeur. The part of persecutor was at first assigned to Professor Flehsig, the physician in whose charge he was; later, his place was taken by God Himself.

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I will quote the relevant passages from the *Denkwürdigkeiten* in full: 'In this way a conspiracy against me was brought to a head (in about March or April, 1894). Its object was to contrive that, when once my nervous complaint had been recognized as incurable or assumed to be so, I should be handed over to a certain person in a particular manner: my soul was to be delivered up to him, but my body—owing to a misapprehension of what I have described above as the purpose underlying the Order of

Things—was to be transformed into a female body, and as such surrendered to the person in question¹ with a view to sexual abuse, and was then simply to be “left on one side”—that is to say, no doubt, given over to corruption.’ (56.)

‘It was, moreover, perfectly natural that from the human standpoint (which was the one by which at that time I was still chiefly governed) I should regard Professor Flechsig or his soul as my only true enemy—at a later date there was also the von W. soul, about which I shall have more to say presently—and that I should look upon God Almighty as my natural ally. I merely fancied that He was in great straits as regards Professor Flechsig, and consequently felt myself bound to support Him by every conceivable means, even to the length of sacrificing myself. It was not until very much later that the idea forced itself upon my mind that God Himself had played the part of accomplice, if not of instigator, in the plot whereby my soul was to be murdered and my body used like a strumpet. I may say, in fact, that this idea has in part become clearly conscious to me only in the course of writing the present work.’ (59.)

‘Every attempt at murdering my soul, or at emasculating me for purposes *contrary to the Order of Things* (that is, for the gratification of the sexual appetites of a human individual), or later at destroying my understanding—every such attempt has come to nothing. From this apparently unequal struggle between one weak man and God Himself, I have emerged as the victor—though not without undergoing much bitter suffering and privation—because the Order of Things stands upon my side.’ (61.)

In a footnote attached to the words ‘*contrary to the Order of Things*’ in the above passage, the author foreshadows the

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¹ It is shown from the context in this and other passages that ‘the person in question’ who was to practise this abuse was none other than Flechsig. (See below (p. **38** ff.).)

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subsequent transformation in his delusion of emasculation and in his relation to God: ‘I shall show later on that emasculation for quite another purpose—a purpose *in consonance with the Order of Things*—is within the bounds of possibility, and, indeed, that it may quite probably afford the solution of the conflict.’

These statements are of decisive importance in determining the view we are to take of the delusion of emasculation and in thus giving us a general understanding of the case. It may be added that the ‘voices’ which the patient heard never treated his transformation into a woman as anything but a sexual disgrace, which gave them an excuse for jeering at him. ‘Rays of God¹ not infrequently thought themselves entitled to mock at me by calling me “Miss² Schreber”, in allusion to the emasculation which, it was alleged, I was about to undergo.’ (127.) Or they would say: ‘So *this* sets up to have been a Senatspräsident, this person who lets himself be f—d!’³ Or again: ‘Don’t you feel ashamed in front of your wife?’ [177.]

That the emasculation phantasy was of a primary nature and originally independent of the Redeemer *motif* becomes still more probable when we recollect the ‘idea’ which, as I mentioned on an earlier page [p. **13**], occurred to him while he was half asleep, to the effect that it must be nice to be a woman submitting to the act of copulation (36.) This phantasy appeared during the incubation period of his illness, and before he had begun to feel the effects of overwork in Dresden.

Schreber himself gives the month of November, 1895, as the date at which the connection was established between the emasculation phantasy and the Redeemeridea and the way thus paved for his becoming reconciled to the former. ‘Now, however,’ he writes, ‘I became clearly aware that the Order of Things imperatively demanded my emasculation, whether I personally liked it or no, and that no *reasonable* course lay open to me but to reconcile myself to the thought of being transformed into a woman. The further consequence of my emasculation could, of course, only be my impregnation by divine rays

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¹ The ‘rays of God’, as we shall see [p. **23**], are identical with the voices which talked the ‘basic language’.

² [In English in the original.]

3 I reproduce this omission from the *Denkwürdigkeiten*, just as I do all the peculiarities of their author's way of writing. I myself should have found no reason for being so shamefaced over a serious matter.

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to the end that a new race of men might be created.' (177.)

The idea of being transformed into a woman was the salient feature and the earliest germ of his delusional system. It also proved to be the one part of it that persisted after his cure, and the one part that was able to retain a place in his behaviour in real life after he had recovered. 'The *only thing* which could appear unreasonable in the eyes of other people is the fact, already touched upon in the expert's report, that I am sometimes to be found standing before the mirror or elsewhere, with the upper portion of my body bared, and wearing sundry feminine adornments, such as ribbons, false necklaces, and the like. This only occurs, I may add, when I am *by myself*, and never, at least so far as I am able to avoid it, in the presence of other people.' (429.) The Herr Senatspräsident confesses to this frivolity at a date (July, 1901)¹ at which he was already in a position to express very aptly the completeness of his recovery in the region of practical life: 'I have now long been aware that the persons I see about me are not "cursorily improvised men" but real people, and that I must therefore behave towards them as a reasonable man is used to behave towards his fellows.' (409.) In contrast to the way in which he put his emasculation phantasy into action, the patient never took any steps towards inducing people to recognize his mission as Redeemer, beyond the publication of his *Denkwürdigkeiten*.

(b) The attitude of our patient towards *God* is so singular and so full of internal contradictions that it requires more than a little faith to persist in the belief that there is nevertheless 'method' in his 'madness'. With the help of what Dr. Schreber tells us in the *Denkwürdigkeiten*, we must now endeavour to arrive at a more exact view of his theologico-psychological system, and we must expound his opinions concerning *nerves, the state of bliss, the divine hierarchy, and the attributes of God*, in their manifest (delusional) nexus. At every point in his theory we shall be struck by the astonishing mixture of the commonplace and the clever, of what has been borrowed and what is original.

The human soul² is comprised in the *nerves* of the body. These

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1 [In his Statement of his Case (see footnote 2, p. 12).]

2 ['*Seele*.' When used adjectively, the term is here translated 'spiritual'. See, for instance, on p. 23, '*Seelenteile*', 'spiritual parts'.]

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are to be conceived of as structures of extraordinary fineness, comparable to the finest thread. Some of these nerves are suited only for the reception of sense-perceptions, while others (*the nerves of understanding*) carry out all the functions of the mind; and in this connection it is to be noticed that *each single nerve of understanding represents a person's entire mental individuality*, and that the presence of a greater or lesser number of nerves of understanding has no influence except upon the length of time during which the mind can retain its impressions.¹

Whereas men consist of bodies and nerves, God is from His very nature nothing but nerve. But the nerves of God are not, as is the case with human bodies, present in limited numbers, but are infinite or eternal. They possess all the properties of human nerves to an enormously intensified degree. In their creative capacity—that is, their power of turning themselves into every imaginable object in the created world—they are known as *rays*. There is an intimate relation between God and the starry heaven and the sun.²

When the work of creation was finished, God withdrew to an immense distance (10-11 and 252) and, in general, resigned the world to its own laws. He limited His activities to drawing up to Himself the souls of the dead. It was only in exceptional instances that He would enter into relations with particular, highly gifted persons,³ or would intervene by means of a miracle in the destinies of the world. God does not have any

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1 The words in which Schreber states this theory are italicized by him, and he adds a footnote, in which he insists that it can be used as an explanation of heredity: 'The male semen', he declares, 'contains a nerve belonging to the father, and it unites with a nerve taken from the mother's body to form a new entity.' (7.) Here, therefore, we

find a quality properly belonging to the spermatozoon transferred on to the nerves, which makes it probable that Schreber's 'nerves' are derived from the sphere of ideas connected with sexuality. It not infrequently happens in the *Denkwürdigkeiten* that an incidental note upon some piece of delusional theory gives us the desired indication of the genesis of the delusion and so of its meaning. [Cf. below, p. 35 f.]

2 In this connection see my discussion below on the significance of the sun [p. 53 ff.].—The comparison between (or rather the condensation of) nerves and rays may well have been based on the linear extension which they have in common.—The ray-nerves, by the way, are no less creative than the spermatozoon-nerves.

3 In the 'basic language' (see below [p. 23]) this is described as 'making a nerve-connection with them'.

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regular communication with human souls, in accordance with the Order of Things, till after death.¹ When a man dies, his spiritual parts² (that is, his nerves) undergo a process of purification before being finally reunited with God Himself as 'forecourts of Heaven'. Thus it comes about that everything moves in an eternal round, which lies at the basis of the Order of Things. In creating anything, God is parting with a portion of Himself, or is giving a portion of His nerves a different shape. The apparent loss which He thus sustains is made good when, after hundreds and thousands of years, the nerves of dead men, that have entered the state of bliss, once more accrue to Him as 'forecourts of Heaven' (18 and 19 n.).

Souls that have passed through the process of purification enter into the enjoyment of a *state of bliss*.³ In the meantime they have lost some of their individual consciousness, and have become fused together with other souls into higher unities. Important souls, such as those of men like Goethe, Bismarck, etc., may have to retain their sense of identity for hundreds of years to come, before they too can become resolved into higher soul-complexes, such as 'Jehovah rays' in the case of ancient Jewry, or 'Zoroaster rays' in the case of ancient Persia. In the course of their purification 'souls learn the language which is spoken by God himself, the so-called "basic language", a vigorous though somewhat antiquated German, which is especially characterized by its great wealth of euphemisms'⁴ (13).

God Himself is not a simple entity. 'Above the "fore-courts of Heaven" hovered God Himself, who, in contradistinction

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1 We shall find later [p. 24 ff.] that certain criticisms against God are based on this fact.

2 [See footnote 2, p. 21.]

3 This consists essentially in a feeling of voluptuousness (see below [p. 29]). [The German word here translated 'state of bliss' is '*Seligkeit*', literally, 'state of being blessed (*selig*)'. '*Selig*' is used in various senses,—'blessed', 'blissful', and also, euphemistically, 'dead'. (See Freud's footnote 2 below, p. 30.)]

4 On one single occasion during his illness the patient was vouchsafed the privilege of seeing, with his spiritual eyes, God Almighty clear and undisguised before him. On that occasion God uttered what was a very current word in the basic language, and a forcible though not an amiable one—the word 'Slut!' (136). [In German '*Luder*'. This term of abuse is occasionally applied to males, though much more often to females.—Freud returns to a discussion of the 'basic language' at the end of Lecture X in his *Introductory Lectures* (1916-17).]

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to these "anterior realms of God", was also described as the "posterior realms of God". The posterior realms of God were, and still are, divided in a strange manner into two parts, so that a lower God (Ahriman) was differentiated from an upper God (Ormuzd).' (19.) As regards the significance of this division Schreber can tell us no more than that the lower God was more especially attached to the peoples of a dark race (the Semites) and the upper God to those of a fair race (the Aryans); nor would it be reasonable, in such sublime matters, to expect more of human knowledge. Nevertheless, we are also told that 'in spite of the fact that in certain respects God Almighty forms a unity, the lower and the upper God must be regarded as separate Beings, each of which possesses its own particular egoism and its own particular instinct of self-preservation, *even in relation to the other*, and each of which is therefore constantly endeavouring to thrust itself in front of the other' (140n.). Moreover, the two divine Beings behaved in quite different ways towards the unlucky Schreber during the acute stage of his illness.¹

In the days before his illness Senatspräsident Schreber had been a doubter in religious matters (29 and 64); he had never been able to persuade himself into a firm belief in the existence of a personal God. Indeed, he adduces this fact about his earlier life as an argument in favour of the

complete reality of his delusions.² But any one who reads the account which follows of the character-traits of Schreber's God will have to allow that the transformation effected by the paranoid disorder was no very fundamental one, and that in the Redeemer of to-day much remains of the doubter of yesterday.

For there is a flaw in the Order of Things, as a result of which

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¹ A footnote on page 20 leads us to suppose that a passage in Byron's *Manfred* may have determined Schreber's choice of the names of Persian divinities. We shall later come upon further evidence of the influence of this poem on him. [P. 44.]

² That it was simply a matter of illusions seems to me to be in *my case*, from the very nature of things, psychologically unthinkable. For illusions of holding communication with God or with departed souls can properly only arise in the minds of persons who, before falling into their condition of pathological nervous excitement, already have a firm belief in God and in the immortality of the soul. *This was not by any means so, however, in my case, as has been explained at the beginning of this chapter.*' (79.)

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the existence of God Himself seems to be endangered. Owing to circumstances which are incapable of further explanation, the nerves of *living* men, especially when in a condition of *intense excitement*, may exercise such a powerful attraction upon the nerves of God that He cannot get free from them again, and thus His ownexistence maybe threatened (11). This exceedingly rare occurrence took place in Schreber's case and involved him in the greatest sufferings. The instinct of self-preservation was aroused in God (30), and it then became evident that God was far removed from the perfection ascribed to him by religions. Through the whole of Schreber's book there runs the bitter complaint that God, being only accustomed to communication with the dead, *does not understand living men*.

'In this connection, however, a *fundamental misunderstanding* prevails, which has since run through my whole life like a scarlet thread. It is based precisely upon the fact that, *in accordance with the Order of Things, God really knew nothing about living men* and did not need to know; consonantly with the Order of Things, He needed only to have communication with corpses.' (55.)—'This state of things ... I am convinced, is once more to be brought into connection with the fact that God was, if I may so express it, quite incapable of dealing with living men, and was only accustomed to communicate with corpses, or at most with men as they lay asleep (that is, in their dreams).' (141.)—'I myself feel inclined to exclaim: "*Incredibile scriptu!*" Yet it is all literally true, however difficult it may be for other people to grasp the idea of God's complete inability to judge living men correctly, and however long I myself took to accustom myself to this idea after my innumerable observations upon the subject.' (246.)

But as a result of God's misunderstanding of living men it was possible for Him Himself to become the instigator of the plot against Schreber, to take him for an idiot, and to subject him to these severe ordeals (264). To avoid being set down as an idiot, he submitted himself to an extremely burdensome system of 'enforcedthinking'. For 'every time that my intellectual activities ceased, God jumped to the conclusion that my mental faculties were extinct and that the destruction of my understanding (the idiocy), for which He was hoping, had actually set in, and that a withdrawal had now become possible' (206).

The behaviour of God in the matter of the urge to evacuate

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(or 'sh—') rouses him to a specially high pitch of indignation. The passage is so characteristic that I will quote it in full. But to make it clear I must first explain that both the miracles and the voices proceed from God, that is, from the divine rays.

'Although it will necessitate my touching upon an unsavoury subject, I must devote a few more words to the question that I have just quoted ("Why don't you sh—?") on account of the typical character of the whole business. The need for evacuation, like all else that has to do with my body, is evoked by a miracle. It is brought about by my faeces being forced forwards (and sometimes backwards again) in my intestines; and if, owing to there having already been an evacuation, enough material is not present, then such small remains as there may still be of the contents

of my intestines are smeared over my anal orifice. This occurrence is a miracle performed by the upper God, and it is repeated several dozens of times at the least every day. It is associated with an idea which is utterly incomprehensible to human beings and can only be accounted for by God's complete ignorance of living man as an organism. According to this idea "sh—ing" is in a certain sense the final act; that is to say, when once the urge to sh— has been miracled up, the aim of destroying the understanding is achieved and a final withdrawal of the rays becomes possible. To get to the bottom of the origin of this idea, we must suppose, as it seems to me, that there is a misapprehension in connection with the symbolic meaning of the act of evacuation, a notion, in fact, that any one who has been in such a relation as I have with divine rays is to some extent entitled to sh—upon the whole world.

'But now what follows reveals the full perfidy¹ of the policy that has been pursued towards me. Almost every time the need for evacuation was miracled up in me, some other person in my vicinity was sent (by having his nerves stimulated for that purpose) to the lavatory, in order to prevent my evacuating. This is a phenomenon which I have observed for years and upon such countless occasions—thousands of them—and with such regularity, as to exclude any possibility of its being attributable to chance. And thereupon comes the question: "Why don't you sh—?" to which the brilliant repartee is made that I am "so

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¹ In a footnote at this point the author endeavours to mitigate the harshness of the word 'perfidy' by a reference to one of his arguments in justification of God. These will be discussed presently [p. **28**].

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stupid or something". The pen well-nigh shrinks from recording so monumental a piece of absurdity as that God, blinded by His ignorance of human nature, can positively go to such lengths as to suppose that there can exist a man too stupid to do what every animal can do—too stupid to be able to sh—. When, upon the occasion of such an urge, I actually succeed in evacuating—and as a rule, since I nearly always find the lavatory engaged, I use a pail for the purpose—the process is always accompanied by the generation of an exceedingly strong feeling of spiritual voluptuousness. For the relief from the pressure caused by the presence of the faeces in the intestines produces a sense of intense well-being in the nerves of voluptuousness; and the same is equally true of making water. For this reason, even down to the present day, while I am passing stool or making water, all the rays are always without exception united; for this very reason, whenever I address myself to these natural functions, an attempt is invariably made, though as a rule in vain, to miracle backwards the urge to pass stool and to make water.¹ (225-7.)

Furthermore, this singular God of Schreber's is incapable of learning anything by experience: 'Owing to some quality or other inherent in his nature, it seems to be impossible for God to derive any lessons for the future from the experience thus gained.' (186.) He can therefore go on repeating the same tormenting ordeals and miracles and voices, without alteration, year after year, until He inevitably becomes a laughing-stock to the victim of His persecutions.

'The consequence is that, now that the miracles have to a great extent lost the power which they formerly possessed of producing terrifying effects, God strikes me above all, in almost everything that happens to me, as being ridiculous or childish. As regards my own behaviour, this often results in my being obliged in self-defence to play the part of a scoffer at God, and even, on occasion, to scoff at Him aloud.'² (333.)²

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¹ This confession to a pleasure in the excretory processes, which we have learnt to recognize as one of the auto-erotic components of infantile sexuality, may be compared with the remarks made by little Hans in my 'Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-year-old Boy' (1909b), *Standard Ed.*, **10**, **97**.

² Even in the basic language it occasionally happened that God was not the abuser but the abused. For instance: 'Deuce take it! What a thing to have to say—that God lets himself be f—d!' (194.)

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This critical and rebellious attitude towards God is, however, opposed in Schreber's mind by an energetic counter-current, which finds expression in many places: 'But here again I must most

emphatically declare that this is nothing more than an episode, which will, I hope, terminate at the latest with my decease, and that the right of scoffing at God belongs in consequence to me alone and not to other men. For them He remains the almighty creator of Heaven and earth, the first cause of all things, and the salvation of their future, to whom—notwithstanding that a few of the conventional religious ideas may require revision—worship and the deepest reverence are due.’ (333-4.)

Repeated attempts are therefore made to find a justification for God's behaviour to the patient. In these attempts, which display as much ingenuity as every othertheodicy, the explanation is based now upon the general nature of souls, and now upon the necessity for self-preservation under which God lay, and upon the misleading influence of the Flechsig soul (60-1 and 160). In general, however, the illness is looked upon as a struggle between Schreber the man and God, in which victory lies with the man, weak though he is, because the Order of Things is on his side (61).

The medical report might easily lead us to suppose that Schreber exhibited the everyday form of Redeemer phantasy, in which the patient believes he is the son of God, destined to save the world from its misery or from the destruction that is threatening it, and so on. It is for this reason that I have been careful to present in detail the peculiarities of Schreber's relation to God. The significance of this relation for the rest of mankind is only rarely alluded to in the *Denkwürdigkeiten* and not until the last phase of his delusional formation. It consists essentially in the fact that no one who dies can enter the state of bliss so long as the greater part of the rays of God are absorbed in his (Schreber's)¹ person, owing to his powers of attraction (32). It is only at a very late stage, too, that his identification with Jesus Christ makes an undisguised appearance (338 and 431).

No attempt at explaining Schreber's case will have any chance of being correct which does not take into account these

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¹ [The word in brackets was added in 1924.]

peculiarities in his conception of God, this mixture of reverence and rebelliousness in his attitude towards Him.

I will now turn to another subject, which is closely related to God, namely, the *state of bliss*.¹ This is also spoken of by Schreber as ‘the life beyond’ to which the human soul is raised after death by the process of purification. He describes it as a state of uninterrupted enjoyment, bound up with the contemplation of God. This is not very original, but on the other hand it is surprising to learn that Schreber makes a distinction between a male and a female state of bliss.² ‘The male state of bliss was superior to the female, which seems to have consisted chiefly in an uninterrupted feeling of voluptuousness.’ (18.) In other passages this coincidence between the state of bliss and voluptuousness is expressed in plainer language and without reference to sex-distinction; and moreover that element of the state of bliss which consists in the contemplation of God is not further discussed. Thus, for instance: ‘The nature of the nerves of God, is such that the state of bliss ... is accompanied by a very intense sensation of voluptuousness, even though it does not consist exclusively of it.’ (51.) And again: ‘Voluptuousness may be regarded as a fragment of the state of bliss given in advance, as it were, to men and other living creatures.’ (281.) So the state of heavenly bliss is to be understood as being in its essence an intensified continuation of sensual pleasure upon earth!

This view of the state of bliss was far from being an element in Schreber's delusion that originated in the first stages of his illness and was later eliminated as being incompatible with the rest. So late as in the Statement of his Case, drawn up by the patient for the Appeal Court in July, 1901, he emphasizes as

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¹ [See footnote 3, p. 23.]

² It would be much more in keeping with the wish-fulfilment offered by the life beyond that in it we shall at last be free from the difference between the sexes.

Und jene himmlischen Gestalten
sie fragen nicht nach Mann und Weib.

[From Mignon's Song in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, Book VIII, Chapter 2.

And those calm shining sons of morn

They ask not who is maid or boy.
(Carlyle's Translation.)]

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one of his greatest discoveries the fact 'that voluptuousness stands in a close relationship (not hitherto perceptible to the rest of mankind) to the state of bliss enjoyed by departed spirits' [442].¹

We shall find, indeed, that this 'close relationship' is the rock upon which the patient builds his hopes of an eventual reconciliation with God and of his sufferings being brought to an end. The rays of God abandon their hostility as soon as they are certain that in becoming absorbed into his body they will experience spiritual voluptuousness (133); God Himself demands that He shall be able to find voluptuousness in him (283), and threatens him with the withdrawal of His rays if he neglects to cultivate voluptuousness and cannot offer God what He demands (320).

This surprising sexualization of the state of heavenly bliss suggests the possibility that Schreber's concept of the state of bliss is derived from a condensation of the two principal meanings of the German word '*selig*'—namely, 'dead' and 'sensually happy'.² But this instance of sexualization will also give us occasion to examine the patient's general attitude to the erotic side of life and to questions of sexual indulgence. For we psychoanalysts have hitherto supported the view that the roots of every nervous and mental disorder are chiefly to be found in the patient's sexual life—some of us merely upon empirical grounds, others influenced in addition by theoretical considerations.

The samples of Schreber's delusions that have already been given enable us without more ado to dismiss the suspicion that it might be precisely this paranoid disorder which would turn

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1 The possibility of this discovery of Schreber's having a deeper meaning is discussed below. [The reference is perhaps to p. 47 ff.]

2 [See footnote 3, p. 23 above.] Extreme instances of the two uses of the word are to be found in the phrase '*mein seliger Vater*' ['my late father'] and in these lines from [the German text of '*Là ci darem*'] the duet in *Don Giovanni*:

Ja, dein zu sein auf ewig,
wie selig werd' ich sein.
[Ah, to be thine for ever—
How blissful I should be!]

But the fact that the same word should be used in our language in two such different situations cannot be without significance.

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out to be the 'negative case' which has so long been sought for— a case in which sexuality plays only a very minor part. Schreber himself speaks again and again as though he shared our prejudice. He is constantly talking in the same breath of 'nervous disorder' and erotic lapses, as though the two things were inseparable.¹

Before his illness Senatspräsident Schreber had been a man of strict morals: 'Few people', he declares, and I see no reason to doubt his assertion, 'can have been brought up upon such strict moral principles as I was, and few people, all through their lives, can have exercised (especially in sexual matters) a self-restraint conforming so closely to those principles as I may say of myself that I have done.' (281.) After the severe spiritual struggle, of which the phenomena of his illness were the outward signs, his attitude towards the erotic side of life was altered. He had come to see that the cultivation of voluptuousness was incumbent upon him as a duty, and that it was only by discharging this duty that he could end the grave conflict which had broken out within him—or, as he thought, about him. Voluptuousness, so the voices assured him, had become 'Godfearing' and he could only regret that he was not able to devote himself to its cultivation the whole day long.² (285.)

Such then, was the result of the changes produced in Schreber

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1 'When moral corruption ("voluptuous excesses") or perhaps nervous disorder had taken a strong enough hold upon the whole population of any terrestrial body', then, thinks Schreber, bearing in mind the Biblical stories of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Deluge, etc., the world in question might come to a catastrophic end (52).—'[A rumour]

sowed fear and terror among men, wrecked the foundations of religion, and spread abroad general nervous disorders and immorality, so that devastating pestilences have descended upon mankind.' (91.)— 'Thus it seems probable that by a "Prince of Hell" the souls meant the uncanny Power that was able to develop in a sense hostile to God as a result of moral depravity among men or of a general state of excessive nervous excitement following upon over-civilization.' (163.)

2 In connection with his delusions he writes: '*This attraction* [i.e. the attraction exercised by Schreber upon the nerves of God (see p. 25)], *however, lost its terrors for the nerves in question, if, and in so far as, upon entering my body, they encountered a feeling of spiritual voluptuousness* in which they themselves shared. For, if this happened, they found an equivalent or approximately equivalent substitute in my body for the state of heavenly bliss which they had lost, and which itself consisted in a kind of voluptuous enjoyment.' (179-80.)

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by his illness, as we find them expressed in the two main features of his delusional system. Before it he had been inclined to sexual asceticism and had been a doubter in regard to God; while after it he was a believer in God and a devotee of voluptuousness. But just as his re-conquered belief in God was of a peculiar kind, so too the sexual enjoyment which he had won for himself was of a most unusual character. It was not the sexual liberty of a man, but the sexual feelings of a woman. He took up a feminine attitude towards God; he felt that he was God's wife.¹

No other part of his delusions is treated by the patient so exhaustively, one might almost say so insistently, as his alleged transformation into a woman. The nerves absorbed by him have, so he says, assumed in his body the character of female nerves of voluptuousness, and have given to his body a more or less female stamp, and more particularly to his skin a softness peculiar to the female sex (87). If he presses lightly with his fingers upon any part of his body, he can feel these nerves, under the surface of the skin, as a tissue of a thread-like or stringy texture; they are especially present in the region of the chest, where, in a woman, her breasts would be. 'By applying pressure to this tissue, I am able to evoke a sensation of voluptuousness such as women experience, and especially if I think of something feminine at the same time.' (277.) He knows with certainty that this tissue was originally nothing else than nerves of God, which could hardly have lost the character of nerves merely through having passed over into his body (279). By means of what he calls 'drawing' (that is, by calling up visual images) he is able to give both himself and the rays an impression that his body is fitted out with female breasts and genitals: 'It has become so much a habit with me to draw female

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1 'Something occurred in my own body similar to the conception of Jesus Christ in an immaculate virgin, that is, in a woman who had never had intercourse with a man. On two separate occasions (and while I was still in Professor Flechsig's institution) I have possessed female genitals, though somewhat imperfectly developed ones, and have felt a stirring in my body, such as would arise from the quickening of a human embryo. Nerves of God corresponding to male semen had, by a divine miracle, been projected into my body, and impregnation had thus taken place.' (Introduction, 4.) [Schreber's book includes both a preface and an introduction as well as a prefatory 'Open Letter to Professor Flechsig'. Cf. p. 10, n. 4 and p. 38, n. 1.]

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buttocks on to my body—*honi soit qui mal y pense*—that I do it almost involuntarily every time I stoop.' (233.) He is 'bold enough to assert that anyone who should happen to see me before the mirror with the upper portion of my torso bared— especially if the illusion is assisted by my wearing a little feminine finery—would receive an unmistakable impression of a *female bust*'. (280.) He calls for a medical examination, in order to establish the fact that his whole body has nerves of voluptuousness dispersed over it from head to foot, a state of things which is only to be found, in his opinion, in the female body, whereas, in the male, to the best of his knowledge, nerves of voluptuousness exist only in the sexual organs and their immediate vicinity (274). The spiritual voluptuousness which has been developed owing to this accumulation of nerves in his body is so intense that it only requires a slight effort of his imagination (especially when he is lying in bed) to procure him a feeling of sensual well-being that affords a tolerably clear adumbration of the sexual pleasure enjoyed by a woman during copulation (269).

If we now recall the dream which the patient had during the incubation period of his illness, before he had moved to Dresden [p. 13], it will become clear beyond a doubt that his delusion of being transformed into a woman was nothing else than a realization of the content of that dream. At that time he had rebelled against the dream with masculine indignation, and in the same way he began by striving against its fulfilment in his illness and looked upon his transformation into

a woman as a disgrace with which he was threatened with hostile intention. But there came a time (it was in November, 1895) when he began to reconcile himself to the transformation and bring it into harmony with the higher purposes of God: 'Since then, and with a full consciousness of what I did, I have inscribed upon my banner the cultivation of femaleness.' (177-8.)

He then arrived at the firm conviction that it was God Himself who, for His own satisfaction, was demanding female-ness from him:

'No sooner, however, am I alone with God (if I may so express it), than it becomes a necessity for me to employ every imaginable device and to summon up the whole of my mental faculties, and especially my imagination, in order to bring it about that the divine rays may have the impression as

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continuously as possible (or, since this is beyond mortal power, at least at certain times of day) that I am a woman luxuriating in voluptuous sensations.' (281.)

'On the other hand, God demands a *constant state of enjoyment*, such as would be in keeping with the conditions of existence imposed upon souls by the Order of Things; and it is my duty to provide Him with this... in the shape of the greatest possible generation of spiritual voluptuousness. And if, in this process, a little sensual pleasure falls to my share, I feel justified in accepting it as some slight compensation for the inordinate measure of suffering and privation that has been mine for so many past years ...' (283.)

'... I think I may even venture to advance the view based upon impressions I have received, that God would never take any steps towards effecting a withdrawal—the first result of which is invariably to alter my physical condition markedly for the worse—but would quietly and permanently yield to my powers of attraction, if it were possible for me *always* to be playing the part of a woman lying in my own amorous embraces, *always* to be casting my looks upon female forms, *always* to be gazing at pictures of women, and so on.' (284-5.)

In Schreber's system the two principal elements of his delusions (his transformation into a woman and his favoured relation to God) are linked in his assumption of a feminine attitude towards God. It will be an unavoidable part of our task to show that there is an essential *genetic* relation between these two elements. Otherwise our attempts at elucidating Schreber's delusions will leave us in the absurd position described in Kant's famous simile in the *Critique of Pure Reason*—we shall be like a man holding a sieve under a he-goat while some one else milks it.

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