By early in the last decade of the nineteenth century Freud had become preoccupied with sexual pathology and the possibility that it serves as a causative factor in neurasthenia and psychoneurosis. Writing to Wilhelm Fliess in October of 1893, Freud remarks, “Meanwhile things have grown livelier. The sexual business attracts people; they all go away impressed and convinced, after exclaiming, ‘No one has ever asked me that before!’” (1954, 78). His letter to Fliess the following month contains this passage: “The sexual business is becoming more and more firmly consolidated, and the contradictions are fading away” (80). Before long, Freud ascribes the cause of hysteria to sexual conflict: “hysteria is conditioned by a primary sexual experience (before puberty) accompanied by revulsion and fright” (129). By the time of the paper on the role of sexuality in the etiology of the neuroses, Freud’s consolidation of “the sexual business” is complete: “The unique significance of sexual experiences in the aetiology of the psychoneuroses seemed to be established beyond a doubt; and this fact [!] remains to this day one of the corner-stones of my theory” (1906, 273).

During the next two decades or so Freud makes innumerable efforts to document this hypothesis in his case histories, sporadically in the Studies on Hysteria (1893–1895) and insistently in the other cases being considered in this chapter. The main question to be considered is this: To what extent do Freud’s clinical hypotheses reflect his data in a comparatively detached, objective manner and to what extent do they exhibit motivated conceptualizations, that is, theory-driven positions he wants to find evidence for in his case material? A critical rereading of Freud’s cases shows that his explanations along libidinal lines do not hold up, being
variously ancillary, forced, inconsistent, irrelevant, exaggerated, supposi-
tious, and sometimes downright wishful—not always, of course, but with
damaging frequency. These cases nevertheless still constitute meaningful
documents in the context of a revised theory of object relations—a per-
son-oriented as distinguished from a drive-oriented one. They remain
meaningful to a significant degree for various reasons, among them the
high quality of most of Freud’s observations, the merits of his method of
investigation, the shrewdness of his insights, and because the semantic
richness of these clinical texts is such that they contain the data needed to
substantiate alternative readings at odds with the interpretations Freud
tries to impose on them.

A crucial aspect of the residual significance of this case material lies in
the fact that Freud insists on the importance of conflict in the etiology of
neurotic behavior. In a passage designed to discriminate between obses-
sional neurosis and hysteria, he remarks in a letter to Fliess that “at the
root of hysteria is always conflict (sexual pleasure versus an accompanying
unpleasure)” (1954, 139). Naturally Freud conceptualizes conflict along
sexual lines in keeping with his fateful decision to regard all objects as
sexual objects. Had Freud chosen instead to situate the origins of neurotic
behavior in object relational conflict, without insisting on the presence or
primacy of sexual factors, and above all without invoking his metapsy-
chological deus ex machina of libidinal hydraulics, who would say him
nay? Again and again in the case material to follow, emotional conflict
concerning self and other will be seen to occupy the center of the stage,
while sexual conflict—when present at all—remains in the background.

STUDIES ON HYSTERIA

The first of the cases in Studies on Hysteria, that of Anna O., was handled
by Breuer, but Freud knew it intimately, learned from it, and commented
on it. For purposes of the present discussion, it may be treated almost as
if it were one of Freud’s cases. Anna O., who appears to have had a
normal childhood, develops a variety of symptoms, chiefly conversion
symptoms and some dissociative behavior. The symptoms begin to emerge
after Anna has been nursing her dying father for several months, although
she takes to her bed well before he dies. During what appears to be the
most representative of several traumatic scenes, Anna envisions, during
the night at her father’s bedside, a waking dream (hallucination) of being
unable to prevent a menacing black snake from approaching her father’s bed (for the purpose of biting him). The fingers of her paralyzed right hand turn into “little snakes with death’s heads (the nails)” (1893–1895, 38). Although Breuer succeeds, with the aid of hypnosis, in exhuming this and other forgotten scenes of conflict, which results in a cure, his case history remains oddly silent concerning the exact nature of the conflict in Anna’s mind. Content to focus on traumatic, seemingly exterior events, Breuer fails to comment on the presence of a fairly blatant death wish directed, for obvious reasons, by the overstressed Anna toward her burdensome but otherwise beloved father. Breuer makes no explicit mention of any tormenting guilt resulting from this wish, though he may have intuited its existence. Freud, commenting on the case in his Five Lectures (1910), accurately represents the symptoms as deriving from “emotional” traumas (10) and “‘strangulated’ affects” (18) without specifying what these were. He makes no direct reference to specific sexual elements in the case itself, yet he feels at liberty to generalize about the strangulated affects in terms of “somatic innervations” and “cathected mental processes” in a manner that can be said indiscriminately to lump together emotions, psychic energy, sexual energy, “mental” processes, and physiological processes of the brain.

Guilt appears to be a factor in the case of Frau Emmy von N. Frau Emmy consciously hates her younger daughter for three years, she says, because she believes—quite unrealistically—that she would have been able “to nurse her husband back to health if she had not been in bed [ill] on account of her child” (1893–1895, 63). Anxiety is an obvious feature of the case. Frau Emmy has an endless series of bad dreams. She remembers—with Freud’s help—a series of fearful experiences from her youth, and continues, at the age of forty, to be afraid of innumerable innocuous situations. At an unspecified period in Frau Emmy’s childhood, her mother was committed to an asylum, a situation that may or may not have produced the anxious behavior that in attachment theory would be attributable to extended separation of child from mother at a vulnerable age, but of course Freud does not explore such a possibility. Instead he infers the presence of a “neurotic factor” due to “the fact that the patient had been living [as a widow] for years in a state of sexual abstinence” (88). “Such circumstances,” he adds, “are among the most frequent causes of a tendency to anxiety.” He maintains this position despite his later admission of “a complete absence of the sexual element” in “all the intimate information given me by the patient” (103). Freud simply assumes she has
emended her life story in this regard into "a bowdlerized edition." He freely concedes that he feels uncertain about his diagnosis of the problem (85) and admits that the help he has been able to give his patient with her pains and phobias proves to be only temporary (101).

In the case of the governess, Miss Lucy R., the patient experiences persistent olfactory delusions, specifically the odors of burnt pudding and cigar smoke, subsequent to being cured of an actual nasal infection. Through the treatment process, Freud discovers that these symptoms relate to emotional conflict Lucy suffers having to do with her promises to her charges’ dead mother, ill treatment by the domestic help, her unacknowledged love for her employer, whom she unrealistically hopes to marry, and her shock at her employer’s displays of anger. Lucy’s nose knows. Her sense of smell functions as a kind of memory bank—a nasal palimpsest. Her tormenting olfactory delusions serve as markers; they are like gravestones indicating the sites of buried memories of painful scenes, such as the employer’s rage when his accountant kisses the children (in Lucy’s charge) on the lips. These markers are metonymic signs, arbitrary in their relation to the events in question except for their coincidence in point of time (that is, the smells occur in temporal conjunction with the painful scenes). Other than the possibility of choosing to look at the romantic element of Lucy’s story in sexual terms, which Freud refrains from doing, one can see that all of the conflict in this case reflects the “mnemonic repression,” as it were, of emotional disturbances in the sphere of object relations. Deeper conflicts, if present, remain unrecorded. The treatment, intermittent and covering only nine weeks, helps Lucy to adjust to her emotional problem and removes her delusional symptoms.

In the case of Katharina, a simple mountain girl about twenty years old, Freud immediately recognizes that her physical symptoms reflect anxiety attacks. Katharina has no idea where they come from. By questioning her Freud learns she was exposed to the sexual advances of her uncle at the age of fourteen, and that she caught a glimpse of a scene she did not fully comprehend at the time: her uncle having intercourse with Katharina’s cousin. Freud concludes, “The case of Katharina is typical. In every analysis of a case of hysteria based on sexual traumas we find that impressions from the pre-sexual period which produced no effect on the child attain traumatic power at a later date as memories.” (133). What Freud does not admit until nearly thirty years after the publication of this case, in the form of a footnote, is that the man who made the sexual advances was not Katharina’s uncle but her father! While admitting that
this “distortion” was a mistake, Freud neglects to elaborate in any way on the implications of this new information for understanding the case. One way of rereading it, in object-relational terms, is to perceive that Katharina was traumatized not by sexuality itself but by the conflict generated in her by her father’s incestuous behavior. Had he chosen to pursue the issue in this case, Freud might have been inclined to view this conflict as involving the threat of tapping the daughter’s unconscious, tabooed desire. Victims of such advances will themselves no doubt elect to see them rather as emotionally devastating breaches of the sanctity of a natural bond entirely different in kind from Freud’s understanding of it as a fundamentally incestuous attachment. But even if allowance be made for the possibility of an element of deep-seated sexual conflict, unconscious on Katharina’s part, between desire and taboo, what emerges from consideration of this case, a fortiori, is that psychological conflict has the greatest potential for development in an object-relational context, especially when the objects in question are primary attachment figures. Not surprisingly, the most conflictful scenes of Greek tragedy are usually family scenes. Aristotle recognizes that the most terrible, pitiful events portrayable in tragedy occur when “suffering is inflicted upon each other by people whose relationship implies affection, as when a brother kills, or intends to kill, his brother, a son his father, a mother her son, a son his mother” (1958, 27).

In the last of the studies on hysteria, Fräulein Elisabeth von R. suffers hysterical pains in her legs. After a normal, happy childhood, during which she is “tenderly attached to her parents” (Freud, 1893–1895, 139), she experiences these pains for the first time after she has been devotedly nursing her father for a period of some twelve months. She identifies with her father in various ways. She unconsciously identifies with the pain he has in his leg because of his heart trouble. She eventually realizes, with Freud’s help, that the particular location of pain in her right thigh must have something to do with the fact that her father rested his own badly swollen leg on hers when she changed the bandage on it (148). Ramifications of her symptom ensue when she experiences pain in her legs in a way that is unconsciously associated with the pleasure of taking a walk with her sister’s husband (156), with whom Elisabeth von R. has fallen in love unawares. The psychological plot thickens when this sister dies not long thereafter. Fräulein Elisabeth feels unbearably guilty when, in the midst of mourning the death of her sister, this thought flashes through her mind concerning her sister’s husband: “Now he is free again and I can
be his wife” (156). As part of his overview of the case, Freud concludes that the hysterical pain in her thigh occurs “at a moment when the circle of ideas embracing her duties to her sick father came into conflict with the content of the erotic desire she was feeling at the time. Under the pressure of lively self-reproaches she decided in favour of the former, and in doing so brought about the hysterical pain” (164). What happened, continues Freud, is that “she repressed her erotic idea from consciousness and transformed the amount of its affect into physical sensations of pain” (164). By the phrases “erotic desire” and “erotic idea” Freud refers to Fräulein Elisabeth’s attachment to, or love for, her sister’s husband. But Freud makes no reference to any explicitly lustful thoughts or impulses. The point is that Freud often blurs the differences existing between attachment behavior and sexual behavior in favor of attending to what they may have in common, this practice being in contrast to his attempt, notably in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, to keep sexual aims and sexual objects conceptually isolated from each other. Even if Elisabeth von R. did in fact experience what we would today describe as “erotic desires,” readers of the case never become privy to any details about them. Here, as so often, a gap exists between sexual experiences attributed by Freud to his patients and the memories of actual feelings and events elicited by Freud during the analytic process.

**DORA**

There cannot of course be any question concerning the presence of sexual impulses in the case of Dora (“Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria,” 1905a), only many, if not most, of these sexual impulses belong to other people! Be that as it may, my concern is not to defend Dora against Freud, which a number of legitimately angry feminists have already undertaken to do in recent years (Bernheimer and Kahane, 1985), or to attempt a thorough sorting out of the tangled skein of interpersonal relationships in this case. I confine my attention to matters concerning the relative weight and pertinence of sexual factors in Dora’s case, especially as they come into play within the framework of Dora’s oedipal relationships.

Beginning with Dora’s case, conducted late in 1900 and written up, for the most part, early in 1901, the relative weight of Freud’s attention to sexual matters increases exponentially as compared to *Studies on Hys-
"Sexuality is the key," he trumpets in his finale to the case. "Sexuality provides the motive power for every single symptom," he says. "I can only repeat over and over again—for I never find it otherwise—that sexuality is the key to the problem of psychoneuroses... No one who disdains the key will ever be able to unlock the door" (1905a, 115). Apart from the sexual impulses belonging to other persons, exemplified by the long-standing affair of Dora's father with Frau K. and Herr K.'s attempted seductions of Dora and a governess, the door into which Freud inserts his analytical key opens up a Pandora's box of what he regards as perverse infantile sexuality. It should be noticed that Freud attributes the experience of a primal scene to Dora as distinct from eliciting fragments of the memory of one. He then uses this construction to explain Dora's breathing difficulties by assuming that what she heard was lots of heavy breathing (accentuated in her father's case because of his tuberculosis). Freud further attributes Dora's vaginal discharge to masturbation, with a great show of authority and in spite of Dora's claim that she cannot recall engaging in this practice. Still worse, at least as far as symptom formation goes, is the oral eroticism of Dora's infantile sucking. Freud discusses thumb sucking in connection with his attribution of a fellatio fantasy to Dora, largely on the basis of the fact that Dora believes her father to be impotent and responds to Freud's query about how her father can, under the circumstances, be having an ordinary love affair by saying that "she knew... that there was more than one way of obtaining sexual gratification" (47). Freud infers, without really demonstrating, that this "unconscious phantasy" gives rise to Dora's hysterical coughing (51). Last but not least, Freud attributes a "homosexual current" (60) to Dora's affection for and loyalty to Frau K.; in fact, he asserts in a letter to Fliess that in this case "the principal part in the conflicting mental processes is played by the opposition between an attraction towards men and one towards women" (4). A possibility that does not enter into Freud's calculations is that Dora may be capable of being attracted to Herr K., as a man, in a way that is not incompatible with experiencing fondness for a woman like Frau K., whose children she has taken care of, whom she looks up to, and who in all likelihood serves as an unconscious substitute for the maternal support figure Dora's mother can no longer be because of her emotionally crippling "housewife psychosis"—as Freud calls it.

Even if one grants, in theory, the persistence in Dora of remnants of polymorphous sexuality deriving from childhood that constitute, insofar as they become synthesized, her adult, genitally oriented sexuality, these
questions remain: To what extent do sexual factors affect her adult object relations and to what extent do her symptoms derive from object-relational conflict as distinct from sexual conflict? Looking at what Freud writes about Dora in an oedipal context suggests an alternative reading to the one he proposes—not a totally different but a significantly qualified one. The premise underlying this view of the oedipus complex, applicable to other cases as well, and perhaps generally to everyone, is that sexual issues, such as incest and castration anxiety, do not constitute the essence of oedipal conflict—contrary to what Freud has for so long persuaded so many. An appropriate perspective on oedipal object-relations in childhood should focus on attachment behavior, not sexual behavior, because the latter elements derive primarily from adulthood by way of a process Freud himself named and discussed, that of deferred action (Nachträglichkeit). Given this perspective on Dora’s oedipal experience, her childhood rivalry with her mother can be seen to take the form of possessiveness, or greedy attachment to her father, as distinguished from the inner excitation of lust for her father’s body.

Freud launches his own oedipal “hypothesis” this way: Dora’s “preoccupation with her father’s relations to Frau K. owed its obsessive character to the fact that its root was unknown to her and lay in the unconscious. . . . She felt and acted more like a jealous wife—in a way which would have been comprehensible in her mother. By her ultimatum to her father (‘either her or me’). . . she was clearly putting herself in her mother’s place” (56). Except for his casual reference in the next sentence to the “sexual” nature of Dora’s cough (the fellatio connection), one cannot take exception to the object-relational cast of Freud’s remarks here or in what immediately follows: “She was therefore identifying herself both with the woman her father had once loved and with the woman he loved now. The inference is obvious that her affection for her father was a much stronger one than she knew or than she would have cared to admit: in fact, that she was in love with him” [meaning “in love with him in an inappropriate, incestuous way’] (56; italics added). Freud tends to use words like “affection” and “love” ambiguously in a manner similar to what he calls “switch-words” (65n), words that can track on different sets of rails. But Freud’s mention in the subsequent paragraph of Oedipus, and his reference to “the forces of the libido,” leave no doubt as to which track he has taken.

Nevertheless, in this same paragraph, and the following one, Freud speaks of matters allowing today’s readers to switch to the object-rela-
tional track instead. Freud writes of the probability that the traces of oedipal feeling in all of us "must be assumed to be more intense from the very first in the case of those children [like Dora, presumably] whose constitution [or early development] marks them down for a neurosis," these being children "who develop prematurely and have a craving for love" that leads to "a fixation of this rudimentary feeling of love" (56). From the perspective of attachment theory, all children need love, contact, and security, but those who exhibit excessively anxious, clinging behavior do so because they have experienced either some form of traumatic separation, or flawed intersubjectivity, which they may carry over into adult relationships. Since Freud elsewhere mentions how "tenderly attached" Dora was to her father (18), and he to her (56), and since we know about the emotional unavailability of Dora's mother (both to her husband and daughter), we can allow for the likelihood of the derivation from her childhood of a certain turbulence in Dora's adult emotional life, yet we need not assume this turbulence to be strictly sexual in nature. As for her emotional conflict taking the form of hysterical symptoms, Dora has an abundance of neurotic models to imitate, including her mother, her aunt, and Frau K.

When Freud confronts Dora by contending that her childhood affection for her father "must at a very early moment have amounted to her being completely in love with him," meaning incestuously, Dora says she does not remember anything like that but then goes on to tell an anecdote about a seven-year-old girl she knew. Freud construes this anecdote as confirming Dora's implicit acceptance of his version of her oedipus complex. The little girl, after witnessing a heated altercation between her parents, later whispers into Dora's ear: "You can't think how I hate that person!" (pointing to her mother), "and when she's dead I shall marry Daddy" (57). Parsimoniously construed, all the anecdote confirms is the person-oriented object-relational view that childhood attachments, especially possessive ones, are often regarded by children as involving competitions with adults and may be represented as taking on, in a child's eye, the form of the attachments of the adults with whom the child identifies. Marriage, in this instance, serves as a metaphor for the kind of emotional intimacy the child sees her parents' relationship as partaking of. "Marriage" is a metaphor, a representational model, that does not necessarily include any sexual baggage as far as a child is concerned.

By the same token, if the quality of deep attachments of children to parental figures must be regarded as founded on physical closeness, emo-
tional responsiveness, security, a sense of self-worth, and above all on what Erikson calls basic trust, then Dora’s anger at her father, and at Herr K., are perfectly understandable in object-relational terms. Dora may love her father (such attachments being, as Henry James once said of one’s bond to one’s native land, prior to choice) but she nevertheless knows him to be “insincere,” manipulative, and inappropriately self-centered (34). As for her father’s unspoken collusion with Herr K., Freud understands that she feels embittered “by the idea that she had been handed over to Herr K. as the price of his tolerating the relations between her father and his wife,” and he adds, “Her rage at her father’s making such a use of her was visible behind her affection for him” (34). Similarly, if Dora does love Herr K., as Freud insists and as Dora ultimately does not continue to deny, she may love him in the sense that she secretly wishes she could marry him rather than because she welcomes his erotic attentions (the abrupt kiss and furtive embrace when she is fourteen), as Freud believes she ought to. She may love him even though she does not welcome the blunt erotic proposition by the lake when she is older, a proposition the more unwelcome because she recognizes it as being couched in the same language Herr K. uses to proposition his children’s governess, a scene Dora already knows about.

HANS

Maintaining clear and appropriate distinctions between sexual behavior and attachment behavior in the case of Little Hans (“Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy,” 1909a) becomes more difficult than in the case of Dora because of the way the boy’s father, in cahoots with Freud, endeavors to impose sexual interpretations on everything he does, and thinks, and dreams, thereby precipitating iatrogenic conflicts in him in the process. Another complication derives from the functional ambiguity of Hans’s penis, which eliminates waste products from his body, which gives him pleasure when touched, and which furthermore represents gender differentiation and the potential for sexual reproduction, topics Little Hans does not understand very well and about which no one gives him timely, appropriate, accurate information.

Poor Little Hans: he gets reprimanded for touching his “widdler” (Wiwimacher, in the original), so how can he make wee-wee without conflict? When he is three and a half years old, his mother, seeing his
hand on his penis, spontaneously performs her official Freudian function by threatening him: “If you do that, I shall send for Dr. A. to cut off your widdler. And then what’ll you widdle with?” (1909a, 7–8). When he is four and three-quarters, Hans wakes up one morning in tears from a bad dream. He tells it to his mother: “When I was asleep I thought you were gone and I had no Mummy to coax [cuddle] with” (23). When, shortly thereafter, Hans develops a phobia about going out into the street because he is “afraid that a horse will bite him,” the father, one of Freud’s adherents, thinks the ground may have been prepared by “sexual over-excitation due to his mother’s tenderness,” and he thinks the fear seems “somehow” related to being frightened by a horse’s penis: “He had noticed at a very early age what large penises horses have, and at the time he inferred that as his mother was so large she must have a widdler like a horse” (22). Freud needs no prompting to convince himself that Hans’s fear of losing his mother must coincide with an “enormously intensified,” age-specific (oedipal), erotic attraction to his mother. So Freud arranges for Hans’s father to tell his son “that all this business about horses was a piece of nonsense and nothing more. The truth was, his father was to say, that he was very fond of his mother and wanted to be taken into her bed. The reason he was afraid of horses now was that he had taken so much interest in their widdlers” (28). Freud believes, in sum, that Hans’s animal phobia reflects castration anxiety stemming from his oedipal desires and fears.

During his early years Hans’s impressionable mind is subjected to a staggering amount of misinformation ranging from mild distortion to outright lies—some of them whoppers—by Freud and the boy’s parents. No wonder he gets confused. Sometimes the parents tell fibs: babies are brought by the stork, and naughty children get arrested by the policeman at the Schönbrunn. Often distortions take the form of neglecting to correct faulty impressions, such as Hans’s perception that his new baby sister has a widdler that is “quite small” (11), but “so lovely” (21), and his bizarre but understandable inference that his large mother has a large widdler, like a large male horse. Hans gets no error-correction feedback to help him deal with his misconceptions. Sometimes his parents furnish him with information that is simply misleading or inaccurate, for example, that babies are pressed out “like lumf” (feces) during the birth process. Horses do not bite, Freud tells Hans, though Hans knows better and tells Freud about a white horse at Gmunden that bites. When Hans mentions what Lizzi’s father said to her as she was departing,—“Don’t put your
finger to the white horse or it'll bite you”—Freud responds to this undistorted report of a real event (remark) by telling Hans he cannot mean what he says: “I say, it strikes me that it isn’t a horse you mean, but a widdler, that one mustn’t put one’s hand to” (29). How, one might ask, is Hans supposed to understand that this communication is designed to be an interpretation rather than a flat contradiction of his perfectly good memory? Hans responds with imperturbable logic: “But a widdler doesn’t bite.” And what does Freud say to that? He says, “Perhaps it does, though” (30). Such distortions amount to small fry compared to others mentioned in the text. Twice, for instance, Hans’s mother assures him that she does have a widdler, knowing full well that the term “widdler” means “penis” to Hans. Can Hans possibly understand what Freud is driving at when he tells him that “he was afraid of his father precisely because he was so fond of his mother” (42)? Later, a thoroughly mystified Little Hans complains to his father, “Why did you tell me I’m fond of Mummy and that’s why I’m frightened, when I’m fond of you?” (44). And can Hans possibly fail to become even more confused when confronted by the interpretation of Freud quoted earlier: (1) that his fear of horses is “nonsense”; (2) that the “truth” is that “he was very fond of his mother and wanted to be taken into her bed”—which is true enough, but how can the horse business be meaningless (nonsense) if there’s an underlying truth to it?; and (3) that “the reason he was afraid of horses [contradicting the nonsense-explanation of (1)] was that he had taken so much interest in their widdlers,” which must also contradict explanation (2)—not for Freud, of course, but for Hans. One may be permitted to doubt that Hans eventually outgrew his phobia any faster by virtue of the quality of the information he was receiving.

Be that as it may, a fundamentally different interpretation of the animal phobia of Little Hans can be found in Bowlby’s reading of it (1973, 283–87). If ever there were a case designed to set up a contrast between the interpretation of object relations along orthodox, Freudian, drive-oriented lines as compared to the person-oriented lines of attachment theory, this is the one! Bowlby does not, in this instance, attack Freud’s theory of sexuality directly. He does so indirectly by suggesting a more plausible explanation of Hans’s situation, one more in line with the facts of the case and more in line also with what is now known about comparable instances of animal phobias in children. Bowlby concentrates on separation anxiety as distinct from castration anxiety. What he sees through the lens of attachment theory is the evidence the case provides that Hans’s anxiety
about leaving home \textit{precedes} the form it later takes of an animal phobia, and that the phobia signifies fear not so much of leaving home as fear of being separated from his mother. The anxiety dream about his mother being gone also precedes the horse phobia. Bowlby notes that in Hans’s mind there exists a link between being bitten by horses and the theme of the departure of someone he likes (Lizzi’s father warns her as she departs not to stick out her finger or the white horse will bite it). Bowlby observes that Hans’s father himself realizes that Hans’s “present anxiety, which prevents him from leaving the neighborhood of the house, is in reality the longing for [his mother],” though the father later falls in with Freud’s libidinal interpretation. Bowlby points out that Hans’s fear of leaving the house arises subsequent to Hans’s having been kept away from his mother during the birth of Hanna when Hans was three and one-half, a prime age for the experience of separation anxiety. Bowlby stresses that the case records the mother as having threatened Hans with not coming back home (Freud, 1909a, 44–45), and he speculates that Hans may have had a premonition of eventually being separated from his mother by the divorce of his parents. One of the key differences between the two interpretations is that Freud reads Hans’s eagerness to cuddle with his mother and his desire to climb into bed with both parents as reflecting an increase of libidinal excitation and an expression of oedipal rivalry whereas Bowlby recognizes the eagerness as an increase of the need for closeness and love by a child experiencing separation anxiety—and dreaming about it. The dream is ambiguous: “When I was asleep I thought you were gone and I had no Mummy to coax with.” Freud reads it one way, and Bowlby quite another.

As for Hans’s castration anxiety, what is at issue is not its \textit{reality} but its \textit{origin}. It originates, first of all, as a result of an actual, explicit threat uttered in the context of Hans’s taking pleasure in fondling his penis. Though the mother’s tone and manner may in part have been playful and teasing (“And then what’ll you widdle with?”), and her intentions good, the residual effect of the threat itself seems to have proved harmful in the sense of constituting one of the several factors promoting Hans’s clinging behavior later on. The remarks of Freud and his father may also have increased Hans’s castration anxiety. Hans’s keen interest in anatomy (sharpened, no doubt, by his mother’s cutting remark) becomes an anxious one because the theme of things being bitten off (fingers by horses) gets muddled—not by Hans but by his father and Freud! By the time they are through indoctrinating him with their explanations (of things
like widdlers that bite), it is no wonder his castration anxiety becomes heightened.

Ironically, it is possible that what Freud terms "masturbation" in this case may be more of an object-relational phenomenon in early years than an erotic one. If the consequence of the manual stimulation of a nerve-rich portion of his anatomy—his penis—is analogous in function to the paradoxically calming effect of self-induced oral stimulation—in the instance of non-nutritive sucking on pacifiers—Hans's so-called masturbation may have served him principally for the purpose of allaying anxiety in the liminal situation of falling asleep (bedtime was his usual time for fondling himself). If Winnicott is right about thumb sucking as a transitional phenomenon, then perhaps genital manipulation in childhood, in addition to supplying direct sensory gratification, serves both short-term object-relational needs (the self as object) and long-term object-relational development. Thus what looks like purely erotic behavior may not be.

An amusing instance of adult preoccupation with sexuality in this case occurs when Hans's father insists on his opinion that Hans wants his mother to have another baby. Hans replies, "But I don't want it to happen" (92). Father: "But you wish for it?" Hans (probably confused): "Oh yes, wish." Father (seeing an opening): "Do you know why you wish for it? It's because you'd like to be Daddy." Hans responds, "Yes... How does it work?" Father: "How does what work?" Hans: "You say Daddies don't have babies; so how does it work, my wanting to be Daddy?" During the ensuing dialogue, Hans's father asserts that if Hans were married to his mother he would "like Mummy to have a baby," clearly meaning, adultomorphically, "make a baby with Mummy." Hans responds by emphasizing that if he were married to his Mummy they wouldn't want any more (baby sisters!). His father, attempting to salvage what he can of the shredded remnants of his oedipal hypothesis, asks, "Would you like to be married to Mummy?" "Oh yes," says Hans, speaking, presumably, in much the same way Dora's little friend speaks when she declares she will marry her father when her mother is dead. Hans's father believes Hans desires his mother as a sexual object whereas Hans himself seems to be thinking along the object-relational lines of possessing his mother, as an attachment figure, and at the same time relating to his beloved father by identifying with his marital status.
RAT MAN

Of all the cases being discussed, that of Rat Man ("Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis," 1909b) offers the greatest challenge to the claim that Freud overemphasizes sexual factors in neurosis. It does so partly because of the cogency of Freud's solutions to Rat Man's puzzling thoughts and behavior, and partly because of the brilliance of Freud's discussion of obsessional neurosis. But the most direct challenge lies in the comparative prominence of erotic elements in this case. Mahony's *Freud and the Rat Man* (1986) calls attention to the extent Freud was aware, to a degree remarkable in 1909, of the operation of internalized object relations. Mahony cites this passage: "It seems likely that he [the patient] is also identifying himself with his mother in his criticisms of his father and is thus continuing the differences between his parents within himself" (43). At the same time, Mahony points out, "Not recognizing the full importance of early object relations at the time, Freud put predominant weight on the father's role as interferer of instinctual gratification" (43). Mahony himself, while he does tend to pay more attention than Freud to object-relational factors, nevertheless unquestioningly goes along with most of Freud's sexual formulations. In that respect, Mahony's study resembles the otherwise very different one by Sherwood (1969). Focusing on the explanatory process itself as distinguished from the merit of the terms (or premises) of Freud's explanation of the case, Sherwood remains locked into Freud's assumptions about the sexual etiology of neurotic conflict. The following discussion will slight the considerable complexity of detail regarding Rat Man's "rat complex" and the intricacies of his obsessional thinking in order to attend to the issue of the relative importance of sexual factors in Freud's explanation.

Freud gives not one but many explanations, that is, many distinguishable but overlapping lines of explanation. To begin with, Freud explains Rat Man's problem as neurotic conflict between "an erotic instinct and a revolt against it" (1909b, 162), Freud's specific formulation of Rat Man's situation being: "If I have this wish to see a woman naked, my father will be bound to die" (162). The presence of noxious experiences early in life constitutes another explanatory line, instances being Rat Man's precocious sexual experience of crawling under the skirt of his governess and fingering her genitals, and the episode of rage against his father at the age of three when, innocent of swear words, he hurls such terms of abuse at
his father as "You lamp! You towel! You plate!" (205). Another explanatory line takes the form of hypothecating Rat Man's "disintegration into three personalities," one unconscious and two preconscious ones, between which consciousness oscillates. His unconscious one is comprised of "passionate and evil impulses." "In his normal state he was kind, cheerful, and sensible—an enlightened and superior kind of person—while in his third psychological organization he paid homage to superstition and asceticism" (248). This formulation, foreshadowing Freud's "structural" triumvirate of id, ego, superego, fits only too well in the sense that it may be said to fit everyone, not just Rat Man. Still another explanatory line takes the nosological form of designating Rat Man as an obsessional neurotic. The shoe fits well enough in this case except that Freud's reasoning tends to be circular: Rat Man behaves like an obsessional neurotic, and an obsessional neurotic behaves like Rat Man. This approach has the unquestionable value of matching an individual with a class of behavior, yet it is the special merit of psychoanalytic case histories that at their best they deal with the particularities of individual life history.

What succeeds best in this case is Freud's holistic-biographical approach, which constitutes not only another line of explanation but perhaps the most powerful one because of its semantic richness and specificity. This line of explanation operates by situating a piece of puzzling behavior—mysterious when isolated from the appropriate contexts—within a larger biographical matrix. Freud's explanations of such puzzling episodes as the strange business of Rat Man's futile attempts to pay for the pince-nez glasses, and the bizarre behavior of playing with his penis in front of the mirror at midnight instead of studying, just when his dead father might be expected to check on his work habits, make sense precisely because they fit, congruently, with other information we have about Rat Man's object-relational history.

This question remains: To what extent are Rat Man's problems sexual in nature, that is, problems resulting—to a significant degree—from factors and experiences exhibiting conflict over sexuality itself as distinguished from object-relational conflict that on occasion takes on the appearance of sexual behavior? A representative instance crops up when Freud ventures to "put forward" one of his theory-driven "constructions" to the effect that in childhood Rat Man may have been "guilty" of the "sexual misdemeanor" of masturbation. To Freud's initial delight, Rat Man remembers being told by his mother that there was "an occurrence of this kind" in early childhood, only, as it turns out when Rat Man
interrogates his mother, what he had done at the age of three was to bite someone. This was the occasion when he attempted to swear at his father because his father spanked him. Freud admits that in the mother’s account “there was no suggestion of his misdeed having been of a sexual nature,” (206), yet at this point Freud appends a leviathan footnote, probably defensive, the drift of which is to deny the force of the mother’s recollection of the nonsexual nature of the event. Since Rat Man’s biting was hostile, and his verbal abuse of his father was certainly angry, and since the problem of handling anger bulks so large in this and other cases of obsessional neurosis, it may be asked, rhetorically at this point, if Rat Man’s unconscious guilt (conflict) does not lie more in the sphere of hostile impulses than that of sexual ones.

Rat Man, who is familiar with Freud’s theories before he begins analysis, happily brings up various anecdotes about his early sexual life: how he used to experience erections at the age of six, how he crept under Fräulein Peter’s skirt and fingered her genitals at the age of four, an experience leaving him with “a tormenting curiosity to see the female body” (169), and his exploits at the age of seven with Fräulein Lina: “When I got into her bed I used to uncover her and touch her, and she made no objections” (161). Freud infers that Rat Man as a child was “under the domination of a component of the sexual instinct, the desire to look” (162). What Freud fails to do is to establish beyond reasonable doubt that such episodes had any lasting, negative effect on Rat Man’s development, though he implies that they did.

Apropos of his wish to see females naked, Rat Man tells Freud that an uncanny feeling, “as though something must happen if I thought such things, and as though I must do all sorts of things to prevent it,” accompanies this wish to see females naked. Asked for an example of what might happen, he responds: “For instance, that my father might die” (162), this in spite of the fact that Rat Man’s father has been dead for several years. Recognizing such thinking as involving what Freud later calls “distortion by ellipsis” (227), and applying the heuristic strategy of filling-in-the-gaps that Freud uses to explain the thought, “If I marry the lady, some misfortune will befall my father” (226), allows us to reconstruct Rat Man’s thought along the following lines. “Something must happen.” What? In the context of the cultural taboo on sexuality, especially as it obtained at the beginning of this century, what must happen is punishment for the crime. Since the father is the conventional repository of moral authority in the nuclear family, he will carry out punishment for any misbehavior,
just as he presumably did in the biting episode. “Something must happen” includes both the fear of experiencing the punishment deserved (for dirty thoughts as well as dirty deeds) together with Rat Man’s equally guilt-inducing fear that he will be tempted to retaliate against the punisher—as he later retaliates against Freud in the transference. In such a conflict-inducing sequence, which is emotionally conflictful primarily because of the child’s attachment to the punitive parent, the sequence of desire (seeing girls naked) leading to fear (of punishment) leading in turn to anticipation of his own hostility toward an attachment figure may relate to any behavior, not just sexual behavior. As Freud explains Rat Man’s obsessional train of thought in the instance of “If I marry the lady, some misfortune will befall my father [in the next world],” it means, with the gaps filled in, “If my father were alive, he would be as furious over my design of marrying the lady as he was in the scene of my childhood; so that I should fly into a rage with him once more and wish him every possible evil” (226). Ira furor brevis est. If anger is brief madness, anger toward a loved person is madness multiplied. The more important the object, the sharper the conflict.

Part of Freud’s explanation of the case in sexual terms involves his assumptions about Rat Man’s “anal erotism” (213). So phrased, the term fuses sexuality with anality, just as the term “sexual object” tends to define all objects as sexual ones. If we were to accept Freud’s claims in Three Essays about orality and anality being component instincts, then the sexual elements of Rat Man’s pregenital sexual organization would loom larger than otherwise because of the manifest pervasiveness of anality in the case. Freud assumes, for example, that sadism is a psychosexual phenomenon; in contrast, I assume that sadism may more profitably be regarded as a form of object relations that sometimes includes sexual behavior. But even if one were to agree with Freud in regarding Rat Man as an anal erotic instead of seeing him, as I prefer, as exhibiting an anal-obsessional personality whose behavioral style, including ways of thinking, can extend to and modify his sexual activity, the question remains as to the priority of sexual over object-relational factors in the case.

Rat Man’s playfully hostile transference fantasies reek with anality. There is no doubt of that! They usually contain sexual elements—but not always. What they always reflect is hostility. Once Rat Man dreams that he makes the “mistake” of mocking Freud instead of consoling with him after his mother dies. Another time he imagines, in session, that Freud’s mother stands in despair as all her children are being hanged (284).
Distinct from such nonsexual, nonanal fantasies are the following ones. Rat Man thinks about Frau Professor Freud licking his (Rat Man's) anus (293). Another one, which Freud the archeologist describes as "a most wonderful anal phantasy," is this little gem: "He was lying on his back on a girl (my daughter) and was copulating with her by means of the stool hanging from his anus" (287). What seems to be happening is that in the process of uncorking his hostility in the transference Rat Man raises the emotional ante by discharging insults, as the Yahooos dump theirs on Gulliver, in the shitiest form imaginable, with a twist of erotica for accent. That Rat Man's hostile attacks on his father via the transference often include sexual elements by no means establishes the primacy of these elements.

Many of the scenes of conflict referred to in Rat Man's history partake of no sexual element whatsoever. Illustrative examples are when Rat Man bites someone at the age of three and then "curses" his father after being spanked; when he attempts to shoot his younger brother in the eye with the ramrod of his toy gun; and when he commits the "crime" of failing to be at his father's bedside when he dies because he has misunderstood the answer to the question he asks the doctor concerning when the danger would be over. All of these instances involve conscious or unconscious hostility toward important others, and hence conflict, but not sexual conflict, unless, of course, one reads all hostile behavior as sadistic, and all sadistic behavior as reflecting anal eroticism, as Freud is wont to do. All of these instances reflect ambivalence. Other conflictual episodes marked by ambivalence but lacking overt sexual elements occur when Rat Man thinks Gisela might be more kind to him if a misfortune occurred to him, like the death of his father, and when the idea comes to him that he will be rich enough to marry Gisela if his father dies. In the case of his practice of masturbating in front of the mirror when he should be studying, where the sexual element appears to be inescapable, Freud himself recognizes the operation of ambivalence in Rat Man's wishful fantasy that his father will return from the dead, and—more important—he realizes that Rat Man's violation of a prohibition requires the defiance of a command. The object-relational element of defiance presumably weighs far more in this episode than the sexual form the resistance to studying takes. Rat Man's defiance of his father also operates, as Freud understands, in the matter of his wanting to marry Gisela, which he eventually does after the treatment is over (Mahony 1986), rather than the girl his family picks out for him to marry. Even Gisela comes in for her share of Rat Man's ambivalence.
Once, when she lies ill in bed, Rat Man suddenly wishes "she might lie like that forever" (1909b, 194), and he admits to Freud that he experiences occasional impulses "to do some mischief to the lady he admired" (195). At one point he is horrified by the thought, which crosses his mind, that "she is a whore" (301), a thought thoroughly at odds with his customary deep respect for her.

The points being made, in short, are that the essence of Rat Man's conflict is object relational rather than sexual, and that the essence of his object-relational conflict lies in his ambivalence toward important others, stemming from childhood and carrying on into adulthood. The essence of what Freud achieves in treating Rat Man is to enable him to come to terms with that ambivalence.

DR. SCHREBER

Sexual factors appear to play a substantial part in the case of Dr. Schreber ("Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia [Dementia Paranoïdes]," 1911). Schreber believes, among other things, that it is his mission "to redeem the world and to restore it to its lost state of bliss" by being transformed into a woman and impregnated by God (16–17). Freud notes that prior to his second prolonged illness he had the idea, as a kind of reverie, "that after all it really must be very nice to be a woman submitting to the act of copulation" (13). According to Freud, Schreber's delusions about sexual abuse and gender change, persecutory for the most part, reveal that "what lies at the core of the conflict in cases of paranoia among males is a homosexual wishful fantasy of loving a man" (62). Freud claims this to be the common finding in every one of "a number of cases" coming "under observation" by Freud, Jung, and Ferenczi (59).

Libido theory plays a prominent role in Freud's formulation of the case. "The exciting cause of his illness, then, was an outburst of homosexual libido" (43), this outburst being conjunctive with a four-day absence of Frau Schreber. The concept of libido becomes a universal explanatory principle, accounting for Schreber's withdrawal from reality (a "detachment of the libido from people—and things—that were previously loved," 71), his delusions of grandeur ("fixation at the stage of narcissism," 72), and the form of his delusions of persecution (the extent to which they are sexual in nature). Freud even goes so far as to venture this startling
comparison: “Schreber’s ‘rays of God,’ which are made up of a condensation of the sun’s rays, of nerve-fibres, and of spermatozoa, are in reality nothing else than a concrete representation and projection outwards of libidinal cathexes; and they thus lend his delusions a striking similarity with our theory” (78).

Freud’s difficulty is threefold. His use of libido theory and his insistence on sexual conflict in the etiology of neurosis—and here, psychosis—constitute two aspects of the problem. The third aspect consists of his claim that in the instance of paranoia the real villain is not just the repression of sexual drive in general but the repression of homosexual impulses in particular. Freud’s reiterated claims concerning the etiological significance of latent homosexual desire in paranoia seem problematic today. For one thing, Freud implicitly hypothesizes an intrinsic conflict between homosexual and heterosexual orientations (165) in a way that does not tally with what we know today about “core gender identity,” the concept designating the “conviction that the assignment of one’s sex was anatomically, and ultimately psychologically correct” (Stoller 1985, 11).

Except for his delusions, which technically speaking are not homosexual but transsexual, with Schreber playing the role of a female engaging in heterosexual intercourse, the outward facts of Schreber’s life (his childhood, marriage, desire for children, and social and professional identity in a markedly patriarchal society) indicate Schreber’s core sexual identity to be heterosexual. Another difficulty with Freud’s position lies in the fact that modern surveys regarding the incidence of homosexuality in paranoia weigh heavily against his claim (Meissner 1978, 19; Ovesey 1969, 53).

In Part 3 of the case, a large portion of which has nothing directly to do with Schreber, Freud presents a remarkable series of defensive transformations as being typical of paranoia. He claims that “the familiar principal forms of paranoia can all be represented as contradictions of the single proposition: ‘I (a man) love him (a man).’” One contradiction is: “I do not love him—I hate him.” But another contradiction is that “I hate him” becomes transformed by projection into: “He hates (persecutes) me, which will justify me in hating him.” In short, “I do not love him—I hate him, because he persecutes me.” Freud shrewdly adds that there is no doubt “that the persecutor is some one who was once loved” (1911, 63). (Two other sets of transformations in this passage I omit from discussion here because they have no bearing on the case of Dr. Schreber. One involves the theme of sexual jealousy, and one the transformation of a male object into a female object.) Freud shows, of course, that the “he” is
God, and also Dr. Flechsig, and by extension the psychological father, though Freud explicitly discriminates the psychological father in this case from Schreber's biological father. What we now have more information about, in the light of the research of Niederland (1984) and others, is what kind of a god God was in this case, the gist of the situation being that Schreber's delusions of persecution undeniably reflect, in however bizarre and exaggerated a manner, the very real physical and psychological "persecution" (or what looks like persecution) visited upon Schreber as a child by his father. What this information makes possible is the generation of another transformation in the emotional grammar of Schreber's soul—one which Freud has overlooked. Side by side with Freud's "I do not love him—I hate him, because he persecutes me" we can inscribe, "Because he persecutes me, I hate him whom I love." If we examine this emended version in the light of attachment theory and at the same time discard Freud's benighted notion that children's love of parents of the same sex must necessarily be erotic and therefore homosexual, what precipitates out of the propositional calculus is a poignant sense of the emotional double-binding to which Schreber had been subject as a child. We gain a firmer grasp of the object-relational elements of the case as distinct from the allegedly libidinal ones. We realize that because of what seemed like persecution, Schreber could not help hating the father he loved.

What remain to be mentioned are the factors that may have led the fifty-one-year-old Schreber to represent the delusional form of his submissive relationship to his father as a sexual one. In the circumstances, these factors will have to be largely conjectural—though because some are conjectural does not mean they cannot be correct. We do know that the various impulse-restraining mechanical contraptions invented by Schreber's authoritarian father to condition children and deracinate all signs of "self-will," represented by Schreber in his delusions as "soul-murder," were designed to effectuate bodily control. Thus part of the basis of the delusions lies in the intense involvement of the emotionally beloved same-sex parent with his son's body in a way that created pain and shame, not pleasure. What we may also be seeing in the delusional representation of nonsexual love between parent and child as a sexual one is the kind of adultomorphization of childhood behavior by Schreber that leads to the confusion of innocent physical intimacy in childhood with what, in adulthood, especially in Schreber's society, would be largely confined to conjugal relationships. Quite apart from the question of adultomorphization, how, in so patriarchal a society, would the highly stratified power
Freud’s cases reread

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relationships of father and son be represented metaphorically when those relationships were loving ones characterized by domination on one side and submission on the other? The schema of master and slave comes to mind, of course, though that of husband and wife more nearly corresponds to an intense emotional relationship characterized, according to the conventions of the day, by dominance and submission. However his ideas came to take such a form, what Schreber gives us is an omnipotent God on one side and on the other a castrated redeemer transformed, at a later date, into God’s wife and sexual slave.

Virtually all of the delusional material Schreber presents in his memoirs needs to be read as metaphorical rather than literal. But Freud elects to read the gender change and other sexual business literally. In contrast, a contemporary clinician makes a distinction between true homosexuality and what he calls “pseudohomosexuality” (Ovesey 1969), the latter being a form of conflict developing (according to Meissner’s summation, 1978, 20) “in men who fail to meet the standards of society for masculine performance,” as Schreber may have felt he failed to do when he was defeated as a candidate for the Reichstag, just before his first illness, and as he may have feared to fail after being promoted to the high office of presiding judge in the Court of Appeals, just before his second illness. “The equation of failure with castration, feminine inadequacy, and homosexuality underlies the pseudohomosexual conflict” (Meissner 1978, 20). Although Ovesey does not discuss the Schreber case at length, he offers “an adaptional revision of the Freudian theory of paranoia” demonstrating “that paranoid phenomena can stem from nonsexual adaptions to societal stimuli, and motivationally need have nothing to do with homosexuality whatsoever” (1969, 54).

Many interesting features of the dynamics of Schreber’s psychosis fall outside the scope of the present discussion, among them his depression (he was suicidal at the beginning of his first two periods of illness) and the vicissitudes of his self-esteem. But a few words more need to be devoted to some of the object-relational elements of his story. To begin with, the period of stress precipitating Schreber’s illnesses, described in terms of “mental overstrain” and the “burden” of his professional duties, may be likened to exposure to an external danger triggering attachment behavior in children. On the occasion of the commencement of his second illness, Schreber’s principal support figure, his wife, was absent, the presumption being that the operative factor was stress-plus-separation as distinct from what Freud claims, namely that “the mere presence of his
wife must have acted as a protection against the attractive power of the men about him" (1911, 45). In this connection it is worth noting that Schreber's final flight into insanity occurred not long after his mother's death in 1907, that is, after the loss of his original primary support figure. Given the absence of adequate interpersonal support, and lacking inner resources of character—which can be conceptualized as fully assimilated internalizations of beneficent others sufficient to sustain him in his hour of need—Schreber may be regarded as having sought help internally in the form of a massive regression to the time of his greatest closeness to his all-powerful father, represented in psychotic fantasy as God. For someone with Schreber's childhood experiences, to plug into this omnipotent source of power was like making a pact with the devil. God became his ally only at the price of becoming his adversary: “God Himself was on my side in His fight against me” (Schatzman, 1973, 75). Schreber also tells us that “when the work of creation was finished, God withdrew to an immense distance” (Freud 1911, 22). This distance is the inner equivalent of separation from his biological parents. The enormity of the hostility experienced by Schreber as a consequence of the demands made upon him by God, such as “in the matter of the urge to evacuate” (25) and the devastating (though voluptuous) effect of the divine rays of God, was such that Schreber felt “entitled to sh— upon the whole world” (26). The fundamental power of God in Schreber's delusions may be compared to the elemental power of any primary attachment figure, the power to threaten withdrawal of love: “God Himself demands that He shall be able to find voluptuousness in him, and threatens him with the withdrawal of His rays if he neglects to cultivate voluptuousness and cannot offer God what He demands” (30).

Freud recognized the metaphoric nature of the religious elements of Schreber's delusions readily enough. Had he not been so preoccupied with his metapsychological assumptions, Freud might have understood the sexual elements to be metaphoric as well.

WOLF MAN

As for Wolf Man (“From the History of an Infantile Neurosis,” 1918), Sherwood, in commenting on the difficulties presented by this case, believes there is “good reason to doubt whether Freud ever satisfactorily understood this patient” (1969, 262). True or not, the case does pose
many problems, Freud’s apologies notwithstanding. One problem arises because Freud decided to write—instead of a true case history—the distillation of an account of a (hypothetical) infantile (childhood) neurosis, said to be implied by the case as a whole, with the unhappy consequence that this material becomes factually and conceptually isolated from the case proper and from the transference. Another problem turns on the question of the severity of Wolf Man’s adult and childhood illnesses. Freud introduces him as being “entirely incapacitated and completely dependent upon other people” (1918, 7) at the beginning of treatment, a description lacking in specifics and radically at variance with Wolf Man’s situation as we learn about it from his memoirs. Freud also asserts that Wolf Man’s early years were “dominated by a severe neurotic disturbance” (8), an assessment that more nearly characterizes Freud’s perception of the endopsychic drama he “reconstructs” than it conforms to the actualities of Wolf Man’s outward life. These actualities are such as to make Wolf Man’s childhood sexual experiences seem unremarkable and his “phobias” more like the normal fears of childhood. What cannot be overlooked, though the problem cannot be resolved in the present discussion, is the overall disparity between the accounts provided by Freud and by Ruth Mack Brunswick, on the one hand, and those furnished by Muriel Gardiner and the Wolf Man himself (all except Freud in Gardiner, 1971). The discussion to follow will be confined to raising certain questions with respect to the force and plausibility of Freud’s claims concerning sexual factors in the case.

Freud often succeeds in handling childhood sexuality with a light, comic touch, as in the anecdote he records about the three-year-old girl who asks her friend, as she and her friend and her little brother go to the toilet together: “Have you got a purse too? Walter’s got a little sausage; I’ve got a purse” (1900, 373). In contrast, the sexual scenes of the Wolf Man case are serious to the point of qualifying as psychic melodrama. Many of them are scenes of “seduction,” a term redolent with overtones of adult sexuality. During the first one mentioned, Wolf Man’s sister, a couple of years older, “had seduced him into sexual practices” by proposing, “Let’s show our bottoms” (1918, 20). Wolf Man is three and a quarter years old at the time. As their mother works in an adjoining room, “his sister had taken hold of his penis and played with it, at the same time telling him incomprehensible stories about his Nany [nanny]” and the gardener: “She used to stand him on his head, and then take hold of his genitals.” Far from regarding this episode as comical and harmless,
Freud holds this “seduction” responsible for inducing sexual passivity in the boy and for stimulating him to compensatory fantasies (dreams) in which he plays an aggressive sexual role toward his sister, the dates being unspecified and the text of the dreams unrecorded (19–20). The lack of specificity regarding the timing and content of these fantasies leave their connection to the “seduction” of Wolf Man open to question.

As for the second “seduction,” Freud would have us believe that young Wolf Man rejects “the allurements” of his sister and tries to “win” his nurse instead. Supposedly acting on the hint provided by his sister concerning Nanya and the gardener, “He therefore began to play with his penis in his Nanya’s presence, and this . . . must be regarded as an attempt at seduction” (24). Nanya responds by making “a serious face” and telling her little charge that children who play with their privates get a “wound” in that place, a response Freud reasonably enough construes as a veiled threat of castration.

According to Freud, this scene of frustrated seduction, and the psychic scars left by the first one, lead to a third seduction. After Nanya’s rejection of his advances, Wolf Man “began to contemplate another person as a sexual object”: his father. Asked as a boy what he wants to become, he replies, “a gentleman like [my] father” (27). “This object of identification of his active current [of libido],” says Freud, homing in on libidinal hydraulics while ignoring object-relational factors of a nonsexual kind, “became the sexual object of a passive current in his present anal-sadistic phase. It looks as though his seduction by his sister had forced him into a passive role, and had given him a passive sexual aim” (27; italics added). This reasoning leads Freud to construe Wolf Man’s naughtiness—yet to be discussed—as a masochistic attempt to provoke physical punishment (“beatings”) from his father in order to obtain the masochistic “sexual satisfaction that he desired. His screaming fits were therefore simply attempts at seduction” (28). Elsewhere Freud links what he chooses to regard as passive behavior, seeing it as homosexual and therefore automatically passive, to Wolf Man’s identification with his mother as she purportedly engages in anal intercourse with his father in the primal scene (age one and a half) constituting part of the background for the later dream of the wolves in the tree that becomes the centerpiece of the case history.

Freud’s presentation of a fourth seduction scene, so remarkable for its artistry and ingenuity that one almost neglects to be concerned about veridicality, depicts the recovery by Wolf Man of the recollection of
anxiety he experiences as a child at seeing a butterfly he had been chasing land on a flower, a scene associated in his mind with the image of a kneeling nurserymaid named Grusha: “When he saw the girl scrubbing the floor he had urinated in the room and she had rejoined, no doubt jokingly, with a threat of castration” (92). Freud hypothesizes that when Wolf Man saw the nurserymaid on her knees, scrubbing the floor, with her buttocks projecting, “he was faced once again with the posture which his mother had assumed in the copulation scene” (92), the one dated by Freud as occurring when Wolf Man was one and a half years old. “She became his mother to him; he was seized with sexual excitement . . . and, like his father (whose action he can only have regarded at the time as micturation), he behaved in a masculine way towards her. [Happily, in this instance, Wolf Man identifies with his father rather than his mother.] His micturation on the floor was in reality an attempt at a seduction, and the girl replied to it with a threat of castration, just as though she had understood what he meant” (93). Besides failing to explain why the girl would respond to a child’s sexual advances by threatening castration, Freud overlooks two alternative possible scenarios. First, Wolf Man’s remembrance of things past may have been confused with regard to sequence. The nurserymaid may have been doing what nurserymaids do, namely cleaning up messes. Even if little Wolf Man were precociously stimulated by Grusha’s alluring rump, that vista in all likelihood followed rather than preceded the scene of his urinary incontinence. Second, this particular peasant girl may well have been cranky at the moment (tired of cleaning up messes), so that her playful threat to cut off his little hose may well have been designed to frighten him into continence.

According to Freud’s oedipal script, “it would seem palpably obvious [not just “obvious” but “palpably obvious”] that the repression and the formation of the neurosis [meaning the obsessional neurosis of Wolf Man’s childhood] must have originated out of the conflict between masculine and feminine tendencies, that is, out of bisexuality” (110). Freud finds this conclusion uncontradicted by Wolf Man’s eventual development of normal, heterosexual, genital organization during puberty, that is, prior to his analysis. This somewhat unexpected revelation invites the following question. If Wolf Man functioned normally as an adult in the sexual realm, in spite of his childhood situation (obsessional conflicts, a negative oedipus complex, a traumatic primal scene, the “seduction” by his sister), what did he need analysis for?

This question leads to a brief consideration of some of the object-
relational features of the case, beginning with the ambiguity surrounding the events and circumstances that precipitated Wolf Man's fears and his "naughtiness" as a child. "He seems at first to have been a very good-natured, tractable, and even quiet child" (14–15), we are told, "but once, when his parents came back from their summer holiday, they found him transformed [age three and a half]. He had become discontented, irritable, and violent, took offense at every possible occasion, and then flew into a rage and screamed like a savage" (15; italics added). The possibility that the heretofore secure boy may have experienced separation anxiety and as a consequence bitterly resented his parents' absence never comes up for discussion. We do know Wolf Man loved his Nanya, so he may not have resented the absence of his parents. Freud relates that in his earliest years Wolf Man's relation with his father was "a very affectionate one" (17). But we know that attacks of depression led to his father's absences from home, and also that as a consequence of the mother's "weak health" "she had relatively little to do with the children" (13). Wolf Man's attachment to his parents may or may not have been muted and compensated for by attachments to his Nanya and his sister. Freud ascribes the boy's angry behavior to the disruptive presence of an eccentric English governess who stayed on that summer and who quarrelled with Wolf Man's Nanya, calling her a "witch" (15). In contrast, I am inclined to attribute the sudden emergence of Wolf Man's angry behavior, and the obsessional defenses with which he attempts to cope with his anger later on, to disappointment by or conflict with primary attachment figures, whoever they may have been.

Freud asserts that Wolf Man told him he felt scarcely a trace of grief at the sudden, unexpected news (when he was nineteen) that his sister had committed suicide. Perhaps this response had reference only to an initial numbness. In any case, Wolf Man writes in his memoirs about the depth of his loss: "After the death of Anna, with whom I had had a very deep, personal, inner relationship, and whom I had always considered as my only comrade, I fell into a state of deepest depression" (Gardiner 1971, 25; italics added). Further on he remarks, "I had fallen into such a state of melancholy after Anna's death that there seemed to be no sense or purpose in living, and nothing in the world seemed worth striving for" (50). These feelings hamper his studies and cause him to sample the usual wares of the sanatoria of the day. Then, at a sanatorium in Munich, he falls in love at first sight with the beautiful woman who eventually becomes his wife: Therese. Regarding the depression he had been suffering at the
school in St. Petersburg, Wolf Man says that whereas “the main symptom of my condition had been the ‘lack of relationships’ and the spiritual vacuum which this created, I now felt [after meeting Therese] the exact opposite. Then I had found life empty, everything had seemed ‘unreal,’ to the extent that people seemed to me like wax figures or wound-up marionettes with whom I could not establish any contact. Now I embraced life fully and it seemed to me highly rewarding, but only on condition that Therese would be willing to enter into a love affair with me” (50). Their relationship lasted for thirty years, until the suicide of Therese in 1938. Emotionally, it lasted much longer than that. Wolf Man’s sense of loss continues undiminished, as he notes in a letter to Muriel Gardiner in 1960: “As regards myself, also, I am aware over and over again that I shall never really recover from the loss of my wife. And I often think how lonely the evening of my life will be” (339). Looked at in retrospect, the attachments to others and subsequent experiences of loss, including the temporary loss as a child of his parents during the summer of his discontent, appear to be more credible sources of major conflicts in Wolf Man than the alleged sexual sources Freud points to.

The cases discussed in this chapter differ from each other so much that they almost defy consideration as a group. But there are some common elements. A thread running through most of them, as case histories, is what Freud refers to as the sexual business. That thread now seems frayed beyond usefulness, and beknotted beyond untangling. In spite of so grave a limitation, the cases themselves, as independent wholes, retain their object-relational significance. What seems reasonable to say at this point is that all of the individuals analyzed were conflicted, to a greater or lesser degree, and that their conflicts developed within interpersonal contexts. The principal source of the conflicts lay in the experience of painful encounters with, or losses of, emotionally important others.