

# SUMMARY

I have attempted to indicate some of the problems involved in the conception of defense. In a restricted sense, defense is viewed as the sum of those unconscious ego activities which work toward maintaining a neurotic equilibrium and thus hinder the emergence of the transference neurosis; they tend to prevent the crystallization of the neurotic conflicts in the analytic process. Defenses are directed against instinctual drives as well as against anxiety, and those vanguards of the drives, the emotions. I have endeavored to show that the mechanisms of defense are complex entities which may involve several defensive positions, and that it is fruitful to distinguish between the deep, unconscious, automatic defense mechanisms and those located in what we called the layers of defense near the ego. Reflections concerning a differentiation of the concepts, defense and resistance, are presented with the intention of finding the sometimes elusive but nevertheless very specific nature of the concept of defense. These reflections are in accord with the current psychoanalytic endeavor to recognize with greater precision the role played by the ego in the process of defense.

## REFERENCES

1. FREUD: The Defense Neuropsychoses. In: *Selected Papers on Hysteria*. New York: Nervous and Mental Disease Monograph Series, No. 4, 1909.
2. —: *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes*. Coll. Papers, IV.
3. —: *Repression*. Coll. Papers, IV.
4. —: *The Problem of Anxiety*. New York: The Psa. Quarterly Press and W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1936.
5. —: *The Dynamics of the Transference*. Coll. Papers, II.
6. FREUD, ANNA: *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*. London: Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psa., 1937.
7. HARTMANN, HEINZ: *Ich-Psychologie und Anpassungsproblem*. Int. Ztschr. f. Psa., XXIV, 1939, pp. 62-135.
8. ISAKOWER, OTTO: *A Contribution to the Pathopsychology of Phenomena Associated With Falling Asleep*. Int. J. Psa., XIX, 1938, pp. 331-345.
9. LEWIN, BERTRAM D.: *Inferences From the Dream Screen*. Int. J. Psa., XXIX, 1948, pp. 224-231.
10. NUNBERG, HERMANN: *The Synthetic Function of the Ego*. Int. J. Psa., XII, 1931, pp. 123-140.
11. REICH, WILHELM: *Zur Technik der Deutung und Widerstandsanalyse*. Int. Ztschr. f. Psa., XIII, 1927.

## THREE NOTES ON THE SCHREBER CASE

BY WILLIAM G. NIEDERLAND, M.D. (NEW YORK)

In his classic study of Schreber's Memoirs,<sup>1</sup> Freud states: 'In working upon the case of Schreber I have had a policy of restraint . . . it will not be possible to define the limits of justifiable interpretation until . . . the subject has become more familiar'.

As almost forty years have elapsed since Freud's famous interpretation of the case (and nearly half a century since the publication of the *Denkwürdigkeiten*), the subject has indeed become more familiar, and an attempt is made here to add a few observations to the classic text. Though preliminary in nature and hardly of major importance in themselves, they may contribute in one way or another to the clarification of some obscure points in the *Denkwürdigkeiten* as well as in the English version of Freud's original text.

### I

#### THE ONSET OF SCHREBER'S TWO ILLNESSES

Freud opens his presentation of the case with Schreber's own words: 'I have suffered twice from nervous disorders and each time as a result of mental overstrain'. In this opening statement of the patient, it seems to me that perhaps not the full weight of consideration has been given to the onset of both illnesses nor to the particular circumstances under which they developed.<sup>2</sup> Although comparatively little is known about

Read before the New York Psychoanalytic Society, March 14, 1950.

I wish to express to Dr. René A. Spitz and Dr. Robert Fliess my thanks for their suggestions in the preparation of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> Freud: *Psychoanalytic Notes Upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia* (based on *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken* [Memoirs of a Neurotic], by Dr. jur. Daniel Paul Schreber, published 1903). Coll. Papers, III.

<sup>2</sup> A reference to Schreber's situation at the outbreak of his two illnesses can be found in a recent paper by E. Klein in *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, Vol. III/IV. New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1949.

Schreber's first sickness—except that it is described as a condition of 'severe hypochondriasis' and that it lasted about one year, several months of which the patient spent in a mental hospital—the onset of this first illness is clearly stated. It began in the year 1884, when Schreber was a candidate for election to the Reichstag, running for the office of *Reichstagsabgeordneter*, a position comparable to member of Congress in the United States or member of Parliament in England.

Since Schreber, at the outbreak of his first illness, was a candidate for an important political office, it is worth-while to consider the political conditions then prevailing in Germany. Bismarck, the 'Iron Chancellor', was then not only at the height of his power in the *Vaterland* but, as the highest official and chancellor of the Reich, he could summon the Reichstag or dissolve it arbitrarily, as he had repeatedly done in fact before 1884. It is important to note, for the understanding of Schreber's situation, that dissolving the Reichstag meant punishing it and its members, and that running for the Reichstag signified in a way running against Bismarck, the most powerful man in Germany, who all his life was sternly opposed to parliamentary ('filial') intrusion. If toward Bismarck the Reichstag misbehaved by voting against his policy, it was threatened with dismissal or it was dissolved by him in short order and its members were sent home, much in the way a disciplinarian or authoritarian teacher dismisses a misbehaving class in anger and paternal wrath.

We do not know exactly how Schreber's candidacy for the Reichstag came about, nor what became of it. We do know, however, that it coincided with the first occasion when he fell ill, and as nothing has ever been said or written about a *Reichstagsabgeordneter* Schreber nor about an election campaign conducted by him, it is probably safe to assume that his candidacy ended, perhaps by his withdrawal, because of the very illness that then made its appearance.

The second illness, of course, is known to us in detail, since Schreber's memoirs, as well as Freud's interpretation of them, are almost entirely devoted to this second illness. About the

onset of this recurrence, Schreber states that it began after he was promoted to the high office of a *Senatspräsident* of the Supreme Court of Justice in Saxony. Precisely when he embarked on this new career, still preparing himself for the duties and manifold responsibilities of the presidency of the highest court in the state, he fell ill for the second time.

Viewed in the light of these conditions, it seems difficult indeed to avoid the assumption that the two illnesses, both appearing under such similar circumstances, have a common denominator, perhaps hitherto not fully considered, at least as far as their precipitating cause is concerned. Also, in the beginning at least, there seems to have been little clinical difference between the two: in both instances the onset was marked by severe hypochondriacal symptoms which led to hospitalization. Before the outbreak of the second illness, Schreber remarks that he dreamed two or three times that his old nervous disorder had returned. We thus learn from the patient himself that the two diseases appeared to him closely related; furthermore, he tells us that on each occasion a similar condition prevailed in his life, which he calls 'mental overstrain', mentioning also 'a very heavy burden of work' in the second. No further parallel between the two episodes can be drawn from Schreber's memoirs alone about his situation at that time.

Our question as to the onset of both illnesses, then, reduces itself to a search for potential, precipitating factors which may have activated well-known latent forces in a paranoid individual, of which the patient himself—as so often happens in these cases—was not entirely unaware. His cautious generalizations about 'mental overstrain' or 'a very heavy burden of work' would seem, judging by their consequences, to refer to something more specific. What does he mean by them?

Freud makes no mention of the onset or the meaning of Schreber's first illness, being primarily interested in the protracted, second psychosis. About the outbreak of the latter, Freud draws attention only to 'a somatic factor which may very well have been relevant' in the case, and notes that Schreber then 'had reached a time of life which is of critical importance

in sexual development . . . the climacteric'. Apart from Freud's own doubts about this explanation which recur throughout his text, and without distracting from the importance of the somatic factor emphasized by him, it seems to me that the possible action of such a somatic factor would explain only the outbreak of the second illness when Schreber was fifty-one. It could hardly be regarded as a sufficiently active element in precipitating the first episode which occurred eight or nine years earlier. Consequently, in accepting the 'male climacteric' as a factor in the development of the second illness, one cannot possibly attribute to it the same significance in the earlier outbreak; nor does the presumed existence of such somatic factors preclude the importance of external events in the patient's life each time he became sick. In fact, if our view of the close connection and perhaps identity of Schreber's two illnesses is correct, it is impossible to avoid the assumption of such psychologically precipitating factors, which must have been operative on both occasions, at or shortly before the onset.

From the study of Schreber's memoirs, Freud brilliantly concluded that in this case 'we find ourselves once again upon the familiar ground of the father complex', as evidenced by the clinical picture, the patient's fantasies and delusions, and their analytic interpretation. This being the case, we cannot fail to see that Schreber in his social relations with Flechsig and von W., as well as in his delusions (God-sun-father) during his illness, succumbed to passive feminine fantasies only after having been put in the unbearable situation, prior to each outbreak, of assuming an active masculine role in real life, either by facing the father as the rebellious son or by becoming a father figure himself.

We may assume, indeed, that what Schreber dreaded most was taking the place of the father. For reasons unknown to us, his marriage was childless though he apparently desired to have children. Under circumstances better known to us, however, we see that Schreber could not accept an active masculine role, in a wider sense. When called upon to become a member of the Reichstag as a rebellious son in opposition to the awe-

inspiring Bismarck,<sup>3</sup> he fell ill the first time. When, nine years later, he was called upon to take a father's place by becoming the presiding judge of the supreme court, he again fell ill, and this time for good. Not being able to face the powerful father in fighting competition as a member of the Reichstag, or to take the place of father as *Senatspräsident*, he became incapacitated whenever such a threat appeared. Instead of running for office or accepting an appointment to a high office, he had to run from it, driven by his castration fantasies which were set in motion the very moment the dreaded masculine role threatened to become a reality.

How unbearable his position seemed to Schreber is stated in his own words in which he describes, almost with insight, the dilemma in which he found himself as a result of his promotion in 1893: 'This burden was the heavier, and put the greater demands on tact in personal intercourse, as the members of the five-man court, of which I had to assume the presidency, were nearly all my seniors, far superior to me in age (up to twenty years) and, moreover, more familiar with the practice of the court to which I was a newcomer'. The patient, in other words, found himself surrounded by threatening father-figures in whose midst he saw himself as a filial intruder, helpless and in danger.

Schreber, therefore, is completely right when, in referring to this situation, he speaks of 'mental overstrain' and 'a very heavy burden of work' to which he succumbed. We have only to add that the strain was not from overwork in the usual sense, but from the unbearable and overpowering burden coming, in 1884, from the threatening election or, in 1893, from the appointment to political (juridical) 'masculinity'. How much even the thought of an active masculine role was dreaded by Schreber is indicated by the fact that shortly after having been notified 'of his prospective appointment as *Senatspräsident*', and some time before assuming this office, he had the ominous fantasy that 'after all it really must be very nice to be

<sup>3</sup> There is a somewhat oblique reference to Bismarck in Schreber's book which seems to point in this direction: Bismarck, Goethe, and other great men belong to the 'important souls' which later become higher, godlike unities.

a woman submitting to the act of copulation'. Under the impact of a threatening reality which imperiously demanded of him an active masculine role (this being precisely the situation he feared most, and which was consciously perceived as 'mental overstrain' and 'a very heavy burden'), his latent passive feminine tendencies broke into consciousness and he fell ill.

That, indeed, the same precipitating mechanism must have been at work nine years earlier, at the outbreak of the first illness, may be surmised from his statement, occurring in the same context, about his repeated dreams that the former disease had returned. In the patient's unconscious the determining mental forces as well as their clinical results were obviously closely related. In fact, they were quite likely based on the same mechanisms and escaped from repression under virtually the same circumstances regardless of the presence or absence of an additional somatic factor.

Viewing the onset and the duration of the two diseases in this light, I would like to venture an hypothesis about the different courses of the two illnesses. If they are similar in structure and origin, why did they have such different clinical courses, the one ending in recovery after one year, the other developing over years into an apparently lifelong process? I believe that here, in the protracted course of the second illness, the somatic factor resulting from the patient's age may play an important part. We cannot, however, overlook the fact that the first relatively mild and temporary illness occurred in connection with a political candidacy which, even if successful, would at best have resulted in a comparatively short period in public office. Having in 1884 relinquished his candidacy because of an illness that necessitated his hospitalization in a mental clinic for several months, the chronic relapse followed a promotion which under normal circumstances would have meant a lasting and practically irreversible life status for him. In this instance, a refusal would have been something like a crime, a kind of *lèse majesté* or worse, since such promotions were made by the King of Saxony, or at least confirmed by royal decree, and could not be refused. Illness, then, was the only

way out, and with a lifelong position of this kind as a permanent threat before the patient, it could not be of short duration.

## II

### OBSERVATIONS OF A LINGUISTIC AND EXPLANATORY NATURE

Various obscure passages in Schreber's *Denkwürdigkeiten* appear unchanged and unexplained in Freud's study and have remained so, perhaps because they have not been deemed important enough to require further elaboration. I have noticed, however, that some of these difficult passages appear in the English translation of Freud's text in such a manner that not only is their meaning lost, but sometimes actually reversed.

One of these passages deals with God's language which in the German original as well as in Freud's monograph is called *Grundsprache*. In the current English translations different versions are used; for instance, 'root language'<sup>4</sup> in the translation of Freud's paper, or 'basic language'<sup>5</sup> in Fenichel's excerpts from the Schreber case. These translations are not only inaccurate, but they also seem to miss a rather interesting point. When Schreber speaks of God's language as *Grundsprache*, it is well to remember that he was a learned and scholarly man, trained in philosophy and abstract thinking. He was certainly informed about such philosophical concepts of God as *Prima Causatio* or, in German, *der Grund allen Seins* ('ground of all being'), etc. God thus being recognized as the *Grund*, it becomes understandable that the language he speaks is the *Grund-language*. In fact, it may be assumed that to Schreber's way of thinking it has to be that way; it may well be that the 'order of things' so often mentioned by him demands it. At any rate, just as a German speaks German and an Englishman, English, it is only natural that God, the 'Ground', uses *his* language, the 'Ground'-language. Using such terms as 'root

<sup>4</sup> Freud: Coll. Papers, III.

<sup>5</sup> Fenichel, Otto: *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1945.



language' or 'basic language', makes this connection completely unintelligible for the English-speaking reader. There is still another reason why the word 'ground' is here particularly appropriate, since it points the direction of Schreber's thinking. He also speaks of *Grundteufel* ('ground' devil) and certain *Untergrund* (underground) phenomena which, together with *Grundsprache* and other anal word usages, are characteristic of Schreber's trend of anal thinking and writing.

According to Schreber, on the one occasion during his illness when he saw God and heard him speak, a word was uttered which was a very current and forcible one in the *Grundsprache*. This word was *Luder*. Translation of this unmistakable German insult into 'scoundrel', as the English version has it, is even more misleading. *Luder* is related to *liederlich*, the English 'lewd', and clearly refers to a female. 'Scoundrel' in German is *Schuft* or *Schurke*, referring only to males. The expression *Luder*, however, is a strong, antiquated, but often used insult in southern Germany (fitting perfectly into the *Grundsprache* described by Schreber as 'a vigorous, somewhat antiquated German'), and is applied to a lewd female, a hussy, or even a whore. It is frequently used in combination with some other insulting epithet explicitly addressed to a female, such as *Dreckluder* or *Sauluder*. In current American slang, *Luder* could perhaps best be translated as 'bitch' or the like. Schreber, then, is called 'tart', 'bitch' or 'whore' which in the context of the patient's delusional system is perfectly understandable.

Schreber states, in allusion to his emasculation, that the 'rays of God' thought themselves entitled to mock at him by calling him 'Miss Schreber'. The word 'Miss' is one of the very few English words which occur in the *Denkwürdigkeiten*. The question arises why Schreber should here have used an English expression. In certain parts of Germany the English term 'Miss' had (and possibly still has) a definitely derogatory connotation. It designated an unmarried woman of somewhat doubtful reputation and character, who displayed also a certain arrogance and ostentatious superciliousness. The meaning of 'Miss' in the Germany of those days can perhaps best be com-

pared with the use of *Fräulein* by our occupation troops in that country today. Schreber himself makes it clear that his being called 'Miss' can be understood only in this way. In the context in which he reports that the 'rays of God' called him 'Miss Schreber', he states that the voices, which are identical with the 'rays', derided him and jeered at him. How did they do that? By calling him 'Miss'.

Completely incomprehensible in the English version are those passages which are repeatedly translated as 'cursory contraptions'. It is true that the original, *flüchtig hingemachte Männer*, is difficult enough to translate. But it is also true that the *flüchtig hingemachte Männer* of the original and the 'cursory contraptions' of the translation have hardly anything in common, either in their wording or the ideational content. Schreber writes of 'men cursorily made, drawn, or delineated', and not of contraptions. The full sense of these words remains doubtful, since no detailed elaboration is given by Schreber who describes himself as being extremely puzzled by these phenomena. Freud believes they may refer to children or spermatozoa or a combination of both, and Katan has recently made a special study of Schreber's 'little men'.<sup>6</sup>

The 'ground language', properly understood, perhaps contains also the key to the meaning of these obscure passages. According to Schreber's statement, the expressions *flüchtig hingemachte Männer*, *kleine Männer*, *Luder*, *Grundteufel*, *Untergrund*, etc., belong in one way or other to the 'ground language'. We are told by Schreber that this language is 'a vigorous, somewhat antiquated German', and we also know from certain words of this language, like *Grund* or *Luder*, that it seems to be especially rich in expressions deriving from or belonging to anal terminology. Viewing Schreber's *flüchtig hingemachte Männer* in this way, and with the additional knowledge that *hinmachen* means not only 'make' but also 'defecate', and that, moreover, it is often used in the sense of 'kill' or 'murder', especially in southern Germany, it becomes evident that these frequent

<sup>6</sup> Katan, M.: *Schreber's Hallucinations About the 'Little Men'*. Int. J. Ps., XXXI, 1950, pp. 32-35.

passages, obscure as they are, have to do with anal-sadistic word usages—certainly not too strange a finding in Schreber who devotes page after page to the description of God's processes of evacuation and other anal activities.

This view is supported by a closer study of those chapters in the *Denkwürdigkeiten* in which the puzzling *flüchtig hingemachten Männer* are mentioned. In the early part of the book they frequently appear in connection with other expressions denoting 'dead', 'dying', 'dissolved', 'disappeared', etc., i.e., destroyed. In other passages the specifically anal meaning emerges even more clearly, for instance, when Schreber writes: 'The orderlies M. and Sch. loaded a part of their bodies as a foul mass into my body in order to sit away'. Schreber describes the noises which he heard repeatedly during the 'sitting of the cursorily made men' as *röcheln*, which literally means 'rattle' or 'death rattle'. In other passages he speaks of these phenomena as 'being really souls', and he equates 'being among cursorily made men' as being 'amongst the fossils', again a clear allusion to dead, destroyed, and anal objects. The expression 'amongst the fossils' is especially characteristic of the 'ground language': fossils are, even literally speaking, ground objects; but in a further sense 'fossils' also refers to persons who are dead or whom one wishes dead, and was often used in German university circles in this sense. Schreber also speaks of the 'little men' as having a repulsive odor, and as being of a strange color, described as *möhrenrot* (carrot-red), a very unusual and, I believe, unique German word. This Schreberian neologism, then, is understandable only in terms of the fecal brownish yellow color of the carrot as well as its shape, while red probably has the sadistic meaning of blood and killing.

A similar meaning emerges from a closer study of those passages in which Schreber discusses the 'little men' in direct connection with specific persons. He repeatedly mentions the 'little men' in close association with 'little Flechsig' and 'little von W.', his two main persecutors. From the associative context and the choice of words, it has clearly the same anal-sadistic, paranoiac meaning.

There remains still another connotation not yet fully considered. The German *hinmachen* means not only to make, to defecate, to kill, but also to draw or to sketch. In the last sense, it may refer to those numerous diagrams, pictures, and drawings of male figures which illustrate a book, *Ärztliche Zimmergymnastik*, written by Schreber's father who was the founder of therapeutic gymnastics in Germany and who prescribed numerous physical exercises which are presented in detail in his book. In fact, some detailed descriptions in the *Denkwürdigkeiten* of, for instance, the 'fore courts' of God, his 'posterior' courts, upper and lower parts, etc., read like graphic though distorted descriptions of the anatomical illustrations included in the elder Schreber's book. In addition, several pages of the *Denkwürdigkeiten* are exclusively devoted to a discussion of drawing and sketching.

### III

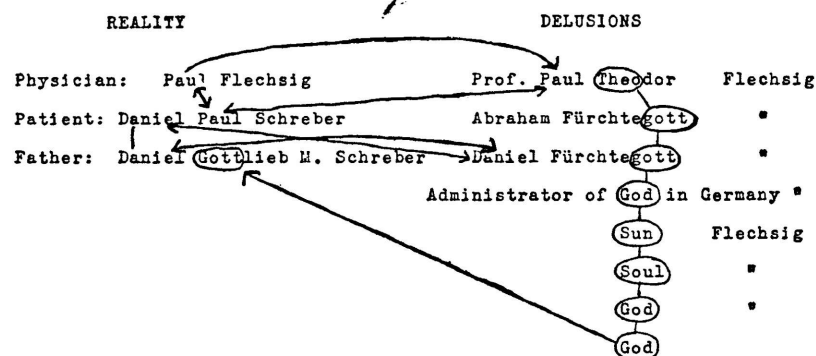
#### THE ASCENT FROM FLECHSIG TO GOD IN SCHREBER'S DELUSIONAL SYSTEM

Freud was particularly interested in the psychopathological process which brought about 'the ascent from Flechsig to God', a process in which ultimately the figure of the physician Flechsig was replaced by the superior figure of God.

Without going into the clinical details of Schreber's delusional system, I wish here only to point out that this ascent can be clearly followed in the *Denkwürdigkeiten*. The intermediate steps of this development are presented by Schreber's chronology of the various delusional names belonging to this part of his delusional system.

Of this chronology, the last four items were discussed in detail by Freud. The first four items are taken from the *Denkwürdigkeiten* to show the various intermediate steps in the production of Schreber's delusional system, which culminates in his characteristic Flechsig-father-God delusion. These stages in his delusion can be found in those chapters which deal with his distortion of the intimate relations between the Schreber and Flechsig families.

The successive delusions can perhaps be best understood in the terms of Freud's analysis of the patient's psychotic thought process as an 'attempt at restitution'. One of the characteristic manifestations of this attempt consists in an effort to regain the lost libidinal objects (from which the cathexis was withdrawn) by reinforcing the cathexis of the verbal representations standing for the lost objects. Hence the prominent role played



The circles in the above system indicate Flechsig's successive deifications. The arrows illustrate Schreber's statement with reference to the close relation between the Schreber and Flechsig families: 'I have parts of their souls in my body'.

by verbal production in schizophrenia such as neologisms, verbiage, word salad, etc. The outstanding libidinal object from which the cathexis is withdrawn in Schreber's case is the father. The verbal representation of his father—his given name, Daniel Gottlieb—is recathected, and it will be noted that in all the variations of the delusional names the word 'God' occurs in one combination or other. Among them, *Fürchtegott* (fear God) is of special interest, revealing the patient's ambivalence, his fear of God as well as the threat he addresses to God.

It is noteworthy that the patient shared the name of Daniel with his father and the name of Paul with his physician. In the delusional system, the father's names, Daniel and Gottlieb, are

bestowed on the physician with the various deifications, thus identifying him clearly as a representative of the father. Of the combinations Paul Theodor Flechsig, Daniel Fürchtegott, and Abraham Fürchtegott, Schreber states: 'I have parts of their souls in my body'. That from Theodor, literally 'God's gift', Schreber draws on his knowledge of Greek is confirmed by him in several passages. The names Abraham and Daniel are of biblical origin, the former meaning 'father of a multitude' and the latter, divine judge or judge appointed by God. It is a matter for speculation whether his use of the name Daniel, containing the Hebrew words *Dan* (judge) and *El* (God), is to be understood, as a double-edged threat, in the same double sense as *Fürchtegott*. At any rate, the deification of the father—a process for which the father's actual middle name, Gottlieb, offered a welcome opportunity—can be easily followed through its various, intermediate steps.

The father as such has vanished in consequence of the withdrawal of cathexis. His name, Daniel Gottlieb, however, has remained, and the cathexis it undergoes can in this system be identified point-blank, as it were, by following the various deifications. In this process the patient arrives step by step at the enthronement of Flechsig as God's administrator or proconsul in Germany, presumably a reference to Bismarck, and from there the cathexis of the word representations proceeds rapidly to culminate finally in 'God'. The process is now completed. First Flechsig, and then God, is reinstated in the place of father. With the new father, God, collecting the totality of cathexis, the schizophrenic thought process has gone as far as possible. It has run its full course in its attempt to restore, with the aid of verbal representations, those libidinal ties which had been abandoned.