

Jacques Lacan:

## Presentation of the *Memoirs* of president Schreber in French translation\*

*Translated by Andrew J. Lewis*

Circumstances: learning that M. Paul Duquenne had undertaken the translation of President Schreber's *Memoirs* I arranged for their publication, in serial form, in the journal of the epistemological circle of the École normale supérieure, *Cahiers pour l'analyse*. I asked Jacques Lacan for this presentation which appeared in number 5, nov-dec 1966. The complete text, reviewed by Mme Nicole Sels, appeared in 1975, in the collection of the Champ freudien (Seuil)

J.-A. Miller.

This translation has been long awaited. To be exact, since our seminar of the year 1955-56. We remember having seen Mrs Ida Macalpine prick up her ears, who no doubt hastened the one she, with the help of her son, was doing in English: it is clear that she could have taken her time.

Perhaps a delay so scarcely justified warrants one's keeping it under scrutiny for longer, or else coming back to it.

Be that as it may, this seminar, as happens when you refer back to these recorded texts, the fifth in our teaching and the third from Saint Anne, demonstrates to us themes not necessary to the broadening of received categories, but some of these themes, dating from when

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they would follow the career that nowadays sees them circulating in the journals, the ones read by those of finer graces (*bel air*), or, if you like, of refined intellect (*bel esprit*).

If some of these themes appear in these short words of introduction with which we will accompany what follows, provided by our friend Doctor Duquenne, it is only because they are illuminated by the light this text produces. For do not forget that Freud knew nothing of the "Schreber case" other than this text. And it is this text which carries with it everything revelatory that he was able to draw from this case.

This is why this seminar which takes its title from the fourth of the said five great psychoanalyses of Freud, could not better enlarge its base than to stress the very text which served as its object. To our knowledge, we were the first to do this to such an extent.

Not of course that Mrs Ida Macalpine does not present in pre- and then in post-face a psychoanalysis of this text which aims at correcting Freud.<sup>1</sup> But it only appeared in the final two seminars of the year (27<sup>th</sup> June - 4<sup>th</sup> July) that I could restore Freud to his rightful place, returning to this issue just two years later in an article where, in a construction which proved very decisive for what followed, we condensed close to two thirds of the material covered in that year. I refer you to the article: "On a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis".<sup>2</sup>

Lets say that Schreber's text is a great Freudian text, in the sense that, rather than it being Freud who throws light on it, the text itself illuminates the relevance of categories that Freud has forged, undoubtedly for other objects, and from a point for the definition of which it does not suffice to invoke genius, unless one understands by this an extensive facility with respect to knowledge.

Certainly Freud would not repudiate this text's being placed on his ledger, when it is in the article where he promotes it to the rank of a case that he declares that he thinks it neither unworthy, nor even risky, to let himself be guided by such a radiant text; even if he should be exposing himself to the reproach of sharing the sick man's delusion, which scarcely seems to disturb him.

The facility of Freud here is simply to make the decisive step of introducing the subject as such, which means that the mad are no longer sized up in terms of deficits and dissociative functions. So simply reading the text clearly shows that in this case there is nothing of that sort.

It is, nevertheless, certainly there that genius, if it comes with such facility, still does not suffice.

1. Paru dans *la Psychanalyse*, vol. 4. Repris dans mes *Écrits*, p. 531-583.

For to construct the subject by taking the unconscious as a point of departure is a matter of logic, as a glance at one of Freud's books is enough to make clear—and it remains no less true that I am the first to have made the remark.

To give credit to the psychotic, in this case, would be nothing more than that which will remain for any other, treated just as liberally: to break down an unlocked door is to have absolutely no idea of what space it opens onto.

When one reads in what follows in Schreber's hand that he himself gives support to God or the Other enjoying his passified being (*être passivé*), so long as he abandons himself to the thinking-of-nothing so that God, this Other consisting of an infinite discourse, withdraws and that from this lacerated (*déchiré*) text that he becomes, there rises the bellowing that he qualifies as miraculous, as if testifying that the distress that it reveals no longer has anything to do with any subject—does one not find there a suggestion to orient oneself with the precise terms that alone Lacan's discourse on Freud provides.

The theme that we measure by the patience which such terrain demands where we have to make it understood, in the polarity, the most recent to be promoted there, between the subject of *jouissance* and the subject that the signifier represents for an always other signifier, is not this what will enable us to move towards a more precise definition of paranoia as identifying *jouissance* in this place of the Other as such.

Does not Schreber's text turn out to be a text to be inscribed in the Lacanian discourse, this must be said, after a long detour during which it was from elsewhere that this discourse assembled its terms. But the confirmation of this comes from the same mould as the one that Freud's discourse receives from it, which is hardly surprising, since it is the same discourse.

In actual fact this translation clarifies this most recent discourse, precisely as it did Freud's initial discourse.

Perhaps this will allow us to take up again the thread which leads us to the Freudian venture. That is, this pathway (*tranchée*) which opens with my thesis, the case of Aimée, which I did not include in the collection of my *Écrits*.

Perhaps one will note, mentioned at several points in this collection, this phase of our reflection, which was firstly that of a psychiatrist, which armed itself with the theme of *paranoiac knowledge* (*connaissance paranoïaque*). To aid us in this collation, someone has already noted that we hardly clarified this notion which has left very few traces.

What a beautiful career as an essayist I could have made for myself with this theme so favorable to all the modulations of aesthetics. One need only recall the way our friend Dalí knew how to unravel it.

Certainly paranoiac knowledge is of everything that parades as knowledge, the least obscene, but this is not to diminish its obtuseness.

Following a rhythm which we have become accustomed to, after ten years our thesis began to be read in such avant-garde places as the asylum of Saint-Albans, and of course the Clinique de la Faculté de Paris (1932-1942).

The inadequacy of psychoanalytic teaching had to be publicly exposed for me to become engaged in the task. 1956—1966 marks the same interval. Two years still remained before the "question preliminary" was given its complete sequel.

What does this mean except that we are not interested in anything other than in the training of subjects capable of entering into a certain experience that we have learnt to centre where it is.

Where it is—as constituted by the true structure of the subject—which as such is not complete, but divided, and lets fall an irreducible residue, the logical analysis of which is in process.

Now it is easy to introduce thought to this structure, as it is easy to introduce a child, at a relatively early age (in school development, if not in analytic phases) to the study of mathematics through set theory.

It is at the level of mathematics as it is being developed that the treatment begins.

This can give us an idea of the resistance that is encountered, amongst psychoanalysts, by the theory on which their training itself depends.

Apart from the fact that this is where the psychoanalysing function gives the subject's constitution its greatest anxiety-provoking employment.

A type of bungled action (*actes manqués*)—perhaps they are the only ones worthy of their name because in neurosis they are successful acts—a type of 'bungled on purpose' act, stands out very prominently in the midst of the theoretical transmission that the training of psychoanalysts implies.

This is, as one can imagine, the domain in which proof is at its most difficult, but how can we fail to see one in this unlikely indifference to the text of President Schreber's *Memoirs* - which meant that it was published in English by an outsider (Mrs Ida Macalpine, as a student of Edward Glover's, who adhered too strongly to the requirements of science, has not been made a member, unless recently, of the London Society), that in France it is in a particularly sensitive zone, but on the fringe in relation to a group (the one that my teaching sustains), a zone represented by the

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*Cahiers pour l'analyse*, that the *Memoirs* to which we have devoted such care is finally brought to light.

May the *Memoirs* be a reminder to those who are capable of understanding what I have said, on the eve of a colloquium on the clinic, about the implication of the subject supposed to know in the symptom, and also the fact that the conception of psychiatric disorders is the clinician's concern—which merely opening this poignant text demonstrates.

The fact is that the said clinician must accommodate himself to a conception of the subject, from which it emerges that as subject he is no stranger to the link which places him, for Schreber, under the name of Flechsig, in the position of object of a sort of mortifying erotomania, and that the place he holds in the extraordinary photograph with which Ida Macalpine's book opens, namely, before the gigantic mural image of a brain, makes sense in the whole affair.

It is a question there, not of any access to a mystical asceticism, any more than of any effusive opening onto the lived experience of the ill, but rather of a position to which only the logic of the treatment can introduce one.

<sup>1</sup> [See Ida Macalpine and Richard A. Hunter, "Introduction" and "Translators' Analysis of the Case" in Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness*, 369-411. Translated by Ida Macalpine and Richard A. Hunter. 1955. 2nd edition. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988. Trans. note]

<sup>2</sup> Appeared in *La Psychanalyse*, vol. 4. Reprinted in *Écrits*, p.531-583 [*Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, p.179-225]

Endnote:

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Schreber's 'Memoires' are available here <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=293> or here: *Memoirs of my nervous illness*: 1903: D. P. Schreber

Sigmund Freud's comments on Schreber's text are available here

<http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=244> or here: Case history of Schreber: 1910: Sigmund Freud