

# A PSYCHOTIC LOVE

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Love, whose benefits are praised by some and its devastation bemoaned by others, is a special risk for the psychotic subject.

This subject does not do any worse than others in the maze of sexual, marital or family life. A psychotic married woman, for example, maintains a job, looks after the house, brings up her child, invites friends home, spends holidays in foreign countries, attends Masonic meetings; but for more than one year, she has been on the brink of despair, a fact which only her analyst knew because she had been waiting for her boss to declare the love she perceived he had for her. She feared an outburst as disastrous as the psychotic onset she suffered many years ago, after she had been abandoned by her lover, and during which she threw herself out of a window.

## THE PSYCHOTIC'S EROS

There is 'a psychotic's Eros',<sup>1</sup> said Lacan, and it means that the psychotic's feelings of love cannot be easily separated from their links to the drives. Therefore, the psychotic subject can be pushed into a disturbance of libido, from which emerges the figure of an Other moved by a demonic will of *jouissance*. Thus, Professor Schreber, in *The Memoirs of his Nervous Illness*,<sup>2</sup> declared he had to develop and acquire female emotions for the satisfaction of God. We cannot define such ideas as love.

Schreber's project, nevertheless, was described by Lacan as a 'divine erotomania'.<sup>3</sup> That means that such a love belongs to the group of the passional psychoses, so named by De Clerambault, in which love at first sight is a typical way of falling in love. But if the enamoured subject believes he attracts the sexual ideas of his love object, he is also certain that the object has started to love him first. That's the well-known postulate of De Clerambault - everything starts from the Other - which Schreber's example demonstrates.

Other psychotic Eros can be described. Nijinsky, on becoming schizophrenic, accused his wife of being attracted to his body instead of his art,<sup>4</sup> and Joyce, whose psychosis was demonstrated by Lacan, considered his wife Nora endowed with a lewdness, which reached, in the letters he wrote to her, the summits of literary licentiousness.<sup>5</sup> For Joyce, that was his only way of keeping alive his love for his wife.

In the following case study, I will refer to the Schreber case in the form given by Lacan in his 'Presentation' of Schreber's *Memoirs*.<sup>6</sup> This text, which develops the *Preliminary question to any possible treatment of psychosis*,<sup>7</sup> introduces the concept of *jouissance* in the theory of paranoia, and it indicates an opposition between the place of the Other, where the *jouissance* can be entirely located, and the subject 'left in the lurch'.<sup>8</sup> This text also provides new considerations about the transference in psychosis, and specifies the position of the object in erotomania.

## PSYCHOANALYSIS

When she was a child, the only thing Miss X aspired to do was to grow up and get married. Through this dream, she was trying to escape the uneasiness of her childhood. Her mother, dominating a meek husband, was preoccupied with pleasing young men. Her two older sisters were united in ganging up against her, and were often joined by the mother. After the birth of her younger brother, who became the Prince of the household, she started wetting her bed, so her status as a devalued girl was highlighted.

A dunce at school, devoted at home to cleaning the house and going shopping, the inequality between her and the other children became more evident with her staying at home with her brother when her sisters were sent to a boarding-school: only the little boy was kissed good night by the mother before going to bed.

Her grievances today, about her childhood, can be summed up in a few words: she is subservient, a discarded person, who did not learn anything, and does not understand anything.

Her first request for psychoanalysis was motivated by her sister's analysis and her interest in such a practice. She complained about her childhood, her lover, her cats, about the mediocrity of her life, and she mentioned rapidly a sentimental disappointment in her adolescence, which seemed to me at that time very ordinary.

I met her again a few months later, as she was going to break off a psychotherapy she had not mentioned previously: she blamed the psychiatrist for not being professional, but she asked herself if he had not had the behaviour of a clumsy but sincere lover.

Gradually, I was informed about her first sentimental disappointment, the importance of which grew when she encountered a new love. Progressively, it became the paradigm of all her love life.

When she was a teenager going on eighteen, at the beginning of the school year, in a coffee shop frequented by pupils of her technical school, she saw a man close to her ideal of a man: curly brown-hair, blue-eyed. They hardly got to know each other, they did not speak very often. She said: 'We just liked to look at each other'. This situation lasted until the end of the year.

After the Christmas holidays, she saw him again. She heard him telling a friend that he liked children's drawings, and that he had a son. She was stunned, when she realised he wore a wedding ring. One time, he was accompanied by his young boy. She hated children, but she found him very beautiful and began to stare at babies in their prams.

She then sank into a sort of torpid state. She missed school, complained about extreme fatigue, lost sleep, endured strong feelings of loneliness and isolation. Subsequently, she gave herself to the first man she met. 'I was not quite all there', she said. She feared her parents were plotting to hospitalise her. She survived a suicide attempt at home, to which nobody in her family had paid any attention.

Her belief in the hereafter came crashing down. She said recently, from that time on 'something remained, a terror, a horror'. In the past, her belief had already faltered,

when she learnt that Father Christmas was fictitious.

## STYLES OF FALLING IN LOVE

She became wary of her feelings. 'Feelings', she says, 'throw me into distress'. Her cautiousness did not prevent her from having sexual experiences, by which she verifies, not without a masochistic benefit, the loathsome brutality of men who are only preoccupied with their virility.

However, it so happened she was caught by a man's smile. She poured out her story, then made her reproaches, because of the feeling of powerlessness which followed.

Ten years after her first love episode, one day in the metro, she fell in love at first sight. She saw a man leaving a carriage, turning around and looking at her. The astonishment she discovered on his face shocked her, because she understood immediately that the man in seeing her had just recognised his own image.

This short-lived episode was related a bit later on with embarrassment, but made her laugh. Then, she commented: 'He was what I am, I have got what he is lacking. If a mirror had been in front of me, the effect would have been the same. Why was he me, and me him?'

A few months later, it seemed to her that her boss was speaking ambiguously, and she noticed his paleness. That is a sign for her when she falls in love; she read it had been the same for Dora, the Freud case.

## OTHER PHENOMENA

Her styles of falling in love, which generally provoked an outburst of anxiety, are not the only phenomena of her psychosis.

At one time, when she had a love affair, she suspected her concierge of keeping watch on her.

Further, she was convinced that somebody had poured cat's piss on her doormat, and she complained twice to the police.

The persecuting concierge was later replaced by the landlord's daughter who lived in a flat close to hers and polluted her life space with a TV installed behind her wall.

The love onsets and the momentary psychotic episodes provided her usual loneliness with some kind of delusional social relations. Usually, her efforts to frequent social groups are rapidly compromised by her exaggerated touchiness: she felt easily hurt by a word, a tone, an attitude. Recently, however, she succeeded in obtaining after a year at university the equivalent of baccalaureate.

In Miss X's analysis - and twenty years after the original love event - the drive basis of this erotomania was becoming step by step more precise, and related to the transference, the context of which was sometimes delicate.

She mentioned an elementary phenomenon, which she interpreted as revenge, because she felt so violently hateful toward God the day before. In the middle of the

night, she was woken by a tap on her arm – ‘it was intentional’, she said and she saw a dark mass with phosphorescent eyes: ‘It’s the Black Angel with feathers or hairs’, she thought. From that time, she never turned off her lights when sleeping.

This sort of phenomenon was not uncommon to her. After her first breakdown, she had already experienced such physical jolts. For example, after her aunt’s death, a hand touched her shoulder. She was also convinced of being jolted by her friend Marie-Lou, who had committed suicide a few weeks ago. Her conviction of possessing a gift for interpreting dreams was rooted in her certainty that she had had an access to the real behind appearances.

The novelty of this phenomenon consisted in the objectification of the gaze. That point, on which her certainty had been fixed, quietened all her criticism against such a weird apparition.

Six months later, watching a TV presenter again, whom she was fond of, she discovered suddenly with terror that he resembled Tony, the first man she loved.

Her infatuation for the presenter was actually caused by the menacing presence of ‘Tony’s ghost’, as she called it. ‘I thought all that was finished, but the past is still haunting me’.

She stared at the presenter again, but she concluded he wasn’t really a true likeness of Tony. Then, making a further step, she isolated what had given real power to Tony’s image: the blue colour on the TV screen, which reminded her of Tony’s blue eyes. That is what triggered the attraction to the presenter. And Miss X concluded: ‘Blue is my colour’.

Another time, she was again attracted to a man, a colleague of hers, with whom she had gladly had a love affair. But her infatuation was disturbed by the similarity of his facial expressions with Tony’s, even though, as she specifies, their names were different.

She complained anxiously: ‘How long will I be haunted by Tony’s ghost? And why?’ I intervened: ‘Everyone has their own taste and colour. Perhaps you had chosen previously?’ She continued: ‘Of course. Tony had just jumped into the right place. It is like the sea I fear and love, by which I am fascinated and captured, whether on television or in reality’.

Then, a delicate phase began in the transference, which was indicated by her being late for her appointments.

She asked me one time in a stormy session if it were my intention to push her into the arms of a bizarre man she met from time to time when she was waiting for her session in the waiting room.

Her continual lateness was worsening. One day, without saying anything to me, she stopped coming to her sessions for a month. Later, she told me she had stopped coming to see me after she had a dream which made her conclude she could never succeed in her analysis.

After she received the letter I wrote to her, she had a new dream which she interpreted as she had to make a choice: analysis or death. In another dream she

recognised her analyst as a saviour represented by the figure in a western TV series - so she decided to continue.

The difficulties in the analytical relationship ended the day she expressed, after a dream, that the transference was disturbing her. In the first quite obvious part of this dream, she succeeded in escaping her analyst, who was sticking to her like flies she wanted to swat. The second part of the dream, on the contrary, was deeply encoded. It was not difficult, however, to decipher the means with which the dream-work had installed the gaze on the analyst's side: an Egyptian cat which belonged to the analyst wore on the top of its head something like a lighthouse with two or three diamonds. The patient in her dream tried to follow that cat when it climbed a narrow spiral staircase - a staircase, as specified by her, different from that of Mont Saint-Michel - a place near to where she was born and grew up.

## HYPOTHESES

According to the Presentation of Schreber's Memoirs, the paranoiac subject identifies '*jouissance*' as being located in the Other. In order not to be dropped by the Creator, President Schreber had 'to give the support of his passivated being'<sup>9</sup> to God's *jouissance*.

Therefore, two extreme positions can be conceived: the Other's position who concentrates on him the whole *jouissance* and, the subject's position as 'left in the lurch'. Her fundamental state of despair about which she repeatedly complains, expresses a failure of the 'sense of being alive'. This is an effect of the phallic elision<sup>10</sup> which depends on the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father. 'Deeply, I am not concerned. I am not an integral part of things. There is a veil between the world and me'.

She also blames the men who are full of their virility for provoking an odious disorder in the world (war, corruption, sexual crimes, and so on), a world where there is no place for her.

Between the subject 'left in the lurch' and his libidinal vacuum, and the *jouissance* located in the Other, a series of psychotic phenomena take place: styles of falling in love, delusions, defenses against her psychotic inhibitions.

All these phenomena are different attempts by the subject to fix the libido, to localize *jouissance*.

Ordinarily, the patient experiences a heavy pain in living, a painful apathetic state, a state of inhibition sometimes described as a feeling of being hindered.

At the height of such a psychotic inertia, she indulges in the endless extraction of blackheads, or, in order to obtain peace, she remains in the shower until she falls asleep.

Her infatuations with falling in love with an attractive man re-establish her self-esteem and obviously have a narcissistic basis.

The patient, fascinated by her own image seen in the other, falls in love on sight. The mirror stage briefly gives support to such an alienating structure.

Miss X's psychosis began through her first love. Can we explain that in comparison with Schreber's case, for whom the question of paternity revealed a foreclosure of the signifier on which the question of paternity is founded? The son of the man Miss X loved introduced a third party into their mutual eroticised relation based on an imaginary dyad, the father of the boy.

Miss X's psychosis, however, had apparently not been triggered in a delusional way, like President Schreber's delusional onset, but it began with a depression in which the effects of the foreclosure of the phallus were prominent ( $\Phi_o$ ) - and not those of the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father ( $P_o$ ).<sup>11</sup>

A comment the patient made recently specified the impact of her disastrous encounter, after which her life had never been the same. 'I fell into a bottomless pit', she said, 'a fall which never finished'. 'It was a collapse beyond a collapse'.

The imaginary relation which structures the love feelings is unable to satisfy narcissism, to keep the erotic link under the control of the pleasure principle, and to maintain limits against an invading *jouissance*.

The gaze, separated from vision and the eye, objectified as an evil eye, localized *jouissance* and operated as a condenser of it; a *jouissance* which can now be defined as a *scopic jouissance*.

Probably most of the patient's psychotic phenomena were concerned with that *scopic jouissance*: erotomania and the different styles of falling in love, of course, and also the brief delusional outbursts. For example, the patient feared being watched for a time, so she waited until night-time to close the shutters in order to clean the windows.

The coding, the ciphering by the dream-work of the *scopic jouissance* brought this *jouissance* to the unconscious. In the same way, the patient's dream indicated to the analyst what his correct position was in the patient's psychotic structure.

#### ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Lacan, Jacques, *The Psychoses, The seminar, Book III*, edited by Jaques-Alain Miller, translated with notes by Russell Grigg (1993), Routledge, London, p. 254.

<sup>2</sup> Schreber, Daniel Paul, *Memories of my Nervous Illness*.

<sup>3</sup> Lacan, o.c., p. 142, 311.

<sup>4</sup> Nijinski, Vaslav, *Cahiers*, Actes Sud, Paris, 1995, p. 187. See also, Wachsberger, Herbert, "Psychose et création: l'art de Nijinski", *Les Feuilles du Courtil*, no. 13, janvier 1997, pp. 57-64.

<sup>5</sup> Joyce, James, "Choix de lettres", in *Oeuvres, tome I*, édition établie par Jacques Aubert, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1982.

<sup>6</sup> Lacan, Jacques, "Présentation", *Cahiers pour l'analyse*, n° 5, novembre-décembre 1966, pp. 69-72.

<sup>7</sup> Lacan, Jacques, "On a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis", *Écrits: A Selection*, Routledge, London, 1977, pp. 179-225.

<sup>8</sup> Liegen lassen (German), laisser en plan (French).

<sup>9</sup> Lacan, Jacques, "Présentation", o. c., p. 70.

<sup>10</sup> Lacan, Jacques, "On a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis", *Écrits: A Selection*, Routledge, London, 1977, p. 201.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., see Schema I, p. 212.