RE-READING "LITTLE HANS": FREUD'S CASE STUDY AND THE QUESTION OF COMPETING PARADIGMS IN PSYCHOANALYSIS

Psychoanalysts have long recognized the complex interaction between clinical data and formal psychoanalytic theories. While clinical data are often used to provide "evidence" for psychoanalytic paradigms, the theoretical model used by the analyst also structures what can and cannot be seen in the data. This delicate interaction between theory and clinical data can be seen in the history of interpretations of Freud's "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy" ("Little Hans"). Freud's himself revised his reading of the case in 1926, after which a number of psychoanalysts—including Melanie Klein, Jacques Lacan, and John Bowlby—reinterpreted the case in the light of their particular models of the mind. These analysts each found "evidence" for their theoretical model within this classic case study, and in doing so they illuminated aspects of the case that had previously been obscured, while also revealing a great deal about the shifting preoccupations of psychoanalysis as a field.

On January 7, 1908, a four-year-old boy named Herbert Graf was taken for a walk by his nursemaid in the Stadtpark, a public garden near the center of Vienna. While in the street he began to cry, saying that he wanted to "coax" with his mummy. His nursemaid brought him home, but that evening he became tearful again, could not

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be separated from his mother, and when he went out the following day—this time with his mother—quickly became distressed and insisted on being taken home. When his mother pushed him for a reason (he could no longer be upset about the separation from her, as they had been together the whole time), Herbert replied, "I was afraid a horse would bite me." By the next morning, he was refusing to leave the house, afraid of seeing a horse. So began what is probably the most famous case study of an infantile phobia in the history of psychiatry—Freud's "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy," better known as "Little Hans."

But even before that fateful walk in the park, little Herbert was already the object of intense scrutiny, thanks to the close relationship between his family and a certain Dr. Sigmund Freud. Herbert's father, Max Graf (1875–1958), was a music critic living in Vienna, who met Freud in 1900 while Freud was treating a lady Graf knew (possibly his future wife). In his "Reminiscences of Professor Sigmund Freud," Graf (1942) describes how he became actively involved in Freud's circle during the period 1902–1911 as one of Freud's "closest adherents," taking part especially in the attempt to use psychoanalysis to understand the process of creativity (for a review of Graf's writings on music, see Abrams 1993). After Graf's marriage, Freud "took the warmest part in all family events," even bringing Graf's son, Herbert, a rocking horse for his third birthday (Graf 1942, p. 474).

About Max Graf's wife, Olga Hönig, little is known, although she had been treated by Freud, who describes her as a "beautiful" woman and an "excellent and devoted mother" (Freud 1909, pp. 27–28).[1] Herbert himself, who grew up to be a stage director at New York's Metropolitan Opera, was born in 1903. His godfather was the composer Gustav Mahler, but it was Freud himself who persuaded the family not to baptize their child as a Christian, a common practice in the anti-Semitic atmosphere of Vienna at that time (Graf 1942, p. 473).

From 1906, when Herbert was still only two, his father began sending Freud regular observations of his son's development, focusing especially on his growing curiosity about sexual matters—where

[1] Jean Bergeret (1987) has speculated that Hans's mother may have been the real figure behind the "Katharina" of Freud's *Studies on Hysteria* (Breuer and Freud 1895), but this view is based more on thematic similarities than on any historical evidence and would seem to clash with Anny Katan's view that Mrs. Graf was still in analysis with Freud at the time her husband was sending Freud observations of their son's development (Frankiel 1991).

babies come from and the difference between boys and girls.[2] But Herbert's importance to Freud increased dramatically early in January 1908, when, following the incident in the Stadtpark, Max Graf wrote to Professor Freud to tell him that the observations he was now making of his son had become "material for a case history" (Freud 1909, p. 22).

The publication of this case study in 1909 came at an important time for Freud. With the initiation of the Wednesday Meetings of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society in 1902, Freud had systematically begun to ask his colleagues to observe and study the children around them in order to gain empirical support for his emerging ideas about dreams, the unconscious, and the origin of neurosis. This task became more urgent after the publication of the chapter on infantile sexuality in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Freud 1905), as almost all of Freud's data came from reconstructions from adult analyses, a fact widely criticized in contemporary reviews. For Freud it became a necessity to find empirical support for his ideas about polymorphous perversity, the castration complex, and infantile sexuality through direct observation of infants and children, and no child did more to offer this evidence than Herbert Graf.

But the role of little Hans in formulating important aspects of psychoanalytic theory was not to end with Freud. Following Freud's lead, several major post-Freudian psychoanalytic innovators have presented their own understanding of the origin of psychopathology and the nature of the mind by way of re-readings of the case of Little Hans. In this way, each new generation of psychoanalysts has been able to revisit the case study in the light of their contemporary preoccupations, making use of the same primary data but emphasizing different elements and reinterpreting key moments.

In this paper I will trace the way that a number of major psychoanalysts have revisited "The Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy," showing how each re-reading has thrown new light on the case while also challenging earlier psychoanalytic paradigms. By seeing how four key figures—Freud himself, Melanie Klein, John Bowlby, and Jacques Lacan—have written about Little Hans,

[2]Freud made use of these observations of "little Herbert" in his 1907 paper "The Sexual Enlightenment of Children," and again in his revolutionary work "On "the Sexual Theories of Children" (1908), where he spoke for the first time about concepts such as the "castration complex," the "phallic woman," and the "sadistic view of coition."

we can gain an increasingly rich and multidimensional view not only of the case, but also of the shifting preoccupations and models of the mind—and hence of therapeutic treatment—that have emerged within psychoanalysis.

SIGMUND FREUD: HANS, "OUR LITTLE OEDIPUS"

Within days of receiving his first account of the development of the phobia from the boy's father, Freud (1909) plunged straight into an interpretation of the material, noting that "no moment of time is so favourable for the understanding of a case as its initial stage" (p. 24). And from the very beginning he placed his understanding of Hans's anxiety within the context of his recently published findings on the significance of infantile sexuality.

Freud begins by asking what it was, following that fateful walk in the park one winter morning, that led to this sudden transformation of a previously "cheerful, good-natured and lively little boy" (p. 6) into this neurotically anxious child. He notes that a few days prior to the outbreak of his phobia Hans woke from an anxiety dream saying that he wanted to "coax" with his mother (p. 23), a vital clue in reconstructing the prehistory of the outbreak of neurosis.

Based on a detailed reading of Hans's early history, Freud argues that the little boy was in a state of intensified sexual excitement, focused on his wish to see his mother's "widdler," but that previous threats to send for Dr. A to have his "widdler" cut off, when he didn't stop touching himself at night, led to a sudden fear of castration—a fear that was now activated by his discovery that little girls—and women—don't have a penis. Hans's separation from his mother causes anxiety because of the intensification of erotic longings that cannot be satisfied: "It was this increased affection for his mother which turned suddenly into anxiety—which, as we should say, succumbed to repression" (p. 25).

This might serve as an explanation for Hans's sudden state of anxiety, but why would these feelings then become focused on the fear of a horse's biting him? Tracing a number of associative links based on visual similarities and contiguous memories, Freud deduces that "the horse must be his father" (p. 123) and that the fear of horses is actually a displaced fear of his father. Hans was afraid of his father, Freud goes on, because "he himself nourished jealous and hostile wishes against

him" (p. 123), wishes deriving from his sense that his father was both an interferer with his sexual wishes and an obstacle to his exclusive attachment to his mother. When Hans had recently seen a horse falling down in the street, Freud reconstructs, he must have wished that his father might fall down in the same way and die, a thought that would have put Hans in internal conflict with his loving and affectionate feelings toward his father.

For Freud the description of this boy's fantasies and anxieties confirmed the centrality of castration and the oedipus complex to the origin of the anxiety neuroses "in the most concrete and uncompromising manner" (p. 111). The intensification of his libidinal longings, when faced by the threat of castration, led to a sudden repression of libido and its transformation into anxiety.

This theory of anxiety, which links it intimately to the problem of libido, was a central aspect of Freud's earliest model of repression, the oedipus complex, and the infantile neuroses. But it was soon to be challenged—and the theory of anxiety revised—by way of a re-reading of the case study of Little Hans by the first great psychoanalytic revisionist—Sigmund Freud himself.

SIGMUND FREUD: THE EGO AND SIGNAL ANXIETY

Perhaps it is inevitable that Freud did not wait for others to reinterpret his case study, but began the process himself—in particular, by revisiting the role that anxiety and the ego play in the origin of neuroses, especially the infantile phobias.

The theory of anxiety outlined in the 1909 case study illustrated what Freud was later to call his "first theory of anxiety": that when libido becomes intensified and threatens to overwhelm the ego, a process of repression sets in that leads to the unacceptable wish becoming unconscious and the loving feelings being transformed into anxiety. When Freud (1926) came to revise this theory, in "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety," he returned to the case of little Hans in order to work out his new understanding of the origin of neurotic symptoms.

On first reading it may not be apparent how profoundly revolutionary this work is. Freud begins by confronting a simple problem: if the anxiety felt in a phobia is due to the transformation of libido, how does this relate to the anxiety felt in the face of more "realistic"

dangers, as when someone suddenly surprises us? In such a case, it would be odd to describe this anxiety as a "transformation of libido," yet it would be equally strange to say that these two kinds of anxieties—which feel so similar—could be created by entirely different processes.

Freud turns to Little Hans in part 4 of "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety." He revisits his assertion that Hans's anxiety is related to his "castration anxiety," but now sees that this—at least from Hans's point of view—is an entirely "realistic" anxiety to have. Hans fears castration because of his oedipal rivalry with his father, whom he wishes to get rid of. Rather than anxiety being a transformation of libido *following* repression, anxiety was now seen as a signal arising from the ego itself, warning of the danger faced and leading the ego to employ suitable defensive reactions. This is true whether that danger comes from the instincts, the superego, or the external world.

Freud now reinterprets the stages in the formation of Little Hans's phobia once more: a fear of being castrated is seen by the ego as a danger, which releases a "signal anxiety." This anxiety activates ego defenses (though their activity takes place without any awareness on the part of Hans)—primarily a repression of the wish to murder his father, an unacceptable thought that, through a series of unconscious associations, reemerges as the more acceptable but wholly irrational fear of being bitten by a horse. As a horse can be avoided more easily than his father, Hans is able to master his anxiety by means of an inhibition. He refuses to go outside, and so the ego no longer has to produce a signal of anxiety. Hans no longer feels any conflict between his loving and murderous feelings toward his father, as the latter have disappeared entirely from his consciousness.

Without introducing any new data, Freud interpreted the material in a new way, subtly changing the way we could think about little Hans and his anxious state, but also changing our view of psychoanalysis itself. Moreover, Freud's re-reading of the case in 1926 became crucial to all post-Freudian accounts of the origin of anxiety, because it opened up the possibility of thinking about the impact of the environment (as well as of drives and sexuality), of considering stages of development earlier than the oedipus complex, and raised the possibility that castration anxiety might not be the primary, most fundamental danger situation the ego faces.

Every later account of the case of Little Hans has taken up one or more of these issues, and has led to a shift in the way psycho-

analytic theory has been conceptualized. As Robert Wallerstein (2002) has recently written, "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety" marked "the transition of psychoanalysis from being primarily an id or drive psychology, focused on the vicissitudes of the instinctual drives . . . , to a period in which the ego was accorded equal importance and was regarded as the prime shaper and modulator of behavior . . ." (p. 136).

Within this new paradigm—"ego psychology"—anxiety was no longer seen as inherently linked to the question of libido, as it was now seen as within the sphere of a relatively autonomous ego. This ego could "produce" anxiety in response to any possible source of danger—internal or external, "neurotic" or "objective," oedipal or preoedipal.[3] In many of the early texts of ego psychology, this new point of view is contrasted with a certain "one-sided approach" within psychoanalysis that focuses only on "bringing the id-derivatives into consciousness," an approach that might "produce abundant material from the deepest strata of the id," but which, in doing so, may also "overstep the bounds of the analytic situation" (A. Freud 1936, p. 28). Although not named as such, it is clearly the Kleinian approach that is being referred to, and it is perhaps not coincidental that Klein herself, in her first major work, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (1932), went back to the case of Little Hans to offer a very different understanding of childhood phobias and the role of anxiety and the oedipus complex in early development.

[3]This view of the ego is, of course, elaborated in Anna Freud's *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (1936), where she discusses the case of Little Hans to illustrate the defense mechanism of "denial in phantasy." In a later paper, Anna Freud argued "that the importance of Little Hans" lies in the fact that it opened up "a new branch of psychoanalysis" (1980, p. 278). A casual reader might assume this to mean the analytic treatment of children, a new branch of psychoanalysis that Anna Freud was instrumental in developing. But in this paper she is explicit that she means something quite different—the evolution of psychoanalysis itself "from a psychopathology to a developmental psychology" (p. 281). This evolution, she might have added, was her own life's work, exemplified by her account of Little Hans, where she focuses on what the case can tell us about the *normal* mechanisms of defense employed by children in the process of development. Moreover, by shifting her focus to defenses against painful affects rather than unacceptable drives (even if theoretically she insisted that affects were merely an expression of drive activity), Anna Freud opened up the way for the study of the ego's reaction to all kinds of anxiety situations, moving psychoanalysis into an area that she was later to term "beyond the infantile neurosis."

MELANIE KLEIN: THE "MATERNAL OEDIPUS COMPLEX"

The introduction to Melanie Klein's *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* begins by paying tribute to the importance of the case of Little Hans to the development of psychoanalysis. For her, the case was significant because it illustrated that "psycho-analytic methods could be applied to small children," and this in turn opened up the possibility of reaching a "deeper and more accurate knowledge of the working of their minds than analysis of adults had done . . . " (Klein 1932, p. xv). Such a "deeper" knowledge, she implies, is what she had uncovered in her own analytic work with children, and in chapters 8 and 9 of the book she offered her new theory of early anxiety situations and the oedipus complex by way of a re-reading of the case of Little Hans. In particular, Klein offers a radical new understanding of the concept of anxiety, and through this a new understanding of anxiety neuroses, including childhood phobia.

Freud's study of Little Hans had appeared to support the view that childhood phobias have their roots in conflicts occurring during the "phallic" stage, generally identified as starting between the ages of three to five, simultaneous with the development of oedipal feelings. Yet children develop intense anxiety states at a much earlier age than this—indeed for Klein the infant's cries could be seen not as a mere physiological reaction to hunger, but as responses to overwhelming anxiety states, often driven by powerful unconscious fantasies. Moreover, Klein's analyses of very young children had suggested that these fantasies already had an "oedipal" quality to them, long before Freud's "phallic phase" had begun. If Klein was to substantiate these views, she could do no better than to find support for them in the case where Freud himself had offered his phallic/oedipal understanding of childhood phobias.

In chapter 8 of *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, Klein returns to Freud's discussion about the origin and meaning of anxiety, tracing how his views shifted between the 1909 case study and the 1926 revisions, in which anxiety as a reaction to danger became central. But what is the earliest danger situation that the ego faces? Freud himself had seemed uncertain about this, caught between wanting to maintain the centrality of castration as the fundamental danger at the root of neurosis, while also recognizing that castration anxiety does not appear until

about the fourth year of life, and that the anxiety reaction to danger situations itself far predates this time.

Klein herself turns to the earliest phobias of childhood to find a solution to this problem. Referring to Freud's comment in "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety" that such early childhood phobias have "so far not been explained" by the psychoanalytic theories available at the time (Klein 1932, p. 156), Klein argues that these phobias actually relate to the very earliest anxiety situations of the infantile mind, associated with fears of violent objects, both external and introjected. In the animal phobias, these anxieties are an attempt to modify the fear of a terrifying, anal-sadistic id and superego, first by ejecting them into the outside world, and then displacing them onto the figure of an animal, often in a modified form: "What lies at the root of a phobia," she writes, clearly differentiating herself from Freud, "is ultimately an internal danger. It is the person's fear of his own destructive instinct and of his introjected parents" (p. 158).

Hans's phobia, Klein tells us, was "readily dissipated by a short piece of analysis" because he had been able to modify these early psychotic anxieties as his relationship to his parents and to his environment was "very good" and his general development was progressing (pp. 158–159). The anxiety-animal (the horse) was "not a terrifying one in itself," and the phobia exhibited "only a few traces of that type of anxiety which belongs to the earliest stages," anxieties that had already been quite successfully modified (p. 158). But even here, Klein suggests, the earliest anxiety situations are still latent, to a greater or lesser degree, and the phobic anxiety can be understood as relating to early sadistic fantasies and the anxieties associated with them.

Klein's re-reading of the case challenges Freud's view of the phallic/oedipal origins of the infantile neurosis—as well as his understanding of the origin of anxiety—on the basis of the very same case material that Freud used to provide "conclusive evidence" for his own point of view. Klein's attention to the early fantasies that underlie Hans's more developed anxieties paved the way for a new understanding of what Grotstein (1982) has called the "archaic matriarchal Oedipus," one in which the very earliest stages of development, and in particular the relationship with the mother, plays a far more central part in psychoanalytic theory than it had done previously. Long before she had introduced the concepts of the "paranoid-schizoid" and the

"depressive" positions, Klein was already describing, in her account of Little Hans, how very primitive, psychotic anxieties underlie the seemingly oedipal-depressive anxieties of early childhood.

Klein's refocusing of psychoanalytic theory onto the early anxieties within the mother-infant relationship has had a profound impact on psychoanalytic theory, whether Kleinian or non-Kleinian. One of those whose ideas built on this shift in focus to the early mother-infant relationship, while rejecting some of the fundamental ideas of Kleinian psychoanalysis, was John Bowlby, and it is to his re-reading of the case of Little Hans that we will now turn.

JOHN BOWLBY: SEPARATION ANXIETY AND THE IMPACT OF "REAL" EXPERIENCE

Although often considered "nonpsychoanalytic," Bowlby's theory of attachment was developed via a detailed re-reading of psychoanalytic theories. And, like Klein before him, he gives central place to "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety," before offering his own view of the centrality of separation anxiety to an understanding of the infantile neurosis, using the case of Little Hans to illustrate his new ideas.

Prior to his 1926 work, argues Bowlby, Freud paid little attention to separation anxiety, and when he did so briefly, as in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), he saw it as but one example of the general theory that anxiety is a transformation of libido that cannot be discharged. In 1926, however, Freud returns (in Bowlby's reading) to empirical observation and makes a significant breakthrough in the understanding of separation anxiety. Bowlby quotes Freud's own words as support for his view on the central importance of separation anxiety: "Only a few of the manifestations of anxiety in children are comprehensible to us, and we must confine our attention to them. They occur, for instance . . . when [a child] finds itself alone with an unknown person instead of one to whom it is used—such as its mother. . . . Here, I think, we have the key to an understanding of anxiety. . . . anxiety appears as a reaction to the felt loss of the object" (Freud 1926, p. 136).

Bowlby argues, however, that Freud backs away from the full implications of this observation, reducing the "felt loss of the object" to a theory of what Bowlby (1958) calls "secondary drive"

(p. 350).[4] He suggests that the hints Freud offers for thinking about separation anxiety as a *primary* anxiety fell on "stony ground" among psychoanalysts developing their own ideas at the time this work was published, and that Freud's belated recognition of the importance of separation anxiety has not sufficiently been incorporated into later psychoanalytic theorizing. According to Bowlby, even Klein (with her view of anxiety in terms of the death instinct and as secondary to aggression) had formed her views of anxiety prior to the publication of "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety," and was therefore not substantially influenced by it (Bowlby 1973, pp. 28, 384–389).

As Melanie Klein had done in 1932, Bowlby (1973) notes how Freud, toward the end of "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety," comments on the "puzzling phobias of early childhood," giving as examples the fear of the dark or of being left alone with strangers, neither of which is easily intelligible in terms of the theory of anxiety as a response to instinctual danger situations (p. 83). Bowlby implies that Freud himself sensed that his explanation of such phenomena had not been entirely satisfactory, so leaving the way open for Bowlby himself—as it had been for Klein before him—to offer a more satisfactory explanation, this time in terms of the theory of "attachment."

In volume two of *Attachment and Loss,* Bowlby (1973) turns to the case of Little Hans to give his own explanation of those "puzzling phobias of early childhood." He begins by arguing that most cases commonly labeled as childhood phobias are mislabeled, as what is most feared is often not simply the presence of some particular situation, but rather the absence of a "secure base." These conditions can better be understood as "anxiety states" and, perhaps more specifically, as reactions to separation anxiety (pp. 259–263). For Bowlby, separation anxiety is "the inescapable corollary of attachment behaviour—the other side of the coin" (Bowlby 1960, p. 102).

[4]According to this view, anxiety about loss of the object is not primary, but rather occurs as a consequence of the danger to the infant that bodily needs will not be gratified. This will then lead to an "economic disturbance [for the infant] caused by the accumulation of amounts of stimulation which require to be disposed of" (Freud 1926, p. 138). The anxiety, then, is primarily related to the physiological needs of the child to maintain drive-equilibrium, and this anxiety is merely displaced onto the "condition which determined that situation, viz. the loss of the object," in a secondary way (p. 138).

But what is it that leads one individual to suffer from an excess of separation anxiety? While some psychoanalytic theories stress constitutional differences (e.g., greater libidinal need or a stronger death instinct), Bowlby (1960) argues that children who are more anxious about separation often have had to deal with parental hostility (conscious or unconscious), experiences of rejection, threats of loss of love, or real experiences of loss and separation. But Freud's theories, he suggests, have led to a "reluctance in many analysts to accept as valid the evidence which supports the hypothesis here advanced" (p. 107). Bowlby's reading of the case of Little Hans can be understood as an attempt to uncover this psychoanalytic blind spot.

Bowlby begins by asking whether there is any evidence in the case of Little Hans that he may be suffering from an "anxious attachment"; he immediately suggests that there is. This evidence, however, has been "overlooked or relegated to a subordinate position" by psychoanalysts reading the case, because their theoretical expectations led them to attend to other aspects of the data (p. 283). Bowlby notes that Hans's symptoms did not suddenly appear out of the blue, but were preceded by a period of upset in the previous week, beginning one morning when Hans woke up in tears. When his mother asked him why he was crying, Hans told her: "When I was asleep I thought you were gone and I had no Mummy to coax with" (Freud 1909, p. 23). A few days after this came the incident in the park with his nursemaid, when Hans became distressed and wanted to return home to "coax" with his mother, and that evening at home he became demanding and clingy toward her.

But why did Hans develop this anxiety, and why was he not comforted by having his mother present? Freud had answered this question by saying that it was the intensification of his libidinal wishes, and the conflict this had created, that led Hans to become anxious, so that his mother's presence could only intensify his longings. Bowlby (1973), however, sees things differently. He argues that "distinct from and preceding any fear of horses, Hans was afraid that his mother might go away and leave him" (p. 327); as evidence of this, he traces Hans's anxiety back to a period six months before the development of the horse phobia, when the family had been on holiday together. At this time Hans had started saying, "Suppose I was to have no Mummy" or "Suppose you were to go away." (This holiday was not long after Hans's sister had been born, a period during which he had been kept away from his mother.)

Bowlby points out that Hans had faced real threats from his parents that they would leave if he was naughty, leading him to express anxiety about the possible disappearance of both his mother and his father. But in the 1909 case study, Hans's father, concurring with Freud, interprets these anxieties as expressing an underlying oedipal wish to get rid of his father. Bowlby disagrees, suggesting that the underlying anxiety is about separation. He makes a case, therefore, for seeing Hans's phobia as a reaction to an "anxious attachment," one predicated on certain real characteristics of his family environment, threats of abandonment and separation in particular, which led to the representation of his mother as a "potentially abandoning figure" (Juri 2003, p. 237). The fact that Hans's parents, some time after the publication of the case study, did actually get divorced, appears to provide some justification to Hans's anxieties about being separated from them.

In contrast to earlier theorists, Bowlby rejects explanations of Hans's separation anxiety that put primary emphasis either on wish fulfillment (Freud) or on the theory of unconscious hostile wishes (Klein)—hostility that Bowlby acknowledges the child may well feel, but only in response to threats of abandonment. From his point of view, the child's hostility would exacerbate separation anxiety, but this would be secondary, the hostility merely a reaction to threats or actual experiences of rejection or abandonment, especially from the mother.

In the original case study, Freud (1909) had described Mrs. Graf as an "excellent and devoted mother" (p. 27–28), and argued elsewhere that "not *that* many mistakes [in Hans's upbringing] were made, and those that did occur did not have *that* much to do with the neurosis. . . . neurosis is essentially a matter of constitution" (Nunberg and Federn 1965, p. 235). Recent authors, however, writing about the case of Little Hans explicitly from an attachment perspective, have emphasized the degree to which both parents, but especially Hans's mother, influenced the development of his phobia through inappropriate and harmful parenting. Lindon (1992, pp. 392–393) goes so far as to provide an appendix listing twenty-one examples from the case study of the "parents' pathogenic interactions with Little Hans," including the forceful use of laxatives and enemas, exposure to parental nudity and sexual intercourse, threats of abandonment and castration, lying and excessive punishment, misattunement to developmental needs, and emotional unavailability.

Within this model, the understanding of anxiety has undergone a complete reversal from Freud's original ideas: anxiety is understood by Bowlby as a response to the "real" failure to provide Hans a secure base that could form the basis of a secure attachment. Both Freud's emphasis on libido and Klein's emphasis on aggression had, in Bowlby's view, led to a profound blindness to the impact of real experience—especially experiences of loss and separation—on a child's development. Once again, by showing how evidence for such a view could be found in Freud's own case study of Little Hans, providing an alternative and more compelling understanding of childhood anxiety, Bowbly was making a strong claim for psychoanalysis to have a deeper appreciation of the significance of early object relations.

But some psychoanalysts were concerned that this turn toward "object relations" was made at the price of reducing psychoanalysis to a naive model of the impact of "real" experience upon the mind, in which Freud's deeper insights into the power of the unconscious would be lost. One of the psychoanalysts who held such a view was Jacques Lacan, and it is perhaps no surprise to discover that Lacan took issue with this new "object relations" school of psychoanalysis through a radical re-reading of the case of Little Hans.

JACQUES LACAN: ANXIETY ON THE CUSP OF THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX

Jacques Lacan declared his "return to Freud" in 1953 by setting up a series of weekly seminars that were soon to become legendary for their radical reinterpretation of key Freudian concepts. In the fourth such seminar, Lacan chose as his topic "the object relation" (Lacan 1956–1957), and devoted almost half of the lectures to a re-reading of the case of Little Hans.

In Lacan's revision of Hans's story, he accepts Freud's view that Hans was a normal three-year-old with a healthy interest in "widdlers," and that the central moment in the foundation of his infantile phobia came with the threat of castration spoken by his mother: "If you do that, I shall send for Dr. A to cut off your widdler. And then what will you widdle with?" (Freud 1909, pp. 7–8). Freud declares that this was the moment in Hans's development when he acquired the "castration complex," although its actual effect was deferred until later. But Lacan sees the situation slightly differently. For him, Hans had come face to face

with a potentially traumatic question, a question that takes the form, "What does mother want from me?" It is a question, for Lacan, that leads to the shattering of the illusory symbiosis of the so-called "preoedipal" stage—although for Lacan "preoedipal," as we will see, is not the right term.

According to Lacan, this early mother-child relationship is often seen as a dual relationship, a preoedipal one. But in Lacan's account of this earliest stage of life (which earlier he had described in terms of the "mirror stage"), one is already involved with a triangular structure, which he calls the first "time" of the oedipus complex, and the child is never alone with the mother in a truly "preoedipal" state. At this early stage, however, the third term is not the father, but rather the "imaginary phallus"—that which stands for what the mother really desires, a role that the infant child is only too happy to fulfill. Insofar as the infant can "be" the phallus for his mother, both infant and mother can remain in this "game of imaginary lure."[5]

For the four-year-old Hans, however, there were two "crises" that were to shatter this imaginary "illusion"—the birth of his sister and the discovery of what Lacan calls "the penis as real" (Newman 2001, p. 119). With the first of these, as Freud recognized, Hans is suddenly cast out from the illusory dual relationship with his mother, his role in the game of imaginary lure seemingly taken by another. As for the latter, his phallic masturbation leads his mother to scold him, a scolding that he takes as a rejection of his penis per se. This is a situation that makes him "fundamentally other than what is desired . . . rejected outside of the imaginary field" (Lacan 1956–1957, quoted and translated in Newman 2001, p. 119). The world as he had known it has come to an end, for it appears that he may "keep" his position only by losing a significant part of him. Hans's question, "What does mother want?" becomes a source of great anxiety, confronting him with the enigma of parental sexuality and his place within it. Lacan describes this "fundamental disappointment," explaining that Hans must come to recognize not only "that he is not the unique object of the mother, but also that the mother's interest, more or less accentuated depending on the case, is the phallus. After this recognition he also realises that the mother is deprived, that she herself lacks precisely this object" (Lacan 1956–1957, quoted and translated in Rodriguez 1999, p. 125).

[5]Freud had written about this in "On Narcissism" (1914b), when he described the lost narcissism of the mother finding "completion" in the baby-as-penis.

With the disruption of the mirror-relationship with the mother, the "imaginary lure" has become a "deadly game" in which the infant becomes aware not only that his mother lacks the phallus and that he cannot satisfy this lack, but also that this lack is a menace, a "gaping hole" that marks her enigmatic desire. Dislocated on the cusp of his entry to the complete oedipus complex, the child feels anxiety. Only by the intervention of the real father, who lays claim to possession of the phallus on the basis of a symbolic law, does a symbolic "castration" take place, one that gives a dual message: "He says, as it were, to the child, 'No, you won't sleep with the mother'; and to the mother, 'No, the child is not your phallus. I have it'" (Benvenuto and Kennedy 1986, p. 134).

This introduction of the "paternal metaphor" marks the impossibility of the child trying to "be" the phallus for the mother, so freeing him to identify with the father at the symbolic level and allowing the child to become a desiring subject. But this transition does not always take place successfully. As Lacan notes, castration "is always tied up with the impact, the intervention, of the real father. It may equally be deeply marked, and profoundly unbalanced, by the absence of the real father. When this atypical situation occurs, the substitution of something else for the real father is required—which creates severe forms of neurosis" (Lacan 1956–1957, quoted and translated in Rodriguez 1999, p. 126).

In Little Hans's case, suggests Lacan, this is exactly what happens. Picking up on the hints in Freud's case study about the father's failure to step in between Hans and his mother and to clarify the father's role in making babies, Lacan suggests that in Hans's case the father did not successfully play the role of the mediator of the mother's desire, thus leaving his son facing an unbearable anxiety: "What is threatening to Hans," according to Rodriguez (1999), "is not the father (as Freud had assumed), but a desire of the mother that appears to Hans as unsatisfied and not subjected to the law. As such, it assumes terrifying imaginary figurations, dominated by oral cannibalism, that is, the fantasy of the devouring mother that lies behind the symptom (fear of horses *biting*)" (p. 128). The horse that Hans fears, we might say, is not a *symbol* of the father, as Freud had suggested, but rather the child's attempt to create a *substitute* for the missing (symbolic) father that he so desperately needed.

The phobia, then, is a way of binding anxiety, as Freud had already suggested in 1926. It serves a defensive function in that it turns uncontained anxiety into a specific fear by focusing it on a par-

ticular object. But what, for Lacan, is the nature of the original anxiety that needs to be bound in this way? Not the anxiety that comes from libido transformed (Freud 1909), nor the anxiety that signals the danger of castration (Freud 1926), nor even the anxiety related to projected aggression and subsequent fear of a retaliatory mother (Klein 1932), although perhaps Lacan's view comes closest to the Kleinian formulation. For Lacan, the anxiety that Hans experiences—almost a "nameless dread" or an existential angst—is a response to being poised between the imaginary, oedipal triangle (mother-child-phallus) and the symbolic oedipal quaternity (mother-child-phallus-symbolic father). It is the point, as Lacan puts it, in his typically enigmatic style, where "the subject is suspended between a moment where he no longer knows where he is and a future where he will never again be able to re-find himself" (Lacan 1956–1957, quoted and translated in Evans 1996, p. 11).

For Lacan, all of this must be understood within the context of a theory of psychoanalysis that puts the object, and the object relation, at its core—yet the term means something very different from the way it is used by either Klein or Bowlby. As Newman has noted, Lacan's account of the case of little Hans comes in his seminars on the topic of the "object relation," where Lacan is trying to offer an understanding of the early mother-infant relationship alternative to that offered by the emerging object relations school of psychoanalysis in Britain, which he saw as intellectually weak (Newman 2001, p. 117).

Lacan opposed the idea of seeing object relations in terms of a series of "real" relationships to "real" objects, yet his emphasis on the early mother-infant relationship and the link between separation and anxiety was shared by many of his psychoanalytic contemporaries in the object relations school during the 1950s. What Lacan was arguing for, however, was an understanding of object relations that did not neglect the unconscious and that remained aware of Freud's central insights into the structuring role of the father, at both an individual and a symbolic level.[6]

[6]Since the time that Bowlby and Lacan were writing, in the 1950s and 1960s, the theoretical "unity" of psychoanalysis—if it ever really existed at all—has become much more fragmented, and psychoanalytic models can no longer be divided along clear theoretical lines. At the same time, one can see a certain coming together, or acceptance, of certain fundamental ideas across the range of different psychoanalytic schools, and this is reflected in the various contemporary readings of the case of Little Hans. For example, almost all contemporary readings—whatever their

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In comparing these different re-readings of Little Hans—by Freud himself, then Klein, Bowlby, and Lacan—it is possible to see how each of these theorists became aware of a limitation or blind spot in previous conceptualizations of psychoanalysis and offered a new reading of the case in order to provide clinical evidence for their own theoretical revisions. In each of these re-readings, "evidence" for certain refutations or elaborations of previous psychoanalytic theories was found in Freud's founding text itself, often by emphasizing data that had been neglected by previous psychoanalytic readers.

What then does it mean for psychoanalysis that the same clinical material can be interpreted in so many different ways? And can any one interpretation of the material be judged to be more "accurate" or "true" than the others? How should one decide between competing theoretical frameworks? Or are these strikingly different readings simply evidence that we are better off without "psychoanalytic theory" at all? After all, psychoanalysis—with its highly speculative theorizing or "metapsychology"—has developed a bad reputation among certain clinicians, some of whom believe that it would be better to dispense with theory and rely on clinical data alone (see Schafer 1976; Meissner 1981).

What I believe this study of the various readings of Little Hans demonstrates is that no observation is theory-free, and that theory, implicit or explicitly stated, always determines not only how to interpret data, but even what constitutes relevant data in any particular field.

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theoretical background—question Freud's oedipal interpretation of the case (e.g., Fromm and Narvaez 1968; Lindon 1992; Juri 2003) and place a far greater emphasis on the role of the mother and the preoedipal relationship than was done in the initial case study (e.g., Joseph 1990; Frankiel 1992; Taub 1995), while suggesting that Max Graf's therapeutic interventions, especially by focusing on oedipal rage and hostility and the excessive interest in Hans's sexual fantasies, were not entirely helpful (e.g., Glenn 1980). For these reasons, a number of modern readings of the case, following both Lacan's and Bowlby's leads, emphasize the ambivalent nature of Hans's resolution of his phobic problems, involving sacrifices in terms of his own authentic self-experiences and compromised identifications (e.g., Hinshelwood 1989); or as a "negative oedipal" resolution of conflicts, based on a passive-feminine identification with his mother (Silverman 1980; Ross 1989; Frankiel 1992). Frankiel finds support for this interpretation in the data available about Herbert Graf's later life. While Graf was outwardly successful in his professional identity as an opera director, Frankiel detects in his "Memoirs of an Invisible Man" (Graf 1972) "unresolved tendencies towards over-compliance and . . . masochistic needs to be overpowered and defeated by superior males, tendencies which can be traced back to Hans' 'sad, limited and far from ideal' solution to the conflicts within his early development" (Frankiel 1992, pp. 332–333).

This is not an argument for simply "doing without" theory. Indeed, Ricardo Bernardi (1989), in a paper on "paradigmatic determinants in psychoanalytic understanding," argues that theories or paradigms are "necessary since they represent a way of solving problems in a field. . . . [They are] conceptions that bring about order and transparency to the raw material of the observation" (p. 343). But what is most valuable in each paradigm is also its blind spot—"what they help to think about is also what they cannot stop thinking about," making each paradigm both partial and total: "partial in so far as each theory starts from a given perspective, total because each of them reformulates the whole psychoanalytic field," so limiting what can, or cannot, be thought (pp. 351, 353). As Bernardi warns us, "These parasites are indispensable for us to be able to metabolise experience, but they might also take too much space in our minds and do the thinking for us, which leads us to take their products . . . as if they were the ultimate reality" (p. 354).

How, then, should we choose between these alternative readings of Little Hans? Does any one of them get closer to the truth of the case than do the others? I would suggest that we need to adopt a "both/and" rather than an "either/or" perspective when evaluating the contribution of different theoretical perspectives. Theory moves forward by adding new perspectives, while retaining the old. Each re-reading of the case allows us a different way of "seeing-thinking" about the material, but it also limits what can or cannot be seen. By looking at these alternative readings side by side, our familiar ways of conceptualizing the data may be challenged, preventing the paradigms themselves from actually "taking the place of experience" (Bernardi 1989, p. 355).

Ever since Freud, there has been a tension concerning the "core" of the psychoanalytic approach: is it defined by the substantive content of the theory (e.g., the oedipus complex, infantile sexuality), or by the method by which these discoveries were made? I believe that psychoanalytic epistemology (and the methodology that follows from it) is wholly independent of the validity—or invalidity—of any particular psychoanalytic concept or theory. What is important is the way in which psychoanalysis directs our attention to a study of the unconscious via the instrument of the observer's own psyche. That *different* theoretical models of the mind—Freudian, Kleinian, Lacanian, or any other—should follow from this *same* fundamental procedure is inevitable. Each one of the theories that is developed out of the psychoanalytic process allows us to see—and prevents us from seeing—certain

aspects of reality. An awareness of such relativity reminds us that it is the *methodology* of psychoanalysis, rather than any particular *theory* that may emerge from using it, that is at the core of the psychoanalytic enterprise.[7]

Freud himself believed that it was "only since Hans [that] we know what a child thinks" (Nunberg and Federn 1967, p. 230). I would argue, despite Freud's claim, that we will never have direct knowledge of who this little boy really was, or know for certain what led to the development of his infantile phobia. The brilliance of Freud's case study, however, lies partly in the fact that it is written in a way that has allowed many other analysts to re-read it, emphasizing aspects of the data that Freud ignored (but still recorded) or interpreting the same data from a different vantage point, thus allowing multiple perspectives on "what a child thinks."

As we read each of these accounts of the case study, we can discover aspects of Hans that we had not seen before; but Hans also reveals to us the way that psychoanalysis has evolved and the changing preoccupations and paradigms of psychoanalytic theory itself.

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[7]The way in which this shift of emphasis took place within Freud's own work may be explored historically, by comparing the different ways in which Freud himself defined the "core of psychoanalysis" at different points in his life. In 1914, before the major splits in the psychoanalytic movement, Freud wrote that "any line of investigation that recognises these two facts [i.e., the facts of transference and of resistance] and takes them as the starting-point of its work has the right to call itself psycho-analysis, even though it arrives at results other than my own" (Freud 1914a, quoted by Bergmann 1997, p. 75). By 1923, after a series of splits and the establishment of the "secret committee" to defend the "truth" of psychoanalysis against its potential enemies, Freud defined psychoanalysis very differently. He wrote that the theories of unconscious mental processes, resistance and repression, the centrality of sexuality, and the oedipus complex are the "principal subject-matter of psycho-analysis. . . . No one who cannot accept them all should count himself a psycho-analyst" (Freud 1923, quoted in Bergmann 1997, p. 76). We can see here a shift in definition from psychoanalysis as a *process* of investigation (with potentially different discoveries emerging from it) to a set of *beliefs*, which have to be either accepted or rejected. It is this transition that marks the "birth of psychoanalytic orthodoxy" (Bergmann 1997), and that Devereux, in his wonderful book, *From Anxiety to Method in the Behavioral Sciences* (1967), recognizes as the eclipse of the true originality of the psychoanalytic project.

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