

FETISHISM IN STATU NASCENDI¹

BY

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NEW YORK

My friendship with the parents of a little boy of four permitted me to observe him. He was an only child, the centre of attention and the object of over-tenderness from both the mother and father, as well as from relatives and friends. The observations I am going to present will not strike you as new, since psycho-analytical practice offers the opportunity to reconstruct early childhood happenings similar to these. The only reason for presenting them is to add to the evidence behind Freud's most recent conception of fetishism, described first in 1928.

I shall give you a brief history of the little boy, so that the connection between the symptoms and his preceding experiences should be more comprehensible.

Harry was precocious and his mental development was very rapid. His interest in and curiosity about all things was the most outstanding of his characteristics, and led like a red thread through every phase of his development. It showed itself in innumerable questions about everything and everybody. But this stopped to a great degree at about the age of four, when he began to try to figure out things for himself, such as numbers, the meaning of words, etc. When I first took notice of the rather curious habit I am about to describe, he was just four, and had been indulging in the habit for a few months. The habit consisted of stroking and kissing the shoes of women friends of his mother, but only those friends whom he liked exceptionally well. Also, when women friends were seated around the table, he tried to lift their skirts and to peer under them. This habit of exploring under the skirt reached back to about a year previous; the mother had first noticed it on a boat excursion. Harry was trying to lift up her own skirt and that of a woman friend and made quite a scene when reproached. More recently he had been asking repeatedly—in reference to one particular friend of his mother—whether she had the same big pussy (this was his word for penis) as daddy, to the great embarrassment of the parents. He had other questions which embarrassed the parents, and often asked them in the presence of other people. He had

¹ Read before the International Psycho-Analytical Congress, Oxford, July, 1929.

various ways of enquiring about bowel and urinary functions. The answers, usually given by the mother, did not seem to satisfy him. When the mother explained that the urine came from the water which he drank and the faeces from the solid food, he asked: 'How is it then that I drink so much cold water and the we-we is so hot, and the food smells so nice when I eat it and smells so bad when it comes out?' These questions, with many others, remained unanswered by the mother.

When he was reprimanded by the mother for fondling the shoes of her women friends, and asked why he did it, this usually very active child became suddenly silent, retired to his own room, and for the next few hours could hardly be made to talk.

The parents were flattered by my interest in the child, although not from the scientific aspect. They were flattered only in so far as the interest of any person would have flattered them. So I became a good friend of Harry's and visited him for more than half a year, once or twice weekly, usually on Sundays and holidays, when I spent nearly the whole afternoon in his company. He soon became very intimate with me. At my first visit he tried to fondle my shoes, which the parents said was very unusual. He had never before fondled the shoes of men. He introduced me to his toyland, and began to tell me little stories, some of which had been read to him from story-books. Most of them he himself had created.

When his confidence in me had grown, he tried to approach me with questions, apparently to see whether they would elicit from me answers different from those his parents had given him. The questions concerned the origin of children, death, and once there was a question about the use of the penis. The question was put in this form: 'Do you use your pussy to make we-we too'. At the time I began my observations, his favourite form of play was to sit for hours at his little desk, dressing paper dolls. In our talk about this, I asked him directly once whom he was dressing when he dressed a doll, and he answered spontaneously: 'Mama'. Actually he took a great interest in his mother's clothes. He made comments on her appearance; he was always around her when she dressed and wanted to help her. He also paid close attention to what his mother ate, and said he wanted her to remain thin, since he did not like fat women. The mother was very careful of her appearance and paid particular attention to her footwear, buying several pairs of shoes at once.

After playing by himself for a while he would suddenly shriek so as

to send his parents running into the room. He explained that he had shrieked because he saw a dark shadow in front of the window or a dark cloud passing by. He showed me how he had to lie face down on the ground and press his face to it, in order not to see the shadow. He used to dream about a dark cloud and then run frightened into his mother's bed, which was near his, since he shared a room with the mother and the father slept in the next room. When he went into his mother's bed, he said, he was no longer afraid. He told me also of a dream in which he saw the obelisk in Central Park. There was a man in front of it talking to the children about the length of the shadow which the obelisk cast. The mother told me that this had actually happened once in Central Park.

When I visited him the next time after he had told me the story of the obelisk-shadow dream, he jumped happily into my lap and told me about another dream. He had seen a child—a wooden child—with an immense nose. The hands were cut off. 'You cut them off', he said to me, laughingly. When I asked why I had cut them off, he said that I had done it in order that the child might not be able to scratch. When I asked, 'To scratch what', he answered, 'The nose'. Previously to that the mother had told me that the child had developed the habit of continually adjusting his panties in the front, and that she had called his attention to it, saying that it wasn't nice. Harry went on, telling me about another child, also with a big nose, who climbed trees to look for caterpillars, that the caterpillars chewed away his nose and made it small. For a long time after that, whenever I came to see him, he would begin by saying, 'Do you know what happened to the child since last time?' And then go on telling me that another part of the body had been eaten away. Once an arm, the next time another arm, a leg, etc. I learned that the parents had tried to frighten him by saying that if he should tell a lie, the hardness or softness of his nose would show it.

In the meantime he developed a fear of infection. If he scratched his finger only a little—not even to the point of bleeding—he himself ran to the bathroom and put iodine on it. He displayed these iodine marks proudly and always wanted assurance that nothing would happen to him. This habit of iodining began after he had seen a man in the subway with both hands bandaged, the bandages discoloured with blood. He told me also of a girl he had seen in camp the previous summer, a girl who did not have fingers on either hand. At that time he was afraid to approach her and would talk to her only from a dis-

tance. It was explained to him then that her fingers had been frozen off, but now he continually asked me why she had no fingers.

The next time I came he approached me quietly, and with fear in his eyes, he said, 'You won't make me disappear, will you?' At this visit he was not much concerned with his toys, neither did he talk much. Instead, he sat at his little desk and seriously scribbled on a piece of paper and drew figures. When he saw that I was interested in his drawings, he drew a boy and a girl for me, and then an 'ugly big boy'. He drew their eyes and ears very carefully, counted out five fingers on each hand, and in every case attached to the lower part of the abdomen the line which meant the "pussy." Again he returned to talk about scratches and wounds, and wanted to be assured that his tonsils, which had been removed the year before, had been removed completely and that he would not have to be operated on again.

At my next visit I was informed that the day before, when left alone in his room, Harry had cut a lock of hair from the front of his head. He was ready to discuss the matter, and laughingly told me the story, saying that he did not know why he had done it, but that he was sorry.

During this visit a relative came in to visit the family, a man with one leg amputated. Harry could not be induced to enter the room; the moment he heard the voice of the man outside the door he ran screaming into the bedroom. The next time I saw him he put many eager questions about death, and in a crying voice he said that he wanted his father to live for ever, not to die soon. He was also eager to get answers to his questions as to where children come from. The father had explained to him that God makes them and sends them down. Inexhaustible questions followed this explanation. 'How do they come down? There is no stairway'. Then he pestered his parents to tell him why some children are boys and some are girls. The mother's explanation was that they are wrapped in clothes, and the clothes make them either boys or girls. To which Harry's answer was: 'Why did you dress me in boy's clothes when you wanted a girl?' This question referred to a remark his father had once made to him, telling him to behave because his mother wanted a girl anyhow, and a girl gives no trouble. He wanted me to tell him whether children are born nude, how many children God makes, and if He makes them, why doesn't He make them grown-up? When I asked him why he would prefer that children should be born grown-up, he thought for a

while and then answered: 'So I shouldn't have to eat so many vegetables'.

As I have already mentioned, his parents had separate sleeping rooms; he slept in his mother's room; until a year previous he had slept in the same bed with her and at times he did it even now. This gave him ample opportunity to explore the mother's body. Sometimes, when sitting on the mother's lap, in my presence, he reached up towards her breasts. When asked what he was doing he answered laughingly that he was looking for 'daddy'. The mother seemed to understand what he meant, and told me that just after his operation for phymosis, which I shall talk about later, he saw a cow with many udders and said, 'See how many pussies the cow has?' He was very jealous of his father, and when the father kissed the mother good-bye he had to follow it by kissing the mother a hundred times.

At the age of two he had been operated on for phymosis, after which he was afraid, for a long time, of moving objects, particularly of a pendulum of a clock, which the parents connected with a large pendulum-clock that had stood in the waiting room of the physician. Also just before the operation, the father had carried the boy around on his shoulders, and the swinging chandelier had struck him on the head. At that age he had been much admired for his ability to pick out any phonograph record he was asked to bring, out of the hundred odd which the parents owned. Now, nearly three years later, I took a few of the records and asked Harry to show me how he recognized them. Around the centre hole of each disc, where it was placed on the pivot, were two lines. He recognized faulty points in these lines, and also practically unnoticeable variations in the colour of the label paper again particularly towards the centre hole. This strong scotophilic instinct remained unchanged, as did his power to memorize things seen or heard. His liking for drawing returned, after a lapse of a few months, but now his figures were not as distinctive as those described formerly. He still attached a penis to the figures of both boys and girls, but it was no longer a simple line. It assumed a greater similarity to the male genitals, and to a certain degree the whole body was genitalized—the most important parts of the drawing being the long neck, the small chest, and a very small head. The eyes in the other drawings had been very carefully filled out with pupils, now they were merely circles.

His fondness for caressing shoes was not exhibited any longer. It seemed that reprimands and urging of his parents had enabled him to suppress it.

The history you have just heard, although fragmentary, nevertheless provides material for conclusions based on Freud's presentation of fetishism, and adds evidence on fetishism in its original, childhood stage. Freud's paper presented fetishism as a substitute for the mother's phallus, which the little boy once believed in and does not want to renounce as a protection against his castration anxiety. Fetishism is the final consequence of the retention of this fantasy even after the individual has been convinced of its falsehood, but in childhood there are other consequences of the 'female penis' phantasy. In connection with the case of little Harry, I was particularly interested in the footnote to Freud's paper, in which he refers back to his 1910 paper, 'A Childhood Memory of Leonardo da Vinci'. Here he had stated that in foot or shoe fetishism, the foot or shoe is a substitute symbol for the female penis, the female being always the mother. This casual mention already contained the conclusion presented in 1928 and could not have led to any other. All investigations of fetishism, particularly Abraham's, led to the conclusion that the fetish has something to do with the female penis. We know that all psycho-sexual difficulties and perversions in adult life are the result of experiences in early childhood sexual development, and of a fixation in this period, and the fetish is a substitute for the woman's penis; then immediately the explanation offers itself that the woman can be no one else but the mother, who is the first love object and who is always with the child during his early sexual development and around whom it takes place. But it is quite a different thing from theoretical conjecture to follow facts taking place before one's very eyes.

We can talk of fetishism only, as Freud says, when the fetish is completely separate from the beloved person and has assumed in itself all the attributes of the sexual object. This is fetishism as a perversion in adults. But in childhood, the same fetishistic manifestation is transient, and likely to disappear under the force of repression. It is deserving of attention in its early stage of development, where the child's interest cannot yet be separated from the love object—the mother. Sexual development is in full progress. The castration anxiety, which is the pivot around which the child's sexual development moves, and which activates his clinging to the belief in the female penis, brings about various manifestations. We must consider the castration anxiety as being very strong in order to create a denial of a fact which the little boy had had ample opportunity to learn. Little Harry's curiosity, which always led him to try and discover new things

and which sharpened the scopophilic tendencies that showed themselves in his ability to memorize faint graduations of colour and line in phonograph-records, were certainly connected so very early with curiosity about sexual matters. The stronger the exploration tendencies, more and more reality acceptances are demanded. And if they continue in sexual matters, as a natural consequence, more repression has to come about at the stage when the super-ego, with its prohibitive faculty, sets in. We must conceive that the prohibitive faculty of the super-ego made its appearance quite late in little Harry's case, when the curiosity regarding the mother's body and genitals had been unrestricted for a long period. And in spite of the evidence which the little boy certainly met, he could not change his conception of the female penis. Accepting the truth would have interfered with the almost limitless gratifications attached to his curiosity, which reached its peak in the opportunity to sleep with the mother and to climb all over her. From the standpoint of the super-ego he could only carry this out as long as the mother and he were of the same physical make up. The realization of the sex difference between them would, *eo ipso*, have put an end to all sexual playing with the mother (climbing under her skirt, etc.).

This fundamental fantasy of endowing the mother with a penis must have had its effect on another important fantasy—that of childbirth. His constant questioning between the age of four and five about childbirth showed his acute conflict and also his strivings to solve it in a satisfactory way. With the acceptance of the mother's penis, the rejection of the vagina was accomplished and with it the vaginal childbirth theory.²

In the creation of Harry's infantile neurosis and its symptoms the guilt-feeling took an outstanding part. The impulses that Freud put down as being of primary importance in the creation of fetishism—the epistemophilic instinct and ophresolagnia, were marked in Harry as early as the age of two, and put the castration anxiety harder at work. The outcome of this later, as we know, was the endowment of the mother with a penis, which, after a fashion, can be taken as identification of the mother with himself. He made the mother like himself, in order not to be forced to give up his own penis, the narcissistic evaluation of which may have been strengthened by his observation

² See Fenichel: 'Some Infantile Sexual Theories not Hitherto Described', INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PSYCHO-ANALYSIS, Vol. V, 1928.

of his father, whose genitals he had free and ample opportunity to observe. We can conceive of the various powers at work in little Harry's sexual tendencies. His genital tendencies, at the peak of the Oedipus period, drew him toward possession of the mother, which involves the tendency of possessing her with the penis. In this sense he had reached the genital level of the Oedipus period. But while he was at the very height of his self-esteem, after having been the centre of attention his whole life and having had all the opportunity to play around with the mother, the prohibition and deprivation of the developing super-ego began to show itself against these genital aims. This Harry conceived of as the castration anxiety. So, as a compromise between his craving and his guilt, he endowed the mother with the penis, which saved him from castration, since it was a denial of the mother's vagina, and the happy triangle of father, mother, child was kept up as before, without any interruption.

In this early little drama, differences in the distribution of dynamic powers must be responsible for the choice, as Freud says: homosexuality brought on by the fear of castration after the sight of the female genital, fetishism created to ward the castration fear off, or the complete conquest of the castration fear.

In all three cases—normality, homosexuality, fetishism—we can say that the mode and degree of identification with the parent is one very important factor in the outcome of the castration complex, and with it the creation of perversion or normal sex attitude. The homosexual is nearly a complete feminine identification, accepting the mother as she is, with the female genital, making himself like her. The healthy outcome is a perfect masculine identification with the father. Fetishism saves the individual from becoming homosexual but saves him, at the same time, from becoming normal, which would bring the danger of castration.

Little Harry showed a definite tendency to a feminine identification, which he displayed by his imitation of the mother and also by his questions as to why the parents had not dressed him as a girl, since they wanted one. What needs explanation is how, in such early childhood, we already see such a clear differentiation between two ways of identification. Certainly Freud's thesis that the quantitative impulses are responsible for the origin of every neurosis can be applied here, and they help us to an understanding of the formation of fetishism. A certain degree of vacillation in little Harry's object choice was shown when he not only fondled the shoes of women but at the beginning

of my contact with him, tried to do the same with my shoes. He tried first to polish and kiss them, later he used to try to ride on them, in a sitting position, which may have given him the pleasurable sensation of rocking, and the contact with the anal region. His tender treatment of the shoes, and the complete absence of the hostile element, could be ascribed, after Freud's explanation, to the lack of a stronger identification with the father. When there is a strong identification with the father in adult fetishists, there may be both a worshipful and a castrating attitude toward the fetish, as I had the opportunity to observe in the case of one of my patients, who sublimated his fetishistic tendencies in his occupation. He had been attracted by women all his life, and had never consummated sex intercourse. His orgasms were attained by seeing and fondling the genital hair, and at times by pulling it to the degree of causing pain. In his sexual object-choice the colour of the hair was of importance. After graduating from college as an accountant, he became a furrier. This gave him the opportunity to work with furs, to cut them, and in this line he made quite a success.

I should like to stress the drawings which I am presenting, and the change they underwent during the half-year which elapsed between the first and the second sets. The tendency to genitalize the whole body and to emphasize more and more the size of the genitals themselves, was shown in the later drawings, when we can consider Harry's conception of the female penis fading. The more he had to realize the inescapable fact of the absence of the female penis, the stronger his castration fear became, and necessitated a stronger adherence to the fantasy of the female penis in the drawings.

In little Harry's case, the cutting with the scissors, drawing, the fondling of the shoes, the continual dressing of the dolls, which may have meant the reverse, undressing them (which was expressed in his tendency to climb under the skirts of women visitors)—all this play was connected with his infantile erotic urges as all playing is, and as this connection was described and evaluated by Dr. Pfeifer and Mrs. Klein.

In his fondling of my shoes may be seen some appeal to the father to lessen the castration fear.