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Paranoia - An historical digression

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Sigmund Freud, as quoted on the website: www.Schizophrenia-TheBeardedLadyDisease.com Paranoia is precisely a disorder in which a sexual etiology is by no means obvious; far from this, the strikingly prominent features in the causation of paranoia, especially among males, are social humiliations and slights. But if we go into the matter only a little more deeply, we shall be able to see that the really operative factor in these social injuries lies in the part played in them by the homosexual components of emotional life. So long as the individual is functioning normally and it is consequently impossible to see into the depths of his mental life, we may doubt whether his emotional relations to his neighbors in society have anything to do with sexuality, either actually or in their genesis. As a preliminary exercise in understanding the possibilities in such a situation, a case reported from the literature on mental illness may be considered. It is that of a man who has been hospitalized for a long time because of some rather weird ideas. He thinks that certain persecutors, by exerting extraordinary influence upon him, are causing him to be tormented with sexual sensations and feelings which he finds, or professes to find, revolting. The 'influences' by which this is achieved are invisible, and act over long distances. Of main interest here is the kind of experience that could lead to such a disorder, and the kind of person to whom it could happen. Important, first of all, is a particular build of personality. The man is described, at the outset, as exaggerated in his self-esteem, confident to the point of arrogance. In the midst of his exalted pretensions and a feeling of contemptuous superiority towards others, he now discovers within himself, not only that he is timid and inadequate in the region of sexual behavior, but that he has a natural disposition toward effeminacy. In the next phase the idea develops that he has become the object of a plot in which certain evil persons (through motives which need not be detailed) are causing him, or forcing him, to experience the emotions, thoughts and desires of a woman. The extraordinary means by which these influences are exerted, he believes, involve not only supernatural forces, but also electrical action, in which the nerves of his skin are likened to 'tiny radio antennae capable of receiving sensations.

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