

## “THE MOST MODERN TYPE OF THE INSANE GENIUS”: SCHOPENHAUER AND THE PATHOLOGY OF GENIUS, 1870-1900\*

### EL TIPO MÁS MODERNO DEL GENIO DEMENTE”: SCHOPENHAUER Y LA PATOLOGÍA DEL GENIO: 1870-1900

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#### **Abstract**

In the eyes of the optimist, pessimism often appears to be an unsound way of thinking. Occasionally, the attempt has even been made to prove that pessimism is in fact a pathological deviation. This article investigates how Arthur Schopenhauer was used as an example in a debate over the nature of genius that raged in fin de siècle medicine. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, numerous psychiatrists, psychologists, and criminal anthropologists put forth rivalling theories on genius, arguing either that genius is a pathological phenomenon, the positive by-product as it were of a psychopathological state of mind, or that genius is in fact a higher form of health, even if the behaviour of individual geniuses might well be eccentric or indeed aberrant. In this medical controversy, Schopenhauer was a key example: his family history, the alleged suicide of his father, his misanthropy and his erratic behaviour, were all taken to prove that his pessimistic philosophy was a symptom of a pathological form of melancholy. The article investigates the positions and arguments of the protagonists of this medical dispute, from Carl von Seydlitz's 1872 booklet *Dr. Arthur Schopenhauer vom medizinischen Standpunkte aus*, to the theories and studies put forth by Cesare Lombroso, Max Nordau, and P. J. Möbius in the 1890's, and argues that despite the scientific and medical pretensions of these authors, they actually based their theories on biographical information from Schopenhauer's friends and followers.

**Keywords:** Genius, Pathology, Schopenhauer, Lombroso, pessimism

#### **Resumen**

A los ojos del optimista, el pesimismo suele parecer una forma de pensar poco sólida. En ocasiones, incluso se ha intentado demostrar que el pesimismo es en realidad una desviación patológica. Este artículo investiga cómo Arthur Schopenhauer fue utilizado como ejemplo en un debate sobre la naturaleza del genio que hizo estragos en la medicina finisecular. En las últimas décadas del siglo XIX, numerosos psiquiatras, psicólogos y antropólogos criminales propusieron teorías opuestas sobre el genio, argumentando o bien que el genio es un fenómeno patológico, el subproducto positivo por así decirlo de un estado mental psicopatológico, o bien que el genio es de hecho una forma superior de salud, incluso si el comportamiento de los genios individuales puede ser excéntrico o incluso aberrante. En esta controversia médica, Schopenhauer fue un ejemplo clave: su historia familiar, el supuesto suicidio de su padre, su misantropía y su comportamiento errático, se tomaron como prueba de que su filosofía pesimista era síntoma de una forma patológica de melancolía. El artículo investiga las posturas y argumentos de los protagonistas de esta disputa médica, desde el folleto de Carl von Seydlitz de 1872 *Dr. Arthur Schopenhauer vom medizinischen Standpunkte aus*, hasta las teorías y estudios expuestos por Cesare Lombroso, Max Nordau y P. J. Möbius en la década de 1890, y argumenta que, a pesar de las pretensiones científicas y médicas de estos autores, en realidad basaron sus teorías en información biográfica de los amigos y seguidores de Schopenhauer.

**Palabras clave:** Genio, Patología, Schopenhauer, Lombroso, pesimismo

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In the second half of the nineteenth century, psychiatrists all over Europe suddenly began discussing the question whether genius was a form of insanity. Ever since Antiquity, obviously, the notion that there exists a link between genius and madness has been a popular one; in particular to the Romantics the notion that the creativity of the genius had its roots in a domain beyond the realms of sound normality was very popular. “The Romantics liked to tell the world that they were mad,” the historian of medicine Roy Porter observes: “Little did they understand how the world would take its revenge” (65). In the nineteenth century the notion of the insane genius went from a Romantic cliché to a disputed medical conception. In 1836, the psychiatrist Louis-Francois Lélut published a study of Socrates, in which he argued that Socrates’s *daimonion* was in fact a hallucination and a symptom of a pathological state of mind<sup>1</sup>. In 1859, another French psychiatrist, Jacques-Joseph Moreau (de Tours) published an important book that discusses genius as a neurosis. In 1864, Cesare Lombroso, the founder of criminal anthropology, published the first of four books on genius: *Genio e follia*. Lombroso’s ideas in particular became influential and controversial; in all corners of Europe books and articles were written in defence of Lombroso’s theories or attempting to refute them.

In 1872 Carl von Seidlitz, a doctor of medicine in the town of Dorpat (today’s Tartu in Estonia) published a small book in which he professed to discuss Schopenhauer from a medical point of view: *Dr. Arthur Schopenhauer vom medicinischen Standpunkte aus betrachtet*. It became the starting point of a veritable wave of publications in which various representatives of the medical professions would discuss Schopenhauer’s philosophy as a symptom of a mental malady. In this paper, I will discuss the main representatives of this medical literature, in which Cesare Lombroso was arguably the most important name. I will furthermore seek to demonstrate that Schopenhauer was not only a key example of an insane genius to the psychiatrists and psychologists but that the theory of genius that he developed, primarily in § 36 of the first and chapter 31 of the second part of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, was also incorporated into the medical theories on genius. Finally, I will seek to demonstrate that the psychiatrists and anthropologists that discussed Schopenhauer’s pathological genius to a surprising degree relied on rather spurious biographical information. In particular, they drew on Wilhelm von Gwinner’s biography of Schopenhauer, accepting his layman’s observations on Schopenhauer as reliable medical facts.

## Schopenhauer and German Medicine in the 1870’s and 80’s

In the latter half of the 1850’s, Schopenhauer finally attained the recognition that he had always considered himself worthy of. The final years of his life saw an increasing amount of publications about Schopenhauer’s thinking, and after his death in 1860 the numbers increased greatly. An important premise of many of the first books on Schopenhauer’s philosophy was that the author’s personal acquaintance with Schopenhauer gave him a special ability to understand his thinking. Julius Frauenstädt, for instance, argued that he “wol tiefer in den eigentlichen und wahren Sinn seines Systems eingedrungen sein müßte, als irgend Jemand”, after he had spent five months in Schopenhauer’s company, discussing his system with him (*Briefe*, 33). Other disciples such as Ernst Otto Lindner and Wilhelm von Gwinner made similar claims that their friendship with Schopenhauer

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<sup>1</sup> A decade later, Lélut also published a study of Pascal from a medical point of view: *L’amulette de Pascal: Pour servir à l’histoire des hallucinations*.

gave them a privileged position to understand his ideas<sup>2</sup>. This readiness to use their personal acquaintance to understand a philosophical system obviously goes against the grain of Schopenhauer's philosophy, but nonetheless it came to characterise the early Schopenhauer literature greatly.

Now, if the claims of Schopenhauer's disciples that their personal contact with Schopenhauer enabled them to understand his thinking better was correct, then it could be argued that someone with an expert knowledge of the workings of the human mind could contribute even more to the understanding of his philosophy. The biographical approach of Schopenhauer's disciples to his thinking thus provided the psychiatrists and psychologists with an impetus to study his mind in order to better understand his philosophy. This is the aim of virtually all of the medical studies dedicated to Schopenhauer, usually explicitly stated. Usually, the method consists in trying to demonstrate that his intellectual powers were the result of a mental imbalance that had its roots in a pathology of the brain.

Carl von Seidlitz argued that Schopenhauer's extraordinarily sharp perception and the capacity for intense intellectual labour that it endowed him with were in fact symptoms of a mental pathology: *megalomania (Grössenwahn)* (3). Later on in the book, he would try to prove that Schopenhauer's pessimism was the result of a melancholy disposition that he inherited from his father, and that the predisposition for mental illness was brought into the Schopenhauer family by Schopenhauer's paternal grandmother: "Unzweifelhaft war bei der Mutter die Anlage zu einer Hirnzellen-Wucherung, die in die Gehirn-Erweichung überging, vorhanden gewesen" (4). This association of Schopenhauer's pessimism with the melancholy of his father and the presence of mental illness in his family history would, as we shall see, become a commonplace in the literature on Schopenhauer. Especially considering that it was a booklet of some thirty pages published by an insignificant publisher in a provincial Baltic town, one cannot but admit that Seidlitz's *Arthur Schopenhauer vom medicinischen Standpunkte aus betrachtet* certainly had an influence well beyond what could be expected. His analysis of Schopenhauer was read with great appreciation all over Europe. The English psychologist James Sully, for instance, accepted Seidlitz's diagnosis at face value: "There is little doubt that medical men would regard Schopenhauer as suffering from some form of hereditary disease, probably brain-disease" (82). It seems likely that Nietzsche too read Seidlitz's book, and as we shall see, the most important voice in the nineteenth century medical literature on genius definitely did so: Cesare Lombroso.

Seidlitz was the first but by no means the only physician to address Schopenhauer in relation to the question of the nature of genius. After him a number of psychiatrists, neurologists, anthropologists and psychologists would try to develop or rectify his judgement on Schopenhauer or to refute it altogether. In 1877 the psychiatrist F. W. Hagen cited Schopenhauer as an example in an article on the relation of genius and insanity. He claims that Schopenhauer's family contained several members who suffered from insanity: "Ein Onkel *Schopenhauer's* soll blödsinnig gewesen und seine Grossmutter blödsinnig gestorben sein" (640–75). Hagen does not disclose his source for this information, but in all likelihood it was Gwinner's biography (*Arthur*, 2)<sup>3</sup>. Hagen comes to very cautious conclusions about the nature of genius: he is clearly reluctant to define genius a pathological phenomenon. Hagen did not discuss Schopenhauer's concept of genius (he did discuss the inspiration of genius in relation

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<sup>2</sup> For examples of the polemics amongst the disciples regarding whose friendship with Schopenhauer was most important (Lindner 41).

<sup>3</sup> Where the uncle in question, Michael Andreas Schopenhauer, the oldest brother of Heinrich Floris, is described as having been "von Jugend auf geistesschwach".

to the other great pessimistic philosopher, Eduard von Hartmann's *Philosophie des Unbewussten*, though). To later German psychiatrists in contrast, Schopenhauer was not only an important example of an insane genius, but was also cited as a brilliant theorist of genius. Paul Radestock for instance cites Schopenhauer's notion of genius on a number of occasions in his *Genie und Wahnsinn* from 1884 (VI, 15 f., 20, 22, 25, 27, 41 and 49). It was in particular Schopenhauer's notion that the intellect of the genius has become independent of the will that Radestock cited in order to substantiate that a man of genius is not free, but even more dependent on his bodily organisation than a normal man (41). Radestock draws on older experts such as Moreau (de Tours) and Lélut, along with German psychiatrists such as Griesinger and Hagen for theoretical support. Like Hagen, he too is hesitant to draw too drastic a conclusion about genius and insanity, although he goes further than Hagen did. Genius borders on the pathological, Radestock claims, and is more similar to insanity than to normality: "Das Genie als die höchst gesteigerte Geistesthätigkeit steht an, resp. auf der Grenze zwischen dem normalen, gesunden, und abnormen, krankhaften Zustande; es hat zweifellos mit der Geisteskrankheit viele Berührungspunkte und zwar mehr als der gewöhnliche Mensch" (49).

At the same time as Radestock wrote his study on genius, a much more audacious theory on genius took form south of the Alps. And in a crucial moment of the development of that theory, Schopenhauer was one of the key examples of an insane genius.

### Cesare Lombroso: Genius as Epilepsy

In the last decades of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century, the Italian criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso exerted an influence on the politics and justice system that probably no other scientist has ever been able to equal. His *L'uomo delinquente* (*The Criminal Man*) from 1876 had an immense impact on the way his contemporaries—fellow scientists, politicians, artists and journalists alike—thought about crime and criminals. Lombroso argued that although certain crimes are the result of desperate circumstances—an honest person stealing in order not starve—the majority of the crimes are committed by a category of people innately incapable of functioning in society: the born criminal. Lombroso and his followers believed that the born criminal constituted a threat to society that must be addressed by identifying the criminals, preferably isolating them before they have an opportunity to commit a criminal act. "Lombroso's criminal is ill, is a degenerate, there is no need to seek for the social laws of his illness," Delia Frigessi observes in her excellent intellectual biography of Lombroso<sup>4</sup>.

Today, Lombroso is almost exclusively remembered for his theory of the born criminal. The fact is though that it was far from his only field of interest. During most of his adult life, Lombroso struggled to find a cure to pellagra, a disease widespread among the poor peasants of Northern Italy. He represented the Socialist Party in the city council of Turin between 1899 and 1905 (Gibson 28). He also set out to solve the problem of prostitution, arguing that the vast majority of the prostitutes were pathological deviations analogous to the born criminals. And in spite of his outspoken positivism, he developed an interest in the occult towards the end of his life, taking part in spiritualistic séances. But especially important in the eyes of his contemporaries were his contributions to the study of genius.

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<sup>4</sup> "Il criminale lombrosiano è un malato, un degenerato, del suo male non si cercano le leggi sociali" (Delia 191). Unless stated otherwise, all translations are by the author.

Lombroso would retain his interest in genius through his entire adult life: his publications on the subject span from 1864, when Lombroso as a teaching assistant at the University of Pavia published the first edition of *Genio e follia* to 1907 when the second edition of his *Genio e degenerazione* appeared.

The first editions of Lombroso's books on genius contain no reference at all to Schopenhauer. But once he became acquainted with his thinking he would attribute great importance to him. In the fourth edition of *Genio e follia*, 1882, Lombroso discussed Schopenhauer at length, just as he would do in his later books on genius: *L'uomo di genio* (1888 and 1894), *Genio e degenerazione*, 1897, and *Nuovi studi sul genio*, 1902. The importance of Schopenhauer to Lombroso is underlined by the fact that Schopenhauer's portrait is used as a frontispiece to *Genio e follia*, and reprinted once again as an illustration inside it. There are references to Schopenhauer scattered throughout *Genio e follia*, but in particular Lombroso discusses Schopenhauer as an example of a genius who was simultaneously insane over a number of pages. He refers to two sources for his information on Schopenhauer: Gwinner's biography *Schopenhauer's Leben* and Ribot's study *La philosophie de Schopenhauer* (1882, 81)<sup>5</sup>.

In *Genio e follia*, Lombroso consistently holds it against Schopenhauer that his life contradicted his teachings (an argument one obviously encounters often enough in the Schopenhauer literature). "He was the contradiction in person", Lombroso claims: "He posits the annihilation of life, *nirvana*, as the final scope of life, and then predicts (which means that he congratulates himself to) 100 years of life!— He preaches sexual abstinence as a duty and abuses women. He who had suffered so much from the intolerance of others insults, with unjustified violence, Moleschott and Büchner, and finds pleasure in the Government's forbidding them to teach"<sup>6</sup>. Lombroso furthermore argues that Schopenhauer inherited the intellect of his lively but heartless mother and the character of his father, who was "misanthropic and bizarre to the point of lypemania, and later killed himself"<sup>7</sup>. Lypemania was another term for melancholy in nineteenth century medicine, used in particular by the great French psychiatrist Esquirol (Jackson 152). Schopenhauer suffered from the same melancholy as his father, Lombroso argues, and seeks to demonstrate this by describing how he fled from Naples and Berlin when the towns were assailed by epidemics.

The inspiration of Lombroso's belief that Heinrich Floris Schopenhauer committed suicide was clearly—directly or indirectly—Gwinner. In his 1862 memoir *Arthur Schopenhauer aus persönlichem Umgange dargestellt*, Gwinner relates the sudden death of Schopenhauer's father in 1805: "Im April erfolgte der plötzliche Tod seines Vaters. Die Art derselben—er stürzte aus einer hohen Speicheröffnung in den Kanal—erregte Aufsehen und es ging das Gerücht, dass er, in einem Anfall von Trübsinn, wegen eingebildeter oder wirklicher Vermögensverluste freiwillig geendet habe. Schon längerer Zeit hatte er an krankhafter Aufregung gelitten und war mit zunehmender Taubheit reizbarer

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<sup>5</sup> Later in the book, p. 237, he also refers to Rudolf Haym's essay *Arthur Schopenhauer*. The fourth edition of *Genio e follia* was translated into German as *Genie und Irrsinn* in 1887.

<sup>6</sup> "Era la contraddizione in persona. Mette per iscopo finale della vita l'annientamento, il *nirvana*, eppoi si predice (il che vuol dire si augura) 100 anni di vita! – Predica l'astensione sessuale come un dovere ed abusa delle donne. Egli che avea sofferto tanto dall'intolleranza altrui, insulta, con ingiusta violenza, Moleschott e Buchner, e gode che i Governi loro abbiano impedito di dare lezioni" (*L'uomo* [5th ed.] 81). "Schopenhauer gode delle persecuzioni inflitte a Moleschott: declama contro la donna e ne è caldo amatore; professa la felicità del *nirvana* e poi si predice più di cento anni di vita" (226).

<sup>7</sup> "misanthropo e bizzarro sino alla lipemania, tanto poi s'uccise" (*Genio* [4th ed.] 81).

und heftiger geworden” (34). Although Gwinner explicitly wrote that it was rumoured that Heinrich Floris Schopenhauer committed suicide, his readers soon took it for an established fact that his death was voluntary<sup>8</sup>. Arède Barine, for instance, in an oft-cited article in the symbolist journal *Revue bleue*, presented the suicide of Schopenhauer’s father as a key fact for understanding his character: “Arthur Schopenhauer est né à Dantzig, le 22 février 1788, d’une famille de cerveaux malades. Du côté paternel, sa grand-mère avait la tête dérangée ; un de ses oncles était imbécile ; l’autre, à moitié fou ; son père, Heinrich-Floris Schopenhauer, se suicida dans un accès de folie” (66–75)<sup>9</sup>. The Scottish criminologist John Nisbet similarly linked the suicide of the father with the character of the son: “Schopenhauer’s father committed suicide in a fit of melancholia; an uncle was demented, and the philosopher himself was subject to strange manias and impulses” (220).

For obvious reasons, pessimism has often been associated with melancholy. In fact, the very first definition of the word pessimist alluded to melancholy. In 1759, an anonymous journalist writing for the *Magazine littéraire* defined a pessimist “celui qui voit les choses en noir” Gerhard (column 386), clearly an allusion to the inner darkness caused by an excess of black bile that causes the fear and sorrow of the melancholic in Ancient medical thought (Cf. Flashar 106). In the philosophical literature on pessimism that took form after Schopenhauer’s and especially Eduard von Hartmann’s sudden rise to fame in the late 1860’s, the opponents of pessimism would often draw on the connotations of pessimism to melancholy. Jürgen Bona Meyer for instance, professor of philosophy at the University of Bonn, explains Schopenhauer’s pessimism with reference to his melancholy temperament: “Wir können in diesem seinen Pessimismus nichts weiter sehen, als das Zeugniß eines krankhaft erregten schwarzgalligen Temperaments” (44).

Lombroso’s view of Schopenhauer in *Genio e follia* was therefore on the whole quite typical of the period. His notion that Schopenhauer’s pessimism was a form of melancholy inherited from his father was quite typical; and so was his claim that while in the father this melancholy caused him to take his own life, in Schopenhauer’s case it took the form of a pessimistic philosophical system. In the mid 1880’s, Lombroso’s opinion of genius—and of the criminal—went through a radical change as he incorporated a new notion of epilepsy into his theories (Cf. Gibson 25; Frigessi 186). In *Genio e follia*, he had argued that genius is inherently healthy. There are insane geniuses, to be sure, and even the sane geniuses are affected by for instance the climate in the same way as the insane. Still he claimed that genius and insanity are distinct phenomena: the belief that genius is a form of illness is mistaken. “There are more than a few points of coincidence between the physiology of the man of genius and the pathology of the insane.—There are mad geniuses and insane geniuses—. But there are and there were numerous geniuses that, apart from some anomaly of sensibility, will never be suffering from

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<sup>8</sup> In the 1878 biography, Gwinner added a comment to the description, saying that there was hardly any room for doubt that he did indeed commit suicide: “Mehrfache, mir indirect bekannt gewordene Aeusserungen seiner Witwe und seines Sohnes, an den ich absichtlich eine Frage wegen jenes Todesfalles zu stellen unterliess, geben kaum einen Zweifel Raum, dass jenes Gerücht begründet gewesen sei” (*Schopenhauer’s Leben*, 35).

<sup>9</sup> Baudin quotes this entire phrase.

insanity”<sup>10</sup>. In the years that followed this all changed. In 1888, a new edition of *Genio e follia* was published under a new title: *L'uomo di genio* (*The Man of Genius*)<sup>11</sup>. Most of the sections of the fourth edition are retained, either unchanged or extended. But the basic argument has changed: genius is no longer fundamentally healthy, but is interpreted as a “form of psychosis belonging to the family of epileptic affectations” (*The Man*, 336).

The epilepsy of the genius clearly differs from the typical form of the illness. In particular, there are no seizures. The epilepsy of the genius is a “masked epilepsy” (*epilessia larvata*) according to Lombroso, a highly controversial notion introduced into medicine by Philippe Pinel in 1860, designating a form of epilepsy characterised by the absence of seizures (Temkin 1994, 316–27). Lombroso maintains that the genius exhibits the other typical symptoms of epilepsy; but instead of the seizure, they have moments of inspiration. The creative inspiration is a “psychic equivalent” of the seizure. This conception, formulated by Jules Falret and Paul Samt (362), is also crucial for Lombroso’s conception. The inspiration of the genius is unconscious: in contrast to the mere talent, a genius does not know how he or she creates; creation takes place in a somnambulistic state beyond the control of the normal faculties (*L'uomo* [5th ed.] 18).

Although the basic argument of *Genio e follia* had changed fundamentally in *L'uomo di genio*, Lombroso retained most of his examples unchanged. Most of the references to Schopenhauer therefore remained intact in the latter book. Lombroso extended the lengthy section on Schopenhauer even more, though: he added several pages to it (extending it from three to nine pages), citing and discussing many more anecdotes from Schopenhauer’s biography to prove that he was insane. In *L'uomo di genio*, Lombroso no longer considers Schopenhauer’s insanity—melancholy, megalomania, pathological rage—to be separate from his genius. On the contrary, Schopenhauer is now one of Lombroso’s most important examples in support of his new theory of genius as a pathological deviation. Indeed, Lombroso characterises Schopenhauer as “the most modern type of the insane genius”<sup>12</sup>.

Lombroso still refers to Gwinner’s biography and Ribot’s *La philosophie de Schopenhauer* as his key sources in *L'uomo di genio*, but another source is now more important to him: Carl von Seidlitz’s booklet *Dr. Arthur Schopenhauer vom medicinischen Standpunkte aus*. The six pages that Lombroso added to the section on Schopenhauer were in fact, virtually in their entirety, drawn from Seidlitz. Lombroso often appears to quote either Schopenhauer himself or other sources—“G. Winner” and “Giulio Frauenstaed” for instance: Lombroso’s orthography was always chaotic—but he clearly quotes them indirectly, via Seidlitz. For instance, Lombroso quotes Schopenhauer’s admission that he was

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<sup>10</sup> “V’hanno tra la fisiologia dell’uomo di genio e la patologia dell’alienato non pochi punti di coincidenza.—V’hanno pazzi di genio e genî alienati—. Ma v’hanno e v’ebbero moltissimi genî, che, meno qualche anomalia della sensibilità, giammai patirono d’alienazione” (*Genio* [4th ed.] 244).

<sup>11</sup> *L'uomo di genio* was published in two editions, in 1888 and then in a greatly extended version in 1894. The 1888 edition is described as the fifth (and the 1894 edition as the sixth) extended edition of *Genio e follia*, but I will consider them as separate publications. *L'uomo di genio* was translated into French (*L’homme de génie*, 1889 and 1896), German (*Der geniale*, 1890) and English (*The Man*, 1891). In all three cases some (but not all) of the material that was added to the 1894 edition was incorporated into the translations; in the French edition it is even stated that it was translated from the sixth edition, although the sixth edition was actually published five years after the French translation.

<sup>12</sup> “il tipo più moderno del genio pazzo” (*L'uomo* [5th ed.] 82). In the English edition, this phrase is inaccurately translated as “[t]he most complete type of madness in genius” (*The Man*, 91).

always melancholy as a youth: “‘From my youth,’ he says, ‘I have always been melancholy. Once, when I was perhaps eighteen, I thought to myself, in spite of my youth, that the world could not be the work of a God, but rather of a devil. During my education, I certainly had to suffer too much from my father’s temperament”<sup>13</sup>. This might seem to be a quotation from Frauenstädt’s “Memorabilien”, in which he quotes Schopenhauer saying: „‘Ich war als Jüngling immer melancholisch’ schreibt er ‘und einmal—ich mochte 18 Jahre alt seyn—dachte ich, noch so jung, bei mir: diese Welt sollte ein Gott gemacht haben? Nein! eher ein Teufel! Ich habe freilich schon viel in der Erziehung durch die Härte meines Vaters zu leiden gehabt“ (“Memorabilien”, 306). But in all likelihood, Lombroso quotes Frauenstädt’s rendering of Schopenhauer’s phrase from Seydlitz (11). (Note for instance that he retained the final sentence of the quote, though it is clearly quite unnecessary for his argument.) This is just one example out of many: virtually all the quotations of Schopenhauer included in *L’uomo di genio* are in reality drawn from Seydlitz’s book rather than from Schopenhauer’s works themselves. But even though Lombroso’s direct knowledge of Schopenhauer was thus smaller than it might appear, he had acquired both a deeper understanding of and a deeper respect for his philosophy.

In particular, Lombroso was impressed with Schopenhauer’s notion of genius. He observes that Schopenhauer had told Frauenstädt that his behaviour during the period when he wrote *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* was erratic—speaking loudly to himself in a public park for instance—to the point that people considered him insane (*L’uomo* [5th ed.] 85). To Lombroso this amounts to proof that Schopenhauer’s creativity had pathological roots, that genius is a form of insanity. But it also proves that Schopenhauer had a profound understanding of his own genius. Lombroso quotes a comment of Schopenhauer on genius:

No one has, for the rest, maintained more openly than Schopenhauer, the relationship of genius to insanity. “People of genius,” he wrote, “are not only unpleasant in practical life, but weak in moral sense and wicked.” And elsewhere: “Such men can have but few friends; solitude reigns on the summits [...] Genius is closer to madness than to ordinary intelligence [...] The lives of men of genius show how often, like lunatics, they are in a state of continual agitation.” (*The Man*, 98)<sup>14</sup>

To Schopenhauer, genius was obviously an unnatural phenomenon: a liberation of the intellect from the services of the will that he explicitly defined as “naturwidrig”<sup>15</sup>. A genius possesses an objectivity that makes life difficult and is furthermore highly excitable and volatile. A genius is therefore much more susceptible to insanity than a normal person: Schopenhauer observes that genius and insanity: “eine Seite haben, wo sie an einander grenzen, ja in einander übergehn” (W I § 36, 245). All these observations on genius corresponded to the new theory on the nature of genius that Lombroso

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<sup>13</sup> “Io da giovane era sempre melanconico, scrive egli, ed una volta—io poteva avere 18 anni—pensai, ancora così giovane fra me non potere essere un Dio che abbia fatto questo mondo: No; piuttosto un diavolo. Io ho avuto certamente già troppo a soffrire nell’educazione della tempra del mio padre” (*L’uomo* [5th ed.] 83).

<sup>14</sup> “Nessuno, del resto, più apertamente di Schopenhauer, sostenne la parentela del genio colla follia. ‘Le persone di genio, scrive egli, non solo sono goffe nella vita pratica, ma deboli nel senso morale e cattive’, e altrove: ‘Non possono avere che pochi amici, sulle vette domina la solitudine.—Il genio è più vicino alla pazzia che non all’intelligenza media—. La vita dei genii ci mostra che essi sono spesso in uno stato di agitazione come i pazzi”.

<sup>15</sup> I am quoting Schopenhauer from the *Zürcher Ausgabe: Werke in zehn Bänden*, ed. Arthur Hübscher (1977), W II, chap. 31; ZA vol. IV, p. 457.



developed in the latter half of the 1880's. No wonder then that Schopenhauer became such a prominent example.

In the 1894 edition of *L'uomo di genio* Lombroso's appreciation of Schopenhauer is even more evident. Most of the comments on Schopenhauer remained more or less unchanged: the long section on Schopenhauer is reproduced practically verbatim<sup>16</sup>. But the additions that he made to this edition show that he now took Schopenhauer even more seriously as a thinker. He quoted Schopenhauer's notion of woman as a man arrested in his development, for instance, arguing that Schopenhauer expressed the same view of woman as he himself did, but before him<sup>17</sup>.

It is, in other words, quite clear that although Lombroso based his interpretation of Schopenhauer on second-hand information, he had come to take Schopenhauer much more seriously as a philosopher in *L'uomo di genio*. Schopenhauer personified the typical genius: his skull was huge, indicating massive intelligence; he was mentally unstable to the point of moral insanity, born to an aged father and with a number of relatives suffering from insanity; he hated the nation that he belonged to, etc. But he had also come to consider Schopenhauer an important theorist of genius; he clearly takes Schopenhauer's notion of genius to be a valuable contribution to the understanding of genius.

In *Genio e degenerazione* (1897), Schopenhauer is all but absent. Lombroso cites him as one of many examples of a genius suffering from *folie de doute*, and later on as an example (once again one out of many) of a genius born to aging parents (31 and 119). In Lombroso's last book on genius, *Nuovi studi sul genio* (1902), there is once again a section dedicated to Schopenhauer. Lombroso refers to him already in the preface, as an example of a genius whose affectivity and moral sense is defect (vol. I, vii). In the second volume of the book, Schopenhauer's enormous skull—its volume is reported to be a massive 1 676 cubic centimetres—is mentioned three times. On one occasion it is cited, along with Dante's and Helmholtz's as an example of a beautifully shaped skull typical of a genius (vol. II, 136). On the two other occasions, on the other hand, the size of his skull is taken as an indication that he was hydrocephalic, a condition closely associated with degeneration (vol. I, 216 and vol. II, 185). Apart from these brief allusions to Schopenhauer, *Nuovi studi sul genio* also contains a section in which Lombroso discusses Paul Julius Möbius's pathographic study *Ueber Schopenhauer*.

Möbius was a prominent neurologist with a special interest in the pathology of genius. Apart from his book on Schopenhauer he also published three studies that discussed Rousseau's, Goethe's and Nietzsche's genius from a medical point of view. In the preface to *Ueber Schopenhauer*, Möbius accused Seidlitz of having written a "Schmähschrift", and argued that the fact that Lombroso had relied on Seidlitz distorted his interpretation of Schopenhauer (3). With the aid of Gwinner's biography and some other biographical documents, Möbius tries to reconstruct Schopenhauer's family background in order to determine whether his philosophy was a pathological phenomenon. Möbius maintains that Schopenhauer's pessimism was a result of a mental pathology, a congenital melancholy

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<sup>16</sup> The only difference is that a person who in the 1888 edition is described as having looked upon Schopenhauer as if he were "demented" (*un demente*) instead looked upon him as if he were "mad" (*matto*) in the 1894 edition, probably to avoid repeating the word *demente* (*L'uomo* [6th [i.e. 2nd] ed] 85 and 1894, 126).

<sup>17</sup> "È un'opinione ormai accettata e prima anche delle dimostrazioni che ne ho dato nella *Donna delinquente e la normale*, essere la donna un uomo arrestato del suo sviluppo, un uomo impubere. *La donna è nata pei ragazzi, ed è essa stessa un gran ragazzo*, dice Schopenhauer" (*L'uomo* [6th [i.e. 2nd] ed.] 253).

that he inherited from his father: “Es ist gar nicht zu bezweifeln, daß Schopenhauers Lebensauffassung durch die angeborene Gehirnbeschaffenheit mit bestimmt wurde und daß die Dyskolie ein Erbtheil vom Vater war, wengleich sie in ihm sich anders darstellte als im Vater” (38). Schopenhauer’s pessimistic philosophy was thus the result of this melancholy in combination with an inclination for philosophical reasoning. Discussing Schopenhauer’s melancholy temperament, Möbius furthermore observes that he went through four periods that might be characterised as depressions. But he was nonetheless hesitant to describe Schopenhauer as periodically depressed due to the long interludes between these periods: “Es ist demnach zweifelhaft, ob man von periodischer Depression reden darf. Die Zwischenzeiten betragen etwa 7, 10, 8 Jahre, das ist immerhin etwas auffallend” (76).

Schopenhauer’s mind proves to Möbius that genius is the result of an imbalance between the mental faculties, in its turn caused by exaggerated growth of certain parts of the brain. “Verglichen mit dem Wesen des Normalmenschen hat die Lebendigkeit der Genialen zweifellos einen maniakalischen Anstrich, ist der klinische Ausdruck der Hyperplasie gewisser Gehirnthteile” (93). In a strict sense, then, Schopenhauer’s state of mind was pathological, as a hyperplasia of this kind always causes perturbations of some kind: in Schopenhauer’s case, Möbius describes these perturbations as an inherited nervousness, that is: neurasthenia (9).

In spite of Möbius’s critique that Lombroso had followed Seidlitz too unquestioningly and therefore reproduced many of his inaccuracies, Lombroso introduced Möbius’s study on Schopenhauer by describing it as “new evidence [...] to add to those put forth by me in *L’uomo di genio* [...] on his psychosis that so many people doubt, especially in Germany”<sup>18</sup>. Over some five pages, Lombroso then relates some of Möbius’s main results, in particular regarding Schopenhauer’s family background and his liking for travels. Most of the anecdotes that Lombroso recounts seem to be drawn from his own earlier books, though, and on the whole he is very inaccurate when summarizing Möbius’s results. Speaking of Schopenhauer’s depressions, for instance, Lombroso attributes to Möbius a view quite different from the one he really espoused, and also gets his figures quite wrong: “Möbius finishes by admitting in him the existence of a periodic form of psychic depression, with intervals lasting from 7 to 10 to 17 months when he reached 25, 35 and 43 years, which in layman’s terms [*lingua povera*] means as much as intermittent melomaly with phobias”<sup>19</sup>. In conclusion, therefore, *Genio e degenerazione* is marked by the same flaws as Lombroso’s earlier discussions of Schopenhauer: the same reliance on second-hand material and the same inaccuracies. But it also testifies to his continued interest in Schopenhauer, who was a key example when Lombroso’s mature theory of genius took form and clearly remained so for the rest of his life.

## Schopenhauer and German Medicine in the 1890’s

Already in the 1870’s, in the wake of the publication of *L’uomo delinquente* in 1876 in particular, Lombroso attracted a large number of disciples all over Europe. Max Nordau, arguably Lombroso’s

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<sup>18</sup> “nuove prove [...] da aggiungere a quelle da me addotte nell’Uomo di Genio [...] sulla psicosi messa in dubbio da tanti, specie in Germania” (vol. I, 211).

<sup>19</sup> “Möbius finisce per ammettere in lui l’esistenza di una forma periodica di depressione psichica, con intervalli della durata di 7 a 10 a 17 mesi quando toccò i 25, i 35, i 43 anni, il che in lingua povera si traduce in melomalia intermittente con fobie” (vol. I, 216).

most important follower, considered pessimism to be an important aspect of the threats that modern society and modern man had to face. This made Schopenhauer an even more important example in the medical literature of the day, especially in Germany. Nordau dedicated a chapter of his *Paradoxe* (1885, 1-28) to pessimism and optimism, arguing that pessimism is either a mental illness, a mere pose or the disappointment of someone who is at heart an optimist that his or her life did not turn out according to his or her wishes. The most important discussion of pessimism in Nordau's works takes place in *Entartung*, though, Nordau's large essay on the degeneration of modern man, in which pessimism counts among the symptoms of degeneration. "Die Degenerierten und Irren sind die vorbestimmte Gemeinde von Schopenhauer und Hartmann", Nordau claims (vol. I, 34). Later on, it is not only the congregation, the followers and readers of the pessimists, which is characterised as degenerate: the pessimists themselves are. Pessimism is not a philosophical theory to Nordau, but the form in which certain illnesses reach the mind: "Der Pessimismus ist immer die Form, in welcher Krankheitszustände, in allererster Reihe Nerven-Erschöpfung, dem Kranken zum Bewußtsein kommen. 'Taedium vitae' oder Lebensüberdruß ist ein frühes Vorzeichen des Wahnsinns und begleitet stets die Neurasthenie und Hysterie" (vol. II, 444). An epoch of degeneration is therefore by necessity an epoch marked by its pessimism.

Nordau was immensely important for the reception of Lombroso's ideas in Germany. But the fact is that his own views were at times quite distant from Lombroso's, especially as far as genius was concerned. In an important historical study of the German reception of Lombroso's ideas, Mariacarla Gadebusch-Bondi stresses that the fact that Nordau and another German disciple, Hans Kurella, introduced Lombroso's theories while remaining sceptical to large portions of them was the cause of a great deal of misunderstanding of his ideas. Speaking of Kurella, Gadebusch-Bondi writes: "Seine Übertragung der Theorien des italienischen Psychiaters ist aber wegen ihrer persönlichen Färbung nicht immer objektiv. Da viele zeitgenössische Wissenschaftler sich aber ausschließlich oder hauptsächlich auf diese Übertragungen gestützt haben, ohne die Werke Lombrosos in Original gelesen zu haben, muß sie als Quelle für unzählige Mißverständnisse angesehen werden" (104). This is the case with Nordau as well, and to an even greater degree. Nordau dedicated *Entartung* to Lombroso, but the fact is that his notion of genius is quite different from Lombroso's. Whereas Lombroso, as we saw above, considered genius to be a form of degenerative epilepsy and thus a pathological phenomenon, Nordau argued that the modern artists and thinkers characterised by their degeneration that he discussed in *Entartung* were no geniuses at all. "Indeed, to Nordau sanity is the prerequisite for genius", Hans-Peter Söder observes (134). Nordau's view of Schopenhauer was therefore different from Lombroso's, it was indeed its diametrical opposite.

This is something that not even Nordau's and Lombroso's contemporaries were aware of at all times. One of the most important critics of Lombroso was William Hirsch, whose attempt at a deconstruction of Lombroso's argument remains one of the most interesting responses to his theories. In Hirsch's study *Genie und Entartung* from 1894, he sought to demonstrate that Lombroso's theories were based on faulty statistics, and that his key concepts furthermore remained undefined. Insanity remains a very vague category in *L'uomo di genio*, and the concept of genius in particular, Hirsch notes, is never defined: "Trotz des grossen Umfanges dieser Arbeit macht auch Lombroso keinen Versuch, das Genie zu definieren, sondern setzt den Begriff offenbar als bekannt voraus" (83). An important objective of Hirsch's book clearly was to defend the honour of writers and thinkers that were declared insane by Lombroso and Nordau. Hirsch argues that Lombroso's assertion that Dante's

works indicate that he suffered from epilepsy is unfounded, and defends for instance Ibsen and Wagner against Nordau's allegation that they were degenerate. One of the supposedly insane geniuses that Hirsch was particularly intent to defend was Schopenhauer. He argues that most of the facts that Lombroso bases his analysis of Schopenhauer on are irrelevant: his hurry to leave Naples after the outbreak of cholera for instance is no indication of paranoia, but rather a sign of sound practical reason. And if Schopenhauer's misogyny, as Lombroso had claimed, is a symptom of insanity, then surely Lombroso himself must be declared insane on account of his book on woman, *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale* from 1892. Hirsch furthermore denies that Schopenhauer suffered from melancholy, in the clinical sense of the word: Schopenhauer's profound self-knowledge was actually the very opposite of the self-hatred of the subject of pathological melancholy (245).

Paradoxically, Nordau probably secured Schopenhauer a much larger readership than Hirsch ever could. Although Nordau sought to dissuade his readers from reading Schopenhauer, while Hirsch tried to defend him by arguing that it was in fact those who declared Schopenhauer insane who were really insane, it was in fact Nordau that contributed mostly to Schopenhauer's fame. The fact that Schopenhauer was declared an insane genius—indeed the most modern type of the insane genius—guaranteed him a large audience amongst those who liked to boast with all things fashionable and modern. As genius became associated with degeneration in the 1890's, Jochen Schmidt has observed, the writers and artists of the fin de siècle era became more and more eager to pose as degenerates: "Nur allzugern ergriff man die von der zeitgenössischen Psychiatrie angebotene Möglichkeiten, Décadence mit Genie zu assoziieren, um die eigene Superiorität zu markieren" (vol. II, 259). By defining Schopenhauer a degenerate and an insane genius, Nordau and Lombroso and their peers made it possible to pose as a superior decadent simply by quoting Schopenhauer.

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