



FREUD AND DORA

STORY, HISTORY, CASE HISTORY

Steven Marcus

Freud: A Collection of Critical Essays



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Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History^[1]

By Steven Marcus

I

It is generally agreed that Freud's case histories are unique. Today more than half a century after they were written they are still widely read. Even more, they are still widely used for instruction and training in psychoanalytic institutes. One of the inferences that such a vigorous condition of survival prompts is that these writings have not yet been superseded. Like other masterpieces of literature or the arts, these works seem to possess certain transhistorical qualities —although it may by no means be easy to specify what those qualities are. The implacable “march of science” has not —or has not yet—consigned them to “mere” history. Their singular and mysterious complexity, density, and richness have thus far prevented such a transformation and demotion.

This state of affairs has received less attention than it merits. Freud's case histories—and his works in general —are unique as pieces or kinds of writing, and it may be useful to examine one of Freud's case histories from the point of view of literary criticism, to analyze it as a piece of writing, and to determine whether this method of proceeding may yield results that other means have not. My assumption —and conclusion —is that Freud is a great

writer and that one of his major case histories is a great work of literature—that is to say it is both an outstanding creative and imaginative performance and an intellectual and cognitive achievement of the highest order. And yet this triumphant greatness is in part connected with the circumstance that it is about a kind of failure, and that part of the failure remains in fact unacknowledged and unconscious.

“Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria,” better known as the case of Dora, is Freud’s first great case history —oddly enough he was to write only four others. It may be helpful for the reader if at the outset I refresh his memory by briefly reviewing some of the external facts of the case. In the autumn of 1900, Dora, an eighteen-year-old young woman, began treatment with Freud. She did so reluctantly and against her will, and, Freud writes, “it was only her father’s authority which induced her to come to me at all.” Neither Dora nor her father were strangers to Freud. He had made separate acquaintance with both of them in the past, during certain episodes of illness that characterized their lives if not the life of the family as a whole. (Freud knew other members of the family as well.)

As for Dora herself, her afflictions, both mental and physical, had begun in early childhood and had persisted and flourished with variations and fluctuating intensities until she was presented to Freud for therapy. Among the symptoms from which she suffered were to be found dyspnea, migraine,

and periodic attacks of nervous coughing often accompanied by complete loss of voice during part of the episode. Dora had in fact first been brought by her father to Freud two years earlier, when she was sixteen and suffering from a cough and hoarseness; he had then “proposed giving her psychological treatment,” but this suggestion was not adopted since “the attack in question, like the others, passed off spontaneously.” In the course of his treatment of Dora, Freud also learned of further hysterical—or hysterically connected—productions on her part, such as a feverish attack that mimicked appendicitis, a periodic limp, and a vaginal catarrh or discharge. Moreover, during the two-year interval between Dora’s first visit and the occasion on which her father brought her to Freud a second time, and “handed her over to me for psychotherapeutic treatment... Dora had grown unmistakably neurotic.” Dora was now “in the first bloom of youth — a girl of intelligent and engaging looks.” Her character had, however, undergone an alteration. She had become chronically depressed, and was generally dissatisfied with both herself and her family. She had become unfriendly toward the father whom she had hitherto loved, idealized, and identified with. She was “on very bad terms” with her mother, for whom she felt a good deal of scorn. “She tried to avoid social intercourse, and employed herself—so far as she was allowed to by the fatigue and lack of concentration of which she complained—with attending lectures for women and with carrying on more or less serious studies.” Two further events precipitated the crisis which led to her being delivered to

Freud. Her parents found a written note in which she declared her intention to commit suicide because “as she said, she could no longer endure her life.” Following this there occurred one day “a slight passage of words” between Dora and her father, which ended with Dora suddenly losing consciousness — the attack, Freud believed, was “accompanied by convulsions and delirious states,” although it was lost to amnesia and never came up in the analysis.

Having outlined this array of affections, Freud dryly remarks that such a case “does not upon the whole seem worth recording. It is merely a case of *‘petite hysterie’* with the commonest of all somatic and mental symptoms. ... More interesting cases of hysteria have no doubt been published.”

This disavowal of anything sensational to come is of course a bit of shrewd disingenuousness on Freud’s part, for what follows at once is his assertion that he is going to elucidate the meaning, origin, and function of every one of these symptoms by means of the events and experiences of Dora’s life. He is going in other words to discover the “psychological determinants” that will account for Dora’s illnesses; among these determinants he lists three principal conditions: “a psychological trauma, a conflict of affects, and... a disturbance in the sphere of sexuality.” And so Freud begins the treatment by asking Dora to talk about her experiences. What emerges is the substance of the case history, a substance which takes all of Freud’s immense analytic, expository, and narrative talents to bring into

order. I will again very roughly and briefly summarize some of this material.

Sometime after 1888, when the family had moved to B___, the health resort where the father's tuberculosis had sent them, an intimate and enduring friendship sprang up between them and a couple named K. Dora's father was deeply unhappy in his marriage and apparently made no bones about it. The K.'s too were unhappily married, as it later turned out. Frau K. took to nursing Dora's father during these years of his illness. She also befriended Dora, and they behaved toward one another in the most familiar way and talked together about the most intimate subjects. Herr K., her husband, also made himself a close friend of Dora's—going regularly for walks with her and giving her presents. Dora in her turn befriended the K.'s two small children, "and had been almost a mother to them." What begins to be slowly if unmistakably disclosed is that Dora's father and Frau K. had established a sexual liaison and that this relation had by the time of Dora's entering into treatment endured for many years. At the same time Dora's father and Frau K. had tacitly connived at turning Dora over to Herr K., just as years later her father "handed her over to me [Freud] for psychotherapeutic treatment." In some sense everyone was conspiring to conceal what was going on; and in some yet further sense everyone was conspiring to deny that anything was going on at all. What we have here, on one of its sides, is a classical Victorian domestic drama, that is at the same time a sexual and emotional can of worms.

Matters were brought to a crisis by two events that occurred to Dora at two different periods of her adolescence. When she was fourteen, Herr K. contrived one day to be alone with her in his place of business; in a state of sexual excitement, he “suddenly clasped the girl to him and pressed a kiss on her lips.” Dora responded with a “violent feeling of disgust,” and hurried away. This experience, like those referred to in the foregoing paragraph, was never discussed with or mentioned to anyone, and relations continued as before. The second scene took place two years later in the summer when Dora was sixteen (it was just after she had seen Freud for the first time). She and Herr K. were taking a walk by a lake in the Alps. In Dora’s words, as they come filtered to us through Freud, Herr K. “had the audacity to make her a proposal.” Apparently he had begun to declare his love for this girl whom he had known so well for so long. “No sooner had she grasped Herr K.’s intention than, without letting him finish what he had to say, she had given him a slap in the face and hurried away.” The episode as a whole leads Freud quite plausibly to ask: “If Dora loved Herr K., what was the reason for her refusing him in the scene by the lake? Or at any rate, why did her refusal take such a brutal form, as though she were embittered against him? And how could a girl who was in love feel insulted by a proposal which was made in a manner neither tactless nor offensive?” It may occur to us to wonder whether in the extended context of this case that slap in the face was a “brutal form” of refusal; but as for the other questions posed by Freud they are without

question rhetorical in character.

On this second occasion Dora did not remain silent. Her father was preparing to depart from the Alpine lake, and she declared her determination to leave at once with him. Two weeks later she told the story of the scene by the lake to her mother, who relayed it—as Dora had clearly intended—to her father. In due course Herr K. was “called to account” on this score, but he “denied in the most emphatic terms having on his side made any advances” and suggested that she “had merely fancied the whole scene she had described.” Dora’s father “believed” the story concocted by Herr— and Frau—K., and it is from this moment, more than two years before she came to Freud for treatment, that the change in Dora’s character can be dated. Her love for the K.’s turned into hatred, and she became obsessed with the idea of getting her father to break off relations with them. She saw through the rationalizations and denials of her father and Frau K., and had “no doubt that what bound her father to this young and beautiful woman was a common love-affair.” Nothing that could help to confirm this view had escaped her perception, which in this connection was pitilessly sharp. ...” Indeed, “the sharp-sighted Dora” was an excellent detective when it came to uncovering her father’s clandestine sexual activities, and her withering criticisms of her father’s character—that he was “insincere... had a strain of baseness in his character... only thought of his own enjoyment... had a gift for seeing things in the light which suited him best”— were in general concurred in by Freud.

Freud also agreed with Dora that there was something in her embittered if exaggerated contention that “she had been handed over to Herr K. as the price of his tolerating the relations between her father and his wife.” Nevertheless, the cause of her greatest embitterment seems to have been her father’s “readiness to consider the scene by the lake as a product of her imagination.” And although Freud was in his customary way skeptical about such impassioned protestations and repudiations —and surmised that something in the way of an opposite series of thoughts or self-reproaches lay behind them —he was forced to come to “the conclusion that Dora’s story must correspond to the facts in every respect.” If we try to put ourselves in the place of this girl between her sixteenth and eighteenth years, we can at once recognize that her situation was a desperate one. The three adults to whom she was closest, whom she loved the most in the world, were apparently conspiring—separately, in tandem, or in concert—to deny her the reality of her experience. They were conspiring to deny Dora her reality and reality itself. This betrayal touched upon matters that might easily unhinge the mind of a young person; for the three adults were not betraying Dora’s love and trust alone; they were betraying the structure of the actual world. And indeed when Dora’s father handed her over to Freud with the parting injunction “Please try and bring her to reason,” there were no two ways of taking what he meant. Naturally he had no idea of the mind and character of the physician to whom he had dealt this leading remark.

II

Dora began treatment with Freud some time in October 1900. Freud wrote to Fliess that “the case has opened smoothly to my collection of picklocks,” but the analysis was not proceeding well. The material produced was very rich, but Dora was there more or less against her will. Moreover, she was more than usually amnesic about events in her remote past and about her inner and mental life. The analysis found its focus and climax in two dreams. The first of these was the production by Dora of a dream that in the past she had dreamed recurrently. Among the many messages concealed by it, Freud made out one that he conveyed to his patient: “You have decided to give up the treatment,” he told her, adding, “to which, after all, it is only your father who makes you come.” It was a self-fulfilling interpretation. A few weeks after the first dream, the second dream occurred. Freud spent two hours elucidating it, and at the beginning of the third, which took place on December 31, 1900, Dora informed him that she was there for the last time. Freud pressed on during this hour and presented Dora with a series of stunning and outrageously intelligent interpretations. The analysis ended as follows: “Dora had listened to me without any of her usual contradictions. She seemed to be moved; she said good-bye to me very warmly, with the heartiest wishes for the New Year, and came no more.” Dora’s father subsequently called on Freud two or three times to reassure him that Dora was returning, but Freud knew better than to take him at his word. Fifteen months later, in

April 1902, Dora returned for a single visit; what she had to tell Freud on that occasion was of some interest, but he knew that she was done with him, as indeed she was.

Dora was actuated by many impulses in breaking off the treatment; prominent among these partial motives was revenge —upon men in general and at that moment Freud in particular, who was standing for those other men in her life who had betrayed and injured her. He writes rather ruefully of Dora’s “breaking off so unexpectedly, just when my hopes of a successful termination of the treatment were at their highest, and her thus bringing those hopes to nothing—this was an unmistakable act of vengeance on her part.” And although Dora’s “purpose of self-injury” was also served by this action, Freud goes on clearly to imply that he felt hurt and wounded by her behavior. Yet it could not have been so unexpected as all that, since as early as the first dream, Freud both understood and had communicated this understanding to Dora that she had already decided to give up the treatment. What is suggested by this logical hiatus is that although Dora had done with Freud, Freud had not done with Dora. And this supposition is supported by what immediately followed. As soon as Dora left him, Freud began writing up her case history —a proceeding that, as far as I have been able to ascertain, was not in point of immediacy a usual response for him. He interrupted the composition of *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* on which he was then engaged and wrote what is substantially the case of Dora during the first

three weeks of January 1901. On January 25, he wrote to Fliess that he had finished the work the day before and added, with that terrifying self-confidence of judgment that he frequently revealed, “Anyhow, it is the most subtle thing I have yet written and will produce an even more horrifying effect than usual.” The title he had at first given the new work —“Dreams and Hysteria”—suggests the magnitude of ambition that was at play in him. At the same time, however, Freud’s settling of his account with Dora took on the proportions of a heroic inner and intellectual enterprise.

Yet that account was still by no means settled, as the obscure subsequent history of this work dramatically demonstrates. In the first letter of January 25, 1901, Freud had written to Fliess that the paper had already been accepted by Ziehen, joint editor of the *Monatsschrift für Psvchiatric und Neurologie*. On the fifteenth of February, in another letter to Fliess, he remarks that he is now finishing up *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, and that when he has done so, he will correct it and the case history. About two months later, in March 1901, according to Ernest Jones, Freud showed “his notes of the case” to his close friend, Oscar Rie. The reception Rie gave to them was such, reports Freud, that “I thereupon determined to make no further effort to break down my state of isolation.” On May 8, 1901, Freud wrote to Fliess that he had not yet “made up his mind” to send off the work. One month later, he made up his mind and sent it off, announcing to Fliess that “it will meet the gaze of an astonished public in the autumn.” But nothing

of the sort was to occur, and what happened next was, according to Jones, “entirely mysterious” and remains so. Freud either sent it off to Ziehen, the editor who had already accepted it, and then having sent it asked for it back. Or he sent it off to another magazine altogether, the *Journal für Psychologie und Neurologie*, whose editor, one Brodmann, refused to publish it. The upshot was that Freud returned the manuscript to a drawer for four more years. And when he did at last send it into print, it was in the journal that had accepted it in the first place.

But we are not out of the darkness and perplexities yet, for when Freud finally decided in 1905 to publish the case, he revised the work once again. There is one further touch of puzzlements. Freud got the date of his case wrong. When he wrote or rewrote it, either in January 1901 or in 1905, he assigned the case to the autumn of 1899 instead of 1900. And he continued to date it incorrectly, repeating the error in 1914 in the “History of the Psychoanalytic Movement” and again in 1923 when he added a number of new footnotes to the essay on the occasion of its publication in the eighth volume of his *Gesammelte Schriften*. Among the many things suggested by this recurrent error is that in some sense he had still not done with Dora, as indeed I think we shall see he had not. The modern reader may be inclined to remark that these questions of date, of revision, problems of textual status and authorial uncertainties of attitude would be more suitable to a discussion of a literary text —a poem, play, or novel —than to a work of “science.” But

such a conception of the nature of scientific discourse—particularly the modes of discourse that are exercised in those disciplines which are not preponderantly or uniformly mathematical or quantitative —has to undergo a radical revision.

The general form of what Freud has written bears certain suggestive resemblances to a modern experimental novel. Its narrative and expository course, for example, is neither linear nor rectilinear; instead its organization is plastic, involuted, and heterogeneous, and follows spontaneously an inner logic that seems frequently to be at odds with itself; it often loops back around itself and is multidimensional in its representation of both its material and itself. Its continuous innovations in formal structure seem unavoidably to be dictated by its substance, by the dangerous, audacious, disreputable, and problematical character of the experiences being represented and dealt with, and by the equally scandalous intentions of the author and the outrageous character of the role he has had the presumption to assume. In content, however, what Freud has written is in parts rather like a play by Ibsen, or more precisely like a series of Ibsen's plays. And as one reads through the case of Dora, scenes and characters from such works as *Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *An Enemy of the People*, *The Wild Duck*, and *Rosmersholm* rise up and flit through the mind. There is, however, this difference. In this Ibsen-like drama, Freud is not only Ibsen, the creator and playwright; he is also and directly one of the characters in the action, and in the end suffers in a

way that is comparable to the suffering of the others.

What I have been reiterating is that the case of Dora is first and last an extraordinary piece of writing, and it is to this circumstance in several of its most striking aspects that we should direct our attention. For it is a case history, a kind or genre of writing—that is to say a particular way of conceiving and constructing human experience in written language—that in Freud’s hands became something that it never was before.

III

The ambiguities and difficulties begin with the very title of the work, “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria.” It is a fragment in the sense that its “results” are “incomplete.” The treatment was “broken off at the patient’s own wish,” at a time when certain problems “had not been attacked and others had only been imperfectly elucidated.” It follows that the analysis itself is “only a fragment,” as are “the following pages” of writing which present it. To which the modern reader, flushed with the superior powers of his educated irony, is tempted to reply: how is it that this fragment is also a whole, an achieved totality, an integral piece of writing called a case history? And how is it, furthermore, that this “fragment” is fuller, richer, and more complete than the most “complete” case histories of anyone else? But there is no more point in asking such questions of Freud—particularly at this preliminary stage of proceedings—than there would be in posing similar

“theoretical” questions to Joyce or Proust.

The work is also fragmentary, Freud continues, warming to his subject, because of the very method he has chosen to pursue; on this plan, that of nondirectional free association, “everything that has to do with the clearing-up of a particular symptom emerges piecemeal, woven into various contexts, and distributed over widely separate periods of time.” Freud’s technique itself is therefore fragmentary; his way of penetrating to the micro-structure—the “finer structure” as he calls it—of a neurosis is to allow the material to emerge piecemeal. At the same time these fragments only *appear* to be incoherent and disparate; in actuality they eventually will be understood as members of a whole.

Furthermore, Freud goes on, there is still another “kind of incompleteness” to be found in this work, and this time it has been “intentionally introduced.” He has deliberately chosen not to reproduce “the process of interpretation to which the patient’s associations and communications had to be subjected, but only the results of that process.” That is to say, what we have before us is not a transcription in print of a tape recording of eleven weeks of analysis but something that is abridged, edited, synthesized, and constructed from the very outset. And as if this were not enough, Freud introduces yet another context in which the work has to be regarded as fragmentary and incomplete. It is obvious, he argues, “that a

single case history, even if it were complete and open to no doubt, cannot provide an answer to all questions arising out of the problem of hysteria.” Thus, like a modernist writer—which in part he is —Freud begins by elaborately announcing the problematical status of his undertaking and the dubious character of his achievement.

Even more, like some familiar “unreliable narrator” in modernist fiction, Freud pauses at regular intervals to remind the reader of this case history that “my insight into the complex of events composing it [has] remained fragmentary,” that his understanding of it remains in some essential sense permanently occluded. This darkness and constraint are the result of a number of converging circumstances, some of which have already been touched on and include the shortness of the analysis and its having been broken off by Dora at a crucial point. But it also includes the circumstance that the analysis —any analysis —must proceed by fragmentary methods, by analyzing thoughts and events bit by discontinuous bit. And at the end of one virtuoso passage in which Freud demonstrates through a series of referential leaps and juxtapositions the occurrence in Dora’s past of childhood masturbation, he acknowledges that this is the essence of his procedure. “Part of this material,” he writes, “I was able to obtain directly from the analysis, but the rest required supplementing. And, indeed, the method by which the occurrence of masturbation in Dora’s case has been verified has shown us that material belonging to a single subject can only be collected piece by piece

at various times and in different connections.” In sum the process resembles “reality” itself, a word that, as contemporary writers like to remind us, should always be surrounded by quotation marks.

We are then obliged to ask —and Freud himself more than anyone else has taught us most about this obligation — *what else* are all these protestations of fragmentariness and incompleteness about? They refer in some measure, as Freud himself indicates in the Postscript, to a central inadequacy and determining incompleteness that he discovered only after it was too late—the “great defect” of the case was to be located in the undeveloped, misdeveloped, and equivocal character of the “transference,” of the relation between patient and physician in which so much was focused. Something went wrong in the relation between Freud and Dora —or in the relation between Dora and Freud. But the protestations refer, I believe, to something else as well, something of which Freud was not entirely conscious. For the work is also fragmentary or incomplete in the sense of Freud’s self-knowledge, both at the time of the actual case and at the time of his writing it. And he communicates in this piece of writing a less than complete understanding of himself, though like any great writer he provides us with the material for understanding some things that have escaped his own understanding, for filling in some gaps, for restoring certain fragments into wholes.

How else can we finally explain the fact that Freud chose to write up this particular history in such extensive detail? The reasons that he offers in both the Prefatory Remarks and the Postscript aren't entirely convincing— which doesn't of course deny them a real if fractional validity. Why should he have chosen so problematic a case, when presumably others of a more complete yet equally brief kind were available? I think this can be understood in part through Freud's own unsettled and ambiguous role in the case; that he had not yet, so to speak, "gotten rid" of it; that he had to write it out, in some measure, as an effort of self-understanding—an effort, I think we shall see, that remained heroically unfinished, a failure that nonetheless brought lasting credit with it.

IV

If we turn now to the Prefatory Remarks it may be illuminating to regard them as a kind of novelistic framing action, as in these few opening pages Freud rehearses his motives, reasons, and intentions and begins at the same time to work his insidious devices upon the reader. First, exactly like a novelist, he remarks that what he is about to let us in on is positively scandalous, for "the complete elucidation of a case of hysteria is bound to involve the revelation of intimacies and the betrayal of...secrets." Second, again like a writer of fiction, he has deliberately chosen persons, places, and circumstances that will remain obscure; the scene is laid not in metropolitan

Vienna but “in a remote provincial town.” He has from the beginning kept the circumstance that Dora was his patient such a close secret that only one other physician—“in whose discretion I have complete confidence”— knows about it. He has “postponed publication” of this essay for “four whole years,” also in the cause of discretion, and in the same cause has “allowed no name to stand which could put a non-medical reader on the scent.” Finally he has buried the case even deeper by publishing it “in a purely scientific and technical periodical” in order to secure yet another “guarantee against unauthorized readers.” He has in short made his own mystery within a mystery, and one of the effects of such obscure preliminary goings-on is to create a kind of Nabokovian frame —what we have here is a history framed by an explanation which is itself slightly out of focus.

Third, he roundly declares, this case history is science and not literature: “I am aware that—in this city, at least—there are many physicians who (revolting though it may seem) choose to read a case history of this kind not as a contribution to the psychopathology of neuroses, but as a *roman a clef* designed for their private delectation.” This may indeed be true; but it is equally true that nothing is more literary—and more modern—than the disavowal of all literary intentions. And when Freud does this again later on toward the end of “The Clinical Picture,” the situation becomes even less credible. The passage merits quotation at length.

I must now turn to consider a further complication to which I should

certainly give no space if I were a man of letters engaged upon the creation of a mental state like this for a short story, instead of being a medical man engaged upon its dissection. The element to which I must now allude can only serve to obscure and efface the outlines of the fine poetic conflict which we have been able to ascribe to Dora. This element would rightly fall a sacrifice to the censorship of a writer, for he, after all, simplifies and abstracts when he appears in the character of a psychologist. But in the world of reality, which I am trying to depict here, a complication of motives, an accumulation and conjunction of mental activities—in a word, overdetermination—is the rule.

In this context it is next to impossible to tell whether Freud is up to another of his crafty maneuverings with the reader or whether he is actually simply unconscious of how much of a modern and modernist writer he is. For when he takes to describing the difference between himself and some hypothetical man of letters and writer of short stories he is in fact embarked upon an elaborate obfuscation. That hypothetical writer is nothing but a straw man; and when Freud in apparent contrast represents himself and his own activities he is truly representing how a genuine creative writer writes. And this passage, we must also recall, came from the same pen that only a little more than a year earlier had written passages about Oedipus and Hamlet that changed for good the ways in which the civilized world would henceforth think about literature and writers.^[2] What might be thought of as this sly unliterariness of Freud's turns up in other contexts as well.

If we return to the point in the Prefatory Remarks, we find that Freud then goes on to describe other difficulties, constraints, and problematical circumstances attaching to the situation in which he finds himself. Among them is the problem of “how to record for publication” even such a short case

—the long ones are as yet altogether impossible. Moreover, since the material that critically illuminated this case was grouped about two dreams, their analysis formed a secure point of departure for the writing. (Freud is of course at home with dreams, being the unchallenged master in the reading of them.) Yet this tactical solution pushes the *entire problematic* back only another step further, since Freud at once goes on to his additional presupposition, that only those who are already familiar with “the interpretation of dreams” —that is, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), whose readership in 1901 must have amounted to a little platoon indeed — are likely to be satisfied at all with the present account. Any other reader “will find only bewilderment in these pages.” As much as it is like anything else, this is like Borges—as well as Nabokov. This off-putting and disconcerting quality, it should go without saying, is characteristically modern; the writer succumbs to no impulse to make it easy for the reader; on the contrary, he is by preference rather forbidding and does not extend a cordial welcome. The reader has been, as it were, “softened up” by his first encounter with this unique expository and narrative authority; he is thoroughly off balance and is as a consequence ready to be “educated,” by Freud. By the same token, however, if he has followed these opening few pages carefully, he is certainly no longer as prepared as he was to assert the primacy and priority of his own critical sense of things. He is precisely where Freud —and any writer —wants him to be.

At the opening of Part I, “The Clinical Picture,” Freud tells us that he begins his “treatment, indeed, by asking the patient to give me the whole story of his life and illness,” and immediately adds that “the information I receive is never enough to let me see my way about the case.” This inadequacy and unsatisfactoriness in the stories his patients tell is in distinct contrast to what Freud has read in the accounts rendered by his psychiatric contemporaries, and he continues by remarking that “I cannot help wondering how it is that the authorities can produce such smooth and exact histories in cases of hysteria. As a matter of fact the patients are incapable of giving such reports about themselves.” There is a great deal going on here. In the first place there is the key assumption that everyone — that every life, every existence —has a story, to which there is appended a corollary that most of us probably tell that story poorly. Furthermore, the relations at this point in Freud’s prose between the words “story,” “history,” and “report” are unspecified, undifferentiated, and unanalyzed and in the nature of the case contain and conceal a wealth of material.

Freud proceeds to specify what it is that is wrong with the stories his patients tell him. The difficulties are in the first instance formal shortcomings of *narrative*: the connections, “even the ostensible ones—are for the most part incoherent,” obscured and unclear; “and the sequence of different events is uncertain.” In short these narratives are disorganized and the patients are unable to tell a coherent story of their lives. What is more, he states, “the

patients' inability to give an ordered history of their life in so far as it coincides with the history of their illness is not merely characteristic of the neurosis. It also possesses great theoretical significance." What we are led at this juncture to conclude is that Freud is implying that a coherent story is in some manner connected with mental health (at the very least with the absence of hysteria), and this in turn implies assumptions of the broadest and deepest kind about both the nature of coherence and the form and structure of human life. On this reading, human life is, ideally, a connected and coherent story, with all the details in explanatory place, and with everything (or as close to everything as is practically possible) accounted for, in its proper causal or other sequence. And inversely illness amounts at least in part to suffering from an incoherent story or an inadequate narrative account of oneself.

Freud then describes in technical detail the various types and orders of narrative insufficiency that he commonly finds; they range from disingenuousness, both conscious and unconscious, to amnesias and paramnesias of several kinds and various other means of severing connections and altering chronologies. In addition, he maintains, this discomposed memory applies with particular force and virulence to "the history of the illness" for which the patient has come for treatment. In the course of a successful treatment, this incoherence, incompleteness, and fragmentariness are progressively transmuted, as facts, events, and memories

are brought forward into the forefront of the patient's mind. And he adds as a conclusion that these two aims "are coincident"—they are reached simultaneously and by the same path. Some of the consequences that can be derived from these extraordinary observations are as follows. The history of any patient's illness is itself only a substory (or a subplot), although it is at the same time a vital part of a larger structure. Furthermore, in the course of psychoanalytic treatment, nothing less than "reality" itself is made, constructed, or reconstructed. A complete story—"intelligible, consistent, and unbroken"—is the theoretical, created end story. It is a story, or a fiction, not only because it has a narrative structure but also because the narrative account has been rendered in language, in conscious speech, and no longer exists in the deformed language of symptoms, the untranslated speech of the body. At the end—at the successful end—one has come into possession of one's own story. It is a final act of self-appropriation, the appropriation by oneself of one's own history. This is in part so because one's own story is in so large a measure a phenomenon of language, as psychoanalysis is in turn a demonstration of the degree to which language can go in the reading of all our experience. What we end with, then, is a fictional construction which is at the same time satisfactory to us in the form of the truth, and as the form of the truth.

No larger tribute has ever been paid to a culture in which the various narrative and fictional forms had exerted for centuries both moral and

philosophical authority and which had produced as one of its chief climaxes the great bourgeois novels of the nineteenth century. Indeed we must see Freud's writings —and method —as themselves part of this culmination, and at the same moment, along with the great modernist novels of the first half of the twentieth century, as the beginning of the end of that tradition and its authority. Certainly the passages we have just dealt with contain heroic notions and offer an extension of heroic capabilities if not to all men then to most, at least as a possibility. Yet we cannot leave this matter so relatively unexamined, and must ask ourselves how it is that this "story" is not merely a "history" but a "case history" as well. We must ask ourselves how these associated terms are more intimately related in the nexus that is about to be wound and unwound before us. To begin to understand such questions we have to turn back to a central passage in the Prefatory Remarks. Freud undertakes therein "to describe the way in which I have overcome the *technical* difficulties of drawing up the report of this case history." Apparently "the report" and the "case history" referred to in this statement are two discriminable if not altogether discrete entities. If they are then we can further presume that, ideally at any rate, Dora (or any patient) is as much in possession of the "case history" as Freud himself. And this notion is in some part supported by what comes next. Freud mentions certain other difficulties, such as the fact that he "cannot make notes during the actual session...for fear of shaking the patient's confidence and of disturbing his own view of the

material under observation.” In the case of Dora, however, this obstacle was partly overcome because so much of the material was grouped about two dreams, and “the wording of these dreams was recorded immediately after the session” so that “they thus afforded a secure point of attachment for the chain of interpretations and recollections which proceeded from there.” Freud then writes as follows:

The case history itself was only committed to writing from memory after the treatment was at an end, but while my recollection of the case was still fresh and was heightened by my interest in its publication. Thus the record is not absolutely — phonographically — exact, but it can claim to possess a high degree of trustworthiness. Nothing of any importance has been altered in it except in some places the order in which the explanations are given; and this has been done for the sake of presenting the case in a more connected form.

Such a passage raises more questions than it resolves. The first sentence is a kind of conundrum in which case history, writing, and memory dance about in a series of logical entwinements, of possible alternate combinations, equivalences, and semiequivalences. These are followed by further equivocations about “the record,” “phonographic” exactitude, and so forth — the ambiguities of which jump out at one as soon as the terms begin to be seriously examined. For example, is “the report” the same thing as “the record,” and if “the record” were “phonographically” exact would it be a “report”? Like the prodigious narrative historian that he is, Freud is enmeshed in an irreducible paradox of history: that the term itself refers to both the activity of the historian —the writing of history —and to the objects

of his undertaking, what history is “about.” I do not think, therefore, that we can conclude that Freud has created this thick context of historical contingency and ambiguity out of what he once referred to as Viennese *schlamperei*.

The historical difficulties are further compounded by several other sequential networks that are mentioned at the outset and that figure discernibly throughout the writing. First there is the virtual Proustian complexity of Freud’s interweaving of the various strands of time in the actual account; or, to change the figure, his geological fusing of various time strata —strata which are themselves at the same time fluid and shifting. We observe this most strikingly in the palimpsest-like quality of the writing itself, which refers back to *Studies on Hysteria* of 1895; which records a treatment that took place at the end of 1900 (although it mistakes the date by a year); which then was written up in first form during the early weeks of 1901; which was then exhumed in 1905, and was revised and rewritten to an indeterminable extent before publication in that year; and to which additional critical comments in the form of footnotes were finally appended in 1923. All of these are of course held together in vital connection and interanimation by nothing else than Freud’s consciousness. But we must take notice as well of the copresence of still further different time sequences in Freud’s presentation — this copresence being itself a historical or novelistic circumstance of some magnitude. There is first the connection established by the periodically varied

rehearsal throughout the account of Freud's own theory and theoretical notions as they had developed up to that point; this practice provides a kind of running applied history of psychoanalytic theory as its development is refracted through the embroiled medium of this particular case. Then there are the different time strata of Dora's own history, which Freud handles with confident and loving exactitude. Indeed he is never more of a historical virtuoso than when he reveals himself to us as moving with compelling ease back and forth between the complex group of sequential histories and narrative accounts, with divergent sets of diction and at different levels of explanation, that constitute the extraordinary fabric of this work. He does this most conspicuously in his analytic dealings with Dora's dreams, for every dream, he reminds us, sets up a connection between two "factors," an "event during childhood" and an "event of the present day —and it endeavors to reshape the present on the model of the remote past." The existence or recreation of the past in the present is in fact "history" in more than one of its manifold senses, and is one of Freud's many analogies to the following equally celebrated utterance.

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honored disguise and this borrowed language. (*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.*)

And just as Marx regards the history-makers of the past as sleepwalkers, “who required recollections of past world history in order to drug themselves concerning their own content,” so Freud similarly regards the conditions of dream-formation, of neurosis itself, and even of the cure of neurosis, namely the analytic experience of transference. They are all of them species of living past history in the present. If the last of these works out satisfactorily, then a case history is at the end transfigured. It becomes an inseparable part of an integral life history. Freud is of course the master historian of those transfigurations.

V

At the very beginning, after he had listened to the father’s account of “Dora’s impossible behavior,” Freud abstained from comment, for, he remarks, “I had resolved from the first to suspend my judgement of the true state of affairs till I had heard the other side as well.” Such a suspension inevitably recalls an earlier revolutionary project. In describing the originating plan of *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge writes that it “was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.” We know very well that Freud had a more than

ordinary capacity in this direction, and that one of the most dramatic moments in the prehistory of psychoanalysis had to do precisely with his taking on faith facts that turned out to be fantasies. Yet Freud is not only the reader suspending judgment and disbelief until he has heard the other side of the story; and he is not only the poet or writer who must induce a similar process in himself if he is to elicit it in his audience. He is also concomitantly a principal, an actor, a living character in the drama that he is unfolding in print before us. Moreover, that suspension of disbelief is in no sense incompatible with a large body of assumptions, many of them definite, a number of them positively alarming.

They have to do largely with sexuality and in particular with female sexuality. They are brought to a focus in the central scene of Dora's life (and case), a scene that Freud orchestrates with inimitable richness and to which he recurs thematically at a number of junctures with the tact and sense of form that one associates with a classical composer of music (or with Proust, Mann, or Joyce). Dora told this episode to Freud toward the beginning of their relation, after "the first difficulties of the treatment had been overcome." It is the scene between her and Herr K. that took place when she was fourteen years old—that is, four years before the present tense of the case—and acted Freud said as a "sexual trauma." The reader will recall that on this occasion Herr K. contrived to get Dora alone "at his place of business" in the town of B, and then without warning or preparation "suddenly clasped the girl to him

and pressed a kiss upon her lips.” Freud then asserts that “this was *surely* just the situation to call up a distinct feeling of sexual excitement in a *girl of fourteen* who had *never before* been approached. But Dora had at that moment a violent feeling of disgust, tore herself free from the man, and hurried past him to the staircase and from there to the street door” (all italics are mine). She avoided seeing the K.’s for a few days after this, but then relations returned to “normal”—if such a term survives with any permissible sense in the present context. She continued to meet Herr K., and neither of them ever mentioned “the little scene.” Moreover, Freud adds, “according to her account Dora kept it a secret till her confession during the treatment,” and he pretty clearly implies that he believes this.

This episode preceded by two years the scene at the lake that acted as the precipitating agent for the severe stage of Dora’s illness; and it was this later episode and the entire structure that she and others had elaborated about it that she had first presented to Freud, who continues thus:

In this scene —second in order of mention, but first in order of time —the behavior of this child of fourteen was already entirely and completely hysterical. I should without question consider a person hysterical in whom an occasion for sexual excitement elicited feelings that were preponderantly or exclusively unpleasurable; and I should do so whether or not the person were capable of producing somatic symptoms.

Also, in Dora’s feeling of disgust an obscure psychological mechanism called the “reversal of affect” was brought into play; but so was another process, and here Freud introduces —casually and almost as a throwaway —one more of

his grand theoretical-clinical formulations, namely the idea of the “*displacement of sensation*,” or as it has more commonly come to be referred to, the “displacement upward.” “Instead of the genital sensation which would certainly have been felt by a healthy girl in such circumstances, Dora was overcome by the unpleasurable feeling which is proper to the tract of mucous membrane at the entrance to the alimentary canal —that is by disgust.” Although the disgust did not persist as a permanent symptom but remained behind residually and potentially in a general distaste for food and poor appetite, a second displacement upward was the resultant of this scene “in the shape of a sensory hallucination which occurred from time to time and even made its appearance while she was telling me her story. She declared that she could still feel upon the upper part of her body the pressure of Herr K.’s embrace.” Taking into account certain other of Dora’s “inexplicable”—and hitherto unmentioned —“peculiarities” (such as her phobic reluctance to walk past any man she saw engaged in animated conversation with a woman), Freud “formed in my own mind the following reconstruction of the scene. I believe that during the man’s passionate embrace she felt not merely his kiss upon her lips but also his erect member against her body. The perception was revolting to her; it was dismissed from her memory, repressed, and replaced by the innocent sensation of pressure upon her thorax, which in turn derived an excessive intensity from its repressed source.” This repressed source was located in the erotogenic oral zone, which

in Dora's case had undergone a developmental deformation from the period of infancy. And thus, Freud concludes, "the pressure of the erect member probably led to an analogous change in the corresponding female organ, the clitoris; and the excitation of this second erotogenic zone was referred by a process of displacement to the simultaneous pressure against the thorax and became fixed there."

There is something questionable and askew in this passage of unquestionable genius. In it Freud is at once dogmatically certain and very uncertain. He is dogmatically certain of what the normative sexual response in young and other females is, and asserts himself to that effect. At the same time, he is, in my judgment, utterly uncertain about where Dora is, or was, developmentally. At one moment in the passage he calls her a "girl," at another a "child" —but in point of fact he treats her throughout as if this fourteen-, sixteen-, and eighteen-year-old adolescent had the capacities for sexual response of a grown woman —indeed at a later point he conjectures again that Dora either responded, or should have responded, to the embrace with specific genital heat and moisture. Too many determinations converge at this locus for us to do much more than single out a few of the more obvious influencing circumstances. In the first instance there was Freud's own state of knowledge about such matters at the time, which was better than anyone else's, but still relatively crude and undifferentiated. Second, we may be in the presence of what can only be accounted for by assuming that a genuine

historical-cultural change has taken place between then and now. It may be that Freud was expressing a legitimate partial assumption of his time and culture when he ascribes to a fourteen-year-old adolescent —whom he calls a “child”—the normative responses that are ascribed today to a fully developed and mature woman. This supposition is borne out if we consider the matter from the other end, from the standpoint of what has happened to the conception of adolescence in our own time. It begins now in pre-puberty and extends to —who knows when? Certainly its extensibility in our time has reached well beyond the age of thirty. Third, Freud is writing in this passage as an advocate of nature, sexuality, openness, and candor—and within such a context Dora cannot hope to look good. The very framing of the context in such a manner is itself slightly accusatory. In this connection we may note that Freud goes out of his way to tell us that he knew Herr K. personally and that “he was still quite young and of prepossessing appearance.” If we let Nabokov back into the picture for a moment, we may observe that Dora is no Lolita, and go on to suggest that *Lolita* is an anti-*Dora*.

Yet we must also note that in this episode —the condensed and focusing scene of the entire case history —Freud is as much a novelist as he is an analyst. For the central moment of this central scene is a “reconstruction” that he “formed in [his] own mind.” This pivotal construction becomes henceforth the principal “reality” of the case, and we must also observe that this reality remains Freud’s more than Dora’s, since he was never quite able to convince

her of the plausibility of the construction, or, to regard it from the other pole of the dyad, she was never quite able to accept this version of reality, of what “really” happened. Freud was not at first unduly distressed by this resistance on her side, for part of his understanding of what he had undertaken to do in psychoanalysis was to instruct his patients — and his readers—in the nature of reality. This reality was the reality that modern readers of literature have also had to be educated in. It was conceived of as a *world of meanings*. As Freud put it in one of those stop-you-dead-in-your-tracks footnotes that he was so expert in using strategically, we must at almost every moment “be prepared to be met not by one but by several causes—by *overdetermination*.” Thus the world of meanings is a world of multiple and compacted causations; it is a world in which everything has a meaning, which means that everything has more than one meaning. Every symptom is a concrete universal in several senses. It not only embodies a network of significances but also “serves to represent several unconscious mental processes simultaneously.” By the same token, since it is a world almost entirely brought into existence, maintained, and mediated through a series of linguistic transactions between patient and physician, it partakes in full measure of the virtually limitless complexity of language, in particular its capacities for producing statements characterized by multiplicity, duplicity, and ambiguity of significance. Freud lays particular stress on the ambiguity, is continually on the lookout for it, and brings his own formidable skills in this direction to bear most strikingly on

the analyses of Dora's dreams. The first thing he picks up in the first of her dreams is in fact an ambiguous statement, with which he at once confronts her.

As if this were not sufficient, the actual case itself was full of such literary and novelistic devices or conventions as thematic analogies, double plots, reversals, inversions, variations, betrayals, etc. —full of what the “sharp-sighted” Dora as well as the sharp-sighted Freud thought of as “hidden connections”—though it is important to add that Dora and her physician mean different things by the same phrase. And as the case proceeds Freud continues to confront Dora with such connections and tries to enlist her assistance in their construction. For example, one of the least pleasant characteristics in Dora's nature was her habitual reproachfulness—it was directed mostly toward her father but radiated out in all directions. Freud regarded this behavior in his own characteristic manner: “A string of reproaches against other people,” he comments, “leads one to suspect the existence of a string of self-reproaches with the same content.” Freud accordingly followed the procedure of turning back “each simple reproach on the speaker herself.” When Dora reproached her father with malingering in order to keep himself in the company of Frau K., Freud felt “obliged to point out to the patient that her present ill-health was just as much actuated by motives and was just as tendentious as had been Frau K.'s illness, which she had understood so well.” At such moments Dora begins to mirror the other

characters in the case, as they in differing degrees all mirror one another as well.

Part of that sense, we have come to understand, is that the writer is or ought to be conscious of the part that he—in whatever guise, voice, or persona he chooses—invariably and unavoidably plays in the world he represents. Oddly enough, although there is none of his writings in which Freud is more vigorously active than he is here, it is precisely this activity that he subjects to the least self-conscious scrutiny, that he almost appears to fend off. For example, I will now take my head in my hands and suggest that his extraordinary analysis of Dora's first dream is inadequate on just this count. He is only dimly and marginally aware of his central place in it (he is clearly incorporated into the figure of Dora's father), comments on it only as an addition to Dora's own addendum to the dream, and does nothing to exploit it. Instead of analyzing his own part in what he has done and what he is writing, Freud continues to behave like an unreliable narrator, treating the material about which he is writing as if it were literature but excluding himself from both that treatment and that material. At one moment he refers to himself as someone "who has learnt to appreciate the delicacy of the fabric of structures such as dreams," intimating what I surmise he incontestably believed, that dreams are natural works of art. And when, in the analysis of the second dream, we find ourselves back at the scene at the lake again; when Dora recalls that the only plea to her of Herr K. that she could remember is

“You know I get nothing out of my wife”; when these were precisely the same words used by Dora’s father in describing to Freud his relation to Dora’s mother; and when Freud speculates that Dora may even “have heard her father make the same complaint ...just as I myself did from his own lips”—when a conjunction such as this occurs, then we know we are in a novel, probably by Proust. Time has recurred, the repressed has returned, plot, double plot, and counterplot have all intersected, and “reality” turns out to be something that for all practical purposes is indistinguishable from a systematic fictional creation.

Finally when at the very end Freud turns to deal —rudimentarily as it happens—with the decisive issue of the case, the transferences, everything is transformed into literature, into reading and writing. Transferences, he writes, “are new editions or facsimiles” of tendencies, fantasies, and relations in which “the person of the physician” replaces some earlier person. When the substitution is a simple one, the transferences may be said to be “merely new impressions or reprints”: Freud is explicit about the metaphor he is using. Others “more ingeniously constructed...will no longer be new impressions, but revised editions.” And he goes on, quite carried away by these figures, to institute a comparison between dealing with the transference and other analytic procedures. “It is easy to learn how to interpret dreams,” he remarks, “to extract from the patient’s associations his unconscious thoughts and memories, and to practise similar explanatory arts: for these the

patient himself will always provide the text.” The startling group of suppositions contained in this sentence should not distract us from noting the submerged ambiguity in it. The patient does not merely provide the text; he also is the text, the writing to be read, the language to be interpreted. With the transference, however, we move to a different degree of difficulty and onto a different level of explanation. It is only after the transference has been resolved, Freud concludes, “that a patient arrives at a sense of conviction of the validity of the connections which have been constructed during the analysis.” I will refrain from entering the veritable series of Chinese boxes opened up by that last statement, and will content myself by proposing that in this passage as a whole Freud is using literature and writing not only creatively and heuristically — as he so often does—but defensively as well.

The writer or novelist is not the only partial role taken up unconsciously or semiconsciously by Freud in the course of this work. He also figures prominently in the text in his capacity as a nineteenth-century man of science and as a representative Victorian critic—employing the seriousness, energy, and commitment of the Victorian ethos to deliver itself from its own excesses. We have already seen him affirming the positive nature of female sexuality, “the genital sensation which would certainly have been felt by a healthy girl in such circumstances,” but which Dora did not feel. He goes a good deal further than this. At a fairly early moment in the analysis he faces Dora with the fact that she has “an aim in view which she hoped to gain by her illness. That aim

could be none other than to detach her father from Frau K.” Her prayers and arguments had not worked; her suicide letter and fainting fits had done no better. Dora knew quite well how much her father loved her, and, Freud continues to address her:

I felt quite convinced that she would recover at once if only her father were to tell her that he had sacrificed Frau K. for the sake of her health. But, I added, I hoped he would not let himself be persuaded to do this, for then she would have learned what a powerful weapon she had in her hands, and she would certainly not fail on every future occasion to make use once more of her liability to ill-health. Yet if her father refused to give way to her, I was quite sure she would not let herself be deprived of her illness so easily.

This is pretty strong stuff, considering both the age and her age. I think, moreover, that we are justified in reading an overdetermination out of this utterance of Freud’s and in suggesting that he had motives additional to strictly therapeutic ones in saying what he did.

In a related sense Freud goes out of his way to affirm his entitlement to speak freely and openly about sex —he is, one keeps forgetting, the great liberator and therapist of speech. The passage is worth quoting at some length.

It is possible for a man to talk to girls and women upon sexual matters of every kind without doing them harm and without bringing suspicion upon himself, so long as, in the first place, he adopts a particular way of doing it, and, in the second place, can make them feel convinced that it is unavoidable. . . .The best way of speaking about such things is to be dry and direct; and that is at the same time the method furthest removed from the prurience with which the same subjects are handled in “society,” and to which girls and women alike are so thoroughly accustomed. I call bodily organs and processes by their technical names. . . . *J’appelle un chat un chat*. I have certainly heard of some people —doctors and laymen —who are

scandalized by a therapeutic method in which conversations of this sort occur, and who appear to envy either me or my patients the titillation which, according to their notions, such a method must afford. But I am too well acquainted with the respectability of these gentry to excite myself over them. . . . The right attitude is: *"pour faire une omelette il faut casser des oeufs."*

I believe that Freud would have been the first to be amused by the observation that in this splendid extended declaration about plain speech (at this point he takes his place in a tradition coming directly down from Luther), he feels it necessary to disappear not once but twice into French. I think he would have said that such slips—and the revelation of their meanings— are the smallest price one has to pay for the courage to go on. And he goes on with a vengeance, immediately following this passage with another in which he aggressively refuses to moralize in any condemnatory sense about sexuality. As for the attitude that regards the perverse nature of his patient's fantasies as horrible:

I should like to say emphatically that a medical man has no business to indulge in such passionate condemnation. ...We are faced by a fact; and it is to be hoped that we shall grow accustomed to it, when we have learned to put our own tastes on one side. We must learn to speak without indignation of what we call the sexual perversions. ... The uncertainty in regard to the boundaries of what is to be called normal sexual life, when we take different races and different epochs into account, should in itself be enough to cool the zealot's ardor. We surely ought not to forget that the perversion which is the most repellent to us, the sensual love of a man for a man, was not only tolerated by the people so far our superiors in cultivation as were the Greeks, but was actually entrusted by them with important social functions.

We can put this assertion into one of its appropriate contexts by recalling that the trial and imprisonment of Oscar Wilde had taken place only five years earlier. And the man who is speaking out here has to be regarded as the

greatest of Victorian physicians, who in this passage is fearlessly revealing one of the inner and unacknowledged meanings of the famous “tyranny of Greece over Germany.” And as we shall see he has by no means reached the limits beyond which he will not go.

How far he is willing to go begins to be visible as we observe him sliding almost imperceptibly from being the nineteenth-century man of science to being the remorseless “teller of truth,” the character in a play by Ibsen who is not to be deterred from his “mission.” In a historical sense the two roles are not adventitiously related, any more than it is adventitious that the “truth” that is told often has unforeseen and destructive consequences and that it can rebound upon the teller. But we see him most vividly at this implacable work in the two great dream interpretations, which are largely “photographic” reproductions of dramatic discourse and dialogue. Very early on in the analysis of the first dream, Freud takes up the dream element of the “jewel-case” and makes the unavoidable symbolic interpretation of it. He then proceeds to say the following to this Victorian maiden who has been in treatment with him for all of maybe six weeks.

“So you are ready to give Herr K. what his wife withholds from him. That is the thought which has had to be repressed with so much energy, and which has made it necessary for every one of its elements to be turned into its opposite. The dream confirms once more what I had already told you before you dreamt it —that you are summoning up your old love for your father in order to protect yourself against your love for Herr K. But what do all these efforts show? Not only that you are afraid of Herr K., but that you are still more afraid of yourself, and of the temptation you feel to yield to him. In short, these efforts prove once more how deeply you love him.”

He immediately adds that “naturally Dora would not follow me in this part of the interpretation,” but this does not deter him for a moment from pressing on with further interpretations of the same order; and this entire transaction is in its character and quality prototypical for the case as a whole. The Freud we have here is not the sage of the Berggasse, not the master who delivered the incomparable *Introductory Lectures* of 1916-1917, not the tragic Solomon of *Civilization and Its Discontents*. This is an earlier Freud, the Freud of the Fliess letters, the Freud of the case of Dora as well. It is Freud the relentless investigator pushing on no matter what. The Freud that we meet with here is a demonic Freud, a Freud who is the servant of his *daimon*. That *daimon* in whose service Freud knows no limits is the spirit of science, the truth, or “reality”—it doesn’t matter which; for him they are all the same. Yet it must be emphasized that the “reality” Freud insists upon is very different from the “reality” that Dora is claiming and clinging to. And it has to be admitted that not only does Freud overlook for the most part this critical difference; he also adopts no measures for dealing with it. The demon of interpretation has taken hold of him, and it is this power that presides over the case of Dora.

In fact as the case history advances it becomes increasingly clear to the careful reader that Freud and not Dora has become the central character in the action. Freud the narrator does in the writing what Freud the first psychoanalyst appears to have done in actuality. We begin to sense that it is his story that is being written and not hers that is being retold. Instead of

letting Dora appropriate her own story, Freud became the appropriator of it. The case history belongs progressively less to her than it does to him. It may be that this was an inevitable development, that it is one of the typical outcomes of an analysis that fails, that Dora was under any circumstances unable to become the appropriator of her own history, the teller of her own story. Blame does not necessarily or automatically attach to Freud. Nevertheless, by the time he gets to the second dream he is able to write, "I shall present the material produced during the analysis of this dream in the somewhat haphazard order in which it recurs to my mind." He makes such a presentation for several reasons, most of which are legitimate. But one reason almost certainly is that by this juncture it is his own mind that chiefly matters to him, and it is *his* associations to her dream that are of principal importance.

At the same time, as the account progresses, Freud has never been more inspired, more creative, more inventive; as the reader sees Dora gradually slipping further and further away from Freud, the power and complexity of the writing reach dizzying proportions. At times they pass over into something else. Due allowance has always to be made for the absolutizing tendency of genius, especially when as in the case of Dora the genius is writing with the license of a poet and the ambiguity of a seer. But Freud goes beyond this.

When Dora reports her second dream, Freud spends two hours of

inspired insight in elucidating some of its meanings. “At the end of the second session,” he writes, “I expressed my satisfaction at the results.” The satisfaction in question is in large measure self-satisfaction, for Dora responded to Freud’s expression of it with the following words uttered in “a depreciatory tone: ‘Why, has anything so remarkable come out?’” That satisfaction was to be of short duration, for Dora opened the third session by telling Freud that this was the last time she would be there—it was December 31, 1900. Freud’s remarks that “her breaking off so unexpectedly just when my hopes of a successful termination of the treatment were at their highest, and her thus bringing those hopes to nothing—this was an unmistakable act of vengeance on her part” are only partly warranted. There was, or should have been, nothing unexpected about Dora’s decision to terminate; indeed Freud himself on the occasion of the first dream had already detected such a decision on Dora’s part and had communicated this finding to her. Moreover, his “highest” hopes for a successful outcome of the treatment seem almost entirely without foundation. In such a context the hopes of success almost unavoidably become a matter of self-reference and point to the immense *intellectual* triumph that Freud was aware he was achieving with the material adduced by his patient. On the matter of “vengeance,” however, Freud cannot be faulted; Dora was, among many other things, certainly getting her own back on Freud by refusing to allow him to bring her story to an end in the way he saw fit. And he in turn is quite candid about the injury he felt she had

caused him. “No one who, like me,” he writes, “conjures up the most evil of those half-tamed demons that inhabit the human breast, and seeks to wrestle with them, can expect to come through the struggle unscathed.”

This admission of vulnerability, which Freud artfully manages to blend with the suggestion that he is a kind of modern combination of Jacob and Faust, is in keeping with the weirdness and wildness of the case as a whole and with this last hour. That hour recurs to the scene at the lake, two years before, and its aftermath. And Freud ends this final hour with the following final interpretation. He reminds Dora that she was in love with Herr K.; that she wanted him to divorce his wife; that even though she was quite young at the time she wanted “to wait for him, and you took it that he was only waiting till you were grown up enough to be his wife. I imagine that this was a perfectly serious plan for the future in your eyes.” But Freud does not say this in order to contradict it or categorize it as a fantasy of the adolescent girl’s unconscious imagination. On the contrary, he has very different ideas in view, for he goes on to tell her,

“You have not even got the right to assert that it was out of the question for Herr K. to have had any such intention; you have told me enough about him that points directly towards his having such an intention. Nor does his behavior at L___ contradict this view. After all, you did not let him finish his speech and do not know what he meant to say to you.”

He has not done with her yet, for he then goes on to bring in the other relevant parties and offers her the following conclusion:

“Incidentally, the scheme would by no means have been so impracticable. Your father’s relation with Frau K . . . made it certain that her consent to a divorce could be obtained; and you can get anything you like out of your father. Indeed, if your temptation at L_____ had had a different upshot, this would have been *the only possible solution for all the parties concerned*” [italics mine].

No one —at least no one in recent years —has accused Freud of being a swinger, but this is without question a swinging solution that is being offered. It is of course possible that he feels free to make such a proposal only because he knows that nothing in the way of action can come of it; but with him you never can tell —as I hope I have already demonstrated. One has only to imagine what in point of ego strength, balance, and self acceptance would have been required of Dora alone in this arrangement of wife-and-daughter-swapping to recognize at once its extreme irresponsibility, to say the least. At the same time we must bear in mind that such a suggestion is not incongruent with the recently revealed circumstance that Freud analyzed his own daughter. Genius makes up its own rules as it goes along—and breaks them as well. This “only possible solution” was one of the endings that Freud wanted to write to Dora’s story; he had others in mind besides, but none of them were to come about. Dora refused or was unable to let him do this; she refused to be a character in the story that Freud was composing for her, and wanted to finish it herself. As we now know, the ending she wrote was a very bad one indeed.

VI

In this extraordinary work Freud and Dora often appear as unconscious, parodic refractions of each other. Both of them insist with implacable will upon the primacy of “reality,” although the realities each has in mind differ radically. Both of them use reality, “the truth,” as a weapon. Freud does so by forcing interpretations upon Dora before she is ready for them or can accept them. And this aggressive truth bounds back upon the teller, for Dora leaves him. Dora in turn uses her version of reality —it is “outer” reality that she insists upon —aggressively as well. She has used it from the outset against her father, and five months after she left Freud she had the opportunity to use it against the K’s. In May of 1901 one of the K’s children dies. Dora took the occasion to pay them a visit of condolence —

She took her revenge on them. . . . To the wife she said: “I know you have an affair with my father”; and the other did not deny it. From the husband she drew an admission of the scene by the lake which he had disputed, and brought the news of her vindication home to her father.

She told this to Freud fifteen months after she had departed, when she returned one last time to visit him —to ask him, without sincerity, for further help, and “to finish her story.” She finished her story, and as for the rest Freud remarks, “I do not know what kind of help she wanted from me, but I promised to forgive her for having deprived me of the satisfaction of affording her a far more radical cure for her troubles.”

But the matter is not hopelessly obscure, as Freud himself has already confessed. What went wrong with the case, “its great defect, which led to its

being broken off prematurely,” was something that had to do with the transference; and Freud writes that “I did not succeed in mastering the transference in good time.” He was in fact just beginning to learn about this therapeutic phenomenon, and the present passage is the first really important one about it to have been written. It is also in the nature of things heavily occluded. On Dora’s side the transference went wrong in several senses. In the first place there was the failure on her part to establish an adequate positive transference to Freud. She was not free enough to respond to him erotically— in fantasy —or intellectually— by accepting his interpretations: both or either of these being prerequisites for the mysterious “talking cure” to begin to work. And in the second, halfway through the case a negative transference began to emerge, quite clearly in the first dream. Freud writes that he “was deaf to this first note of warning,” and as a result this negative “transference took me unawares, and, because of the unknown quantity in me which reminded Dora of Herr K., she took her revenge on me as she wanted to take her revenge on him, and deserted me as she believed herself to have been deceived and deserted by him.” This is, I believe, the first mention in print of the conception that is known as “acting out”—out of which, one may incidentally observe, considerable fortunes have been made.

We are, however, in a position to say something more than this. For there is a reciprocating process in the analyst known as the countertransference, and in the case of Dora this went wrong too. Although

Freud describes Dora at the beginning of the account as being “in the first bloom of youth — a girl of intelligent and engaging looks,” almost nothing attractive about her comes forth in the course of the writing. As it unwinds, and it becomes increasingly evident that Dora is not responding adequately to Freud, it also becomes clear that Freud is not responding favorably to this response, and that he doesn’t in fact like Dora very much. He doesn’t like her negative sexuality, her inability to surrender to her own erotic impulses. He doesn’t like “her really remarkable achievements in the direction of intolerable behavior.” He doesn’t like her endless reproachfulness. Above all, he doesn’t like her inability to surrender herself to him. For what Freud was as yet unprepared to face was not merely the transference, but the countertransference as well—in the case of Dora it was largely a negative countertransference—an unanalyzed part of himself. I should like to suggest that this cluster of unanalyzed impulses and ambivalences was in part responsible for Freud’s writing of this great text immediately after Dora left him. It was his way—and one way—of dealing with, mastering, expressing, and neutralizing such material. Yet the neutralization was not complete; or we can put the matter in another way and state that Freud’s creative honesty was such that it compelled him to write the case of Dora as he did, and that his writing has allowed us to make out in this remarkable fragment a still fuller picture. As I have said before, this fragment of Freud’s is more complete and coherent than the fullest case studies of anyone else. Freud’s case

histories are a new form of literature —they are creative narratives that include their own analysis and interpretation. Nevertheless, like the living works of literature that they are, the material they contain is always richer than the original analysis and interpretation that accompany it; and this means that future generations will recur to these works and will find in them a language they are seeking and a story they need to be told.

Notes

[1] "Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History," by Steven Marcus. Copyright © 1974 by Steven Marcus. The essay first appeared in its present form in *Partisan Review* 41:1 (1974), 12-23, 89-108; the full version appears in *Representations: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Random House, 1975). Reprinted by permission of the author.

[2] Some years earlier Freud has been more candid and more innocent about the relation of his writing to literature. In *Studies on Hysteria* he introduces his discussion of the case of Fräulein Elisabeth von R. with the following disarming admission.

I have not always been a psychotherapist. Like other neuropathologists, I was trained to employ local diagnoses and electro-prognosis, and it still strikes me myself as strange that the case histories I write should read like short stories and that, as one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science. I must console myself with the reflection that the nature of the subject is evidently responsible for this, rather than any preference of my own. The fact is that local diagnosis and electrical reactions lead nowhere in the study of hysteria, whereas a detailed description of mental processes such as we are accustomed to find in the works of imaginative writers enables me, with the use of a few psychological formulas, to obtain at least some kind of insight into the course of that affection.

Chronology of Important Dates

- 1856 Freud born in Freiberg, Moravia (now Pribor, Czechoslovakia), on May 6.
- 1860 Freud family moves to Vienna.
- 1865 Enters Gymnasium.
- 1873 Enters University of Vienna as medical student.
- 1876-82 Works as assistant in Brucke's Institute of Physiology; meets Josef Breuer.
- 1877 First medical research articles published.
- 1880 Translates four essays by John Stuart Mill for a German edition of Mill's works.
- 1881 Takes medical degree.
- 1882 Engagement to Martha Bernays; begins work at Vienna General Hospital.
- 1885 Appointed *Privatdozent* (lecturer) in neuropathology at University of Vienna.
- 1885-86 Attends Charcot's lectures at the Salpêtrière in Paris, October to February.

- 1886 Marries Martha Bernays; begins private medical practice as specialist in nervous diseases.
- 1887 Meets Berlin physician and medical theorist Wilhelm Fliess; begins use of hypnotism in private practice.
- 1889 Visits Bernheim in Nancy for further researches into hypnosis.
- 1893 "Preliminary Communication" (with Breuer).
- 1894 "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defense."
- 1895 *Studies on Hysteria* (with Breuer, although cases and discussions written and signed separately); writes *Project for a Scientific Psychology* and mails it to Fliess (first published in 1950).
- 1896 Death of Freud's father, Jakob Freud; first use of term "psychoanalysis."
- 1897 Abandons seduction theory; begins self-analysis.
- 1899 "Screen Memories."
- 1900 *The Interpretation of Dreams* (published in December 1899, but postdated for the new century).
- 1901 *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*.

- 1902 Appointed Professor Extraordinarius (associate professor) at University of Vienna; Wednesday evening meetings begin at Freud's house of the group that will become the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society; end of friendship with Fliess.
- 1905 *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality; Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious; Case of Dora* ("Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Flysteria").
- 1906 Jung makes contact with Freud.
- 1907 *Jensen's 'Gradiva.'*
- 1908 First international meeting of psychoanalysts at Salzburg; "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming"; "Civilized' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness."
- 1909 Visits America with Jung and Sandor Ferenczi; receives honorary degree from Clark University and delivers *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*; A. A. Brill's first English translations begin to appear; Case of Little Hans ("Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy"); Case of the Rat Man ("Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis").
- 1910 *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood; "The Antithetical Sense of Primal Words.'*"
- 1911 The Case of Schreber ("Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia").
- 1911-15 Papers on psychoanalytic technique.
- 1913 *Totem and Taboo*; association with Jung terminated; Jung secedes from International

Psychoanalytic Association the following year.

- 1914 *The Moses of Michelangelo; On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement; "On Narcissism."*
- 1915 Writes twelve papers on metapsychology, of which only five survive ("Instincts and their Vicissitudes," "Repression," "The Unconscious," "A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams," "Mourning and Melancholia").
- 1915-17 Gives *Introductory Lectures* at University of Vienna.
- 1918 Case of the Wolf Man ("From the History of an Infantile Neurosis").
- 1919 "The 'Uncanny.'"
- 1920 *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.*
- 1921 *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego.*
- 1923 *The Ego and the Id*; first of thirty-three operations for cancer of the jaw and palate.
- 1925 "A Note on the 'Mystic Writing-Pad'"; "Negation"; *An Autobiographical Study.*
- 1926 *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety; The Question of Lay Analysis.*
- 1927 *The Future of an Illusion.*

- 1928 "Dostoyevsky and Parricide."
- 1930 Goethe Prize; *Civilization and its Discontents*; death of Freud's mother.
- 1933 Hitler comes to power; burning of Freud's books in Berlin; *New Introductory Lectures*.
- 1936 Eightieth birthday; formal celebrations; elected Corresponding Member of the Royal Society.
- 1937 "Analysis Terminable and Interminable."
- 1938 Nazis enter Austria; Freud leaves for England; *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (published posthumously)
- 1939 *Moses and Monotheism*; dies on September 23 in Hampstead, London.

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Life and Career

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