

Freud's *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* as a *roman à clef*

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The analysis of Dora, which Freud entitled *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, is the only example of the great Freudian case studies that deals with a female patient. Since the seventies, the case of Dora therefore figured as an object of exercise for feminine revisions of orthodox psychoanalysis. In addition, a wealth of studies is available which, for instance, discuss Freud's text in regards to the history of psychoanalytic theory, with respect to treatment methods, the discussion of hysteria or even concerning its textual nature.

In the following, I will focus on an inquiry which continues and specifies the questions raised by Steven Marcus and Neil Hertz as to the textual nature of the *Fragment*¹. One of the many genre references to be found in the *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* will be dealt with in detail: the genre reference to the *roman à clef*. The study of Dora will thus be discussed with regards to a *literary* category.

Only a few of the genre ascriptions the text deliberately deals with shall be mentioned at this point: case history (medical and treatment history), fragment, novella, novel, fantasy, detective story, courtroom drama, appendix (being a supplement to a previous book: *The Interpretation of Dreams*) and the *roman à clef*. Some of these genre ascriptions are done with special emphasis. Thus, for instance, the text claims for itself the tag of a «medical and treatment history», the label of a «case history»; it flirts with the proximity between the doctor and the detective, between psychoanalytic study and detective story, and is obsessively occupied with its status as a fragment². Other genres, on the other hand, seem to have only been brought into the mix in order to be purposely crossed out and discarded – as is the case with the *roman à clef*.

In his foreword, Freud remarks rather less amicably upon a possible reception of the *Fragment* as a *roman à clef*:

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¹ See Steven Marcus (1974): Freud und Dora. Roman, Geschichte, Krankengeschichte. In *Psyche* (28:1, pp. 32-79); and Neil Hertz (1983): Dora's Secrets, Freud's Techniques. In: *Diacritics* (13:1, pp. 65-76).

² In this context, the fragment can be seen as a genre which rose to popularity during Early Romanticism. The *Fragment* points to its status as a fragment through its very title. Regarding the concept of the fragment in Early Romanticism see Waldemar Fromm (2000): Geheimnis der Entzweyung. Zur Ästhetik des Fragments in der Frühromantik. In *Euphorion* (94, pp. 125-147).

I know that there are – at least in this city – many doctors who – disgustingly enough – want to read this medical history not as a contribution to the psychopathology of neurosis but instead as a *roman à clef* meant for their amusement. To this type of readers I give the assurance that all of my medical histories intended to be imparted later on will be protected by similar guaranties of secrecy from their shrewdness, although my use of my material has to undergo a quite enormous restriction because of this resolution³.

However, in, for example, hiding the identity of his patient Ida Bauer with the alias of Dora and in performing other disguises and adjustments, Freud deliberately operates with codification, with encryption. Hence he uses the strategy of the *roman à clef*, which works as follows: A ⟨real⟩, a ⟨factual⟩ constellation is permuted and transposed – and this is done in such a way that the text points to its codified nature and the possibility of decoding it⁴. For how effectively Freud operates with the principle of codification is especially apparent in how the deciphering of *Dora = Ida Bauer* was even possible. Freud evidently works with similar or sometimes the very same techniques as writers of *roman à clefs*. For example, he gives featured persons other names, but at the same time provides the possibility of finding clues as to which real figure might have been alluded to. Thus readers which «want to read this medical history [...] as a *roman à clef* meant for their amusement»⁵ are those recipients who have understood the ⟨principle of the key⟩ for unlocking the novel – and therefore participate in the author’s game. Case history and *roman à clef* share their degree of referentiality, their very explicit recourse to ⟨reality⟩; a recourse which they display, but which they in a second move – on grounds of decency – cloak.

Having said that, a reading approach which treats his case history – which has been coded according to the requirements of a *roman à clef* – as a *roman à clef* Freud calls «disgusting enough»⁶. But, as is widely known, disgust is not only mentioned in the foreword to the *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* cited above, but also in the reconstruction of Dora’s medical history. The fourteen-year-old Dora is ordered into the «shop business» of Mr. K., her father’s friend, where he alone awaits her. He

suddenly pressed the girl close to his body and put a kiss on her lips. That was probably a situation which would cause a definite feeling of sexual excitement in a virginal 14-year-old girl. But Dora felt an enormous disgust in this moment, broke away from him and hurried past the man to the steps and from there to the house door⁷.

Using this example, Freud suggests a ⟨overdetermination⟩ of feelings of *disgust*; he classifies Dora’s reaction as not normal, as hysterical and thus argues for a pathological *reversal of affect*:

Every person in whom the occasion for sexual arousal mostly or exclusively evokes feelings of revulsion I would unobjectionably deem a hysteric, whether she is able to produce somatic symptoms or not. [...] The case of our patient Dora is not yet sufficiently characterized by the emphasis on her reversal of affect; it has to be further noted that a *displacement* of feelings has occurred here. Instead of a sensation of the genitals which certainly would not have been absent in a healthy girl under these circumstances, feelings of aversion arose in her, which belong to the area of the mucous membrane leading to the gastrointestinal tract, which we call disgust⁸.

³ Sigmund Freud (1905 [1901]): Bruchstück einer Hysterie-Analyse. In: Studienausgabe VI (Hysterie und Angst), 8th rev. edition, Frankfurt a.M. 1989, Tr. Asokan Nirmalarajah, pp. 83-186.

⁴ Regarding the strategies of the *roman à clef* see also Gertrud Maria Rösch (2004): *Clavis scientiae. Studien zum Verhältnis von Faktizität und Fiktionalität am Fall der Schlüsselliteratur*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.

⁵ Freud: Bruchstück, p. 88.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 106, emphasis not added.

Dora's disgust, according to Freud's analysis, is a substitution for the spontaneous, displaced and reversed feelings of lust; in a sense, then, it refers to its exact opposite: desire. If we apply this argument to the invective towards the *roman à clef* uttered in the foreword, if we read Freud with and against Freud, then the disgust claimed by this authority, which – in spite of not really being <up to date> in terms of narrative theory – denotes Freud, would also be a reversal of affect, this disgust would hide the pleasure and cloak the lust the author experiences when confronting his *roman à clef*-readers who have understood the game he is playing with them. This passage, then, should be transcribed as follows: «*At least*», or more precisely: «*Thank God there are many doctors in Vienna who find pleasure and enjoyment in the reading of the Dora case as a roman à clef*».

This transcription done with Freud against Freud also opaquely highlights the following: Freud's assurance to the *roman à clef*-readers «that all of my medical histories meant to be imparted later on will be protected by similar guaranties of secrecy from their shrewdness, although my use of my material has to experience a quite enormous restriction because of this resolution»⁹. Just as disgust refers to its opposite, *desire*, the guarantee to guard the secrets here refers to its opposite: *the assurance to disclose secrets*. Just as we know who is hidden behind Dora, we know who, for instance, is referred to with «wolf man».

What's more, Freud's announcement regarding the Dora case history as well as all «medical histories meant to be imparted later on», to protect them by «guaranties of secrecy» against the shrewdness of the reader, is already a paradoxical venture in so far as the Freudian case histories, their construction and their reconstruction represent a project that can hardly be surpassed in its level of shrewdness and sophistication. Freud repeatedly claims that it is his strategy to «gain secrets and hidden meanings from traits deemed marginal or not taken note of, from the refuse of observation»¹⁰. Not only shrewdness, rather an abundance of shrewdness qualifies psychoanalytic argumentations¹¹ – as phrased by Freud:

The case is being made against psychoanalysis [...] that it complicates simple matters in a captious way, that it sees secrets and problems where they do not exist, and that it achieves this by overemphasizing little and marginal traits that can be found everywhere and elevates them to being carriers of the most extensive and alienating deductions. We would argue against this position in vain, that because of such a refusal so many telling analogies and subtle connections, which we can point out in this case, are undone and ripped apart. The opponents, however, will claim that these analogies and connections do not really exist but are carried by us into the case with superfluous shrewdness¹².

When this eulogist for subtleties and shrewdness, who is very much dependent on a shrewdness in his readers sufficient enough to follow his analytical capers, the likes of which are hard to come by in terms of sophistication, promises to keep special secrets from the shrewdness of these readers, it leads directly into an aporia: Few authors are as reliant on readers willing to engage with shrewdness and apply shrewdness themselves, on readers treating secrets as solvable mysteries as Freud is.

In addition, what Freud as the initiator of this discourse claims about the subject of the *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, the secrets of the patient to be analyzed, also applies to the secrets he himself tries to keep from us. Freud states in the *Fragment*:

⁹ Freud: Bruchstück, p. 89.

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud (1914): *Erinnern – Wiederholen – Durcharbeiten*. In: Studienausgabe, Ergänzungsband, Frankfurt a.M. 1975, Tr. Asokan Nirmalarajah, pp. 205-215, p. 207.

¹¹ See Stefan Börnchen (2007): *Zum Geburtstag viel Freud. Paranoia und paranoide Geschlechter-Codes in «Superman's Romance With Wonder Woman»*. In: *Jahrbuch für Literatur und Psychoanalyse. Freiburger literaturpsychologische Gespräche* (26, pp. 203-243), p. 222-225.

¹² Sigmund Freud (1923): *Das Ich und das Es*. In: Studienausgabe III. (Psychologie des Unbewußten), Frankfurt a.M. 1975, Tr. Asokan Nirmalarajah, pp. 298-299.

When I made it my task to bring to light what people are hiding not through the force of hypnosis, but from what they say and show, I assumed the task to be more difficult than it really is. The one with eyes to see and ears to hear is convinced that the mortals cannot hide a secret. The one whose lips are silent chatters with his fingertips; betrayal seeps through all his pores¹³.

How far betrayal seeps through all the pores of Freud himself, how accurately the observations Freud makes regarding his patients can be found within himself, could be shown in dozens of examples. One example may be mentioned that is not entirely without its charm. Throughout the text, Freud preaches the necessity to «discuss sexual relations with all openness, to call the organs and functions of one's sexual life by their proper names»¹⁴. As if he's using a prayer wheel he repeatedly returns to this subject:

One can talk to girls and women about all kinds of sexual matters without harming them or being eyed suspiciously, if one, at first, assumes a certain manner of doing it, and secondly, if one can convince them that it is unavoidable. Under the very same circumstances the gynecologist as well allows himself to treat them to all kinds of disrobements. The best way to talk of these things is the dry and direct one; at the same time, it is very much apart from the lewdness with which these topics are treated in «society» and to which girls and women are very well used to. I give organs as well as processes their technical names and impart them wherever they – the names – are unknown. «*J'appelle un chat un chat*»¹⁵.

Jane Gallop has pointed out how unintentionally funny this reasoning is: The one who takes the stance of spreading the light of sexual enlightenment, the one who does not want to speak in a flowery and displaced manner, but rather frankly and openly, the one who wants to steer clear of any shadow of ambiguity and lewdness dips into French and into the metaphorical: *chat*, *chatte* is a vulgar French term for the female genitalia¹⁶.

However, the shrewdness of the reader, in this case of Jane Gallop, the investigative effort with which the author is caught in the act, refers very much to the axiom stated by Freud. The possibility to show the analyst that he betrays himself as well, no matter how diligently he tries to hide his secrets (and the keys capable of opening these secrets), is as much of a pleasurable, enjoyable project as is the attempt to *invert* the prohibition issued by the authorial power against reading the text as a *roman à clef*: to understand the prohibition as an instruction. The option to read the case history as a *roman à clef* is one the reader does not even have to come up with himself, it is served to him on a silver platter. And he would be neither shrewd nor curious, even completely unsuited to the reading of the *Fragment*, if he would not try out this option.

The intensity of the affect with which Freud argues against the readers who realize the «wrong» genre in their reading, that of the *roman à clef*, is comparable to the intensity with which he opposes the claim that his depiction may exploit sexual lewdness. It almost seems as if the *roman à clef*, the «novel with a key» is reconceptualized by Freud as a «novel with a keyhole» – a voyeuristic, semi-pornographic genre. Immediately after the attack on the *roman à clef*-readers Freud builds a defense wall he can always hide behind (as in the already cited example of «*j'appelle un chat un chat*») and declares:

I simply claim the rights of the gynecologists – or rather much more humble ones as those – for me and declare it to be a sign of a perverse and alien lewdness if someone should assume

¹³ Freud: Bruchstück, p. 147-148.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 123, emphasis not added.

¹⁶ See Jane Gallop (1990): *Thinking Through the Body*. New York: Columbia UP, p. 209.

that these kinds of conversations may be of good use for the arousal and satisfaction of sexual longings¹⁷.

Freud thus states that as far as he is concerned the conversations with Dora *are not put to good use for the satisfaction of longings directed towards sexuality* – and berates (which should certainly also be seen as a concession to the Victorianism of his contemporary readers) those as perverse, who assume such things. The first sentence of the foreword in which Freud announces that he wants to «make concrete» his «claims made in 1895 and 1896 about the [always sexual, C.L.] pathogenesis of hysterical symptoms»¹⁸ by way of the Dora case, however, already assures us of the opposite: this case history is so valuable for Freud because it very much satisfies a sexual longing, or in other words, *a longing directed towards sexuality*: The very longing to show the – exclusively – sexual etiology of neurosis. And Freud does not only say it in the first sentence of his text, he says it over and over again – in the afterword he again sums up:

I was also interested in showing that sexuality not only takes part as a *deus ex machina* occurring once somewhere in the machinery of processes characteristic of hysteria, but rather that it gives force for every single symptom and for every single utterance of a symptom. The signs of illness could almost be called the *sexual activity of the ill*¹⁹.

So every symptom, even every utterance of a symptom is sexually motivated, and the analyst is thus tasked with deciphering every utterance of a symptom as sexual. As the signs of illness are in a sense the sexual activity of the ill, the strains of deciphering, the attempts at healing are the sexual activities of the analyst.

Hence my conclusion: How lustful it is for the analyst Freud to shoot off a firework of sexual interpretations, to give himself up to a rage of analysis that wants to tell everybody of the stories told to him by the female patient, that takes from all details a primary or at least secondary sexual meaning, is already evident from a superficial reading of the *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*²⁰. Freud engages lustfully with the analytical work; he is intoxicated by how aptly the case of Dora fits into his theory of hysteria; he constructs the case of Dora in such a way that it is precisely modeled like a puzzle piece which he wants to put into his psychoanalytical theory structure.

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¹⁷ Freud: Bruchstück, p. 89.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 179, emphasis not added.

²⁰ Freud already outlined the theoretical basis for this in his Leonardo-essay of 1910, claiming science to be a displacement, a sublimation of sexual interest. See Sigmund Freud (1910): Eine Kindheitserinnerung des Leonardo Da Vinci. In: Studienausgabe X (Bildende Kunst und Literatur), Frankfurt a.M. 1975, pp. 87-159.

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