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DORA: FREUD'S PYGMALION?

The Psychoanalytic Century

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BACKGROUND

Dora started her psychoanalytic treatment with Sigmund Freud in the beginning of October and broke it off after three months, on December 31, 1900. At the turn of the century, there was in Vienna a "distinctive, creative ambiance in the split between old and new, between an apocalyptic sense of doom as the century drew to a close and the bright transitional optimism which was also a hallmark of the times—*la belle époque."* It was in this field of high tension between the authority and rhetoric of the old Hapsburg Empire on the one hand and subversive, revolutionary movements and ideas on the other that Freud's work evolved. The emperor was no longer the master in his own house but was compulsively, neurotically occupied with taking personal charge of inspecting his kingdom and its finances; the empress, neurotic, visibly anorexic with narcissistic traits, traveled continually; the son Rudolf, the crown prince, committed suicide, staged as the conclusion of intercourse where the consenting partner was put to death. The emperor was informed of their death by Katharina Schratt, the friend who by her calm, discreet affection consoled him for Empress Elizabeth's emotional unease" (Hallerstedt 1990, p. 9). Freud's consulting room and residence on Berggasse was close to the University and the imposing Ring, a magnificent street lined with palaces, museums, operas, theaters, castles, and the Parliament building.

Seven minutes by streetcar from Ringen, there was an apartment house, called the Beehive, with 216 apartments and a total of more than 1,000 inhabitants, as every tenant had only one room for his or her family.

PRESENTATION OF DORA[2]

Dora, or Ida Bauer as she was really called, was born in Vienna on November 1, 1881. Like Freud, her emancipated Jewish family could be traced back to Bohemia. The father, Philip Bauer, was a wealthy textile manufacturer, "a man of rather unusual activity and talents," (Freud 1905 p. 18) in comfortable circumstances, the owner of a large factory. "His daughter was most tenderly attached to him, and for that reason her critical powers, which developed early, took all the more offense at many of his actions and peculiarities. Her affection for him was still further increased by the many severe illnesses he had been through since her sixth year" (Freud 1905, p. 18). At that time Dora's father had fallen ill with tuberculosis, and when she was about 10 years old he was treated for a detached retina. Two years later, he consulted with Freud concerning symptoms of paralysis and slight mental disturbances; Freud prescribed an energetic course of antiluetic treatments. Her mother, Kathe Gerber Bauer, was "an uncultivated woman and above all a foolish one, who had concentrated all her interests upon domestic affairs, especially since her husband's illness and the estrangement to which it led. She presented a picture, in fact, of what might be called 'housewife's

psychosis.'" (1905, p. 20). Dora's only brother, Otto, who was fourteen months older than she, was one of the leaders of the Austrian Social Democratic Party (from 1918 to 1934) and the Austrian foreign minister from 1918 to 1920. Dora had neurotic symptoms since the age of 8, and was brought to Freud for a consultation when she was 16. At 18, when the analysis started, she

> had grown into a girl in the first bloom of youth with intelligent and engaging looks. But she was a source of heavy trials for her parents. Low spirits and an alteration in her character had now become the main features of her illness. She was clearly satisfied neither with herself nor with her family; her attitude toward her father was unfriendly and she was on very bad terms with her mother, who was bent upon drawing her into taking a share in the work of the house. 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. One day her parents were thrown into a state of great alarm by finding on the girl's writing-desk, or inside it, a letter in which she took leave of them because, as she said she could no longer endure her life. Her father, indeed, being a man of some perspicacity, guessed that the girl had no serious suicidal intentions. But he was nonetheless very much shaken and when one day, after a slight passage of words between him and his daughter, she had a first attack of loss of consciousness—an event which was subsequently covered by an amnesia—it was determined, in spite of her reluctance, that she should come to me for treatment, [p. 23]

BEYOND THE SEDUCTION THEORY-INTRODUCING A NEW TECHNIQUE

Several years earlier, Freud had abandoned the theory of actual sexual abuse as a prerequisite for neurotic symptoms and had made new enemies

instead by accentuating the role of infantile sexuality in these symptoms. Studying his own dreams he did find that "a recurring theme was love and jealousy, a triangle where the parent of the opposite sex was the desired one, following the structure in the antique drama of fate, *Oedipus Rex."* Publishing his article on Dora 1905 he wrote:

> In my *Interpretation of Dreams,* published in 1900, I showed that dreams in general can be interpreted, and that after the work of interpretation has been completed they can be replaced by perfectly correctly constructed thoughts which can be assigned a recognizable position in the chain of mental events. The following fragment from the history of the treatment of a hysterical girl is intended to show the way in which the interpretation of dreams plays a part in the work of analysis, [p. 15]

He also emphasized that he did introduce a new technique: "I now let the patient himself choose the subject of the day's work, and in that way I start out from whatever surface his unconscious happens to be presenting to his notice at the moment" (p. 12). The practical goal of treatment was to cure all the damage to the patient's memory and that when a successful conclusion has been reached it will be possible for him to *own his history.*

WHO OWNED DORA'S HISTORY?

When Erikson asks this question in *Insight and Responsibility* (1964), he makes a distinction between reality and actuality. He says that reality is a phenomenonic experience whereas actuality is what is current, present,

immediate, and active; it includes a participation in the world in the company of others, preferably with a minimum of defensive attitudes and a maximum of mutual activation.

Ida Bauer, an 18-year-old young woman—in a sense still a girl—was seriously involved in a complicated relation between her father and his mistress, Frau K.—a tangled web of relations between adult men and women. The situation both frightened and fascinated

Dora, as Freud was to call her in his case history. She is brought to Freud by her father, who appeals to Freud to try and bring her to reason. With this as a starting point, what stance is she to take in the consulting room? How can the daughter's observations be of use? What can she make of her experiences? How can her history be told? Who will be able to tell it? Can she do it without help from adults? How is one to get at the truth? What is the truth? Whose truth is the truth? Will Freud be able to search for it with her? Can we do that? Can anyone?

When Dora confronted her environment, hoping to get it to divulge its secrets and reveal its lies, she did this out of a young person's need and right to test the correctness, the durability, and the truth of the attitudes, methods, ideas, and ideals of her environment. Loyalty, constancy, and fidelity are the strengths and crises of adolescence. According to Erikson, Dora was

concerned with the immediate, historic truth while Freud wanted to get at the genetic truth behind the symptoms, for Freud considered it the patient's duty and responsibility to come to a realization of these genetic connections and not be inhibited by environment, as was the case with Dora.

Many have accused Freud of having used Dora as his "Pygmalion"—on the one hand to serve as a demonstration to the world of the central place occupied in therapy by the interpretation of dreams, and on the other hand to be used as proof of the unique place of sexuality in the understanding of the origin of neurosis. Many others, especially feminist research workers, have asserted that Freud exploited Dora, and that he lost his head over her and it was out of his own need and preconceived ideas that he constructed her "story."[3] In a postscript Freud writes:

> On a date which is not a matter of complete indifference, on the first of April (times and dates, as we know, were never without significance for her), Dora came to see me again: to finish her story and to ask for help once more. One glance at her face, however, was enough to tell me that she was not in earnest over her request . . . she had come for help on account of a right-sided facial neuralgia, from which she was now suffering day and night. 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. [p. 122]

What can have happened to Dora and between her and Freud? Freud himself asked that question, just as many analysts after him have returned to the Dora case history to state, clarify, interpret, explain, and go through the

problems and difficulties Freud and Dora had when they met each other. Freud wrote:

> Her father and his family had formed an intimate friendship with a married couple, Herr and Frau K. Frau K. had nursed him during his long illness, and had in that way, he said, earned a title to his undying gratitude. Herr K. had always been most kind to Dora. He had gone for walks with her when he was there, and had made her small presents; but no one had thought any harm of that. Dora had taken the greatest care of the K.'s two little children, and been almost a mother to them. [p. 25]

When Dora was 16, Herr K. "had the audacity to make her a proposition while they were on a walk." Herr K. accused Dora of being overexcited by reading certain books, and had merely "fancied" the whole scene. Even if her father did not doubt that this incident was responsible for Dora's depression, he could not do what Dora demanded, which was to break off relations with the K. family. His friendship with Frau K. was honorable; nothing unseemly had been kept secret; they were just two poor wretches who gave each other comfort and he wanted Freud's help to bring her to her senses. Freud assumed that the experience, the insult to her honor, could have provided her with a psychical trauma, but he also learned to go beyond his earlier theory and to look for the effects in his patient's earliest years.

When the first difficulties of the treatment had been overcome, Dora told him of an earlier episode that occurred when she was 14: Herr K. arranged things so that he was alone with her at his place of business, where:

> He suddenly clasped the girl to him and pressed a kiss upon her lips. 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. [p. 25]

Freud considered Dora's reaction hysterical, as he considered it to be in anyone in whom an occasion for sexual excitement elicits feelings that are predominantly or exclusively unpleasurable, and interprets the reaction as a reversal of affect and a displacement of genital sensations. Freud makes the point that it was difficult to get Dora to concentrate her attention on Herr K. She declared that she was finished with him but she could not forgive her father for continuing his relations with the K. family. She was also completely convinced that her father's relation to Frau K. was a common love affair.

> [Freud] could not in general dispute Dora's characterization of her father; and there was one particular respect in which it was easy to see that her reproaches were justified. When she was feeling embittered she used to be overcome by the idea that she had been handed over to Herr K. as the price of his tolerating the relations between her father and his wife; and her rage at her father's making such a use of her was visible behind her affection for him.
>
> At other times she was quite well aware that she had been guilty of exaggeration in talking like this. . . . But as a matter of fact things were in a position in which each of the two men avoided drawing any conclusions from the other's behavior which would have been awkward for his own plans, [p. 34]

Freud saw how vulnerable Dora's position was in respect to men and

how men and women close to her behaved, but for a number of reasons it is probable that he put up defenses against unconditionally investigating Dora's question: "What do you want to change?" He may have unconsciously shared the blindness of the patriarchal society around him with its focus on exploitation, or he lacked our present knowledge and insight into the particularly fragile identity and self-esteem of adolescence. We have learned that there may be fateful consequences if adults close to young persons, on whom they are still dependent, exploit them to satisfy their own needs. To be a failure, to be humiliated in dealing with those who are near and dear, may shake to the foundations their faith in their own powers and put their self-esteem completely out of balance. Rage against the adults who have so betrayed the child by failing to support the development of the adolescents' ego and superego releases primitive aggression that may be turned against their own bodies, intensifying the symptoms or be turned against the analyst, putting the treatment at risk.

Altogether too busy proving his own theories, Freud directed all his attention to Dora's inner reality, her own contribution to the events, going "back to the speaker's own person." The truth was to be found within the ailing Dora and not in her environment. For that reason Freud was not willing to follow his own instructions, presented a decade later, to "listen with evenly suspended attention, allowing yourself to taken by surprise by every new turn in the process, and always with an open mind" (Freud 1912). Fie insisted

on getting Dora to confess her love and longing for Herr K., and in spite of the fact that he saw the connection between himself and Herr K., he did not seem capable of seeing how Dora might interpret his own commitment, which was his own desire to discover the truth of his own theories. His technique was suggestive, persuasive, and convincing; he constantly pressed Dora to confirm his impressions and interpretations, giving Dora little room to follow up her associations herself. He worked brilliantly from details, aiming at the reconstruction of the original oedipal situation, and he thought his most important duty was to discover the hidden meaning, rooted in childhood, in every symptom.

TAKING OVER

There are many interpretations, explanations, excuses, defenses, and rebukes in the extensive literature about Dora derived from Freud's case histories. Everyone knows that it is easy to be wise after the fact and advance ingenious theories for others; quite simply, there is more freedom in observing from a distance. But we also know that outsiders only possess a "normative" competence—that is, a general understanding—while the involved participants, the patient and the analyst, have a "privileged" competence. With a certain amount of hesitation, one can put the question, How would you consult or supervise Freud if he applied for it? Would you point out the complication that he knew the family? That her father brought

Dora to him with the order: Get her to listen to reason? That he had advance information about Dora and had already anticipated a great deal about her that might interfere with the need to listen with freely shifting attention. Freud might be warned that Dora would interpret his inquisitive, argumentative attitude as evidence that his motive was not to analyze her in order to help her understand herself, her predicament, and help her deal with it, but that he was analyzing the material from the perspective of his own aims, where he only wanted to confirm what he already knew. It may be possible to prove how his premature interpretations and active interrogation were bound to increase Dora's defensiveness and resistance. He might then defend himself by saying that "Everything I call Dora's attention to is present in what she says!" One could well ask Freud, "What do you want to do? What is your goal?" Freud might answer, "I want to create and validate the psychoanalytical theory, I want to confirm my theories about hysteria and use the patient for this end—and there I must often use all my brilliance and my power of persuasion to gather all the details into an argument so I will not to be silenced as I was after I published my book *The Interpretation of Dreams.* But let me tell you her dream:

> Just at the moment when there was a prospect that the material that was coming up for analysis would throw light on an obscure point in Dora's childhood, she reported that a few nights earlier she had once again had a dream which she had already dreamt in exactly the same way on many previous occasions. A periodically recurrent dream was by its very nature calculated to rouse my curiosity; and in any case it was justifiable in the

> interests of the treatment to consider the way in which the dream worked into the analysis as a whole. I therefore determined to make an especially careful investigation of it. And here is the dream related by Dora: 'A house was on fire. My father was standing beside my bed and woke me up. I dressed quickly. Mother wanted to stop and save her jewel case; but Father said: I refuse to let myself and my two children be burnt for the sake of your jewel-case. We hurried downstairs, and as soon as I was outside I woke up.' [p. 64]

I posed, as usual, questions about every detail. One could point out that it is risky to seek the clearing up of the dream before Freud made sure that he could understand what Dora wants to say about the relationship between the two of them. In the dream, one could hear that she says that we (Dora, the children) are in danger; Father (that is, the analyst holding the frame) is going to save us. Mother is too occupied with her jewel case and there is a risk that the analyst will be too, if his main wish is to validate the psychoanalytical theory and confirm his theories about hysteria using her, the patient, to that end. Freud can now react in various ways. He may be able to accommodate the supervisor's perspective on the interactive significance of the dreams. He may already be open to following up in the here and now his impressions and experiences of the communicative importance of transference. He is, however, likely to be conditioned to too great an extent by his duty to bring out the hidden truth *(per via di levare),* and as a result he will probably turn defensive at every effort to get him to pay attention to the importance and the consequences of his own interventions and his motives for them. Freud could end the supervision by summarizing the synthesis of the dream:

> The wish which the dream wants to come true always springs from the period of childhood. The dream expresses this wish anew, and it tries to correct the present day by the measure of childhood. And what Dora is trying to express in her dream is: "Dear Father, protect me again as you used to in my childhood, and prevent my bed from being wetted!" The day after, Dora brought me an addendum: each time after waking up she had smelt smoke. I reminded her that I would often say, "There can be no smoke without fire!" She answered that everyone smokes. Add to this that dreams usually contain the most obscure thought, which here was the longing for a kiss, linked both to the episode when she was fourteen years old and to childhood thumb-sucking. I realized that there was also a link to me in the transference, that she would like to have a kiss from me. I told her this and added in addition that from the re-emergence of the dream during the last few days I had to conclude that she was saying that the same situation had returned and that she had decided to stop the treatment, which, of course, she had only been induced to start through the agency of her father, [p. 69]

Here the supervisor is left with many unanswered questions and suppositions. Who has put Freud in the seducer's position? Is it he himself, a middle-aged man tempted by the young girl's secrets and jewel box? Is it Dora who has chosen this role for him in accordance with what Freud writes about the importance of transference in his postscript to the case history? To Freud, transfers

> are new editions or facsimiles of the impulses and fantasies which are aroused and made conscious during the progress of the analysis; but they have this peculiarity, which is characteristic for their species, that they replace some earlier person by the person of the physician. To put it another way: a whole series of psychological experiences are revived, not as belonging to the past, but as applying to the person of the physician at the present moment. . . . Some of these . . . are merely new impressions or reprints. Others are more ingeniously constructed. [p. 116]

What part does Freud play in establishing his position as seducer, the one who arouses Dora's desire, fear, and defenses? Of what importance in this process is the circumstance that Freud works with the metaphor "a regularly formed dream stands upon two legs," placing the dream at the point of intersection between the legs, at the genitals? The dream may then be seen as a sexual organ to be inspected, penetrated. Freud insisted that Dora confess her love and longing for Herr K., and although he recognized the connection between himself and Herr K., he was blinded by his own strong involvement, his desire and eagerness to reveal "the secret." Dora may very well have interpreted this as Freud's desire to penetrate her, as his own desire to play with fire.

REVENGE: "DO YOU KNOW, DOCTOR, THAT I AM HERE FOR THE LAST TIME TODAY?"

Many have reacted to Freud's tone with Dora, that blooming young girl with intelligent, attractive features, that pathetic teenager brought by her father to him, a 44-year-old neurologist and paterfamilias. She told him a sad story of being exploited, molested, and betrayed by the adults around her. But instead of showing her compassion and sympathy, Freud treated her as a dangerous adversary. He wrestled with her, set traps, pressed her against the wall with confrontations and interpretations.

Several weeks after the first dream, Dora related her second dream.

When work with this had been concluded, the analysis was broken off.

> The labor of elucidating the second dream had so far occupied two hours. At the end of the second session, when I expressed my satisfaction at the result, Dora replied in a deprecatory tone: "Why, has anything so very remarkable come out?" These words prepared me for the advent of fresh revelations. She opened the third session with these words: "Do you know that I am here for the last time today?"—"How can I know, as you have said nothing to me about it?"—"Yes, I made up my mind to put up with it till the New Year (12/31/1900). But I shall wait no longer than that to be cured."—"You know that you are free to stop the treatment at any time. But for today we will go on with our work. When did you come to this decision?"—"A fortnight ago, I think."—"That sounds just like a maidservant or a governess—a fortnight's notice."—"There was a governess who gave notice with the K.s, when I was on my visit to them that time by the lake."—"Really? You have never told me about her. Tell me." [p. 105]

The following was then interpreted by Freud as Dora's rage against Herr K and her wish to take revenge for being betrayed by him, as she "did fancy that Herr K's proposals were serious, and that he would not leave off until you had married him. She had listened, 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" (p. 108).

Freud contributed to the making the grammar of the unconscious, which had always been open to poets and artists, accessible to those engaged in health care and in science of the mind. Speech begins with the original dialogue between child and mother (or "the attentive other"). The infant's cry

calls forth the accessible mother, and in this first dialogue the concepts are created, phase-specific and via the paternal order, which are then integrated into inner endeavors that give meaning to the child's experiences. At the same time the relation between the internal and the external reality is being organized. The original dialogue was revived in Dora's dream; out of her painful, distressing situation she calls out for her father to save her and this is repeated in the analytical situation. She sought shelter with the analyst at the same time as she was setting up precisely the danger from which she was trying to be saved. The aim of the relation and the analytical situation is just this: to facilitate the creation of mutual concepts through which the participants can communicate about such experiences. The patient expresses himself or herself, like Dora, both verbally and nonverbally. For both parties, they create a comprehensible language, assuming that the analyst is able to listen and understand what the patient is trying to say about him, the analyst. The image the patient creates of the analyst may also provide important guidance leading to a better understanding of his own person, technique, and countertransference, presenting material for self-analysis and supervision. Freud was much too preoccupied with his own desire to force the secret out of Dora's dream, and this prevented him from seeing anything other than what he wanted to see.

What we have also learned from Freud's experiences with Dora is that we must understand and deal with transference within an established

working relationship. The patient's tendency to repeat and, in the situation with the analyst, recognize previous experiences, has its roots in old expectations and infantile wishes. The fear of being caught by life, of being drawn in, violated by it in pain and desire—just this commits Dora and many others to the repetition of wishes and fantasies linked to figures from their childhood. In analysis these patterns can be discovered and surveyed—if the analyst does not abandon the patient by being too bound up in his own expectations and theories. Then the risk is, as in the case of Dora, that the analysis will be broken off. Otherwise new experiences which the analysand will have within the analytical situation may offer fresh strategies and solutions to problems. By his interpretations the analyst can help the patient to gain increased self-knowledge. In this process the patient can make surprising discoveries, reaching an insight into himself and his relations. It is important to remember that the analyst's interpretations are always only made up from "ideas" expressing his own interpretations and opinions. They can have a permanent effect only if they stand up against the patient's critical study and dovetail with his or her own inner reality. Only on this basis can the patient change his or her own life.

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Notes

1 To a great extent these reflections are identical with those presented in Chapter 3 of *On Freud's Couch: Seven New Interpretations of Freud's Case Histories* (eds: I. Matthis and I. Szecsödy) published 1998 by Jason Aronson.

2 With the hope of letting Freud—at least partly—own his history, I have chosen to use long quotations from his own text*: "Fragment of an analysis of a case of hysteria," in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (1905) 7:1-122.

3 In Bernheimer and Kahane, eds. (1985); Thompson (1990).