

NIDA'S FEBRUARY SEMINAR

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Dora: Conversion and Imaginary Identification in Hysteria

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What Lily of the Valley says in a dream

Herr K said with a jewelry box.

What one says with flowers

Papa said with pearls

What Dora did not say

the doctor said with smoke.

Hélène Cixous

I

Dora alias, Ida Bauer, an eighteen years Jewish girl of the upper middle-class bourgeoisie family in Vienna was Freud's patient and the subject of his longest case history. Despite Freud's insistence to stay in analysis, Dora broke off her treatment after three months. As the treatment suspended, Freud conceded that Dora left him to avenge Herr K. with whom she was unconsciously fixated and on occasions replaced him with her father and even Freud. Freud's initial interest in this case history was driven from his excitement with this self-evident feminine hysterical case: a young girl with her unconsciously-imbedded psychosomatic symptoms of hysteria. From Freud, we know that Dora was born in a dysfunctional family. Her father was a successful businessman, but an adulterous man inflicted with syphilis. Her mother was a neurotic with a compulsive obsession with domestic cleanliness that Freud gives the name of the 'housewife's psychosis—a condition in which an apathetic mother doesn't show interest and care for her children at all. Freud writes that Dora's mother was often "occupied all day long in cleaning the house with its furniture and utensils and in keeping them clean—to such an extent as to make it almost impossible to use or enjoy," (Freud, 1990, 50). The Dora's family as Freud himself had a long friendship with a couple that Freud calls Herr and Frau K. The interfamily relationship was funny and dramatic. Dora's father has an affair with Frau K., and Dora alleges that Herr K. once made sexual advances toward her. Freud shows mixed feeling about this. He is inclined to accept the view of Herr K. and Dora's father who believed Dora's allegation was merely imaginary. However, Freud also indicates that Dora and Herr K. reciprocated on occasions, mutual feelings.

By looking at Dora's attempt to hystericize everything—her relation to her parents and friends—Freud diagnose Dora with a typical feminine hysteria.

Dora disclosed almost everything to Freud in a confused manner that for him it was too difficult to figure out what was real and what was fantasised in her narrative. She had a passion for finding a place for herself in the love and hate relationship between members of couples. In addition, her typical somatic symptom helped Freud greatly in his diagnosis. Let us not forget that hysteria was the oldest known mental disorder and a great deal of literature on the topic also helped Freud. The Greek knew about it and in the medieval era, physicians used unique therapy for curing hysteria. A medieval Muslim Aristotelian philosopher and physician, for example, developed his own psychotherapy for curing hysterics—provoking extremely unbearable psychical tension and fear to eliminate physical symptoms:

Avicenna was once challenged to cure, on the instant, a girl serving in the royal apartment who had bent over and could not straighten up again. “Take off her veil,” prescribed Avicenna. This was done, putting the girl in an anguish of embarrassment; yet her body was still locked immobile. “Off with the skirt,” commanded Avicenna, and the girl, in a spasm of emotional shock, straightened up and disappeared.” (Ehrenwald, 1959, 219)

In order to have an outline of the theory of feminine hysteria and the analysis of Dora, I wish to summarise the key points in Freud’s long narrative as follows.

- The cause of psychoneurosis as a whole is invariably sexuality and the unconscious fixation with parents and another person. In this, feminine hysteria was Freud’s cherished case in point. He even goes further in his hypothesis that the hysteric physical symptoms are nothing, but manifestations of the underlying neurosis written on the hysteric body to the extent that make these bodily endeavours metaphors for sexual activities, as Nasio writes, “Freud was prepared to equate the hysterical fit with an orgasm. When you see a hysteric fainting, he said decisively, you can be sure that he is doing more than having an orgasm; he is identifying with the sexual agitation shared by the members of the fanaticised couple,” (Nasio, 1997, 119). In Freud’s narrative Dora’s bodily symptoms are:
 - ~ dyspnoea—difficulties in breathing and choking
 - ~ depression, suicidal thoughts, migraines, *taedium vita*—lack of interest in life and the outside world—hysterical fear of sociability
 - ~ *tussis nervosa*—neurotic coughs
 - ~ *aphonia*—the loss of voice
- Dora’s symptoms are triggered by her real or fantasised sexual advances by Herr K. especially the scene of sexual seduction that takes place at Herr K.’s house by the lake. Dora’s father also accepts the idea of the imagined seduction. On Freud’s couch, Dora argues that her own father’s bias is caused by his desire to secure his own surreptitious romance with Frau K.
- Neurosis has a strong productive power. It doesn’t stop the formation of new symptoms even during Dora’s presence in the course of therapy. These symptoms are generated by what Freud calls transference as ‘an inevitable necessity’. For example, Dora develops a set of impulses and fantasies in her consciousness through which the fantasised person(s) are exchanged by the person of the analyst, as Freud writes, “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.” (Freud, 1990, 157-158)

- The text of transference is produced with the discourse of the patient, by the analyst's digging in the patient's "unconscious thoughts and memories, and to practise similar explanatory arts." (158)
- By way of transference, Freud writes about his own place in Dora's case history. The position that is occupied by her father is transferred to Freud, the Dora, this position is the key position in the fantasy in relation to Dora's father and Frau K.'s romance. Freud remarks, "At the beginning it was clear that I was replacing her father in her imagination, which was not unlikely, in view of the difference between our ages. She was even constantly comparing me with him consciously and kept anxiously trying to make sure whether I was being quite straightforward with her, for her father 'always preferred secrecy and roundabout ways,'" (160)
- From Dora's analysis, Freud draws his psychoanalytic formulation that compulsive repetition of an idea gets its force and impetus from what is repressed or hidden in the unconscious. Such an idea "reaches with its root down into unconscious, repressed material, or because another unconscious thought lies concealed behind it," (89).
- Freud's analyse Dora's two dreams: in the first, her father wakes her up because of a fire in order to save her 'jewellery box' which was given to her as a gift by Herr K. In her second dream, Dora lives in an unknown city where she receives a letter from her mother about her father's death. She sets for home but arrives too late at the funeral of her father. Freud detects two important ideas in Dora's dreams. First, the feminine aspects of the Oedipus Complex. Dora is unconsciously fixated to her parents, as the second dream, unfolds Dora's fantasy of revenge against her father for his romance with her rival Frau K. Dora also reveals her rivalry with Herr K., who like her father possesses Frau K.—the object of her secret love.
- Freud concludes that Dora's compulsive thoughts about the love-affair between her father and Frau K. and her passion for Frau K. also illustrates Dora's bisexual tendencies towards Frau K., as Freud in his narration discloses that in Dora's discourse there were signs of her adoration for Frau K.'s 'adorable white body.' Lacan insists that in order to measure who in Dora desires, Freud first wants to know what Dora really desires?

And in the end Freud realizes that in this quartet—Dora, her father, Herr and Frau K.—Frau K. is the object that really interests Dora, in so far as she is identified with Herr K. The question of where Dora's ego is located is thus resolved—Herr K. is Dora's ego," (Lacan, 1993, 174-175).

He then generalises this notion by saying that such 'masculine' feelings of homosexuality "are to be regarded as typical of the unconscious erotic life of hysterical girls." (98) The unconscious psychic crisis is always conveyed by way of symbolisation in terms of bodily symptoms.

II

While endorsing Freud's initial theory of feminine hysteria, Lacan centre his focus in this case history on the problem of identification of the hysteric with another woman who may also play the role of perturbing the suffering hysteric. In this troublesome relation, a feminine hysteric

reveals her homoerotic desire as well. Lacan sums up hysteria by his maxim that a hysteric is always confronted with the question of her femininity—what is it to be a woman? By identifying with Frau K., Dora finds the answer for this question. In her relationship with other woman, a hysteric “is above all seeking to be like her, to think like her, to live like her, to make love like her, to have the same men, and so on. In other words, what is happening here is that the hysteric is basically vampirizing the other woman who, she assumes, has brought her feminine identity to a state of perfection. (Dor, 1999, 88)

It is important to note that in Freud’s theory of hysteric symptoms emphasis was centred on the repressed unconscious Oedipal conflict and the drives. Lacan, on the other hand, is concerned with the hysteric’s configuration problem in relation to the triadic registers, the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic. In order to deal with the lack, a hysteric, moreover, holds the role of a desirer. To take this role, a hysteric like Dora identifies with her father and then with Frau K., representing the enigmatic and ‘object-less’ feminine desire. In the economy of a hysteric desire, the purpose of the hysteric is to support the father’s desire.

It is important to note that the impetus of this movement toward identification with the desirer is marked by the fundamental tendency of the hysterical ego to identify with a desirer who not only seeks but takes pleasure in being in seeking, a pure desirer who takes pleasure in being in the state of desire. (Nasio, 1997, 119)

In “Presentation on Transference,” Lacan reiterates Freud’s comment that the identification of Dora with Herr K. replaced with Freud himself through transference. In his seminar on psychosis, Lacan says that Dora, “uses Herr K. as her ego, in that it is by means of him that she is effectively able to support her relationship with Frau K.,” (Lacan, 1993, 91). The presence of smoke in Dora’s dream represents the smoking cigar of Freud as well. Lacan affirms this and insists that the smoke represents Dora’s identification with two men, Herr K. and Freud himself, manifest the aggressiveness in which we see the dimension characteristic of narcissistic alienation.” (Lacan, 2006, 181). Lacan argues that Dora’s attraction to Frau K. is manifested in Dora’s idealisation of Madonna as well.

In her long meditation before the Madonna and in her recourse to the role of distant worshipper, this mystery drives Dora toward the solution Christianity has offered for this subjective impasse by making woman the object of a divine desire or a transcendent object of desire, which amounts to the same thing. (Ibid)

An interesting thing that Lacan raises in “presentation...” is the idea of closeness of the unconscious and the consciousness of the hysteria. What Dora repressed at the unconscious level resurfaces by projection “into a discourse in the process of becoming...a lower threshold between the unconscious and the conscious, or better, between analytic discourse and the *key* [*moi*] to the symptom.” (Ibid, 184)

In *Seminar VIII: Transference*, Lacan observes that at the level of fantasy, which animates desire, a hysteric always aims at something or someone else. A hysteric for example says X while it is, in fact, Y. Herr K. is Dora’s object *a* and ego but in this, she is aiming at the absolute Other in the Symbolic order who is her own father. Following this line of argument, Lacan writes the formula for the hysteric fantasy which different from that of the neurotic and the pervert:

$$a/-\varphi \leftrightarrow A$$

The formula reads as the object *a*, over (lack of the imaginary phallus - φ or imaginary castration) desire A or the Other, as Lacan says, “Here we have *a*, the substitutional or metaphorical object, over something that is hidden—namely, minus *phi* one’s own imaginary castration—in one’s relation to the Other.” (Lacan, 2015, 246)

Lacan delineates the original aim of Freud from his case history to formalise his theory of hysteria and hysterical identification whereby the hysteric subject distinguishes in another individual “the total or global situation in which he or she lives,” (355). Dora by desiring a man, Herr K. “finds her way toward the woman she loves,” (366). Lacan criticises Freud for bias that stemmed from countertransference, as he writes in *Écrits*, “This is exactly what happened in Dora’s case, because of Freud’s relentless attempt to make her think Herr K. was the hidden object of her desire; the constitutive bias of Freud’s countertransference led him to see in Herr K. the promise of Dora’s happiness.” (Lacan, 2006, 252)

As seen, both Freud and Lacan in Dora recognised an identificatory process which unfolds a salient feature in the structure of hysteria whereby a hysteric is seeking from the chosen model person (male or female) the answer to the question of hysteric desire about the enigma of femininity. In this identification, what is important is its imaginary nature and a passion for facilitating the other desire. The hysteric put herself to the service of the other and see her own self through the other and expresses herself in the light of the other desire. Dora shows always a burning passion to identify with the ideal object of desire Frau K. for her father’s desire. In his *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan return to the relation of Dora with her father and reaffirm his position about Dora’s passionate feeling for Frau K., “Through the adoration of the object of desire that woman has become on her horizon—the woman she envelopes herself in an who in the case study us called Frau K.,” (Lacan, 2007, 74).

The first dream of Dora that Lacan calls the ‘dream of jewel-box’ Dora’s fascination of the box is interpreted in different ways by Freud and Lacan. The dream goes on like this in Freud’s summary:

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. (Freud, 1993, 99)

For Freud Dora’s association with the box which was originally Herr K. gave Dora as a gift, was a ‘meagre association’ as he discloses it in a footnote to this case history that was speaking of “material which had been very intensely repressed,” (104). Freud is interested in the jewel than the box and he called it a symbol for feminine organ. But Lacan is interested in the box to suit his theory of the object *a* which is always hidden in precious case, the object as the source of Dora’s *jouissance*, as Lacan states, “The first dream, the one called the dream of the jewel box, bears this out—it isn’t the jewel, it’s the box, the envelope of the precious organ there you have the only thing she gets *jouissance* out of.” (Lacan, 2007, 96)

In conclusion, hysteria constitutes an interpersonal crisis in which the imaginary identification of the hysteric with another person takes the centre-stage. This identification is more present in the fantasy of the hysteric where the hysteric reveals herself in an impossible situation and in a cross-road of an unsatisfied desire. Dora finds herself in such a double bind in her dreams. Unlike Freud, Lacan saw Dora’s somatic symptoms as manifestation of the question of what a female subject is? In such circumstance, Lacan finds a hysteric always attaches to the object of the desire of the Other. This position is held in this drama alternatively by Frau K. Herr K. Freud

and her own father. In hysteria, “the question that is posited to us is what takes bodies beyond hysterical identification, which has love of the father as its horizon.” (Laurent, 2012, 90). Even Dora’s homoerotic tendency toward Frau K. is also used unconsciously as an assurance to stay in the orbit of the love of father. In order to love father Dora loves the object of his desire.

Freud’s attachment with Dora is lie his feeling for another young female patient, Irma. Lacan is conscious of this. Freud interprets Dora’s brief return to him after fifteen months lapse her intention to take revenge Herr. K. Lacan sees in this a misunderstanding on the part of Freud. Freud was empowered with this return. The misrecognition in relation to the homosexual position of the object. The is the fact that Freud himself hinted when later he comes back to the interpretation of this case history.

None of this is my own invention, for Freud himself recognized after the fact the preliminary source of his failure I n his own misrecognition at that time of the homosexual position of the object aimed at by the hysteric’s desire. (Lacan, 2006, 252

Notes:

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