

## Fantasy or Reality?



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Vienna, January 16, 1899  
IX., Berggasse 19

Dear Wilhelm,

You will immediately have understood what occasioned this letter. My work and the sirocco made me so miserable that I went with the two women to "Ancora Verde,"<sup>1</sup> seeking restoration in a bottle of barolo. I have just returned. All sorts of comfort come from the wine and so I am writing to you now.

If after ten hours of talking I were not so lazy about writing — as you can see from my uneven script — I could really compose a small essay for you about the minor advances of the wish theory, because since the 3rd of January the light has not gone out completely, nor the certainty that I have put my finger on an important nodal point. But perhaps it is better if I save and collect, so that at our Easter congress I shall not again stand before you as a poor beggar, enticing you with nothing but announcements of things to come.

A few other things of minor significance have yielded results as well — for instance, that hysterical headaches rest on an analogy in fantasy which equates the top with the bottom part of the body (hair in both places — cheeks [*Backen*] and buttocks [*Hinterbacken*; literally, hindcheeks] — lips [*Lippen*] and labia [*Schamlippen*; literally, shamelips] — mouth = vagina), so that an attack of migraine can be used to represent a forcible defloration, and yet the entire ailment once again represents a situation of wish fulfillment. The necessary conditions of the sexual become clearer and clearer.<sup>2</sup> In one woman patient (whom I have set right with the key of fantasy)<sup>3</sup> there were constant states of despair with a melancholic conviction that she was of no use, was incapable of anything, and so on. I always thought that in her early childhood she had witnessed an

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analogous state, a genuine melancholia, in her mother. This was in accordance with the earlier theory, but two years brought no confirmation of it. Now it has turned out that when she was a girl of fourteen she discovered that she had atresia hymenalis [an imperforate hymen] and was in despair that she would be of no use as a wife. Hence, melancholia — [that is,] fear of impotence. Similar states, in which she cannot make up her mind to choose a hat or a dress, go back to her struggle at the time when she had to choose her husband.

With another woman patient I have convinced myself that there really is such a thing as hysterical melancholia and identified its characteristics. I have also noted how the same memory appears in the most numerous translations and I have gained a first glimpse of how melancholia comes about through summation. This patient is, moreover, totally anesthetic — as she should be, according to an idea dating back to the earliest period of my work on the neuroses.<sup>4</sup>

I heard about a third woman in the following, interesting way: a man of high standing and vast wealth (a bank director), about sixty years old, came to see me and talked to me about the peculiarities of a young woman with whom he is having an affair. I threw out a guess that she was probably completely anesthetic. On the contrary, she has from four to six orgasms during one coitus. But — at the very first approach she is seized with a tremor and immediately afterward falls into a pathological sleep, during which she talks as though she were in hypnosis, even carries out posthypnotic suggestions; complete amnesia for all this. He is going to marry her off, and she will certainly be anesthetic with her husband. The old gentleman, because of the possible identification with the immensely wealthy father of her childhood, evidently has the effect of being able to set free the libido attached to her fantasies. Instructive!

You have received the Palolowurm.<sup>5</sup> These are good preparations for what you have to say.

At last children and wife are once again well. Annerl suddenly recovered one morning and since then has been delightfully cheeky.

Farewell, cordially greet wife and children, and let me have news of you soon.

Your  
Sigm.

1. An Italian restaurant.

2. "Die Bedingung des Sexuellen stellt sich immer schärfer und schärfer." Does Freud mean that sexuality is always the conditioning factor of a neurosis?

3. The "key of fantasy" refers to Freud's belief that he had discovered that the key

to neurosis lay not in real events (such as seductions) but in fantasies (for instance, of seduction by the father).

4. Freud's early theory stressed real events. He is saying here that he believed the child witnessed real depression in the mother and identified with her. But he now thinks that the fantasies of puberty (in this case that she could not be a wife) seek out, as a rationalization, earlier experiences that never happened.

5. Schröter points out that Fliess mentions this worm in his 1906 book, *Der Ablauf des Lebens* (pp. 308–311).

Vienna, January 30, 1899

Dear Wilhelm,

From what I hear, you have been in Warsaw. I hope it did you good and cost someone else a lot of money. My delay in writing is explained as follows: I had completed a letter to you a week ago because I believed I had made a real discovery. But doubts set in as I was writing; I decided to wait and was right because the thing was not correct; that is to say, there was something to it, but it had to be reinterpreted with application to quite another area.

You probably do not know how much your last visit raised my spirits. I am still living on it. The light has not gone out since then; bits of insight are dawning now here, now there — a genuine reinvigoration by comparison with the desolation of last year. What is rising out of the chaos this time is the connection to the psychology contained in the *Studies on Hysteria* — the relation to conflict, to life: clinical psychology, as I should like to call it. Puberty is becoming ever more central; fantasy as the key holds fast.<sup>1</sup> Yet there is still nothing big or complete. I diligently make notes of all that is worthwhile so as to present it to you at our congress. I need you as my audience.

For relaxation I am reading Burckhardt's *History of Greek Civilization*, which is providing me with unexpected parallels. My predilection for the prehistoric in all its human forms has remained the same.

On day 28 Mathilde had another throat infection, after which she lost a tooth; then she grew again and — is miserable. Her mother, incidentally, did exactly the same thing before the onset of her menstrual periods.

February 3. I could not resolve to send off this letter as if it were completed, and was waiting for new material. But nothing came. Everything is now going in the pages on which I make notes for our congress, and neither my interest nor my energy is sufficient for

anything else. I am a florin, I am a soul are asleep perity, so does what you will insight than e them. In any c Otherwise n children.

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The Complete Letters of  
**SIGMUND FREUD**

————— to —————

**WILHELM FLIESS**

1887 – 1904

Translated and Edited by  
**Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson**



The Belknap Press of  
Harvard University Press  
Cambridge, Massachusetts, and  
London, England  
1985

writes a very intelligent appreciation of *Studies on Hysteria* and later publications. . . . At the end he retracts some of his praise. But something remains, and the good impression is not entirely obliterated. . . .

So you see what happens. I live gloomily and in darkness until you come, and then I pour out all my grumbles to you, kindle my flickering light at your steady flame and feel well again; and after your departure I have eyes to see again, and what I look upon is good. Is that only because the term of the period had not previously been reached? Or could not one of the many days available for all purposes be made into the term by the mental influences by which he who is waiting for the term is affected? Must not some place be left for that, so that the dynamic aspect is not ruled out by the time factor?<sup>1</sup>

My cordial greetings to you and yours,

Your

Sigm.

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Dr. Sigm. Freud,  
Lecturer in Nervous Diseases  
in the University.

Vienna, 16. I. 99.  
IX. Berggasse 19.

My dear Wilhelm,

. . . If I were not so incapable of writing after ten hours' talking—as you can see from my irregular hand—I could write you a small treatise on the small advances made in the wish-theory, for since the 3rd<sup>2</sup> the light has never quite gone out, nor has the certainty that I have laid hands on something of key importance. But perhaps it is better that I should go on saving and collecting, so as not to appear before you again as a penniless

<sup>1</sup> This is Freud's first expression of doubt about Fliess's period theory, which he feared would eliminate the dynamic factors from the psyche. See Introduction, p. 37 *sqq.*

<sup>2</sup> The date of the previous letter.

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<sup>1</sup> See p. 101 *sqq.*

beggar at the Easter congress with nothing to offer you but promises for the future.

A few other things of less importance have happened. It turns out, for instance, that hysterical headaches are due to a fantastic parallel which equates the head with the other end of the body (hair in both places—cheeks and buttocks—lips and labiae—mouth and vagina); so that a migraine can be used to represent a forcible defloration, the illness thus again standing for a wish-fulfilment. That the sexual is the conditioning factor stands out with ever-increasing clarity. One patient (whom I cured with the help of the phantasy key) was continually plunged into despair by the gloomy conviction that she was useless, good for nothing, etc. I always thought that in early childhood she must have seen her mother in a similar state, in an attack of real melancholia. That was in conformity with the earlier theory, but in two years there was no confirmation of it. It now turns out that at the age of fourteen she discovered an *atresia hymenalis* in herself and despaired of ever being able to function fully as a woman, etc. Melancholia is thus fear of impotence. Similar states in which she could not make up her mind to choose a hat or a dress go back to the time when she had to choose her husband.

With another patient I have convinced myself that there really is a hysterical melancholia and established what its indications are, and I have also noted the great variety of translations of the same memory and gained a first inkling of how melancholia arises through summation. This patient incidentally is totally anæsthetic, as she ought to be according to an idea dating from the time of my earliest work on neurosis.<sup>1</sup>

I have heard of a third case in the following interesting manner. An important and wealthy man (a bank director), aged about sixty, came to see me and talked to me about the peculiarities of a young girl who is his mistress. I threw out the guess that she was probably quite anæsthetic. On the contrary, she has from four to six orgasms during a single coitus. But—she falls into a tremor as soon as he approaches her and immediately afterwards falls into a pathological sleep, in which she talks as if in hypnosis;

<sup>1</sup> See p. 101 *sqq.*

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she carries out post-hypnotic suggestions, and afterwards has complete amnesia about the whole thing. He will marry her off, and she will certainly be anæsthetic towards her husband. Her elderly lover, because of the easy identification with the powerful father of her childhood, obviously affects her in such a way as to release the libido attached to her phantasies. Very instructive! . . .

The children and their mother are at last well again. Little Anna woke up one morning and was suddenly cured, and since then has been delightfully cheeky.

Affectionate greetings to your wife and children, and let me have news of you soon.

Your

Sigm.

103

Vienna, 30. I. 99.

My dear Wilhelm,

. . . My dilatoriness is explained as follows. I wrote a letter to you a week ago, thinking I had made a real find. But doubts arose while I was writing and I decided to wait. I was quite right to do so, because the thing was wrong; that is to say, there was something in it, but it had to be worked out in quite another field of application.

You can have no idea how much your last visit raised my spirits. I am still living on it. The light has not gone out since; little bits of new knowledge glimmer now here, now there, which is truly refreshing after the comfortlessness of last year. What is rising out of the chaos this time is the connection with the psychology contained in the *Studies on Hysteria*, the relationship with conflict and life; I should like to call it clinical psychology. Puberty is coming more and more into the centre of the picture, and the phantasy key is substantiating itself. But I have nothing big and complete yet. I am diligently making notes

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THE ORIGINS OF  
PSYCHO-ANALYSIS

*Letters to Wilhelm Fliess,*

*Drafts and Notes:*

1887-1902

*by*

SIGMUND FREUD

EDITED BY

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