
Does the Unconscious Lie? : 15th April 2026 : Janet Haney

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Does the Unconscious Lie?

By Janet Haney

This writing is the first lie! It is made in the unconscious by an energetic agency seeking a more acceptable representative or symbol, the first one having been repressed (...)

[History, Myth and Fiction](#)

Does the Unconscious Lie?

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In his *Project for a Scientific Psychology*^[1] Freud presents Emma, under the heading of Hysterical *proton pseudos*,^[2] to clarify his thinking. What is the first lie?

Emma is “subject to a compulsion of not being able to go into shops *alone*.” She remembers that, when she was twelve years old, she went into a shop and saw two shop assistants laughing. She ran away in an “*affect of fright*.” Why? She thought they were laughing at her *clothes*. Oddly, she adds that one of them had “pleased her sexually.” In what way does this constitute the first lie?

Neither the fragments nor the effect of the experience make sense to Freud. The idea of her *clothes* doesn't explain why she can't go into a shop *alone*. And why does she say that one of the shop assistants pleases her sexually? Further questions bring a second memory that had not been in her mind during the moment described in this scene. When she was eight years old, she had gone into a shop to buy sweets: the grinning shopkeeper had grabbed at her genitals through her clothes. She had returned a second time, she couldn't understand why. She reproaches herself with bad conscience.

She makes an “associative link” between the two scenes: the “laughing” shop assistants reminded her of the “grinning” shopkeeper. Freud deduces something else. The earlier scene was lived before puberty and was invoked after puberty. The earlier scene *retrospectively* gets a sexual charge during the second scene. This quantity of energy is *transformed into angst* [JE, not anxiety], providing the motor discharge to propel Emma out of the shop.

Freud draws a schema to show how her words relate to each other and emerge into consciousness via her perceptions and memories. This writing allows him to see how *the most innocent idea*, “clothes,” represents the whole unconscious complex: repression accompanied by *a symbol-formation* (“clothes”) has taken place. Energy, arising from *within the body* and cut off from its original representations, is used to form the symbol. This writing is the first lie! It is made in the unconscious by an energetic agency seeking a more acceptable representative or symbol, the first one having been repressed. The outcome of this process is the “quite rationally constructed” symptom in which the newly formed symbol, “clothes,” plays no part and passes into consciousness. *This is the peculiarity of the case.* The repressed memory becomes the trauma of sexual desire through the *deferred action* after puberty (“the shop assistant was sexually pleasing to me”). Freud’s pen on the page renders these ideas sensible; his belief in a sexual energy caps it.



1. Freud, S., “Project for a Scientific Psychology” (1950), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume I*, London: Hogarth Press, 1966, pp. 353–356. [↑](#)
2. An idea found in Aristotle: “first falsity,” or “first lie.” [↑](#)

NOTES – Julia Evans

Footnote 1

SE I p353-356, PART II PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

[4] The Hysterical Proton Pseudos

See The Project for a Scientific Psychology (*Entwurf*) : 23rd & 25th September & 5th October 1895 : Sigmund Freud **at** this site /3 Sigmund Freud (September 1895 or Index of Sigmund Freud's texts)

- Does the Unconscious Lie? : 15th April 2026 : Janet Haney, this site /5 Authors A-Z (Haney)

Haney states, Emma is “subject to a compulsion of not being able to go into shops *alone*.” [a] ... She ran away in an “*affect of fright*.” [b] ... Oddly, she adds that one of them had “pleased her sexually.” [c] In what way does this constitute the first lie?

She makes an “associative link” [d] between the two scenes: the “laughing” [e] shop assistants reminded her of the “grinning” [e] shopkeeper. Freud deduces something else. The earlier scene was lived before puberty and was invoked after puberty. The earlier scene *retrospectively* gets a sexual charge during the second scene. This quantity of energy is *transformed into angst* [*JE, not anxiety*] [f], providing the motor discharge to propel Emma out of the shop.

[a] SE I p353,

[b] SE I p353, und lief in irgendwelchem *Schretkaffekt* davon.

[c] SE I p353, und dass ihr einer sexuell gefallen habe.

[d] SE I p353, We only need an associative link between the two./ Wir brauchen nur eine assoziative Verbindung zwischen. beiden.

[e] SE I p354 the laughing of the shop-assistants had reminded her of the grin with which the shopkeeper had accompanied the assault./ Im Laden *lachen* die beiden Kommis, dies Lachen ruft (unbewusst) die Erinnerung an den Greissler wach.

[f] SE I p354 The memory aroused what it was certainly not able to at the time, *a sexual release*, which was transformed into angst [not anxiety]. With this angst [not anxiety], she was afraid that the shop-assistants might repeat the assault, and she ran away./ Die Erinnerung erweckt, was sie damals gewiss nicht konnte, eine *sexuelle Entbindung*, die sich in **Angst** umsetzt. Mit dieser **Angst** fürchtet sie, die Kommis könnten das Attentat wiederholen, und läuft davon.

For comment on the translation of Sigmund Freud's term ‘angst’, see

Angst translated as Anxiety in Sigmund Freud's texts : 26th February 2025 : Julia Evans, see this site /Authors A-Z (Evans)

Note on Translating Angst & L'Angoisse as Anxiety : 20th February 2025 : Julia Evans. See this site /Authors A-Z (Evans))

Footnote 2

Jacques Lacan uses Aristotle's ‘first lie’ in Intervention on the Transference (Paris), Seminar on ‘Dora’ (1950-1951) : 16th October 1951 : Jacques Lacan. See this site /4 Jacques Lacan (19511016 or Index of Jacques Lacan's texts)