

FREUD'S CASES

Psychoanalysis and Literary Fiction

In the human sciences that dominate the public debate around 1900, literary fiction plays a rather dubious role. On the one hand, criminologists and sexologists often refer to literary material to substitute for the lack of empirical observations, and attribute special psychopathological value to the poetic depictions of the human struggle. On the other hand, the same discourses impute to literary authors a rather questionable relation to their poetic products, denying them psychological authority. In contrast to the psychologically and medically trained expert, literary authors, it is said, do not possess the ability to rationally and objectively oversee the entire consequences of their creations. The same mental disposition that qualifies poets to depict psychopathological conditions is responsible for disqualifying them as psychologists. In order to distinguish between scientists and poets, Richard von Krafft-Ebing characterized the

latter as sentimentalists and located their special ability for depicting “the miseries of man and the dark sides of his existence” in their sensitive nature that would itself always run the risk of degenerating into a “horrid caricature.”¹ As I have shown earlier in regard to the sexological reception of Marquis de Sade’s work, attributing to authors a psychological kinship with their literary creations was meant to make their own biographies accessible to psychopathological interpretation and, thus, to produce additional casuistic material. The most radical consequence of this treatment of literature can be found in the two volumes of Max Nordau’s 1892 book *Degeneration*, in which the social critic and physician presents a literary history of contemporary authors as a history of pathologies. Following in the footsteps of Cesare Lombroso’s criminal anthropology, Nordau claims that “degenerates are not always criminals, prostitutes, anarchists, and pronounced lunatics; they are often authors and artists.”² Nordau leaves no doubt about the pathological connection he sees between the author and his choice of material: “The artist who complacently represents what is reprehensible, vicious, criminal, approves of it, perhaps glorifies it, differs not in kind, but only in degree, from the criminal who actually commits it.”³

Considering the 1906 publication of an essay titled “On the Value of the Literary Representation of Crime for Penology” in the *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Strafrechtswissenschaft*,⁴ it must be assumed that this debate was still part of the general criminological agenda when Sigmund Freud approached a similar question in a short presentation one year later:⁵ “We laymen have always

1. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia sexualis: With Special Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Legal Study*, authorized translation of the 7th enlarged and revised German edition, trans. Charles Gilbert Chaddock (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1892), vii.

2. Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (New York: D. Appleton, 1895), vii.

3. Nordau, *Degeneration*, 326.

4. See Jacques Stern, “Über den Wert der dichterischen Behandlung des Verbrechens für die Strafrechtswissenschaft,” *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Strafrechtswissenschaft* 26 (1906): 145–171.

5. Debates about the psychopathological status of literature and the literary author in particular can also be found in Erich Wulffen’s popular criminological

been intensely curious to know . . . from what sources that strange being, the creative writer, draws his material, and how he manages to make such an impression on us with it and to arouse in us emotions of which, perhaps, we had not even thought ourselves capable.”⁶ Freud, however—and this can hardly be considered a surprise—arrives at conclusions very different from those of his medical colleagues Krafft-Ebing and Nordau. Indeed, his reevaluation of literary fiction not only contributes to enhancing its status by assigning to it new areas of psychological influence but also has a significant effect on literary production itself. Far from removing literature from the psychological context, Freud shifts the focus regarding the function of literary fiction for psychological cognition from authorship to form. As I discuss in this chapter, the question of literary form initially appears in Freud in connection with his case histories on hysteria and with the problem of casuistic representation. Freud, however, reverses the prevalent criminological perspective when he notes a certain proximity of his own scientific case histories to literature. This comparison concerns less the scientific value of Freud’s case histories than it does literary fiction and its *reality value*, and, thus, his contribution to new conceptions of literary realism. Indeed, the definition of literary fiction in reference to reality is also at stake in Freud’s 1907 presentation that was cited above, which I take as a point of departure for a discussion of Freud’s treatment of literature before focusing more closely on the question of literary form in his case histories.

In “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,” Freud attributes to the poet the special ability to give aesthetic pleasure by helping the reader to solve mental tensions and to enjoy his or her own fantasies and dreams without feeling the need for self-criticism, censorship,

books such as *Ibsens Nora vor dem Strafrichter und Psychiater* (Halle: Marhold, 1907), and *Gerhard Hauptmann vor dem Forum der Kriminalpsychologie und Psychiatrie: Naturwissenschaftliche Studien* (Breslau: Langewort, 1908). Nordau’s *Degeneration* and the publications following in his footsteps had a significant influence on later debates concerning the *degenerate art* in Nazi Germany.

6. Sigmund Freud, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” (1907/198), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 9 (1906–1908), trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 2001), 143.

and shame. Poetry, for Freud, has a sociopsychological function; it is a medium of aesthetic entertainment with the benefit of psychological relief. To accept Freud's conclusion, however, one must first accept his comparison of the poet's creativity to that of the playing child and the distinction that goes along with it and further shapes his argument: "The opposite of play is not seriousness—it is reality."⁷

The understanding of literary fiction as play that consciously sets itself apart from reality is one of the main and most productive distinctions in the early period of psychoanalysis when it was not yet established as a discipline and still had to define its most basic concepts. Although it was not Freud's intention to contribute to literary interpretation or even to establish a new philological approach to literature, psychoanalytic approaches to literature have significantly added to its redefinition, with important effects on the development of modern forms of writing. Freud himself credited literature with being a major influence on psychoanalysis. He even attributed to literary authors the original discovery of the unconscious, though not without adding that it was he who discovered "the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied."⁸ The anthropological model of psychoanalysis, not unlike poetry, rests on the foundation of a linguistic system and thus, seems to run the risk of being itself taken for literature. This explains Freud's sometimes dismissive attitude toward literature and his emphasis of the scientific quality by which psychoanalysis distinguishes itself and defies the suspicion of being nothing more than a fragile system of literary interpretation.⁹ Generously crediting poets with the discovery

7. Freud, "Creative Writers," 144.

8. Cited in Lionel Trilling, "Freud and Literature," in *The Liberal Imagination* (London: Doubleday Anchor, 1951), 34.

9. In this regard, Jean Starobinski has argued that Freud's seeming disregard for literature and art must be understood as a kind of defense mechanism to deflect from the "literary complex" belonging to psychoanalysis's own foundational background. While psychoanalysis intended to develop as the conscious discourse of reason over the irrational and the nondiscursive, Starobinski reminds us of the mythopoetic origin of many of its primary concepts. (See Jean Starobinski, "Psychoanalysis and Literary Understanding," in Starobinski, *The Living Eye*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989], 129–148.)

of the unconscious while emphasizing the superiority of his own scientific perspective is a rhetorical trick we know from Krafft-Ebing, who in the introduction to his *Psychopathia sexualis* lauds poets and philosophers for their depiction of mental predispositions only to claim the importance of scientific expertise for psychological cognition. Unlike Krafft-Ebing, however, who explains the poet's ability to depict pathological states of mind on the basis of the author's psychological kinship, Freud's scientific system of psychoanalysis has a much deeper and more profound connection to poetic language as it takes into consideration the formal and aesthetic aspects of literature. In addition to the understanding of a literary text as a manifestation of its author's psychological state, Freud finds in literary fiction an exploration of the unconscious by means of poetic form that can be translated into scientific and rational language with the support of the psychoanalytic method. Indeed, the realization of the scientific claim in psychoanalysis is based on a technique of decoding by which a cryptic symbolic language is replaced with a conscious language of interpretation. The scientific rationality of psychoanalysis is essentially based on methods of interpretation, its material is that of language and linguistic expression in which the unconscious matter makes its way to the surface without being recognized. Accordingly, concepts such as fiction, play, and literature are not necessarily to be considered dismissive in psychoanalytic vocabulary, even when Freud strictly distinguishes them from the realm of reality. What *realizes* itself in the *play* of literary fiction is precisely what is not supposed to be part of reality. While this is a very limited understanding of literary fiction, it nevertheless shows the specific psychoanalytic access to literature and the advantage that Freud finds in literary expression for the study of the unconscious.

Below I address the question of the psychoanalytic potential of literary representation in Freud's case histories. As a point of departure, I focus on Freud's famous comparison of case and novella in which he complicates the relation between science and literature. With this comparison, Freud shifts the focus away from the casuistic material itself toward its linguistic and literary composition. The

narrative model of the novella, however, with which Freud attaches his cases to forms of literary representation, does not prevail as the guiding model in Freud's later, more famous case histories. In the Dora case, published in 1905, Freud already questions the closed narrative form for casuistic representation and replaces the novelistic narrative of an omnipresent narrator with the rather fragmentary narrative of the patient herself. Although this places an even stronger emphasis on the question of representation, it requires a closer look at the literary conceptions of reality in their narrative composition. The discussion of some of Freud's most famous cases in the context of this study will contextualize the readings of two texts by Alfred Döblin and Robert Musil who again refer to historical cases in order to reevaluate the realist status of literature.

The Case as Novella

The problem of the distinction between literature and science accompanies the development of psychoanalysis and its methods from Freud's earliest studies. As evidence for the productive proximity of psychoanalysis to literature, literary critics have often pointed to the remark in the 1895 *Studies on Hysteria*, with which Freud introduces the epicrisis of the case of Elisabeth von R.:

I have not always been a psychotherapist. Like other neuropathologists, I was trained to employ local diagnoses and electro-prognosis, and it still strikes me myself as strange that the case histories [*Krankengeschichten*] I write should read like short stories [*Novellen*] and that, as one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science. I must console myself with the reflection that the nature of the subject is evidently responsible for this, rather than any preference of my own. The fact is that local diagnosis and electrical reactions lead nowhere in the study of hysteria, whereas a detailed description of mental processes such as we are accustomed to find in the works of imaginative writers [*Dichter*] enables me, with the use of a few psychological formulas, to obtain at least some kind of insight into the course of that affection.¹⁰

10. Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1957), 160–161.

Freud's comparison of his case histories with novellas has triggered various reactions. Some interpreters have declared this passage the founding document of psychoanalysis.¹¹ Still others have referred to this statement to question the scientific value and to criticize the literary style of Freud's case histories.¹² Freud himself attributed the irritation caused by the literary proximity of his case histories to his scientific upbringing. Beginning in 1883, he had learned how to compose case histories in Theodor Meynert's psychiatric clinic. In comparison with his famous psychoanalytic case histories, however, these early written recordings are highly formalized and do not show any specific individual engagement of their author.¹³

But Freud's genre comparison is not sufficiently understood by reducing it to a perspective that challenges the scientific quality of

11. See Steven Marcus, "Freud und Dora: Roman, Geschichte, Krankengeschichte," *Psyche* 28, no. 1 (1974): 32–79; Jutta Prasse, "Was ist wirklich geschehen?" in *Sprache und Fremdsprache. Psychoanalytische Aufsätze*, ed. Claus-Dieter Rath (Bielefeld: transcript, 2004), 183–193; and Marianne Schuller, "Erzählen Machen: Narrative Wendungen in der Psychoanalyse nach Freud," in *Wissen: Erzählen: Narrative der Humanwissenschaften*, ed. Arne Höcker, Jeannie Moser, and Philippe Weber (Bielefeld: transcript, 2006), 207–220.

12. See Adolf-Ernst Meyer, "Nieder mit der Novelle als Psychoanalysedarstellung: Hoch lebe die Interaktionsgeschichte," in *Die Fallgeschichte: Beiträge zu ihrer Bedeutung als Forschungsinstrument*, ed. Ulrich Stuhr and Friedrich-Wilhelm Deneke (Heidelberg: Asanger Roland Verlag, 1993), 61–84.

13. See Albrecht Hirschmüller, *Freuds Begegnung mit der Psychiatrie* (Tübingen: Diskord, 1991), 208. Although his psychoanalytic case histories differ significantly from these earlier more clinical recordings in their use of less standardized forms and a more refined narrative structure, Freud emphatically claimed his psychoanalytic practice to follow in the footsteps of the medical tradition. Freud's continuous use of the term *Krankengeschichte* (medical history) instead of *Fallgeschichte* (case history) could be interpreted as such an enforcement of this claim, as Mai Wegener argues. (See Mai Wegener, "Fälle, Ausfälle, Sündenfälle: Zu den Krankengeschichten Freuds," in *Fall—Fallgeschichte—Fallstudie: Theorie und Geschichte einer Wissensform*, ed. Susanne Düwell and Nicolas Pethes [Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2014], 170.) However, Stefan Goldmann has shown that the term *Fallgeschichte* was only established in Germany after World War II, and that Freud did not make a decision against it when using the generally accepted term *Krankengeschichte*. (See Stefan Goldmann, "Kasus—Krankengeschichte—Novelle," in *"Fakta, und kein moralisches Geschwätz": Zu den Fallgeschichten im "Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde" [1783–1793]*, ed. Sheila Dickson, Stefan Goldmann, and Christof Wingerts Zahn [Göttingen: Wallstein, 2011], 44.)

his studies. Freud himself thought of it as comforting that the literary form resulted from the object of his scientific interest and did not come from his well-known personal preference for literary fiction. That his case histories read like novellas can first and foremost be attributed to the important psychoanalytic insight that his patients' symptoms did not correspond to what he called "Realitätszeichen," signs of reality, in a letter to his friend Wilhelm Fließ,¹⁴ and that they must rather be decoded according to the fictitious value that was hidden somewhere within the patients' narratives. This again leads to the far-reaching conclusion essential for the clinical picture of hysteria that fictions have important effects on the formation of reality. Thus, it is what Jutta Prasse calls "the veracity of fiction"¹⁵ that is at stake in the passage from the *Studies on Hysteria* quoted above, if not—as one could claim with some confidence—in psychoanalysis in general.

But Freud's comparison of case histories with novellas has even more dimensions than the one that Freud himself emphasized when lamenting the challenge for the medical-scientific value of his studies. Indeed, Freud just reverses what has already been successfully practiced by the end of the nineteenth century, that novellas can be read as case histories.¹⁶ Considering the scientific value that was attributed to literary novellas by some of his sexological contem-

14. Sigmund Freud, *Briefe an Wilhelm Fließ: 1887–1904*, ed. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1986), 283.

15. Prasse, "Was ist wirklich geschehen," 190.

16. In addition to the examples discussed so far in this book, Georg Büchner's 1836 novella *Lenz* is based on the case of the *Storm and Stress* author Michael Reinhold Lenz. In his 1888 novella *Lineman Thiel*, Gerhard Hauptmann presents the protagonist's sudden and intense discharge of mental energies with catastrophic results. And one must also mention E. T. A. Hoffmann's 1816 novella, *The Sandman*, which Freud himself famously read as a case history. (See Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XVII (1917–1919): *An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, ed. James Strachey [London: Vintage, 2001], 217–256.) The close proximity between novella and case history can be traced back to Cervantes, whose novellas, as Stefan Goldmann argues, influenced and inspired Freud's own literary style. (See Stefan Goldmann, "Sigmund Freud und Hermann Sudermann oder die wiedergefundene wie eine Krankengeschichte zu lesende Novelle," in *Literatur, Mythos und Freud*, ed. Helmut Peitsch and Eva Lezzi [Potsdam: Universität Potsdam, 2009], 55.)

poraries, Freud's concern regarding the scientific appearance of his case histories might come as a surprise. On the one hand, it could be argued that Freud only pretended to be concerned about his finding and that his true intention was to emphasize the importance of literary forms of representation for the psychoanalytic method. On the other hand, one must recognize that Freud's work, in comparison with contemporary sexological discourses, takes the reference to literature to a new level. Although the strict distinction between literature and science remained an important element for the self-conception of sexology, Freud's confession scandalizes by radically undermining the distinction between poet and scientist and claiming an intrinsic connection between the two forms that are generally considered to be mutually exclusive. For Freud, literature is not valued simply as a supplier of material for psychological research that claims for itself the ability to read and interpret poetry rationally from the perspective of the human sciences. Rather, case histories that can be read as novellas adumbrate a direct connection between literary form and scientific cognition.

Another indicator of Freud's intention to attribute to literary fiction an important function for the formation of psychoanalytic knowledge is that his comparison makes reference to the genre of the novella instead of simply alluding to narrative qualities. As a genre, the novella shares many characteristics with the case history. In one of the first genre-specific studies of the case from 1930, the literary critic André Jolles recognized the case as an early form of the novella. According to Jolles, a case only needed a few additions to be turned from a simple form to the artistically and aesthetically more accomplished form of the novella.¹⁷ But his definition of the case as a simple form that challenges the law and the norm shows even more similarities with the definition of the novella since Goethe. In his conversations with Johann Peter Eckermann, Goethe famously characterizes the novella as a "peculiar and as yet unheard-of event."¹⁸ Furthermore, he refers to his 1809 novel, *Elective Affini-*

17. See André Jolles, *Simple Forms: Legend, Saga, Myth, Riddle, Saying, Case, Memorable, Fairytale, Joke*, trans. Peter J. Schwartz (New York: Verso, 2017), 146.

18. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret*, trans. John Oxenford (London: George Bell, 1874), 209.

ties, in which he not only highlights the primacy of novelty and noteworthiness of the novella but also emphasizes that it centers in form and content around a “conflict between law and violence, commonsense and reason, passion and prejudice.”¹⁹ Friedrich Theodor Vischer summarized these characteristics in his 1857 *Aesthetics*, where he writes that the novella “does not present the complete development of a character, but an excerpt from the life of a human being that is marked by friction and is in crisis, and that exhibits to us with clarity and by means of a reversal of fate and emotional complication what human life is in general.”²⁰ One could take Vischer’s definition of the novella and apply it directly to Freud’s case histories from the *Studies on Hysteria*. Against this background, it will not be surprising to find that Freud’s famous comparison is placed at the epicrisis and thus at just the part of a case history that is supposed to develop and accentuate the central conflict of the case. And when Vischer emphasizes the special usefulness of the novella for the depiction and understanding of human life, the genre’s close proximity to the case history becomes strikingly evident. Novellas presenting individual lives in crisis in such a way that they take on an exemplary character for the understanding of human life in general can indeed be read like case histories with their epistemological tendency to draw general conclusions from the representation of individual histories.

Freud surely would have liked to claim authorship for his comparison of case with novella. Its originality, however, cannot solely be attributed to the innovative potential of the psychoanalytic method. Freud was an attentive reader of novellas, and Stefan Goldmann has argued that nineteenth-century novelistic fiction formed an almost inexhaustible archive of casuistry for Freud, who took great advantage of it for his own work.²¹ In Hermann Sudermann’s 1894 novella *Der Wunsch*, Goldmann was even able to

19. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Elective Affinities*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1971), 235.

20. Friedrich Theodor Vischer, *Ästhetik oder Wissenschaft des Schönen: Zum Gebrauche der Vorlesungen: Dritter Theil, Zweiter Abschnitt* (Stuttgart: Macken, 1857), 1318.

21. See Goldmann, “Sigmund Freud und Hermann Sudermann,” 61.

identify a model for the very case in the *Studies on Hysteria* from which Freud's famous comparison originates. The relation between Freud's case histories and literature, however, cannot be reduced to the literary archive that Freud might have accessed. Freud's case histories are based on a literary structure that, although posing a challenge to the scientific claim of psychoanalysis, remains responsible for its epistemic dynamic and indispensable for psychoanalytic cognition. It is worth repeating Freud's own assessment that the literariness of his case histories is not based on his own decision or even preference, but that it comes with the object of his investigation. The object of Freud's study is the unconscious, the structure of which Jacques Lacan once compared to that of language, itself a medium that disguises and obscures rather than offering transparency. It is against this backdrop that Mai Wegener concludes that it is the status and condition of language by which psychoanalysis detaches itself from the scientific model of the case,²² and thus, one is tempted to add, opens itself for a poetic experience.

Recording the Case of Dora

In the preface to his most famous case history, published in 1905 as "Fragment of an Analysis of Hysteria" and better known as the Dora case, Freud addresses some problems regarding the composition and publication of his cases. Although he expresses concern about the violation of his patients' privacy that a publication of the most intimate details of their lives would certainly entail, those difficulties he refers to as being "of a technical kind"²³ and that concern the narrative composition of the case history, are of great importance in this context and will be given close attention below.

Freud leaves no doubt that he considers the publication of his cases his scientific duty as long as he can avoid the direct injury of

22. See Wegener, "Fälle, Ausfälle, Sündenfälle," 176.

23. Sigmund Freud, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 2.

the individual. The delicacy of the intimate matters discussed during the therapeutic sessions, however, has a more direct influence on its scientific recording. It excludes the possibility of note taking during the psychotherapeutic treatment “for fear of shaking the patient’s confidence and of disturbing his own view of the material under observation.”²⁴ Thus, in particular, the recording of treatments of longer duration poses a problem for which Freud claims not to have found a solution yet. On the one hand, the Dora case offers itself for publication because the treatment spans only a relatively short period of time and its solution centers around only two dreams. On the other hand, Freud’s interest in the publication of this case is not simply owed to its particular exemplarity and peculiar features, but concerns the composition of case histories in general. It would not have been very difficult, Freud writes, to record the case of Dora from the perspective of its solution and to give a “full and concise medical report.” This, however, would have meant “plac[ing] the reader in a very different situation from that of the medical observer.”²⁵ One cannot sufficiently stress the relevance of this remark for an adequate evaluation of Freud’s cases. He is not content with presenting a clinical picture and instead tasks himself with demonstrating the psychoanalytic technique. Thus, Freud deliberately decides against influencing the form of the narrative even when it affects the consistency of the report. Steven Marcus thus attributes formal similarities of the Dora case to a modern experimental novel: “Its narrative and expository course, for example, is neither linear nor rectilinear; instead its organization is plastic, involuted, and heterogeneous, and follows spontaneously an inner logic that seems frequently to be at odds with itself; it often loops back around itself and is multidimensional in its representation of both its material and itself.”²⁶ From Freud’s own perspective, the literary form Marcus describes is precisely what guarantees the scientific value of his procedure. This is due to two factors. First, it is

24. Freud, *Dora*, 4.

25. Freud, *Dora*, 9.

26. Steven Marcus, “Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History,” in *Freud: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Perry Meisel (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1981), 189.

the status of language on which Freud's psychotherapeutic method relies, through which he attempts to find access to the concealed source of his patient's symptoms and by means of which he delivers his scientific results. In other words, language is simultaneously both the channel through which the unconscious sends coded messages and the medium of scientific rationality. In Freud's practice, then, language has two opposing functions, to conceal and to detect, to distort and to clarify. And this leads to the second factor concerning the narrative structure of Freud's cases. A case is based on a history that can be told differently from the perspective of the patient and that of a rational observer who is able to oversee the presented material in its entirety. A footnote that Freud added to the Dora case reveals a relevant and interesting detail concerning the importance of narrative for the psychotherapeutic method. Freud here refers to another patient who was sent to him with hysteric symptoms. However, after the patient told her history, which "came out perfectly clearly and connectedly in spite of the remarkable events it dealt with," Freud concludes "that the case could not be one of hysteria," a diagnosis that was later confirmed by "a careful physical examination."²⁷ In sum, those who can tell their own history coherently, with clarity in expression and without contradictions, cannot be considered neurotic. On the flip side, it must be assumed that hysterics are poor storytellers.

It is Dora's own narrative that confronts Freud with the problem of representation that surfaces in almost all his case histories, which also are always histories of observation and histories of psychotherapeutic treatments. In the case of the "Wolfman" from 1918, Freud states: "I can neither write a purely historical nor a purely pragmatic history of my patient, I can neither provide a treatment history nor a case history, but shall find myself obliged to combine the two approaches."²⁸ In the case histories from the *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud still followed the model of the clinical case where

27. Freud, *Dora*, 10n3.

28. Sigmund Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis [The 'Wolfman']," in *The 'Wolfman' and Other Cases*, trans. Louise Adey Huish (New York: Penguin, 2003), 211.

he started with the symptoms and, as he writes in the preface to the Dora case, “aimed at clearing them up one after the other.”²⁹ Since then, however, he found this method to be inadequate in facing the structure of the neurosis and he abandoned it in favor of a more refined 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. But on this plan everything that has to do with the clearing-up of a particular symptom emerges piecemeal, woven into various contexts, and distributed over widely separated periods of time. In spite of this apparent disadvantage, the new technique is far superior to the old, and indeed there can be no doubt that it is the only possible one.”³⁰

As a result of this new technique, Freud’s cases appear to be incomplete, piecemeal, and fragmentary. Instead of creating coherence, they are disruptive, they break apart connections and align themselves with the generation of inconsistencies and gaps, in which shall become manifest what Freud refers to as the “necessary correlate of the symptoms . . . which is theoretically requisite.”³¹ Thus, when Freud publishes the Dora case as “Fragment of an Analysis of Hysteria,” he not only alludes to the incompleteness of this specific analysis because of Dora’s decision not to continue with the treatment. In fact, the title designates the essential technique of psychoanalysis for the composition of case histories. A preliminary conclusion could therefore be that the literary genre that Freud’s cases are fundamentally based on is not so much the novella as the fragment.

Literary Modernism and Psychoanalysis

On the occasion of Freud’s seventieth birthday, the literary author and medical doctor Alfred Döblin, congratulated him with a speech

29. Freud, *Dora*, 6.

30. Freud, *Dora*, 6–7.

31. Freud, *Dora*, 11.

in which he also addressed the connection between psychoanalysis and literary fiction. Döblin refers to Freud's novella/case analogy to demonstrate how psychoanalysis profited from adapting literary forms and by drawing knowledge from the realm of literature. Döblin, however, rejects the popular opinion that Freud had influenced literary fiction: "One has suggested that Freud's depth psychology would be followed by a depth poetry. Complete nonsense! Dostojewski still lived before Freud, Ibsen and Strindberg wrote before Freud. And we certainly know that Freud himself learned from them and used them as evidence."³² In other contexts, Döblin is more generous when it comes to evaluating the psychoanalytic impact on modern literature. For instance, he refers to psychoanalytic technique as an important influence for rejecting criticism that he had adapted the literary style of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* from James Joyce. In fact, psychoanalysis undoubtedly had a great impact on modernist prose, and Thomas Anz convincingly claims in a 1997 research report on psychoanalysis and literary modernism that twentieth-century literary history could not be appropriately understood without the history of the reception of psychoanalysis.³³ But Anz also emphasizes the differences and quotes Robert Musil: "Literature differs from psychology, as literature differs from science. . . . The difference itself is simple: literature does not communicate knowledge and cognition. But: literature makes use of knowledge and cognition."³⁴ Even where psychoanalytic insights inform the production of literary fiction, the literary text does not intend a medical diagnosis or psychological case history.

Considering his influence on modernist literature, it seems remarkable that Freud himself remained committed to a rather

32. Alfred Döblin, "Sigmund Freud zum 70. Geburtstage," in *Die Zeitlupe: Kleine Prosa*, ed. Walter Muschg (Olten: Walter Verlag, 1962), 87.

33. See Thomas Anz, "Psychoanalyse in der literarischen Moderne: Ein Forschungsbericht und Projektentwurf," in *Die Literatur und die Wissenschaften 1770–1930*, ed. Karl Richter, Jörg Schönert, and Michael Titzmann (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1997), 377–413.

34. Robert Musil, "Fallengelassenes Vorwort zu: Nachlass zu Lebzeiten-Selbstkritik u-Biogr. [1935]," in *Gesammelte Werke: Prosa und Stücke, Kleine Prosa, Aphorismen, Autobiographisches*, ed. Adolf Frisé (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978), 967.

classical literary concept. The transition from the novella to the fragment for the composition of psychoanalytic cases could be interpreted as paving the way for the transition from realist to modernist prose forms at the turn of the twentieth century. Although this holds true from the perspective of many modernist authors who refer to psychoanalysis as one of their major influences, it means giving too much credit to Freud to attribute to him the role of godfather of literary modernism. For Freud, the fragment is not an independent and self-contained literary form. Instead, it signals the incompleteness of the narrative and is supposed to support psychological cognition. The fragment is characterized by a deficiency, and in Freud's psychotherapeutic setup the neurosis is mastered when the analyst succeeds in making the patient familiar with her own history. In the parlance of literary history one feels reminded of Goethe's famous saying that Classicism is an expression of health whereas Romanticism is one of disease.³⁵ The completeness and closure of the narrative remains the ultimate goal of psychoanalysis, and this is where it differs from both the Romantic notion of literature and that of the early twentieth century.

In conclusion, literary authors adapted from psychoanalysis the fragmentary forms of writing without, however, subscribing to its dedication to completion and the notion of a *healthy* narrative. Modernist forms of writing exhibit the futility of such an endeavor and have indeed quite successfully shown that every story rests on a foundation that is in itself contingent and by no means provides a stable and readily available ground of meaning. When modernist authors at the beginning of the twentieth century keep producing literary case histories by following the literary tradition of referencing historically authentic cases, they no longer aim at displaying coherency and stability. Instead they exhibit the fragmentary, contingent, and indissoluble character of an individual history that escapes the rational attempts to contain it by means of scientific precision. In the literary context of the early twentieth century, a case

35. "Das Klassische nenne ich das Gesunde und das Romantische das Kranke." (Johann Peter Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe*, ed. Ernst Beutler [München: dtv, 1976], 332.)

no longer appears as a case of a general order of things, but it is precisely this connection that modernist forms of writing intend to dissolve and expose in its arbitrariness.

Freud's psychoanalytic technique is still based on the promise of the cultural institution of literature since Goethe; he remains indebted to the *dispositif* of *Bildung*, according to which one reaches the status of a responsible subject when one masters one's own history by means of narrative. Even in his most fragmented case histories, Freud still follows the model of the *Bildungsroman*, which tells the story of how one became what one always was already. At the same time, however, Freud's cases demonstrate the work and discipline that are necessary to successfully gain control over one's own history and life, and thus offer insight into the formal conditions of this complicated endeavor.