Freud deliberately set the cat among the pigeons when he confessed that his case histories ‘read like short stories’ and appear to ‘lack the serious stamp of science’ (Breuer & Freud, 1893–5, p. 160). But the German does not say ‘science’ (Wissenschaft) as translated in the Standard Edition; it says ‘scientificity’ or ‘characteristics of science’ (Wissenschaftlichkeit). Freud was not only speaking of science as such, he was speaking of its style. This was his challenge to readers: you must learn new ways of reading.

Anat Tzur Mahalel has taken up the challenge, at one degree removed, of applying such new readings to the writings of six of Freud’s patients about their analysis – Joseph Wortis, Smiley Blanton, Abram Kardiner, John M. Dorsey, The Wolf Man (Sergei Pankejeff) and H.D. (Hilda Doolittle). Biographically, this is a medley of styles and voices, and Tzur Mahalel sets out to discover if they have anything else apart from Freud in common.

A previous study of some of these patients, Unorthodox Freud by Lohser and Newton (1996), uses their accounts to document Freud’s deviations from a dubious notion of orthodox analysis. By contrast, Tzur Mahalel wants us to read them, not as witnesses for the prosecution, but democratically, in their own right and from their respective viewpoints. Her readings are concerned with authority: she reminds us that in writing their accounts the patients are reclaiming ownership of their experience and thus redressing an age-old imbalance of power between therapist and patient.

Freud himself recorded only one of these cases, the Wolf Man. But though his version is not there to distract us, a conflict of interests persists: how to restore these satellite figures to autonomy, and prevent them being sucked into the black hole of Freud biography.

That looks like an exorbitant demand. In writing their memoirs, the patients have, by their own volition, written their short stories into Freud’s long story. On their behalf, Tzur Mahalel invokes Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of minor literature that ‘gives voice to the voices that had been left muted’ (p. xvi). A voice is political (German ‘Stimme’ denotes both ‘voice’ and ‘vote’): it is a claim to autonomy, perhaps even authority. If the voice is to be individual, staking that claim means choosing a style. Tzur Mahalel goes a step further: as she states, ‘psychoanalysis is by its nature dialogical’ (p. xiv) and in effect creates a new and unique language. The questions she asks in each instance about these retrospective accounts are: what happens to that language after

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the analysis has ended? How did these analysands transition into authors?
And in what way have they translated Freud’s messages to them into their own
idiom?

Answering these questions in detail for all six cases would be beyond the
scope of a book of less than 200 pages. Working instead at a higher level of
generalization, Tzur Mahalel seeks in each text traces of a common process
of separation from, and mourning for, the analysis. In the first case she
presents, that of Joseph Wortis, there is even the question of whether to
describe the case as a proper psychoanalysis. It was a conspicuously failed
training, as both participants were forced to admit. But, perhaps even more
interestingly, it can be read as a fascinating altercation, raising questions about
Wortis’s motives as well as about Freud’s suspiciously irritable reactions to him.
Why did this cocky young American get under Freud’s skin? To have your
life’s work questioned is obviously provoking, but surely a seasoned analyst
should not let himself be provoked? Tzur Mahalel refers to Freud’s ingrained
hostility to American culture and duly notes that Wortis’s loyalty to the
anti-psychoanalytical Havelock Ellis was an aggravating factor. As always,
more questions could be asked: might not Wortis have been exaggerating for
effect, since to have angered Freud is, after all, a sort of achievement? And could
the old man possibly have sensed in Wortis some unwelcome aspect of himself
when young?

Whatever the psychological correlates, Tzur Mahalel brings us back to the
central question of how the analyst deals with the balance of power: ‘Freud’s
lack of insight into Wortis’s inability to express himself freely in the presence
of the authoritative other creates a tragic impasse in this complex analysis’
(p. 24). Tzur Mahalel presents Freud’s failure as an example of the danger
that any therapy must face, of becoming a ‘dialog of power instead of intimacy’
(p. 25).

Psychoanalysis is both dialogical and agonistic. Tzur Mahalel brings to light
resistances less overt than Wortis’s, even in devotees such as Blanton or H.D.
or the compliant Pankejeff. Unlike the others, Pankejeff (aka the ‘Wolf Man’)
had to be urged to write his memoirs. His narrative, unlike the others, focuses
on his autobiography rather than on the analysis itself. That may in part
be because Pankejeff felt this was what his patron, Muriel Gardner, wanted
of him. Or else, it could be because he hesitated to compete with Freud’s case
history. His own passive resistance to psychoanalysis may have something
to do with pressure from the analyst – what Tzur Mahalel terms Freud’s
‘troubling conflict between his rush to develop and prove his theory and an
awareness of the deep and prolonged processes that psychoanalysis requires’
(p. 130).

In his later years Pankejeff denigrated his years of treatment and consequently
also the part he had played – and continued to play – in writing memoirs or
giving interviews. Tzur Mahalel justifiably stresses the role played by Pankejeff’s
sister: she quotes his remark from a late interview – ‘Well, this sister complex is
really the thing that ruined my entire life’ (p. 135). The leitmotif of Tzur Mahalel’s reading of this case is the veil (the caul with which the patient was born) as a mask of the truth. The dream-wolves too were masks and Freud also wore one, for he ‘is implicitly depicted as a wolf, intently staring at the analysand, fixing the analysand’s narrative through his interpretations and writing’ (p. 133). Pankejeff’s nickname thus turns out to be a misnomer. What ruined his life was his failure to become a wolf. In a final switch of animal metaphors, Pankejeff described himself ruefully as the ‘Paradepferd’ (‘parade horse’) of psychoanalysis.

Animals play a prominent part in the other analyses, too. Blanton and Freud bonded over their mutual love of dogs, and Tzur Mahalel notes: ‘Through the dialog about man’s attachment to his dog, a new opportunity opened up for communicating about issues of attachment, and a new language was created …’ (p. 67). By contrast, H.D. felt that her instant attachment with Freud’s chow Jofi aroused Freud’s resistance and justified her non-rational world view:

My intuition challenges the Professor, though not in words. […] If this dog and this woman ‘take’ to one another, it will prove that beyond your caustic criticism – if criticism it is – there is another region of cause and effect, another region of question and answer. (H.D., 1985 p. 99)

H.D. is writing her own subversive ‘short story’ which can be read as a reaction to an assumed ‘scientific’ reading. In the case of H.D. – a writer, a maker of myths and mysteries – feeling is more tangible and essential than factuality. The moment before her encounter with Jofi, Freud had said to her (‘I thought a little sadly’) that she was the only person who had looked at the things in his room before him (H.D., 1985, p. 98). Yet, a couple of pages later, that same memory is subjected to revision: ‘For the Professor is not always right. He did not know – or did he? – that I looked at the things in his room before I looked at him’ (pp. 101–2). By looking past Freud, H.D. had felt that she was overlooking him. This recognition created a conflict for H.D. since she also cared for and respected Freud. So H.D. deliberately revises her account to question that moment. But now the narrative itself has been subverted.

Since H.D.’s elusive memoir (like fiction, or like psychoanalysis itself) questions historical reality, Tzur Mahalel calls for ‘a fragmentary reading’ (p. 139). That phrase is left hanging, but the H.D. quotation that follows soon after hints at a meaning: ‘I do not want to become involved in the strictly historical

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1. New biographical material on the Wolf Man and his sister can be found online. The Odessa historian Oleg Gubar has posted his documentation of the family estate, Vasilev’ka, and copies of what are presumably his sister Anna’s sole surviving poems (which include a lullaby addressed to Sergei and a short poem in which the poet sees her own predicament reflected in that of a caged wolf cub). See https://studylib.ru/doc/2230358/oleg-gubar._-nechto-ob-anne-pankeevoj (accessed 3 March 2021). See also, Sergei Kotelko’s photographic documentation of the family, its history and its estate: https://pragmatika.media/rodovoe-logovo-odesskij-pacient-doktora-frejda/ (accessed 3 March 2021).
sequence. I wish to recall the impressions, or rather I wish the impressions to recall me. Let the impressions come in their own way, make their own sequence.’ (ibid.). The author, not knowing herself, allows the writing to bring her ‘self’ to mind. Tzur Mahalel follows that process through H.D.’s reading of Goethe’s ‘Mignon’s Song’ (‘Kennst Du das Land’). Textual criticism becomes a second level of poetry: fragmented lines of the poem coalesce into a poetical history of H.D.’s analysis.

The ‘fragmentary reading’ Tzur Mahalel invokes brings to mind the Dora case (‘Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria’) – which Wortis evoked through the original title of his memoir, Fragments of an Analysis with Freud. In both cases, retrospect fills gaps in the story. In Freud’s case, it was his subsequent understanding of the transference that would complete the picture; in Wortis’s, he concludes that ‘basically it was the scientific differences that caused the difficulties’ (Wortis, 1994, p. 186). They are both right – but the rightness of writers can be less interesting than what they have left out.

Aside from the Wolf Man’s case, Abram Kardiner’s analysis is the earliest that Tzur Mahalel discusses – it took place in 1921 – yet it was one of the last to be published, under the title My Analysis with Freud: Reminiscences in 1977. No one could miss the irony that, a quarter of a century after Dora, Freud should have failed to detect Kardiner’s unanalysed filial transference, and later hailed his case as ‘complete and perfect’ (p. 78). The oversight invites our Schadenfreude (and in his foreword the Series Editor too takes up that invitation). But Kardiner himself appeared forgiving. After all, as he told Freud, psychoanalysis ‘couldn’t hurt anyone’ (p. 81).

Freud’s response to Kardiner’s remark was to show him two before-and-after photos of Horace Frink (Kardiner’s American mentor): the first depicted Frink looking impressive; in the second, he was haggard and apparently 20 years older. Kardiner was shocked. Tzur Mahalel reads this display of photos as Freud’s warning of the dependence analysands may develop upon the analyst and this may well be how Kardiner interpreted it. But I suspect there was another level. In a letter from Freud to Frink at the time of Kardiner’s analysis, Freud wrote:

‘You are a naughty boy! I had my laugh at your photos even before I knew from Meyer that one of them had been taken in Rotterdam. I rejoice in this trick of yours as a token of your good humour.’ (Freud to Frink 27 October 1921, in Wertham Papers 1,7, Library of Congress)

My guess is that these photos are the ones Freud showed Kardiner, and that the ‘trick’ Freud alludes to was that Frink labelled a healthy portrait ‘before analysis’ and a decrepit-looking one ‘after analysis’. If my guess is correct, this was a private joke between the two analysts. The question why Freud did not let Kardiner in on the joke must remain open.

The least well known of her six author/analysands was John M. Dorsey, an American professor of psychiatry who came to Vienna for analysis with Freud in the mid-1930s, and in 1976 published his memoir, An American Psychiatrist in Vienna, 1935–1937, and His Sigmund Freud. The ‘His’ in the title insists on the
subjective nature of Dorsey’s experience, in line with his belief that one must always cultivate awareness of the primacy of psychic reality. In consequence, Dorsey’s prose is obtrusively studded with possessive pronouns. As Tzur Mahalel indicates, there is a disparity between the awkwardness of his writing and his literary aspirations.

After his analysis, and as a way of working through his separation from Freud, Dorsey started working on a play. It was to be set on a lifeboat and to describe the progressive deaths of the passengers. Dorsey remarked that Freud had once compared his mind to that of Thornton Wilder, and Tzur Mahalel justifiably speculates that Dorsey’s play had thematic affinities to Wilder’s *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (a novel, incidentally, and not ‘a play’). Since this was a book Freud loved, that looks like high praise for Dorsey. However, his analysis took place around the time of Wilder’s first visit to Freud in 1935. During that meeting Freud had expressed vehement distaste for Wilder’s latest novel, *Heaven’s My Destination*, on account of its fanatical religious protagonist (Molnar, 1992, p. 191).

Like Dorsey, all the analysands were continually faced with obscure and equivocal messages they failed to comprehend. Tzur Mahalel argues that it was their ‘passion to translate’ (p. 184) which was their way of dealing with them and which was the underlying motive of their memoirs. Elsewhere she has explained what ‘translation’ involves:

They [the narratives] express translation under three aspects: reconstruction of the past (the work of memory), interpreting the conscious residues of the transference (the work of mourning), and, as a deferred action, deciphering the enigmatic messages received from Freud as the parental figure. This representation of the analysand’s writing suggests that the separation from analysis is an endless work of translation within the endless process of deciphering the unconscious. (Tzur Mahalel, 2017, p. 1719)

In the end, it seems as if there is no liberation from analysis for these patients. They are doomed to endless ‘translation’. I had naively been hoping to see them finally released into a world beyond therapy. But then again, I sit on the history end of the *Psychoanalysis and History* seesaw, and there has always been an uneasy balance between the historian’s and the therapist’s respective frames of reference.

References


