

● HUMOUR & PSYCHOANALYSIS

In about 1900, Freud's theory on human sexuality caused a social scandal. Society was unwilling to accept the destructive views of the Viennese professor and official recognition was a while in coming. Even for the surrealists of the 1920s and 1930s, Freud was a confounded revolutionary thinker, and psychoanalysis was some sort of hermetic doctrine just for the enlightened. Sex was still the mysteriousness of Maya's semi-see-through veil...

However, after the Second World War, the situation changed somewhat. Bikinis and mini-skirts appeared, and psychoanalysis along with the incomprehensible theory of relativity entered the popular mainstream. The Freudian term of 'subconscious' entered everyday jargon. Psychologists, psychoanalysts, sexologists, and psychiatrists wrote newspaper articles, prepared entertaining tests, and appeared on the radio and television. Some of them even became as popular as actors and pop stars. Sometime in the 1960s, a great sexual revolution swept across the world. Some of it was just a fad, but some of it changed our morals. Since then, no one has had to resort to dreaming about mussels and other erotic fetishes because sex has become a public matter. Beautiful Maya suddenly stopped being shy to the extent that we almost had regrets. As they say, Freud would have been dumbfounded.

Libido is a philosophical paradox! The world may have been rejuvenated by eroticism, but psychoanalysis is quite outdated. After all, with all due respect to the great Freud, it is just a hoary old positivist science. It is the science of our fathers, a science full of strange details, quirks, fetishes, trinkets, etuis, and other junk from the end of old times. A lot of it must seem ridiculous today, and it is hard to suppress a laugh. Life is always faster than science, and in the science of man this is doubly applicable. With psychoanalysis, these days it is a little like entering a fun house or an entertaining collection of curios. So, once again we must beg Freud's forgiveness, but his figure is calling out to be caricatured today. The willing custodian with a cultivated beard, Sigmund Freud himself stands before us. This is the start of a tour of the winding labyrinth of human vice and passion, compulsive desire, suppressed instincts, perversions and pathological inclinations. Humans are probably not quite normal...

Unfortunately, that is the way it is. Psychoanalysis seriously doubts the normality of humankind. You have no idea of everything bound up inside us. Under our consciousness is the subconscious, even further down is the unconscious, and if we go up again there is the ego, and on top of that the super-ego. The fundamentals of human existence are dubious through and through, and we should be glad that someone has pointed this out to us. The roots of life do not distinguish much between the normal and abnormal; that is something we must distinguish ourselves in our own development. Naturalness tends to be unnatural and pathological more than natural and naïve in the Rousseau sense. Let us accept, then, that in each passion there is something perverse, in each logic there is something nonsensical, and in every nonsense there is an inner logic. In each woman there is a hysteric, whether she likes it or not, and every superman has his complexes. And ultimately: humour often has something common with neurosis; there are very strange things in the human laugh. But that is not to say we need stop laughing.

Freud was a prototype of the Viennese citizen in the Biedermeier tradition. He was no firebrand or revolutionary, but an orderly father of six children, the head of the family. Before his marriage, the amorous Freud wrote more than 900 letters to his future wife, but later went on to call the passion in his private life sentiment. Stefan Zweig describes Freud to us as a tirelessly working machine; an

incredible wonder of nature, but that is not entirely true. Intellectual discipline was not at all inherent in the genius; it was something he cultivated tenaciously through work. Freud was unwilling to shed light on his life in order to prevent such information being used against his psychoanalysis. From the outside, there is nothing at all to be seen; personal matters are kept concealed or simply do not exist. He spent his whole life proceeding with the regular rhythm of a settled man who devotes himself to science and his family and, for his own pleasure, collects antiques. Professor Sigmund Freud spent nearly fifty years in the same house, at Berggasse 19, Wien. In the photograph we see a solid, four-storey townhouse, which would not look out of place in Prague either. A biographical novel of the great man would soon run out of steam because of a lack of material. A full week of work, from morning to night; no haste, just a regular routine: lectures at the university, analyses of patients and then, in the night, the writing of specialist books. On Saturday afternoon, a game of cards in a Viennese coffeehouse.

The scientist, taken by his word, was stubbornly silent. Even so, more than enough was said. No crankiness, no infidelity, all of this Freud mercilessly suppressed in the interests of science. An absolutely regular life, pleasant Viennese ennui with a Viennese coffee and all that belongs to Vienna. And then work, work, work again. Freud organized everything himself, without a secretary; he wrote letters in his own hand and kept his card-index himself. Finally, half an hour before going to bed, he analysed himself.

Freud's portrait in the Biedermeier frame is a perfect stylization. Only two things can provide us with any solace. Freud suffered from neurosis and had bad moods just like any other mortal. Freud also had a sense of humour, which not everyone has. This latter trait is of eminent interest to us.

According to Freud's pupil Jones, Freud inherited his sense of humour from his father. We know that Freud was born in Příbor, in Moravia, and that he came from the family of a Jewish wool trader. And the Jewish environment has always had a place for the Jewish anecdote. Freud's father was the first to teach Freud how to round off an observation with a joke. A Jewish anecdote is always more than just a bit of fun; it is also a piece of popular poetry, a philosophical aphorism, a piece of vital wisdom with a long and lively tradition. Freud was interested in anecdotes – especially Jewish anecdotes – throughout his life; he collected them and recorded them. His collection was evidently not intended solely for scientific purposes.

Jokes, puns, and anecdotes attracted Freud as typical manifestations of the subconscious. In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud addresses the effect of unconscious forces in cases of erroneous actions. Absent-mindedness, slips of the tongue, incorrect reading, confusion, making mistakes, etc., often make for comical situations. Verbal humour has something in common with psychopathology. Solution words, anagrams, puns, and double meanings are the first requirement of an anecdote.

The Psychopathology of Everyday Life was published in book form in 1904. A year later, another work appeared, called *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*. Freud was clearly continuing his research...

The joke is formed, like a dream, by the unconscious work of mental forces. As nature, under heavy pressure, once transformed prehistoric ferns, horsetails and moss into coal, so the unconscious processes the content of the conscious into an entirely new quality. However, there are evident differences between a dream and a joke. A dream is always mysterious, poetic and incomprehensible, whereas a joke requires clear contours and clarity. A dream is enclosed in its own world, but a joke needs the possibility of a message, social communication. Freud states that a joke is the most social spiritual act leading to bliss.

Someone has to tell the joke, someone has to listen to the joke, and then the joke has to be conveyed to a third person. That is perhaps why a comical couple of clowns are so popular, where the third party is the audience. A dream is a monologue of the soul, but a joke is an expanded dialogue of the collective conscious. Without the participation of this third party not all the social functions of humour are met.

A joke is also an action that leads to our satisfaction. If such humour is biologically and erotically based, it is clear that an attempt at a joke is a constant compulsion of almost every human being. What else do we desire other than bliss? Where there is no humour, there is evidently no desire to satisfy deep inner needs. Therefore a lack of humour is a serious mental disorder. Neurotic disquiet, on the other hand, supports the formation of a joke. Freud's theory is not simple and it is possible to think it through to absolute antitheses. In any rate, this theory has so far penetrated most deeply into the eternal paradoxes of humour.

Jokes surface from the depths of the unconscious. The laughter that accompanies them is essentially the release of accumulated mental energy. We know of gigantic explosions of laughter similar to an earthquake, but also the slight twitching of the lips caused by spiteful irony, and the laughter that mixes with cramps because even pleasure mixes with pain. Humour here is just a social denominator of complex internal processes about which we still know little. Laughter is an element, the transfer of nature into the life of society. A joke cannot be thought up on the spot; a joke is born, it is formed almost accidentally and yet objectively. A joke is a natural phenomenon, but also a social event. The subconscious is creative, silently working...

The psychoanalytical theory of the joke emerged at the same time as the famous Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. Freud is said to have had both manuscripts side by side on his desk, and felt a peculiar scientific excitement from the contrast of the two works. This local confrontation of the joke and sex is more than symbolic, and is not essentially traditional. Freud's discovery that the joke is a type of human delight also evidences that most jokes are about sex or have a piquant erotic subtext. Freud must by rights have encountered the problem of the joke sooner or later. *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* falls within the general context of psychoanalysis.

Freud's study primarily addresses language and literary manifestations. The scholar specifically avoided the genre of visual art. Freud felt most affinity to verbal material; this is also material that can be sorted and tracked as it develops and transforms. Incidentally, Freud's own collection of anecdotes was apparently so large that the whole theory of the joke appears to be just a complement, annotations. However, humour is expressed in images as well as words. Sketched humour is just as interesting as anecdotes.

In 1909, Freud, Jung and other psychoanalysts were invited to an academic congress at Clark University in the USA. The voyage from Bremen took seven weeks, so there was plenty of time not only to promenade the deck of the *Aquitaine*, but also to enter into deeper reflection. An exceptional situation occurred: the queer passengers started conducting psychoanalytical exercises on each other, analysing their dreams, and delving into each other's private lives... It was not always easy; out of prudence they avoided each other, serious scientists hiding from each other like little boys. Freud's suspicious nature and systematic inquisitiveness are well known. In a drawing of Vladimír Jiránek, science is transformed into an entertaining chase...

Other drawings on the cover continue in a similar vein. The 'Psychoanalysis' of Vladimír Jiránek demystifies Freud's theories, in which the public is now better informed than university professors. The time has advanced, psychoanalysis has been absorbed and the former shocks are no more than titill-

ation. From intimate experience, the watchword of progress is now in a blind alley. So what now?

The relationship between psychoanalysis and humour is an ethical matter today. Jiránek's Freud is evidently a different man from what he once was – he is more of a fairy-tale grandfather than a strict professor. It is no longer a matter of knowledge, but of good advice. Not only psychoanalysis, but humour too is a form of treatment. Even humour can be a type of psychoanalysis.

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