

Amnesias of a Freudian Kind

Part I

In one of his most detailed constructions of the workings of an “unconscious,” published in 1915, Freud asserts that repression “does not cover everything that is unconscious.” Instead, the unconscious “has a wider compass: the repressed is a part of the unconscious” (p. 166). Aktar (2013), commenting on this passage, argues that this “wider compass” includes, for Freud, “primal” phenomena, whose origins precede individual subjectivity and experience, existing *a priori* as the “phylogenetically transmitted memories of corresponding events in man’s (sic) prehistory” (p. 2). But what of an individual’s very particular experiences of early life? By what process other than repression are these memories made inaccessible? According to Freud, something he called “infantile amnesia”—one of the nodal points of this paper—shrouds nearly all of our earliest recollections. This suggests another process operating psychically, a different form of forgetting in which much of the “forgotten” is lost to analytic discourse. It is significant that the relationship between the unconscious and repression is spatially construed in Freud’s reckoning: his use of the term “compass” (*Umfang*) is deployed here less as a material object of direction than as an “encompassing” or circumscribing entity. To discover what, beyond repression, might be at work within the unconscious requires examining the latter’s defining characteristic: what Freud would call *amnesie*.

Freud proposed several versions of amnesia in the 1880s and 1890s that not only characterized but also *encompassed* the Freudian unconscious itself. Its edges were not determined by what was conscious or “preconscious” but rather by what Freud chose to discount; it will be termed here as the “forgettable”

rather than the repressed. Certain experiences were excluded from generating psychical meaning, enabling what was worthy of interpretation to have its borders, its sites of repressions, and its pre-discursive “primal” locations. If the disavowal of unacceptable content shaped the analytic psyche, the forgetting of other unwanted material—including aspects of Freud’s own childhood, as I have detailed elsewhere (O’Donoghue, 2019)—invisibly, but powerfully, shaped what he accorded value. Thus, by virtue of this first gesture of exclusion what came to be psychoanalytic inquiry would putatively “reveal” to Freud the mechanism of repression. Amid this complex circularity of authority, the genealogies of Freud’s amnesias deserve a fuller consideration, as they risk becoming quite forgettable themselves.

In this two-part essay, I will first turn to examples of Freud’s ideas of memory failure as found in several writings during the 1890s and, in the second portion, focus on cases from his *Studies on Hysteria* involving two very different versions of “hysterical amnesia.” The study will conclude with a consideration of Freud’s use of suppression (*Unterdrückung*), another form of forgetting that, like amnesia, did not become a privileged psychical mechanism. These omissions have relegated both notions to the margins of discourse on the unconscious, but this role on the periphery is complex and actually constitutive. To bring this claim into sharper relief, we will begin with experiences of forgetting in two locations, both of which Freud imagined to be on the edge.

Colonialist Constructions of Archaeological Amnesia

In the opening paragraphs of his 1896 “Aetiology of Hysteria,” Freud pronounces an “advance”—enacted at what he pictures as an excavation site—by describing a failure of memory:

Imagine that an explorer [*Forscher*] arrives in a little-known region where his interest is aroused by an expanse of ruins, with the remains of walls, fragments of columns, and tablets with half-effaced and unreadable

inscriptions. He may content himself with inspecting what lies exposed to view, with questioning the inhabitants—perhaps semi-barbaric [*halbbarbarischen*] people—who live in the vicinity, about what tradition tells them of the history and meaning of these archaeological remains, and with noting down what they tell him—and he may then proceed on his journey. But he may act differently. He may have brought picks, shovels, and spades with him, and he may set the inhabitants to work with these implements. Together with them he may start upon the ruins, clear away the rubbish, and, beginning from the visible remains, uncover what is buried. If his work is crowned with success, the discoveries are self-explanatory: the ruined walls are part of the ramparts of a palace or treasure-house; the fragments of columns can be filled out into a temple; the numerous inscriptions, which, by good luck, may be bilingual, reveal an alphabet and a language, and, when they have been deciphered and translated, yield undreamed-of information about the events of the remote past, to commemorate which the monuments were built. *Saxa loquuntur!* (Freud, 1896, p. 192)

Here a “scientific” investigator comes upon a group of “semi-barbaric” people who have forgotten the history of the ruins surrounding them. Freud uses the term *halbbarbarischen* to evoke their plight, a trope originating in the classical canon that remained current in his time. Moralee (2008) argues that such “phantasmal hybrids” (p. 57) had been complex markers of the vicissitudes of empire for millennia, as exemplified in the narratives about the emperor G. Julius Verus Maximinus (173–238 CE), posthumously known as Maximinus Thrax (“the Thracian”). As Moralee revisited the appearance of this “*semibarbarus*” ruler in the various accounts of *Historiae*, it became apparent to him that these stories suggested something well beyond the fanciful, and often contradictory, tales of the “Thracian.” The apocryphal biographies of Maximinus “reveal points of tension in the Roman imagination” (2008, p. 2) making visible the anxieties and slippages that arise when

authors attempt to contain and control delineations of “race” and cultural enfranchisement.

“*Halbbarbarischen*” came into German usage from both the Greek and Latin. As the Habsburg Empire absorbed lands in southeastern Europe that were once part of the Hellenic-Roman hegemony, not far from the lands of Thrace, it perpetuated the concept there. In the first volume of the *Jahreshefte* of the Austrian Archaeological Society, published two years after Freud wrote his “Aetiology” preamble, a discussion of Ovid’s location of the *semibarbarus* moves effortlessly from discussions of territories of the classical provinces to the “Balkans,” a word of Turkish origin not used in classical times, which referred to territories under Austro-Hungarian *imperatum*.¹ This term for the “semi-barbarian” returned (not that it had ever really gone away) in the racist genealogical narratives of Aryanism in the 1930s and 1940s (Moralee, 2008, pp. 76-79).

Freud’s marginal figures, cast as “semi-barbaric,” were organized around an inability to remember what was deemed meaningful to others who entered into their territorial frame—as excavators or, by inference in this context, as analysts. As Caruth (2013) notes, after Derrida, desire at the archaeological scene is evidence of an “archival drive” that necessarily, from the Freudian perspective, carries with it a capacity both for unearthing past experience and for repressing it; “in the very act of interpretation” we have a repetition of “the ways in which the past has been erased” (Caruth, 2013, p. 78). But the erasure here is posited as an *a priori* manifestation, that of forgetting as the marker of unconscious functioning, rather than as a permanent eradication of meaning. The figuration of alterity is needed here to provide a dismissible “surface”—something from which meaning can be extracted—as an embodiment of the manifest, so the mechanism of repression, as the vast evidence of empire beneath it, can appear persuasive. Freud’s evocation of archaeology was intended to benefit from its modernist identity, with the imagined population at the scene in stark opposition to the empirical methods intended to help them. These figures, by being designated *halbbarbarische*, occupied the very periphery of Western knowledge: in Freud’s allegory, the amnesic subject was cast as suffering from a pathological condition of unknow-

ing, suggesting “partially civilized” as a symptom. He must have considered it tenable to create a connection between these colonial shades and the “hysteric”—the subject of the paper introduced by this phantasm of excavation—whose behavior was on the edges of social acceptability, and whose childhood sexual traumas, as he would go on to detail, made aspects of their past inaccessible to memory.

In both the analytic and archaeological readings of such an encounter the arrival of the “scientist” brings the possibility of a cure through the restoration of a capacity to access historical memory. But, applying Moralee’s insight, we can consider Freud’s narrative of the *Halbbarbarischen* as a revelation of the tension inherent in this topos: Freud extended this allegory so the scene slips into another, and for him a far more proximal site of ruins of “barbarity” and forgetting: the landscape of contemporary Vienna. Inhabited by many who Freud considered as semi-civilized, unable to recall the past of a place now in the collective civic embrace of a reactionary local regime, this most personal layer of the narrative reflects Freud’s own sense of betrayal by the contemporary scene. His final exclamation of “the stones are speaking” (*saxa loquuntur*) embraces this doubling as well. This phrase was the popular name for Vienna’s City Hall, built as the great exemplar of the city’s diverse citizenry in Freud’s youth, when the building’s now muted stones had given voice to the values of civic inclusion (O’Donoghue, 2019, p. 42ff).

It is noteworthy that Freud’s first published explication of his nascent ideas of “unconscious” functioning, two years after his “Aetiology” paper, dealt with the “physical mechanism of forgetfulness” (Freud, 1898a, b) that centered on an incident with notable resonances to his archaeological scenario. He and his wife, Martha Bernays Freud, were vacationing in the early autumn of 1898 in the region of Bosnia and Herzegovina, politically contentious and culturally pluralistic holdings of the Habsburgs, when he became the one who was unable to remember. He would argue that this memory lapse resulted from a discussion with a traveling companion, in which he shared stories related to attitudes toward sexuality and death among the local Islamic population (Freud, 1898, p. 292). On

recounting this exchange after returning to Vienna, Freud would claim that its content had activated prohibited associations that he repressed, an unconscious act only discerned when his attempted disavowal was exposed by his inability to remember a name in a subsequent, unrelated conversation with this fellow traveler. By that point the topic had turned to a discussion of paintings, with Freud's failure of memory involving the Italian artist Luca Signorelli. As he recounted the story of this slip, he again deployed a chain of polarities—acceptable/repressed, manifest/latent, Italy/Balkans—in order to make the mechanism of psychical “forgetfulness” plausible to his readers.

The incident probably occurred as Freud was travelling from the ancient seaside city of Ragusa (now Dubrovnik, in southern Croatia) to the town of Trebinje. Swales (2003) has suggested this destination after a reconstruction of the options available to Freud, who only notes that the conversation occurred on a carriage trip taken from Ragusa to “a town in nearby Herzegovina” (Freud, 1898, p. 290). He left no record of his motive for the journey. The guidebook he probably had on the trip—the edition of the Baedeker guides that included these regions—makes only a very brief mention of Trebinje, noting it as a small village of about 800 inhabitants, where one could find a “Turkish bazaar and a mosque” (Baedeker, 1895, pp. 326-327). Swales, reading other sources, discovered that there were also the ruins of a women's quarter and suggested that Freud's interest in this excursion included the chance to enter the prohibited realm of the seraglio (2013, pp. 7-8). This wish may relate to an aspect of his repressed “thoughts” associated with the discussion he recalls from that day: sexual attitudes among “the Turks in Bosnia” (Freud, 1898, p. 292). Bjelić (2011), who accepts Swales's interpretation of Freud's itinerary, locates this early evidence of psychical functioning as part of Freud's imaginary of the Balkans as one of the “dangerous geographies” that may “like, the libido, break through the walls of civilization (Europe)” (2011, p. 2). But the Ottoman ruins in Trebinje were not the only historic residues. The Romans left far earlier traces, evidenced by inscribed milestones to mark distances along this winding road. In fact, Sir Arthur Evans, the British archaeologist whom Freud admired and

who worked in the Roman “provinces” (although he was best known as the excavator of Minoan Crete), had taken this same route—from Ragusa to Trebinje—about ten years before Freud, as Evans believed it was an important early Roman road in the province then known as Illyricum.²

Evidence for this small version of a “royal road” were the stones bearing witness to the date and imperial reign when the pathway was created. Indeed, Freud’s own fateful amnesic moment took place in a land very much like that of the imagined *Halbbarbarischen*, where the local population was part of a continuation of a classical phantasm, an illusion perhaps fed by the fact that the road Freud travelled was created by, among others, Maximinus Thrax (Šaćić, 2014, pp. 156-158). Thus, in 1896, and two years later, Freud associated unconscious functioning with conditions of colonialist alterity, suggesting that this construction and, by extension, psychoanalysis itself was deeply imbricated in fantasies of the non- or peripheral European world, as Khanna (2004) has incisively argued, and as Bjelić details as it relates to the Balkan region.

Although the representations of stereotypic difference are present in both these early writings of Freud’s, they participate in arguably very different stories of forgetting. In the two years between them the cause of memory loss shifted from the ramifications of early trauma to the intrapsychic dramas emerging from normative, universal sexual fantasies in childhood. In 1896, it was those on the psychical and cultural edges—“hysterics” and “*Halbbarbarischen*”—who were incapable of remembering. But by 1898 it was Freud whose forgetting revealed the untamed inner world of desires that stood beyond culture’s control and thus had to be banished from awareness. He made such repression part of everyone’s history; his essay on the incident on the road from Ragusa ultimately would become the first chapter of his *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (Freud, 1901, pp. 1ff).

This decisive shift occurred in the year in between, 1897, when Freud turned to a new stratum of buried experiences: sexual fantasies from early childhood, seemingly long forgotten. He would come to call this universal inaccessibility “infantile amnesia.” An inaugural section of one of his *Three Essays on*

Sexuality, first published in 1905, would be devoted to this condition, where Freud expressed wonder that there is so little “astonishment” that we remember so little of our earliest life, save a “few unintelligible and fragmentary recollections” (Freud, 1905, p. 174); the majority of our early memories, he argues, are actually imparted to us from others. This nearly total forgetting results not from an inability to remember as a function of early age, but rather from the same psychical mechanism—repression—whose more pernicious version manifests as “hysteria.” It was the prohibited “sexual impulses of childhood” (1905, p. 175) that he cites as the cause of this state. Infantile amnesia is cast as the *Ur*-forgetting, an originary repression that necessarily precedes any other, including more pathological, versions. In 1898, Freud first voices the significance of this overall forgetting of early life when he suggests to his most trusted interlocutor at the time, the Berlin-based otolaryngologist Wilhelm Fliess, that the origins of dream life are found in the “residues of the prehistoric period of life (between the ages of one and three)—the same period that is the source of the unconscious” (Freud, 1985, p. 302). He goes on to identify the defining feature of this period as “characterized by an amnesia,” one “analogous to “hysterical amnesia” (p. 302). Later in this study I will consider the origins, for Freud, of this latter phenomenon, an important inquiry because he would contend that the forgetting of early life, fundamental to the operations of repression and thus evidence for the mechanisms of an unconscious, actually derived its proof test from pathological amnesia. That said, he would also posit in *Three Essays* (1905) that hysterical amnesia was derivative of the normative, childhood version. In this circular argument Freud asserts that “without infantile amnesia there would be no hysterical amnesia” (1905, p. 176), expanding upon what he had shared with Fliess seven years earlier. Thus, well before its occurrence was detailed in the *Three Essays*, what Freud called *amnesie* had been accorded a role at the core of an individual’s psychical history.

As we consider the two different modalities of forgetting that Freud associated first with trauma and then with repression in the mid-1890s, it is crucial for us not to become amnesic to

another duality of memory “loss” within Freud’s formulations in this period: between the forgotten, the result of unconscious functioning that not only hides experiences from sight but also locates what that can potentially be restored to analytic interpretation and thus meaning, and what can be termed the “forgettable,” those past experiences that will never be granted any psychical worth and thus not be returned to memory and interpretation. In constructing the forgotten, Freud would assign evidence of infantile sexuality the greatest value—in fact, he uses the term *Schatz* (“treasure”)³ in the *Three Essays* to describe the memory traces of earliest desires for the parents. This intrapsychic trove was extractable from the specificity of the external circumstances of its occurrence; in fact, only as a detachable aspect of the person’s distinctive childhood story could this aspect be accorded its currency (omit “value”), its capacity to be “treasured” as evidence of a universal psychical occurrence.

Freud’s own memory of his earliest erotic response to his mother was the inaugural exemplar of schism, as his recollection came to be utterly separable from, and all but obliterate, the circumstances in which it putatively occurred. In a letter to Fliess of October 1897, he claimed to recall that his libidinal “awakening” happened upon seeing his mother naked “on the occasion of a journey” (Freud, 1985, p. 268). That he placed this evidence of early sexuality within a very specific and consequential moment—travelling with her “from Leipzig to Vienna” (p. 268)—has been all but lost to scrutiny. The significance of the family’s passage, occurring when Freud was three, is not brought forward in his analytic project in any way, thus according no impact to his own early experience of a “displacement” and its familial disruptions. What he vaunted as his “oedipal” revelation, at the time that he had just begun to privilege “sexual fantasies” that “invariably [seize] upon the theme of the parents” (Freud, 1985, pp. 264-265), would have resonances of a very different sort today. The parts of the story he deemed forgettable are the all-too-common narratives of children’s multiple moves, the effects of discrimination, and a family’s economic hardships. Freud, his parents Jacob and Amalia, and younger sister Anna left the children’s birthplace

in Moravia when their father faced financial “catastrophe” (Freud, 1899, p. 312). Jacob Freud moved them to Leipzig for promised employment that, on arrival, appeared to evaporate. After his residency petition was repeatedly denied, likely in part motivated by anti-Semitism, a final departure order necessitated the family’s very hasty move to Amalia’s hometown of Vienna, where her parents still resided (Schröter and Tögel, 2007). It was on that portion of this unsettling journey that his maternal desire was said to have been aroused, providing an erotic overlay that created the illusion of agency, shifting the focus of the narrative onto the power and control of the young Freud’s gaze, undoubtedly a re-vision that appears to be in stark contrast to what in fact was happening around, and to, him. Once in Vienna, the family moved incessantly, and by the time he was ten, Freud had lived in nine places, in three countries (Augusta, 2015, pp. 213-215). Yet none of this was brought forward: of his early years in Vienna, he would say that “nothing was worth remembering” (Freud, 1899, p. 312).

How can we create a genealogy of Freud’s making of the forgettable? There is no letter to Fleiss, like the well-known one written to his friend in September of 1897 (Freud, 1985, pp. 264-266) where Freud announces that he had abandoned his belief in the widespread occurrence of sexual abuse in childhood. We have no record of Freud disclosing what he would *not* pursue in his analytic work; we are left to our own devices to reconstruct its role in his early formation of the unconscious. Yet these exclusions, by virtue of their absence, create borders of analytic engagement and are thus an indivisible—while utterly invisible—constituent of the Freudian project.

As part of this challenging endeavor, it is important to pursue this unearthing (omit genealogy) of the “forgettable” in a way that is easily overlooked: to focus on Freud’s earliest understandings of what amnesia meant and for what purposes it might be used. By the time he aligned amnesia to repression in the closing years of the 1890s, any independent lineage for this idea in his earlier thinking was subsumed into its role as a marker of unconscious functioning. In Laplanche and Pontalis’s compendium of psychoanalytic “language,” amnesia is mentioned only in a short entry on its infantile manifestation,

where loss of memory is not considered one of Freud's "discoveries" because there is such "clear evidence" for it (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973, pp. 212-213). Thus, it is only as part of repression—of which Freud would say, "nothing like it had ever been recognized in mental life" (Freud, 1925, p. 30)—that amnesia is accorded any distinction among Freud's insights, and not as a symptom in and of itself. That said, their entry notes that this form of amnesia, that of childhood, extends beyond the repressed material, "to nearly all events of early life" (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973, p. 212). Infantile amnesia for Freud follows the temporal trajectory of infantile sexuality, the evidence of which it tries to make inaccessible, and is a process that continues in children, as Freud had noted in the *Three Essays*, "up to their sixth or eighth year" (Freud, 1905, p. 174). While early amnesia blankets virtually all of early life, only certain memories will become its *Schatz*.

Freud concludes his discussion of childhood amnesia in the *Three Essays* with a nod back to his "Aetiology" paper, noting that "as long ago as the year 1896," he had "insisted on" the importance of early sexuality—albeit at that point prematurely brought upon the child by adult abuse—and concludes that he "never ceased to emphasize the part played in sexuality by the infantile factor" (Freud, 1905, p. 176). This suggestion of a seamless lineage is only credible if the idea is very broadly drawn, as the instigation of early sexuality was initially situated in an external, adult aggressor, while after 1897, its source lay in the intrapsychic workings of the child's own desire. Although Freud does not make a specific phenomenological claim for a totalized condition known as "amnesia," certainly his comment here would lead one to infer it. But the issue of memory loss actually had a considerably longer history in Freud's work, well before the second half of the 1890s. These earlier sources suggest that there were several "amnesias" before the concept was securely conjoined to repression. In charting these variants, a fascinating realization emerges: the two most significant early instances in which Freud addressed amnesia have, for two quite different reasons—disappearance and disavowal—been made virtually inaccessible. The remainder of this portion of my study will focus on the former—Freud's earliest extant work addressing amnesia—itself long lost from sight.

Forgotten Genealogies of Forgetting

Although Freud's understanding of amnesia has been accorded little attention, it was in fact the subject of a short essay he wrote early in his career that, ironically, would be virtually forgotten. Published as a signed encyclopedia entry ("*Amnesie*") in Bum and Schnirer's *Diagnostisches Lexikon für praktische Ärzte*, edited in Vienna as a four-volume compendium between 1893 and 1895,⁴ it was removed from the later edition of 1907 and replaced by an entry, arguably based upon it, by Toby Cohn, a Berlin neurologist (ed. 1907, vol.1, pp. 152-154).⁵ Freud's entry slumbered within this first edition through much of the twentieth century, until it, along with another entry of his devoted to aphasia, was republished in an article by Kästle (1983). With this return to visibility, we can see how Freud thought about memory's absence, and the various guises in which he imagined that amnesia could occur. One can sense not only how Freud regarded this concept, but how much he valued it—a view not necessarily shared by his Viennese colleagues. While Roth (1989) has identified amnesia as a "disease of the nineteenth century" (p. 50), this was truer for France than for the German-speaking lands, where many medical compendia included no mention of it. We will spend some time looking at this early piece because it contains evidence of aspects of the concept of amnesia that Freud would carry into his psychoanalytic formulations.

It would have been Freud's perceived expertise on aphasia—impairments to an individual's ability to use language, frequently involving the forgetting of words—rather than amnesia that prompted Bum and Schnirer to solicit his contribution. There is considerable evidence that Freud had already published an unsigned encyclopedia entry on aphasia in 1888, although there is some interesting speculation that he may not in fact have written the piece (Scherrer, 2002). But there is no question that in 1891 Freud published a monograph on this subject: *Zur Auffassung der Aphasien: Eine kritische Studien* (The Interpretation of the Aphasias: A Critical Study) (Freud, 1891). In later reckonings of Freud's work, this text was frequently perceived as the *terminus ad quem* of his early neurophysiological

interests and as such was often excluded from the narrative of Freud's psychoanalytic formulations—an omission that has been redressed more recently by its inclusion in Guenther's (2015) study of psychoanalysis and the neurosciences (pp. 70-78). This study, along with the impressive attention given his so-called "aphasia book" in a monograph devoted to it by Greenberg (1997), allows us to better situate this work as a bridge rather than a divide; both psychoanalysis and aphasia are, after all, the territory of language and representation. In addressing the condition's pathologies, Freud's study deftly critiqued various "aphasianists" of his era, including his former teacher Theodor Meynert, for their exclusive focus on the locality of language capacities in the brain, a quest that for many centered on the content of particular nerve cells and the behavior of neural pathways. Amid his unsparing challenges to a number of contemporaries, Freud embraced the British neurologist John Hughlings Jackson, whose view of the "concomitant" relationship between the psychical and physical offered a strong counter to the privileging of anatomical topographies. Unmooring psyche and soma in the discourses of aphasia—where "the relationship between the chain of physiological events in the nervous system and the mental processes is probably not one of cause and effect" (Freud, 1891, p. 55)—allowed Freud to consider its far broader trajectories. One area of interest was related to the vagaries of memory. In a number of its emanations, aphasia was a pathology of forgetting; indeed, several decades later, it would be characterized as a "special amnesia."

Freud was particularly interested in the forgetting of words or their sounds (rather than the inability to comprehend aspects of written language) and devoted a section of his critique to the work of Hubert Grashey, then a professor of psychiatry at the University of Würzburg (Freud, 1891, pp. 33-44). In what Freud called "Grashey's aphasia" he found a challenge to the prominent voices of Carl Wernicke and Ludwig Lichtheim, who, like Meynert, were adamant in their view of aphasia as the inability to connect object images and sounds to specific areas of "localized lesions." Freud found Grashey's view—that it is not necessary to have dysfunction of either the cortical centers or the connecting routes—intriguing. Grashey argued

that it was the “decrease in the duration of sensory impressions” that created temporal gaps. He suggested that the inability to recall an object’s name, for instance, may not arise from a disturbance in a pathway from the area devoted to “sound images” rather than “object images”; instead, such an amnesia was a quantitative function better located in a more complex relationship between vision and speech.

Although Freud did go on in his text to disassemble aspects of Grashey’s work, as Greenberg incisively details (1997, pp. 100-110), he nevertheless considered Grashey’s thinking to have merit, conceding that “it can still claim lasting virtue” (Freud, 1891, p. 42). While Freud did not find Grashey’s assertion of the occurrence of an “amnesic aphasia” without localized lesions convincing in itself, the latter’s privileging of the mechanics of forgetting would not be left behind. Freud would come to see the inability to remember as a “focal symptom”—the very characteristic denied by the aphasiologists—first as the gap that belies trauma, and then as the marker of repression, neither requiring a specific relationship to a cerebral location. Freud would evoke Grashey’s work at a highly consequential moment when, in demonstrating the mechanisms of the forgetting of the name of Signorelli, he created a diagram of that process that harks back to the one he had cited from Grashey’s “amnesia” in his aphasia text.

It was Molnar (1994) who alerted us to the legacy of Grashey in Freud’s first publication on the unconscious, when he noted the similarity between Freud’s schema there (Figure 1) and a diagram of the forgetting of words—although he did not specify its source in Grashey’s work—that was included in Freud’s 1891 monograph (Figure 2) (1994, pp. 80-81). This is not the only evocation of his aphasia book in his later analysis of his memory lapse in that conversation of 1898. In fact, resonances to Freud’s earlier book come in the opening paragraph of the “Psychical Mechanisms” paper, where the forgetting of a name can result in a “similar irritation” to “that which accompanies motor aphasia” (Freud, 1898a, p. 289). This return would suggest that Freud was appropriating a visual schema he had originally adapted to elucidate a model of language functioning that did not, unlike those he reproduced from Wernicke’s work, for instance, use the image of the brain.

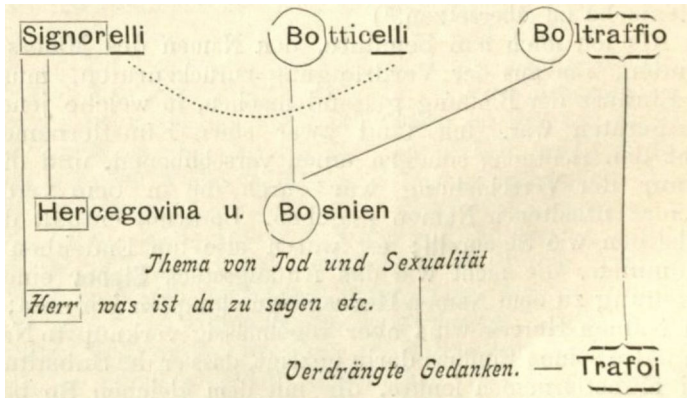


Figure 1. Sigmund Freud. Diagram (*Schema*) of the forgetting of a name, *Monatsschrift für Psychiatrie und Neurologie* 4(6), 1898, p. 436.

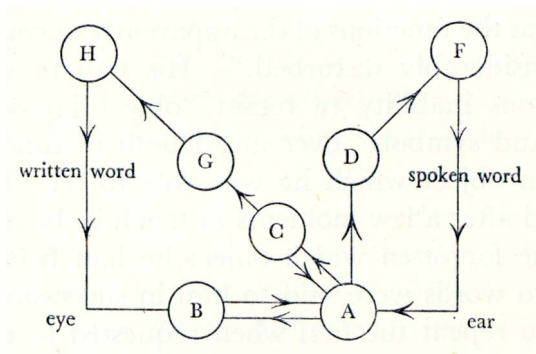


Figure 2. Hubert Grashey. Diagram of workings of amnesic aphasia. From Sigmund Freud, *On Aphasia: A Critical Study* (London: Imago Publishing, 1953), fig. 6, p. 35.

But in its content, too, Freud’s specific reference to Grashey’s model indicates that he considered repression and forgetting part of an amnesiac continuum extending from neuropathologies to experiences of forgetting that were aspects of “everyday life.” Freud replaces the section at the bottom of Grashey’s diagram—indicated by A (center for sound images) and B (center for object images)—with the content that would be repressed.⁶ Thus Grashey’s “centers” are here replaced with content—“thoughts of death and sexuality”—that Freud would go on to present as the unacceptable representational ideation that characterized the unconscious. This idea had its origin for

Freud in something distinctly visually-based: Grashey's notion of the forgetting of an "object image." Freud, in explaining Grashey, used the example of not being able to construct an entire picture after seeing it only in small portions (Freud, 1891, p. 36); his experience of remembering part of a Signorelli painting, one containing the artist's own portrait, but not being able to recall his name, would carry this idea forward.

That Freud deliberately presented, in 1898, his new notions of psychical forgetting in the guise of his previous work on aphasia, and in particular its amnesiac manifestation, has an especially compelling source of support. The journal in which Freud first presented his Signorelli narrative, *Monatsschrift für Psychiatrie und Neurologie*, had been founded in 1897, the year before Freud's essay was published, by Theodor Ziehen and Carl Wernicke, the latter a prominent figure in studies of aphasia whose work Freud had challenged, respectfully, in his own monograph. Freud was aware of the latter's connection with this journal, as he mentioned to Fleiss in 1897 a positive review of his work on childhood paralysis in "Wernicke's *Zeitschrift*"—misremembering the journal title of the *Monatsschrift* (Freud, 1985, p. 267). It would be highly unlikely that the gesture to Grashey's diagram would be lost on Wernicke, and Freud included, as noted above, an explicit reference to "motor aphasia" in this article, a reference that was interestingly dropped in the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. But Wernicke—with whom Freud appeared to have a congenial relationship—may have had at least one final word on aphasia. One of his students, Toby Cohn, would write the entries that replaced Freud's entries on aphasia and amnesia when Bum and Schnirer published an updated edition of their *Lexicon*, thus relegating the earlier edition, and Freud's contributions to it, to obscurity.

While Freud's entry on aphasia closely aligns in content to his subsequent monograph, his text on amnesia is something of a surprise. When the word appears in his essay on aphasia it is cross-referenced, and indeed, when Freud writes about amnesia, the connection to aphasia is noted immediately and acknowledged as having great significance. But following that, Freud immediately moves to other manifestations of the term, returning only briefly to aphasia at the conclusion. One might

expect this in a general diagnostic reference book, where such a topic would extend to various illnesses that present symptoms that involve forgetting. What is fascinating is that Freud opts, beyond the prefatory acknowledgment of aphasia, not to open his text with a pathological condition; rather, he considers a normative example of amnesia: dreaming (Freud, 1893, p. 98). It is prescient that Freud goes on to associate the inability to recall dreams—and thus the making of a normative “amnesia”—with its hysterical version, a relationship repeated in the fashioning of his infantile construction, which he also pairs with its pathological manifestation. It is notable that in the *Lexicon* Freud cites the source where the term “hysterical amnesia”—one he will go on to use when appropriating amnesia into the realm of repression—was first coined, in the “well known case of Dr. Azem [sic]” (p. 98). Indeed, according to the survey of the literature concerning amnesia in France, compiled within the medical dissertation of A.-M.-P. Rouillard and published in 1885, the topic, by then of great interest, was nevertheless rather recent, and very much connected to the work of Azam.

The fact that Freud needed to do no more than cite this name suggests the degree of familiarity that his physician-readers would have had with the story of “Félida X,” whose identity, the literature would suggest, has never been published. We know that she was the fifteen-year-old daughter of a deceased sea captain when, in 1858, she was seen by a Bourdeaux surgeon, Etienne Eugène Azam, who went on to publish her case numerous times, beginning in 1876, and culminating in his *Hypnotisme, double conscience, et alterations de la personnalité* (Azam, 1887). This text, with a preface by Freud’s mentor, Jean-Martin Charcot, appeared in 1887, the year after Freud’s time on a fellowship at Charcot’s hospital, the Salpêtrière, in Paris. “Félida” appeared to manifest what was called a *condition seconde*, where affect oscillated between two different character structures: one the “normal” state and the other a more vivaciously affective character. The earliest published use of “*condition seconde*” was apparently at the behest of Azam’s publisher, although the physician “did not much care for that” descriptor, preferring the more cumbersome “*dedoublement de la personnalité*” (Hacking, 1995, p. 160). This duplication had its sensational

features, such as a pregnancy seemingly known only to one character and not the other, which created a popular fascination with this young woman exceeding that of the medical community's. Having read one of Azam's early reports, Ribot (1881), a French psychologist, characterized her affliction as one of "hysterical amnesia," in his widely read text on memory that was, along with the Azam volume of 1887, in Freud's library. While many saw Félicité as an exemplar of a certain pathology of memory—a "retrograde amnesia"—Freud introduces her case in his entry with the rather neutral observation that this is an amnesia that exists "independent of sleep" (Freud, 1893, p. 98). He then goes on to draw a striking parallel: a "second" self, presumably as embodied in the story of Félicité but also in the realm of dreams, can function in similar ways. He will return to this relationship when, in a letter to Fliess of 1898, he notes that dreams are the residues of earliest life, from the time that marks the formation of the unconscious and is characterized by an infantile amnesia "analogous to hysterical amnesia" (Freud, 1985, p. 302).

Freud proceeds in his entry to cite four conditions that can be accompanied by amnesia: trauma, epilepsy, hysteria, and intoxication (Freud, 1893, p. 99). It is safe to say that all these areas were framed within discourses that he would have encountered during his time at the Salpêtrière. It is noteworthy that upon his return to Vienna, Freud had quickly published a translation of Charcot's lessons, and it would seem that he turned to this text as he was framing his thoughts on the vagaries of memory, as all these topics are featured there. But in his definition of the first category, trauma, he offers a definition strictly limited to the immediate impact of head injuries, gesturing to the influence of the long-held belief about amnesia and accidents.⁷ The deferred manifestations of symptoms, including memory loss, was of great interest to Charcot during Freud's time with him, and this emerges in a relationship between hysteria and epilepsy that Freud cites in his entry. Freud notes that under hypnotic suggestion, a memory cannot be restored if its loss resulted from an epileptic seizure; however, it is possible to regain it if the *Anfall*—the seizure or attack—is only *eine scheinbare*—"an apparent" (a term that carries the nuance

of something feigned) one (Freud, 1893, p. 99). This connects the topic of amnesia to hysteria, an elision that was certainly relied upon within constructions of female sexuality in the later nineteenth century, with a case such as Félida's as one of its origin narratives, and then repeatedly represented pedagogically, clinically, and visually in the Salpêtrière.⁸ But Freud's initial detailing of the circumstances of forgetting suggested both a universalized function, as seen in dreams, as well as circumstances quite specific to the male amnesiac subject. Many of the accident victims were working-class men in the Salpêtrière, and it is likely that when Freud notes the relationship between intoxication and amnesia, for instance, this population may have been his reference point. In Charcot's lecture on the effects of alcohol both sexes are mentioned, but while women in England (the nation whose characterization Freud translated as the "*Vaterlande der Alkoholismus*") were associated in the text with the drinking of cognac, the most serious aspects of the illness were attributed to men (Charcot, 1886, p. 342). When Charcot's colleague and former assistant Guinon (1889) devoted considerable time in his study of *Les agents provocateurs de l'hystérie* to the influence of *intoxications chroniques* on the role played by alcohol in hysterical symptoms, including memory loss, this was considered predominantly the domain of men. Micale (2008), who has examined the topic of male hysteria extensively, has suggested that among the greatest lessons Freud learned in Paris were those gleaned from these patients. In the *Lexicon* passage, it is difficult to trace the gendering of hysterical amnesias, although the phenomenon of the *condition seconde* seems to be primarily female. But there is evidence to suggest that in his discussion of pathological forgetting and hypnotic suggestion, Freud may have been referencing a specific group of men, some of whom were presented at the Salpêtrière during his tenure there and would then figure among the cases in his translation of Charcot's lectures.

In Borch-Jacobsen's (2009) retelling, Freud would have witnessed the creation, as Charcot presented men who had experienced "psychical or mechanical shocks," of what Borch-Jacobsen calls "a completely new expectation, that of post-traumatic amnesia" (p. 25). This latter notion came into

existence when Charcot was able to reproduce “hysterical” symptoms through hypnotic suggestion; in this experiment, he was attempting to prove the veracity for males of the “grand hysteria” that he had already constructed for female patients (Micale, 2008, pp. 121ff.). Borch-Jacobsen recounts that these men could recall their injuries prior to undergoing Charcot’s hypnotic “experiments,” after which “they would tend not to know the cause of their symptoms any longer,” ushering in, in Borch-Jacobsen’s reading, “the era of ‘dissociation of consciousness’ and of ‘repression’” (p. 25). This characterization also points to the power to dissociate conditions surrounding an accident from the hidden affective response to it, thus creating a version of the manifest and latent distinction, and a structure that would allow for the dismissal of meaning from some aspects of memory, and the shift of value onto others. For Freud, not only would this provide insights that would return in his concept of repression—and eventually in his understanding of dreams as well—but it also demonstrated how amnesia could function to distinguish what was “hidden” and worth finding from what was of far less profound importance.

Freud’s discussion of hysteria and amnesia in the *Lexicon* omitted an aspect of this relationship that was clinical rather than diagnostic and thus would not have been considered as appropriate for inclusion in this compendium. But it is important for us to note that several years before authoring his entry, he had created “an amnesia” as part of his treatment of a woman considered to be a “hysteric.” The second part of my essay will begin there, as we turn to the role of volitional intention in Freud’s wish to eradicate memories. This was his method of treatment in his first published case, that of “Frau Emmy von N,” appearing in *Studies on Hysteria* in 1895, two years after his amnesia essay, although the actual experience with the patient had preceded his entry by at least three years. Here we encounter the banishing of memories by hypnotic suggestion; thus, the same method that can call memories back could also, he hoped, permanently excise them. This form of removal is significant in that the discourses of the day focused much attention on what, though not seemingly available to “conscious” memory, could be made accessible in a hypnoid state.

That Freud attempted a form of complete erasure can be easily read, as he did, as a very early, dismissible experiment. But it can also be read as a form of “amnesia”—a disavowal as extirpation—within his structuring of the unconscious itself. The paper above has attempted to excavate early sites of memory loss in the Freud archive—and the near loss of a published text—that suggest the functioning of *amnesie* was complex and multivalent. Building on that, we will next turn to the lineage of what Freud called *Unterdrückung* (suppression). Far less fanfare was accorded conscious disavowal, which, according to Freud’s formulation, was a phenomenon that did not cross over the border into the unconscious: there was no return, psychoanalytically, of the suppressed. To be continued...

Notes

1. In the inaugural volume of the *Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Institutes in Wien* (Vienna: Alfred Holder, 1898), one finds a lengthy article by Anton von Premerstein: “Die Anfänge der Provinz Moesien.” “Moesien,” bordering on classical Thrace, was characterized by the author as the “*Landern der Barbaren*” (p. 146). Von Premerstein includes a citation from Ovid about this region, then glosses it with reference to “*halbbarbarische*” areas of the classical “Balkans.” He concludes with a discussion of Bosnia, a current geo-cultural entity (which figures here as a place visited by Freud) alongside the Roman provinces of the “Moesians and Thracians” (p. 194).
2. The course detailed by Evans (1885) on the map (plate 4) is the Roman route that approximates the one travelled by both him and Freud. Evans’s presence was well known in this area, as he was very much involved in political activities in Bosnia. It is likely that Freud was aware he was travelling on Roman roads, as Evans had made the route known through his writings, and it’s very likely that local guides would have been familiar with Evans’s travels in this rugged, sparsely populated area. See also Šačić (2014), p. 155n3. For Evans’s involvement in the Balkans, refer to Wilkes’s (2006) introduction to a reprint of the “Researches,” as *Ancient Illyria; An Archaeological Exploration* (pp. iii-xiv).
3. Strachey chose to translate *Schatz* as a “store” (*Three Essays*, 1905, p. 175) rather than a more common usage of treasure or a treasury. The intended meaning that Freud wishes to convey here seems unquestionably to emphasize issues of value or worth (*Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, *GW*, 5, p. 76).
4. Anton Bum and Moritz T. Schnirer, *Diagnostisches Lexikon für praktische Ärzte*, 4 vols. (Vienna: Urban & Schwarzenberg, 1893 and 1895). Freud’s entry on amnesia appeared in Volume 1, pp. 98-99.
5. The influence of Charcot on Freud’s terminologies may distinguish his descriptions from those of Cohn, but the latter certainly maintained much of the content of his predecessor’s work.
6. For Freud’s rendition of Grashey’s scheme, see *On Aphasia*, fig. 6, p. 35. Compare with the diagram in “Psychical Mechanism,” fig. 1, p. 294. He will then modify this illustration somewhat when he uses the 1898 essay as his opening section, three years later, of the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, *SE* 6, fig.1.
7. For a good discussion of the discourses of trauma and accidents, see Wolfgang Schaeffer (2001), “Event, Series, Trauma: The Probabilistic Revolution of the Mind

- in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” in M. S. Micale and P. Lerner (Eds.). *Traumatic Pasts; History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870-1930*, (pp. [81]–91). Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.
8. For two of the most persuasive readings of the decisive role of visualities in Charcot’s constructions of pathology, see Didi-Huberman, *The Invention of Hysteria* (2003), and Elisabeth Bronfen’s chapter “Jean-Martin Charcot’s Vampires,” in *The Knotted Subject* (1998), pp. 174-239.

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