

The signification of the phobia and the role of the Father: Punctuations on Hans case

By Lillian Ferrari.

The following paper concerns the significance of the phobia, and its relationship with the role of the father. These commentaries are mainly based on the teachings of Freud and Lacan.

Freud's ideas concerning the phobic neurosis are exemplarily exposed in his famous work *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy* (Freud, 1909), a case in which he did not intervene directly, but rather guiding Hans' father in the direction of the treatment. Little Hans was not meant to be a clinical case, but just observations on the behavior of a child that could be used to strengthen the theory of PSA. Several years earlier Freud had published *Three essays for a sexual Theory* where he gave a detailed account of infantile sexuality. This is a very important fact: from the beginning we are told that the parents agree to educate their child at least in principle- under the Freudian ideals of truth and veracity, and following his disposition to reject hypocrisy, specially when providing information concerning sexual matters. Moreover, the familial configuration of Hans' case reveals that both parents are enthusiasts adherents to the cause of psychoanalysis, having an interest in educating their child in an atmosphere that presents the least possible coercion. Hans' father, Max Graf, had been a member of the Wednesday-night psychoanalytic group for a number of years, and the mother had been Freud's patient. (Gay, Freud, 256). Considering the parents' adherence to psychoanalysis, and their liberal stance toward the education of their child, one would never expect that little Hans would end up developing a childhood neurosis. What happened?

Let's start examining the beginning of the case. The first son of a Viennese young couple, Hans is described by Freud as a cheerful, good-natured and lively little boy, with whom the experiment of letting him grow up and express himself without being intimidated went on satisfactorily (SE 10: 42). However, it won't be long until his parents began noticing the increasing signs of a state of general anxiety and nervousness affecting their little son. Right before Hans' fears assume the definite form of a fear of horses, he is seized by a state of anxiety, a restlessness that makes him wake up, and seek refuge in his parents' bedroom. Hans' general anxiety gradually evolved to a fear of horses, confining his movements to the limits of the house, beyond which he does not dare to go. The time of the appearance of the symptoms of the phobia marks a point of inflection on the development of the case that makes Freud's intervention necessary. At a first glance, it is difficult to explain or even justify the presence of the symptoms since Hans had enjoyed his parents' love and affection almost without restriction. He was not, by any means, a deprived or frustrated child. On the contrary and this is something that does not escape his father- Hans appears fulfilled and gratified (perhaps excessively so) especially in relation to his mother. We know from the beginning that Hans is specially attached to her mother, behaving just like a jealous little Oedipus: he is very fond of mom, and if anything, a bit hostile toward his father. The mother, on the other hand notwithstanding the fact that she is also fulfilling that role that destiny has assigned to her- behaves in a manner that is perhaps a bit excessive. For instance, Hans has been overfed to the point of constipation, a condition for which aperients and enemas have

frequently been necessary (55). Admittedly, she has often taken Hans to the bathroom with her because he goes on pestering me till I let him. Children are like that (57) she naturally informs the father, who seems a bit disconcerted as he is given this piece of information. Finally, as the father concedes with some irritation, Hans had frequently shared his mothers bedroom during a family vacation from which his father had been largely absent. Such experience has taught Hans that his mother could be prevailed upon, when he got into such moods, to take him into her bed (26).

The explanation given by Freud regarding Hans phobia corresponds to the first theory of anxiety which can be summarized as follows: the little child directs his sexual libidinal impulses toward his mother, his first object choice, from whom he expects to get satisfaction. The child accompanies these sexual fantasies with masturbation. But inevitable as the process of socialization and education unfolds, the caretakers in charge of the instruction of the child would impose restrictions and limitations, as they have to provide the child with cultural and socially accepted standards of behaviors. At some point along the way the process of repression occurs, changing the quantitative component of the sexual drive, and what had previously been libido is transformed, later on into anxiety. Freud needed to suppose that in the meantime, the process of repression has taken place resulting in the damage of the sexual pleasure that the child seeks to obtain. Once the process of repression takes place, separating the affect from its representation (the mother), the affect that has been thus liberated is changed into anxiety. The problem, however is how do we account for the repression in this particular case? Where do we find in the observation something related to an act of deprivation that could lead to what Freud describes in the Oedipus Complex, namely the fear of castration? There lies the difficulty.

Up to a certain point, there was no problem. Hans was typically engaged in a relationship with his mother in which the child offers himself and the products of his body- as the realization of that image that Freud saw as so central in the economy of human desire: the image of the phallus. The libidinization of the infantile body implies the presence of the mother, this symbolic Other that is going to sanction the body and its products as gifts, as objects that have symbolic value, not just merely as biological products. The different biological functions of the body become libidinized as a result of this presence: eating, defecating, watching and being watched are from now on eroticised activities that mark the presence of the Other. The intervention of the Other therefore, adds pleasure to the otherwise natural functions of the body, adding a plus in the body that will henceforth, becomes the site of the drives. There is, however one element that gradually takes the predominant role in those activities: the penis. Hans appears particularly interest in the penis, extremely curious to find out whether all creatures are endowed with this fine object, if not everyone at least those he deemed important. He does not even bother to hide the intense pleasure and excitement he finds in masturbation and despite his parents warnings he has great difficulties in renouncing the satisfaction he extracts from it.

However, what happened when Hans offers this precious object to her mother? The mothers response reveals her own horror at the sexual pleasures for which she is the cause: that what Hans offer is not only improper, but piggish (p.10). All of the sudden, she is not willing to play the game with him, she is not longer satisfied with what he has to offer, and she turns to find satisfaction somewhere else: another baby Hanna-

will put Hans in the track of his mothers desire.

These two important events in the life of Hans seem to account for the outbreak of the crisis: on the one hand, the introduction of this real object (the penis) that can not find yet a proper place; on the other hand, the advent of another baby will rise new questions concerning what his mother wants. This is a central question as it points out to role of the father in responding for that desire. Is it possible to satisfy this mother that appears to be continuously changing her demands? Is there in the world something that could be enough, something that could be sufficient for her seemingly voracious appetite? The questions open up by maternal castration are wonderfully represented in the figure of the horse that bites. As Hans points out, the horse that bites is also the horse that could fall, that could be injured and killed, revealing a fantasy that shows the intimate link between desire and fear. In effect, at the imaginary level, the figure of the horse reveals the root of an early identification between, the mother, a baby and Hans himself, as all of them will come to occupy the place of objects of desire, objects that could be exchanged thanks to their phallic value. As Lacan points out, in relation to his mothers desire, Hans is closer to being the metonymy of her desire than the metaphor of her love for the father. The behavior of the mother toward him indicates that he is for her an indispensable appendage (Lacan, Seminar 4, p. 244), an object more akin to her own satisfaction than a little subject in his own right. The behavior of the mother toward Hans betrays a certain perversion in so far she naturally takes him to her bed, takes him to the bathroom while she defecates and changes her trousers before him, trousers that occupy a privilege place in Hans fantasmatic complex. Acting in this manner, as if there is nothing to hide while the body is accomplishing its natural functions, she eliminates the distance, the veil that is necessary to preserve to lure desire. The theme of the veil as a fundamental element for the constitution of desire is extensively explored in this Seminar. In effect, a veil or screen has the function of captivating our desire in so far as it has the power to introduce a dimension that points out to a beyond, triggering out our imagination as to the possibility of there existing something that due to its absence (or more precisely, because its presence is ambiguous: *is it there, is it not?*) creates the promise of pleasure. Before the outbreak of the crisis, Hans is engaged with his mother in a relationship in which what is at stake is a mutually lured activity, a play of presence and absence that aims at bringing out the dimension of the symbolic phallus. But Hans place as being the phallus that imaginarily fulfills maternal desire is shaken when he is confronted with maternal castration, when he realizes that what presides over the conversion and exchangeability of all those objects is an empty space, a void. Behind the imaginary figure of the horse and its different signification as object of desire, lures the threatening effects of maternal castration, constituting the origins of a ferocious Superego whose demand for more threatens to swallow the child. Thus, the oral dimension that is typically found in cases of phobia symbolizes a subjective attempt to represent the desire of the Other (in both senses subjective and objective, see *Subversion of the subject and dialectic of desire, Ecrits, p. 312*). The impasse produced by the proximity of the Others desire makes the paternal intervention a necessary measure in so far as his intervention establishes the metaphor that will induce primal repression, allowing the substitution of the maternal jouissance for a signifier, and thus establishing some measure to her dangerous enjoyment. However, in Hans case instead of the paternal function, instead of the real father acting as the symbolic father that facilitates the separation, we have in Hans case the constitution of a phobia. For reason that we still need to examine Hans father is unable to fulfill his function, he is not able to become

the rival for the child that would enable him the passage through the Oedipus Complex and its resolution via the Castration Complex. In this sense, the father is absent to unload the child from the responsibility of having to satisfy his mother. The phobia makes up for the deficiency in the operation of the name of the father, and thus it becomes a necessary protection against the angst that emanates from maternal jouissance. So we may ask again, at what time and for what reason, this mutually satisfying game becomes all of the sudden serious? What provokes the turning of the situation into something uncanny, something disquieting that threatens Hans so radically? What is the element that shakes up his imaginary reality so completely that this absurd object, the phobia becomes necessary? As it was mentioned earlier, the early experiences of penile erections in the life of a boy are powerful experiences, and they may produce disturbing effects insofar as they illustrate the difficulties of integrating this real element as an instrument that will later on, punctuated by the latency period- serve the sexual function. For the integration of this organ requires its assimilation to a reality that is not a natural reality, but a reality that is symbolic, that is profoundly transformed by the presence of the signifier. That is why the assumption of one's own sexuality is not accomplished through a natural instinctual evolution but requires the intervention of that roundabout that is called the Oedipus Complex, a sort of indirect access to one's own sexuality, and one that it is deemed to leave durable marks in the psyche. The importance of the Oedipus Complex lies in the fact of its being capable of transmitting and introducing the subject to the Castration Complex which symbolizes the origin of the lack, and as a result the emergence of desire. Throughout Seminar 4 Lacan emphasizes the importance of the Oedipus Complex in that it is a vehicle for the transmission of the law, for the establishment of a minimum signifying account that is required to inscribe the child within the symbolic order. As a result of this law the constitution of an object is possible, but the lack that inaugurates desire will never be fulfilled. It is under this perspective of the symbolic order that Lacan argues in the Seminar with the so-called School of Object relations, noting that there is no conceivable notion of an object unless it is conceived first as lost. He argues against a tendency to conceive the Symbolic purely as a system of meaning that would cover up the real, a system in which each element would have a hidden significance, implying ultimately that reality has an additional layer, an extra-signification covering the subject and its objects. But this is not the conceptualization that informs Lacan's ideas concerning the Symbolic. On the contrary, the paradigm of the structure that Lacan has in mind when he develops his ideas regarding the Symbolic Order is represented by language, as a system that is constituted by discrete elements that are in principle devoid of any intrinsic value. It is precisely as a result of this vacuum that the signifier is capable of representing something. The void that is opened up by the symbolic can not be fulfilled and is experienced by the child through the spoken words of those who care for him or her, words that will provide the vehicles through which the desire of the Other captures the child. The advent of a child into this world is an adventure that does not obey a natural law or necessity, but is rather the effect of a desiring encounter which cause escapes the subject, and that henceforth will remain enigmatic. Each child will need to assume this enigma at the core of his/her being via that myth that Freud invented rather than discovered. The Oedipus Complex of the Freudian theory will be designated by Lacan as the Name-of-the-Father, in an attempt to bring forward the elements of the structure that subsist beyond the imaginary aspects of the tale. The phobia as such represents a particular Oedipal configuration, for it represents the Signifier of the Name-of the Father, allowing the effects of the structure to take place. That is, as a result of this phobic configuration a prohibition is established,

allowing a desiring subject to emerge. Once the prohibition is established we can rather say that the phobia makes up for the absence of a prohibition in Hans case- the phobia indicates the forbidden object, the incestuous object whose proximity is desired as much it is feared. At the Symbolic level, the phobia represents the signifier of the Name-of-the-Father that introduces the metaphor that substitutes maternal jouissance for an enigma, producing as such a limit to that jouissance. If the horse -this strange object as Lacan calls it- is able to take on several meanings at different moments throughout the observation such as the mother, the father, Hans himself, including paradoxical meanings such as the fear/wish of his mother biting him- it is because first and foremost the horse is a signifier, a signifying element that as such does not have any intrinsic value. But as a result of this vacuum it has the potential to represent something. Language in its relationship to the subject operates this subtraction of sense that can be referred to the loss of jouissance that the living being suffers for the fact that he speaks. Castration thus becomes a logical consequence of language and not a contingent phenomenon. This becomes especially evident as the observation progresses and Hans phobia with the aid of the father who is by now actively involved in a dialogue with his son-- has the opportunity to evolve and unfold, establishing connections with other elements in the story, and thus configuring a narrative through which Hans will attempt to solve the different dilemmas he encounters. We can witness the significance of the phobia as a mythical configuration that serves to pose those questions that are presented as impasses in the structure. Questions that concern his sister's birth, the nature of his parents' relationships and especially the role of the father in the procreation of a new life are addressed throughout the unfolding of the phobic complex. Thus, as the father conducts the inquiry, it became apparent that Hans is not only afraid of horses, but afraid of horses moving away from the vehicles that they were initially attached to, afraid of vehicles departing and leaving something behind, and afraid of vehicles hooked with carts which are heavily loaded. This property of the horses as being elements that can carry something, that can be attached or detached from their moving vehicles, and that can depart quickly illustrates the figure of the metonym of the signifying chain and the movement it creates threatens to drag and engulf the child. This all-encompassing movement a reflection of maternal jouissance that threatens to devour everything- calls for the constitution of something that could function as the fixed point, something that stops this everlasting displacement and that could become the point of reference through which the subject situates himself. It is only through the introduction of this fixed point that a demarcation of space takes place, representing a point of origin and a point of return, and in between the distance that separates one from the other. The fixed point is precisely the point at which the loss of jouissance is produced and as such is the mark of an absence; a loss that is accomplished by the symbolic removal of a part of one's own body. This is an act of almost biblical proportions that is accomplished through the aid of the Name-of-the-Father. Hans, who along the observation has demonstrated a particular sensibility to the presence of the signifier, understood this very well *you are cross I know you are. It must be true.* (83). This appeal to the father has the force of an invocation to renew the original pact that ties one generation to another. Unfortunately, Hans' father is ill-disposed to play his part, and he hastens to reassure his child that there is nothing to be worried about, he is not angry. Insofar as his real father fails to respond, Hans is forced to construct a figure that will perform the symbolic removal. Various fantasies that Hans relates toward the end represent the staging of castration by an agent that is a substitute of the father. This is the meaning of the final fantasy that Hans relates to his father in which the plumber takes away his behind and his widdler with a pair of pincers

and gives him a new one. It seals the end of the observation, and according to Freud corresponds to the accomplishment of the cure. Although we can't be certain whether this treatment could be considered a complete cure, and whether Hans has accomplished the signifying journey (Lacan, 1957, 334) that represents the castration complex, one thing is sure: the phobia is no longer necessary.

So a closer examination of the phobia reveals, as Freud insists, that the horse represents the figure of the father, more specifically the figure of the father described in the Oedipus Complex. This is the father whom the son is bound to hate as a rival, and whose punishment he is bound to fear. According to the myth, this father should be cross and angry. But nothing could be less characteristic of Hans' father than punishment and anger. On the contrary, Hans' father is nice and affectionate, a respectable gentleman who is very invested in the education of his child. He himself is very vexed when Freud intervenes and says the following: Long before (Hans) was in the world I had known that a little Hans would come who would be so fond of his mother that he would be bound to feel afraid of his father because of this. To this intervention, Hans' father's immediate reaction is to turn to his son asking him: But why do you think I'm angry with you? (SE 10: 42). The father's surprise at Freud's intervention is a surprise which is a bit difficult to understand, since we are told at the beginning that he is familiar with psychoanalytic theory—his reluctance to play the part assigned to him by destiny. This reluctance is also illustrated by the way he interprets Hans' fantasy concerning the two giraffes. After having rightly identified the big giraffe as he himself protesting his son's intrusion into the bedroom (a fantasy that we are told is almost a reproduction of a familiar scene), the father confirms the impotency that is expressed in the fantasy. This is what he writes: On Sunday, March 29th, I went with Hans to Lainz (where grandma lives). I jokingly took leave of my wife at the door with the words: Good-by, big giraffe! (40). Concerning this grandma, it is worth mentioning the fantasy in which Hans expresses the wish that his father marry this granny, so he could be left alone to marry his own mother, finding a happier resolution to the problems arose by the Oedipus complex. (97). A fantasy is indicative of the manner whereby a child attempts to solve the questions brought up by desire, and the manner in which each particular fantasy is constructed is intimately linked with the unconscious fantasy of his/her parents. This fantasy, doesn't illustrate the extent to which Hans' difficulties concerning the question of desire are intermingled with those of his fathers? Perhaps Hans has guessed that behind his father's inability to impose his ways to his wife lies his attachment to granny? As Lacan points out, it is not a surprise that this marriage ends up in divorce (Lacan, Seminar 4, 1957). Whatever the case, it is just an indication to remark that the father's failure or his absence is not a consequence of his poor educational methods, or his poor pedagogical approach, but rather the result of his own unconscious complexes. Hans' father who in a certain way embodies the ideal of the modern father fails to become the one that causes the desire of his wife, the one who as a man is capable of embodying that object that may cause some not all-enjoyment for a woman. The unconscious position of the father is articulated through the dialogues he maintains with Hans, and his hesitations to assume his role in the act of paternity are reflected in the following dialogue:

(Hans naturally asked me yesterday if there were any more babies inside Mummy. I told him not, and said that if God did not wish it, none would grow inside her.)

Hans: But Mummy told me if she didnt want it no more would grow, and now you said if God doesnt want it.

So I told him it was as I had said, upon which he observed: You were there, though, werent you? You know better for certain. (SE 10: 91)

This response, is it not an indication of the fathers refusal to admit his presence in the act of paternity?

We can understand now why the phobia becomes necessary for Hans: the no of the real father is not strong enough, his protestations are not powerful enough to effect the cut between the mother and Hans. The phobia makes up for the insufficiency of the real father to assume the Name-of-the-father. Contrary to what one may think, the phobia, as a symptom does not reflect the threatening effects of castration and the fear of loosing the genitals. On the contrary, it is because there is not enough threat that the phobia becomes necessary. If anything, the phobia and the fear imply on it, safeguard Hans genitals. Why? As psychoanalytic theory teaches us, castration implies that to find ones place in this world, a symbolic place in accordance with a generational line of descent, one has to loose something and a renunciation should take place. This is a sacrifice that is required from every human being, because our humanization is based upon ones inscription within rules that prevail in the social discourse. Our society has secured rules according to which kinship and descent is established. Within this symbolic order, the prohibition assures that a boy renounces the satisfaction he obtains by masturbation, and instead gains the possibility of having the phallus as a symbolic object that will support his masculine identifications. That a man suffers castration means that his organ is lost as an object that functions according to his will and control, and that its successful performance depends on his submission to the Law of desire. It is only within the confines of the symbolic Order that the penis could gain status as an object that a man donates a woman, having the potential to create a new life. For Lacan, the function of the Symbolic father is to support the Name-of-the-Father as the signifier that warrants the rise of the metaphor whereby the child attains some signification as to his presence in the world. Linking the presence of the metaphor with a foundational act, Lacan ascribes the function of the father to that mysterious act of paternity whereby a new name is inscribed in the symbolic, in a register that surpasses the biological birth. Finally, if the signifier of the Name-of-the-Father has the power to represent the mystery of procreation, is because it is an indispensable term that will permit via the inscription of the difference of the sexes, the passage of one generation to the next.

Lillian Ferrari, MA

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