

120th anniversary event for 'Dora' telling her burning house dream to Freud

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Summary. This paper reports a DreamsID (Dreams Illustrated and Discussed) art science collaborative event held to commemorate the first dream told by Dora to Freud, in November 1900, during her psychoanalysis. As part of the online 'Main stage' schedule from the Swansea Science Festival, the event had participation from a worldwide audience, and contributions from expert panel members. That Dora's dream is a poignant depiction of the distress and persecution in her teenage life can be seen from Dora's free associations to the dream, but this is often overshadowed in readings of Freud's case study by his speculative further interpretations of the dream, derived from Freud's own associations. This paper includes the background to the case study, and the main points, themes and questions raised by the online discussion of the case study. These included the lack of emotion in the dream report; whether the dream was used by Dora to show to Freud the danger that she was in; the relationship between Dora's dream, with its metaphor of the need to escape from the danger of fire, and dreams more widely of trauma and abuse; and the ethics of Dora's real-life name having been made known without her permission. The painting produced live during the event is reproduced, with an account of the discussion of how the painting is composed. A link to the film of the event is provided.

Keywords: Dream, Dream analysis, Dora, Freud, Psychoanalysis, Art, Ullman dream discussion technique

Background to the 'Dora' case study and to the Science Festival event

One of the most famous case histories from Sigmund Freud is that of 'Dora,' who saw Freud in the final months of 1900. Freud published the case study in 1905 as *Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria ('Dora')*. The case study addressed two dreams of Dora and had a draft title *Dreams and Hysteria* (p.39: here and following, page numbers refer to Freud, 1905/1977). The case study is important because Freud started writing it in the aftermath of mixed reviews of his (1900) *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and because it provides one of his first instances of publishing detailed examinations of full dream reports combined with considerable details of the life circumstances of the dreamer and of the dreamer's free associations to the dreams.

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Dora is now known to have been teenager Ida Bauer, who was living with her family in Vienna when she had psychoanalysis with Freud, and her biography has been pieced together by various authors despite Freud's aim to anonymise



Figure 1. Ida Bauer, aged 6, and Otto Bauer, aged 7; photograph taken 1 January 1889, unknown photographer.

her (e.g., Bernheimer & Kahane, 1990; Decker, 1991; Ellis, Raitmayr, & Herbst, 2015). Dora was born on 1st November 1882 in an apartment on the Berggasse in Vienna, the same street on which Freud would later live and work. Her brother Otto was born one year later; he became a prominent Austrian socialist politician. Dora has been acclaimed as a feminist hero (e.g., Moi, 1990) because she stopped her psychoanalysis with Freud after just 11 weeks, on 31st December 1900. Dora, who was Jewish, was able to go to the US in 1941 to be with her emigrant son (Decker, 1991).

The aim of the Swansea Science Festival event, held on 24th October 2020, was to consider the case study not as how it is often taken, as part of a critical debate about Freud, but to emphasise solely the first dream that Dora told Freud, her free-associations to it, and the historical events of Dora's life. This was so as to honour her strength and life, and to honour the poignant depiction of her teenage life at that time in her dream. The event had seven panellists, who are the authors of the current paper. The paper reports the comments and deliberations of the panellists during the event. Some of these comments and deliberations were initiated by the panellist/author, some were in response to typed chat comments from the worldwide audience. For transparency, panellist contributions are available on the video of the event. Panel members were Professor Mark Blagrove (Swansea University), Dr Julia Lockheart (Swansea College of Art, UWTSD), Professor Dany Nobus (Brunel University London and the Freud Museum London), Dr Deirdre Barrett (Harvard Medical School), Dr Brigitte Holzinger (Institute for Dream and Consciousness Research, Vienna), Zora Wessely (University of Vienna), and, from Germany, writer Katharina Adler, author of the novel *Ida* (2018), and great-grand-daughter of Dora / Ida. At the start of the event, Dr Holzinger was shown in a film reading the dream to the online attendees from Freud's apartment, where Dora first told Freud the dream in November 1900. The apartment is now the Sigmund Freud Museum, Vienna. Mark Blagrove chaired the discussion and read out contributions from attendees around the world. Simultaneous with the discussion, Julia Lockheart painted the dream onto two pages taken, with publisher's permission, from Freud's (1900/1997) *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The two pages were chosen by her while the dream was being read by Dr Holzinger.

So as to emphasise the dream and Dora's free-associations to it, the event followed the Ullman group dream appreciation technique (Ullman, 1996), which, in a series of strictly defined stages, prescribes listening to and asking questions about a dream, listening to and asking questions about the recent life circumstances of the dreamer, and mapping these together, with minimal projections and speculations from the group members based on their own lives. The stages of the Ullman (1996) dream appreciation technique where a dreamer is present are as follows:

1. Reading of the dream aloud by the dreamer, and clarification of the dream report by the discussers asking questions of the dream sharer.
2. Brief statement by some of the discussers of what feelings they would have experienced if the dream were their own, and of how the discussers would see the dream in terms of their own life.
3. The dream sharer can respond to anything said in stage 2, and then describes his/her waking life as a context for the dream, with particular emphasis on recent experiences and concerns. This can include recent expe-

riences that seem not to be relevant to the dream, as well as free-associations to elements of the dream.

4. One of the discussers reads back the dream to the dreamer, in the second person, so that any additional information about the dream or the dreamer's waking life can be obtained from the dreamer.
5. Orchestration, in which the dream sharer and discussers suggest connections between information that the dreamer has given about his or her dream and information the dreamer has given about the dreamer's life.

The technique was adapted for the event as the dreamer was not present, with Brigitte Holzinger reading the published dream report at stages 1 and 4, and Zora Wessely reading the published free-associations of Dora at stage 3. The Ullman process is always undertaken in groups, and enables the socialisation of the dream, making it known to and appreciated by a wider audience, and with the additional feature for this and other DreamsID events of the final painting enabling the dream to be returned to, in the future, and considered by multiple viewers of the painting.

Regarding the scientific validity of the Ullman technique, Edwards, Ruby, Malinowski, Bennett, and Blagrove (2013) addressed the claims of insight following dream discussion by studying group sessions that followed the Ullman (1996) method. The researchers assessed gains from the sessions using the Gains from Dream Interpretation questionnaire (GDI: Heaton, Hill, Petersen, Rochlen, & Zack, 1998), and, in particular, its Exploration-Insight subscale, which assesses insights regarding one's life, as well as insights about memory sources for the dream. The mean Exploration-Insight subscale score was very high (8.17 on a scale from 1 to 9) and comparable to outcomes on the same measure from sessions using Hill's (2004) established therapist-led dream interpretation method. Accordingly, the Ullman method is effective for establishing connections between dream content and recent waking life experiences. Exploration-Insight subscale scores were also found to be higher after the discussion of dreams than after discussing a recent personally significant event (Edwards et al., 2015) or a daydream (Blagrove, Edwards et al., 2019), where all dream, event and daydream reports were discussed and explored using the Ullman technique. Whereas these papers addressed the effects of Ullman dream discussions on the dream sharer, Blagrove, Hale et al. (2019) and Blagrove et al. (2021) found that, for dyads of dream-sharers and discussers following the Ullman (1996) dream appreciation technique, empathy of discussers towards their dream-sharer increased significantly as a result of dream discussions.

Dora's waking life circumstances, the dream and free-associations

From Freud (1905/1977), we know that in 1895 Dora's father, Philipp, commenced an affair with a young woman anonymised by Freud as Frau K. Her husband, Herr K., befriended Dora and started propositioning her. In June 1898, Dora and her father went to stay with the K.s at their house near a lake in the Alps. Herr K. propositioned Dora there after a boat trip on a lake, she slapped him, and for four successive nights, until she could leave Herr and Frau K.s' house with her father, she had a dream of being rescued by her father from a burning house. Her parents refused to believe her regarding what had happened on the lake, siding with Herr K., who denied it. Dora begged her father to break

off the friendship with the K.s, seeing herself as 'handed over to Herr K. as the price of his tolerating the relations between her father and his wife.' (p.66.) In October 1900, Philipp told Freud that Dora's 'phantasy' of the scene by the lake was causing her to be depressed and to have suicidal ideas, and that she was pressing him to break off relations with the K.s (p.56). He asked Freud to 'bring her to reason.' (p.57.) Dora therefore started to see Freud in October 1900. Six weeks into the treatment, Dora again had her burning house dream. The dream (p.99):

'A house was on fire. My father was standing beside my bed and woke me up. I dressed quickly. Mother wanted to stop and save her jewel-case; but Father said "I refuse to let myself and my two children be burnt for the sake of your jewel-case." We hurried downstairs, and as soon as I was outside I woke up.'

The case study gives details of Dora's free-associations to the elements of the dream, which do give us a very plausible understanding of what the dream was about.

For her first free-association, Dora spoke about how recently her father and mother had been having a dispute, because her father did not want her mother to lock the dining room door at night, as her brother's room could only be reached through the dining-room. Her father said, 'something might happen in the night, so that it might be necessary to leave the room' (p.100), and this had made Dora think of fire.

She then free-associated to the time in June 1898 when they arrived to stay with the K.s. Her father was afraid of fire in the K.s' small wooden house, because of a violent thunderstorm. She also said that the recurrent dream started after the scene by the lake. Freud concluded that the dream, when it first occurred, was an immediate effect of Dora's experience with Herr K. at the lake.

Dora gave another free-association, that after returning with Herr K. from the lake she had gone to lie down in her bedroom to have a short sleep, but suddenly awoke to see Herr K. standing beside her. Freud's reply was '... just as you saw your father standing beside your bed in the dream?' (p.101), to which Dora said 'yes', and that this episode with Herr K. had put her on her guard. The next morning she had locked herself in while dressing, but later that day the key to the room she was staying in was gone, and she believed that Herr K. had removed it. Freud observed that the theme of locking or not locking a room also appeared in the exciting cause of the recent recurrence of the dream.

Freud next asked about the *I dressed quickly* phrase in the dream. Dora replied that she had made up her mind not to remain at the K.s without her father, as she felt afraid that Herr K. would surprise her while she was dressing, 'so *I always dressed very quickly.*' (p.102.) Freud replied: 'I understand. On the afternoon of the day after the scene in the wood you formed your intention of escaping from his persecution, and during the second, third, and fourth nights you had time to repeat that intention in your sleep.' (p.102.)

Freud then asked about the jewel-case. Dora replied that, a year before the dream first occurred, her father and mother had a great dispute about a piece of jewellery he had bought her, which she did not want: 'She was furious, and told him that as he had spent so much money on a present she did not like he had better give it to someone else.' (p.104.) Dora had stated that her father would indeed give jewellery to her mother and herself as cover for when he was giving jewellery

to Frau K. (p.65). Dora also said that Herr K. had given her an expensive jewel-case a little time before. To this, Freud responded: 'Then a return-present would have been very appropriate', and that jewel-case 'is a favourite expression' for female genitals (p.105). Dora replied 'I knew *you* would say that.' Although Freud here alludes to his conclusion that Dora was unconsciously in love with Herr K., his speculation that the jewel-case, which is in danger in the dream, is a reference to Dora's genitals, is plausible. For in waking life she indeed was in danger.

Dora then added, at the next psycho-analytic session, a further free-association regarding smoke, that 'Herr K. and her father were passionate smokers' (p.109), and that 'She herself had smoked during her stay by the lake, and Herr K. had rolled a cigarette for her before he began his unlucky proposal.' (p.109).

Dora's free-associations and Freud's initial interpretations of the dream do show how it is a poignant depiction of the situation Dora found herself in. Freud stated that the meaning of the dream was: 'This man is persecuting me, he wants to force his way into my room. My "jewel-case" is in danger....' (p.105), and that the dream 'presented as fulfilled the wish that her father should save her from the danger.' (p.127.) However, rather than relying only on Dora's free-associations to the dream, Freud added extrapolations and claimed that there was also 'temptation to yield to the man [Herr K.], out of gratitude for the love and tenderness he had shown her during the last few years' (p.123), but based this on his own associations, which were in most cases not even to the dream, but to Dora's associations about the dream.

The Event Discussion

The event had a fascinating discussion about the dream and Dora's life, and the relationship between these. Themes and questions from the discussion include:

- The surprising lack of overt emotion in the dream report, and that modern dream-work methods (see review in Holzinger, 2018) include questioning of the dreamer about whether emotions were or were not present during the dream;
- Dora did not say whether anyone else escaped the fire;
- The oppressive and threatening situation that Dora was in;
- That her seeing Freud was arranged by her father rather than by Dora voluntarily, but that she was then able to confide in Freud for some of the issues with Herr K., and then was able to decide to leave psychoanalysis. It may be that other young female analysands were not able to halt treatment in that manner. In Dora's case she then confronted the K.s and her father and mother soon afterwards and the truth of the events was admitted by Herr K. (p.163);
- The relationship between Dora's dream, with its metaphor of the need to escape from the danger of fire, and dreams more widely of trauma and abuse;
- The ethics of Dora's identity being named by authors after Freud, including the effects of this on the family. Her identity was first discovered by psychoanalyst Felix Deutsch in 1922, and published by him in Deutsch (1990). Deutsch was Ida's physician and had not mentioned to her that he would write about her, waiting until her death to do so. There are different standards

of consent and anonymity now, but these are not universally agreed, for example, regarding what occurs to the need for consent in the case of psychosis, and what occurs if the person is deceased. We discussed also that Herr and Frau K. are now known to have been Hans and Peppina Zellenka, who died in 1929 and 1948 respectively (Ellis, Raitmayr, & Herbst, 2015);

- The conundrum of why in the dream the jewel-case belongs to Dora's mother, whereas in waking life it is Dora (and her 'jewel-case') that are threatened. A possibility is that her father's dismissing of Dora's mother and her jewel-case in the dream refers to the lack of sexual relations in their unhappy marriage, her father having told Freud 'You know already that I get nothing out of my own wife.' (p.57), and that, on occasions 'he tried to put the chief blame for Dora's impossible behaviour on her mother - whose peculiarities made the house unbearable for every one.' (p.57.) The dream may thus be expressing a wish that Dora would no longer be in danger 'for the sake of' her mother and her mother's 'jewel-case.' This is admittedly a patriarchal viewpoint in that it suggests that in the dream Dora was blaming her mother for what happened with Herr K., and that it was her mother's 'jewel-case' putting her in danger.
- In contrast to the latter two points, it may be that, in the dream, Dora's mother's protection of her jewel-case can be interpreted as protective of Dora, rather than as putting Dora in danger from the fire;
- That the dream was used by Dora to show to Freud the danger that she was in, and of her need for being rescued, and that the re-occurrence and telling of the dream cannot be dissociated from the transference and from Dora challenging Freud with the dream;
- The risk of sexually transmitted disease for Dora and her mother;
- Dora's free-associations may be influenced by Freud's presuppositions of female sexuality and infantile wishes;
- Was Frau K. punishing her philandering husband by having the affair with Dora's father?
- That Dora was closer to her father than her mother in waking life, and close to Frau K., whereas Otto was closer to his mother;
- The close relationship of Frau K. to Dora is especially interesting and important to explore, and continued into the 1930s.

Some panellists and audience members did approach the discussion of the dream and Dora's life with contemporary background considerations of sexual harassment and oppression. As Freud wrote that Dora was subject to 'persecution' we consider that this background approach is justified, but we do on self-reflection specifically acknowledge it. Mortari (2015) details characteristics and types of self-reflection that qualitative research such as in this event should entail. One of these is pragmatic reflection, which aims for using an intelligent method of enquiry, such as for us through the choice of the Ullman method to structure the discussion. The aim of the Ullman method is to take what the dreamer says of their dream, and what they say of their waking life, and to map these together with ideally minimal projections from those discussing the dream. This process aims to guard against the mapping / dream interpretation being seen as infallible or imposed.

Another type of reflection in Mortari (2015) is critical reflection, where the power relations in the event and in the subject matter of the event are examined, including how these perpetuate power relations. For all of us the heroic manner of Dora turning down Herr K. and, for some, Freud, was valued by us and seen as signs of independence and of assertion of rights. Participants and panellists did often refer to an abused narrative, and we are aware that we do not want to impose this, much as Freud imposed an infatuated and hysterical girl narrative. As we obviously did not have Dora present to respond, we accept that the narrative we discussed of this being a dream which metaphorically depicts Dora's experience of and response to and struggle against sexual harassment is our own construction, because it is permeated by the scientific and cultural world of the panellists at the event and authors of this paper. We shaped the event rather than just reflecting the phenomena of the extant records of Dora's dream and of her life at the time.

Our reflection on the event includes acknowledging the ethics of Dora's identity having been made known by Deutsch without her consent, and the identity of her parents and of Herr and Frau K. having also been made known (Ellis, Raitmayr, & Herbst, 2015), and distributed further by our event. We acknowledge that modern relational psychoanalytic dream interpretation entails the therapist and patient creating meaning of the dream through their therapeutic relationship, and with the dream then shaping relational living (MacDougall, 2021). In contrast, our event commemorated a historical dream and it is thus not possible for the dreamer to co-create any meaning of it, except through the historical record. Nevertheless, through Freud, the dream report and the historical record of what Dora said about it are publicly available, and we consider there is merit in applying a contemporary method of mapping what a dreamer says of their dream to what they say of their recent life, and in doing so to honour that dream and life. Similarly, for the artist, on reflection, the painting process returns the dream, existing for us as a text, to a visual form, but one which aims to honour rather than exert interpretive sovereignty over the original dream experience.

The painting

The purpose of painting dreams at DreamsID events is to socialise the dream by enabling it to be shared after the event with family and friends. The aim is to use the painting as a cue to meaningful discussions about the life circumstances of the dreamer, and which may thus increase understanding of those circumstances and generate empathy towards the dreamer and the life of the dreamer (Blagrove, Hale et al., 2019, Blagrove et al., 2021). In the case of a dreamer who is no longer alive, the aim of the painting process and of the finished artwork is to again act as a cue to discussions about the life of the dreamer, and to especially cue this for people who have not, or might not, engage with the dream in its written and documented form. The aim also is to utilise a dream, and especially a dream produced during difficult waking life circumstances, as a stimulus for the production of art (Barcaro & Paoli, 2015; Barrett, 2001).

Art was included in the event not just for its beauty, but also for its social and epistemic importance; that is, for its communicative nature, eliciting socio-epistemic skills such as self- and other-understanding, and as 'a source of moral



Figure 2. Painting of Dora's dream of being rescued from a burning house; painted by Julia Lockheart during the two-hour Science Festival event

understanding and self-development' (Sherman & Morrissey, 2017). The latter authors also evidence that there can be emotional sharing between artists, beholders, and other present, and future beholders, with the enhancement of other-understanding and affective and cognitive empathy. King (2002) holds that whereas physics and science more generally narrow down the sensorium to measurable quantities, art practice is an enquiry that opens up the sensorium, including the presence of emotions. For King, 'the practice of the artist is an equally rigorous engagement,' although it can involve 'profligacy, the irrational and the unconscious.' In science, knowledge is tested against sense-data, the sense-data being sought out. In contrast, sense-data are produced in art, and rather than validate theories or hypotheses, they validate the experiences to which they refer. For our event, the artwork aims to honour the original dream, to show that the dream is valued rather than dismissed as, say, a delirium, or as having no connection with Dora's waking life. The art is also playful and contingent on the circumstances of the event, such as what pages of Freud's book are chosen on which to paint and which later provide words that can be incorporated into the artwork, akin to the uses of automatic writing, frottage, collage, and chance described by King (2002) as occurring in Dadaist and Surrealist works.

At the top left of the painting Lockheart depicted the Alpine spa town of Merano, where Dora lived with her family before 1900 and where the K. family also lived. The painting's composition brings together the father, Dora, and Otto, heading to the wide stairs at the bottom of the painting, and with Dora and Otto pulling on their clothes. Dora's mother frames the lower right corner, and is pointing at her jewel-case, at top right.

As occurs in our DreamsID events, on hearing the dream Lockheart chose pages from the Wordsworth Classics (1997) edition of Freud's (1900) *The Interpretation of Dreams* to paint on, with regard to the shapes of the text and paragraphs (pages 214 & 215 were chosen; publisher's permission has been given for this use of the book). As often occurs, during the painting process, Lockheart found words on the page that are uncannily relevant to the dream. Note the words 'female genitals' appearing twice under the jewel-case; 'lady and her daughters' in the jewel-case; 'perfectly indifferent' in the mother's dress; 'boyish' in Dora's brother's head; '17', at the bottom left, and also in the bed, Dora's age at starting to see Freud; the words 'was night; room in which dressing to go', next to her father's head; 'resort', which can be a term for a spa town such as where the affair occurred, can be seen in Dora's father's head; and, most

erie of all, 'Fräulein K.', in her mother's head! These can be seen in detail online on the gallery page of the website DreamsID.com. The words highlighted 'deserves to be recorded in detail: dream', at the top right-hand side, are also relevant, as although there is much debated about and in dispute regarding Dora, Freud and the case study, we are grateful that this poignant dream was recorded by Freud after Dora discussed it with him.

Regarding the incorporation into the painting of words by Freud that happen to be on the pages chosen at the start of the performance by virtue of the shape of the paragraphs and footnotes, the words are what are known in art theory and art practice as *found objects / objet trouvé* (Oneto, 2017). Their inclusion in the artwork is part of a Dadaist and surrealist performative aesthetic, one that links the performance to Freud, through these happenstance words, which could be seen as automatic writing, as the words happen to and are then highlighted by the artist, rather than being created or written by the artist. For André Breton, the founder and major theorist of Surrealism, found objects can display the function of a dream (Oneto, 2017), and these are thus a waking life counterpart of the playful (and, to some, random) incorporation and juxtapositions and mergings of waking life experiences and memories into dreams (Bulkeley, 2019).

Event for Dora's Second Dream

Dora's second dream, of her father having died and Dora travelling to his funeral, occurred just before Dora left psychoanalysis. A follow-up event, on 31st January 2021, had an online discussion of that dream, with simultaneous painting of the dream by Lockheart. Details of the second event can be seen on the DreamsID.com website.

Links

The film of the 24th October 2020 event can be seen at: https://youtu.be/ilbPU_TGeVg

The film of the burning house dream being read at the Sigmund Freud Museum can be seen at: <https://youtu.be/kkMMeSo1ndk>

The final painting can be seen at: <https://dreamsid.com/gallery-of-dreams-and-artworks/doras-dream-of-being-rescued-from-a-burning-house-told-to-freud-in-late-1900-swansea-science-festival-event-24th-october-2020>

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