Enigmatic Messages from Anna and Dorothy: Theorizing my Lesbian Ghost Hunt Through Psychoanalytic History

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Enigmatic Messages from Anna and Dorothy: Theorising my Lesbian Ghost Hunt through Psychoanalytic History

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Abstract

In this article, I explore my personal fascination with the historic relationship between Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham through the lens of queer historiography, "lesbian ghosts feminism", and Laplanchean psychoanalytic theory. Mobilising Derrida's *Archive Fever* and Saketopoulou's traumatophilia, I interrogate my compulsive fascination with archival absences and the temptation to construct "infantile sexual theories" about liminally queer figures in psychoanalysis. Drawing on an autoethnographic account of my interactions with archival fragments, biographical material, and the representation of Freud and Burlingham's relationship in the film *Freud's Last Session* (2024), I argue for sustaining the enigma of their relationship rather than resolving it. Thickening this theoretical approach, I illuminate how encounters with the incomplete psychoanalytic archives stimulate creative theorisation, revealing intersections of sexuality and mythosymbolic structures in the traumata of the history of psychoanalysis. Ultimately, I suggest that embracing unsettling engagements with ambiguity in psychoanalytic history can enliven and support queering and decolonising practices within the contemporary psychoanalytic clinic.

Key words

Psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic history, queer theory, historiography, lesbian studies, queer psychoanalysis

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Biography

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Article

The film *Freud's Last Session* (*Freud's Last Session*, 2024) depicts an imagined meeting between Sigmund Freud and C.S. Lewis on the day that World War II broke out in 1939. It also dramatises the long-standing personal and professional partnership between Sigmund Freud's daughter, Anna, and Dorothy Burlingham, which is a historical reality (Burlingham, 1989; Young-Bruehl, 2008). Towards the end of the film, Anna and Dorothy sit next to each other on Sigmund Freud's famous psychoanalytic couch, directly facing the man himself. Anna and Dorothy, who are depicted as young women, hold hands, smiling tentatively at each other and at Freud. He nods his head almost imperceptibly, then closes his eyes and looks away with an exhausted or resigned expression on his face. Earlier in the film, Dorothy asked Anna to stand up for their relationship by requesting permission for her to move into the Freud family home. From the expression on Freud's face, the audience can infer that Freud has reluctantly accepted this request. Anna and Dorothy are asserting themselves as a lesbian couple on Sigmund Freud's couch, the symbolic centre of psychoanalysis. And Anna and Dorothy will live together in the house at 20 Maresfield Gardens, Hampstead, that is now the Freud Museum London.

I first learned about Anna Freud's long relationship with Dorothy Burlingham, and the possibility that Sigmund Freud's daughter might have been a lesbian, from members of a reading group for queer women and non-binary people[1]. I was intrigued by the possibility of a hidden lesbian history at the heart of psychoanalysis. A colleague suggested that I read Anna Freud's biography (Young-Bruehl, 2008). I soon realised, with some disappointment, that the biography portrays Anna Freud as an ascetic whose libido is sublimated into her

[1] See Mossop, 2022.

work, not as a lesbian[2]. This didn't stop me from looking for traces of lesbian ghosts (Eloit and Hemmings, 2019) in the rich archive of letters, clinical texts, and photographs reproduced in the biography. There were plenty of traces to find: pictures of the two women in Austrian national costume enjoying holidays in the countryside; stories of Anna and Dorothy being buried side by side in Hampstead cemetery; a reproduction of the romantic, loss-filled music and readings at their funerals. My first encounters with this biography could be characterised as going on a "lesbian ghost hunt" in the tradition of lesbian ghost feminism proposed by Eloit and Hemmings.

Despite this, when I first saw *Freud's Last Session*, I was irritated by its portrayal of Anna and Dorothy's relationship, and especially by this scene of putative lesbian power. The film's representation of Anna and Dorothy's imagined lesbian relationship tends towards the homonormative: Dorothy is portrayed as a nagging wife who always wants more from Anna, and living together under the same roof is presented uncritically as a marker of a life partnership. The film is also not historically accurate: Dorothy was in the United States, not London, when World War II broke out, and she moved into 20 Maresfield Gardens in 1941, two years after Sigmund Freud's death. The film's depiction of Anna and Dorothy as lesbians is, nonetheless, important as a counter-balance to psychoanalysis' problematic history with non-normative expressions of gender and sexuality (Dean and Lane, 2001; Saketopoulou and Pellegrini, 2023) and its erasure and silencing of queer female sexuality (O'Connor and Ryan, 1993; Czyzselska, 2022; Mossop, 2022).

My lesbian ghost hunt in the archive of psychoanalytic history has continued for several years. Something about the complex and enigmatic relationship between Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham simultaneously irritates and fascinates me. It won't let me go. I find

[2] In her preface to the second edition of the biography, published in 2008, Young-Bruehl takes a more open position about the nature of the relationship.

it perplexing that Anna Freud had a five-decade long personal and professional relationship with Dorothy Burlingham – they co-parented her four children, lived together, holidayed together regularly, and their professional partnership was at the heart of what is today the Anna Freud Centre (Burlingham, 1989; Young-Bruehl, 2008). And, at the same time, Anna Freud also believed that it was possible, and even desirable, to change someone's sexual orientation from gay to straight through analysis, and she believed that she achieved this with several gay male patients[3]. Given these complexities, when working with the extensive archive of material about Anna and Dorothy's lives, it is easy to feel compelled to look for answers. But the archive of Anna's correspondence with Dorothy, maintained at the Freud Museum London, is frustrating, deliberately incomplete. Dorothy and her co-archivists removed and destroyed any material deemed too sensitive – personally or politically – in the 1970s. We don't know what was removed and why it was deemed sensitive; recent archival work suggests that even the 'sensitive' personal material doesn't reveal any evidence of a sexual relationship between Anna and Dorothy (Meadows, 2022). All this makes it impossible, in my view, to know whether Anna Freud was a lesbian, as shown in the *Freud's Last Session* movie – whatever "being lesbian" might have meant to her, or might mean to us today, in a different temporality and social context. The relationship between Anna and Dorothy remains enigmatic, troubling, not oriented towards heteronormative standards of the time, yet also not quite queer, and in some ways, distinctly anti-queer.

In this article, I mobilise queer historiography as an analytic frame for these encounters with the archive of psychoanalytic history. I provide a speculative Laplanchean metapsychic model to account for this queer fascination with the past, considering the temptation to create "infantile sexual theories" about liminally queer historic figures that

[3] See the account of these clinical papers from the 1950s in Young-Bruehl's biography of Anna Freud. There is no evidence of Anna Freud working clinically with queer women.

incorporate elements of the mythosymbolic in respect of gender, sexuality and race. I argue that striving to keep the enigma of these historic figures from the history of psychoanalysis open can allow for fresh translations of this mythosymbolic material, and that this has implications for both the history of psychoanalysis, and for queering and decolonising today's psychoanalytic clinic.

Queer historiography and the psychoanalytic archive

Queer historiography and Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1995) provide the scaffolding for my thinking about lesbian erasure in the psychoanalytic archive. Even though sexual and gender categories change over time and between cultures, queers still look for traces of something in the past to explain, or perhaps to make up for, the inadequate present, and to find solidarity to build a queerer future. Figures such as Willa Cather, Radclyffe Hall and Emily Dickinson continue to haunt and fascinate in a painful way. Queer history forms 'affective relations across time' (Dinshaw, 1999, p. 138) and can be 'a profound act (and future source) of subject formation' (Dinshaw, 1999, p. 170). Reading Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham as queer women makes me feel more connected to the history of psychoanalysis; it helps me to imagine that I, too, might find a home in its clinics and institutions. Queer archives 'preserve and produce not just knowledge but feeling' and address 'the traumatic loss of history that has accompanied sexual life and the formation of sexual publics, and…assert the role of memory and affect in compensating for institutional neglect' (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 241). As I have found, fantasy is important 'as a way of creating history from absences' (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 271). *Freud's Last Session* imagines Anna and Dorothy sitting on the psychoanalytic couch, directly confronting Freud's difficulties with their relationship. I have also privately imagined what their shared lives were like in Vienna and London, using the archive of letters and photographs as fuel for these

fantasies. Nevertheless, something is painfully missing: '[t]he loss of stories sharpens the hunger for them. So it is tempting to fill in the gaps and to provide closure where there is none' (Hartman, 2008, p. 8). However, my encounters with an imagined lesbian history of psychoanalysis can also become pleasurable; Elisabeth Freeman identifies this as erotohistoriography: 'a new term that can capture the centrality of pleasure, especially sexual pleasure, in queer practices of encountering and documenting the past' (2010, p. xxiii). These encounters can also surprise me, even amuse me; as Eloit and Hemmings wryly observe, '[Lesbian] ghosts are elusive, dismissive, terribly smart and brave. And perhaps most importantly, they love playing around and laughing at us' (2019, p. 354).

Psychoanalyst Avgi Saketopoulou's traumatophilic reworking of psychoanalytic theory has important implications for my encounters with the psychoanalytic archive. She brings queer and queer of colour theory as well as Laplanchean psychoanalytic theory to bear in thinking about interactions with the past, highlighting 'the ecstatic anxieties that congregate around the question of *how* the past is to be remembered, what we are expected to find when we look at its representations, and whether we are permitted to fantasise about it' (2022b, p. 188). When considering the impulse to return to past wounds, she argues that a 'traumatophilic return to the site of the wound is not….a problematic fixation with the past: it is not coming back full circle but a helicoid movement that revisits similar points along a different axis, propelling us forward' (2022b, p. 191).

Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* was originally written as a lecture for the Freud Museum London in 1994 during the process of its conversion from a home into a museum. Derrida reflected on the process of the archivisation of Freud's clinical and personal writing into a formal archive by people he called "archons"; those who 'have the power to interpret the archives' (1995, p. 10). He highlights the violence of the archive in the way that it makes people respect the law of what will be preserved and what will not be preserved. He suggests

that the death drive is at work in archivisation, but that 'it always operates in silence, it never leaves any archives of its own. It destroys in advance its own archive' (1995, p. 14). The death drive eludes perception 'except if it disguises itself, except if it tints itself, makes itself up or paints itself…in some erotic colour' (Derrida, 1995, p. 14). Due to the aggression, destruction, and repetition compulsion of the death drive, '[t]he archive always works, and *a priori*, against itself' (Derrida, 1995, p. 14). This gives rise to what Derrida calls *'mal d'archive'* or 'archive fever': the need for archives, which 'burn[s] with a passion….never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away….a compulsive, repetitive and nostalgic desire for the archive' (Derrida, 1995, p. 14).

Derrida's account of archive fever is important for my consideration of why I have returned so compulsively to the relationship between Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham, not least because it considers as its starting point the process of the archivisation of psychoanalysis that was taking place at the Freud Museum London in the early 1990s. Part of the problem lies, without a doubt, with the necessarily incomplete archive. The archons, including Burlingham, were subject to the workings of the death drive in deciding what to keep and what to discard from the Freud Museum's records, leaving a troublingly incomplete record of this relationship (Meadows, 2022). However, I think that the workings of the Freudian death drive in the process of archivisation do not fully account for my fascination with this relationship, my tendency to create fantasies about it, and the pleasure that I take in this. Something creative is happening as well. I find myself drawn to what Freeman calls 'unintelligible or resistant moment[s]…fixating on that which resists any easy translation into present-tense terms' (xvi). I feel the pull towards translating these moments into something that I can hold onto, and to filling the painful gap created by the absence of queer women in the history of psychoanalysis. To paraphrase Saketopoulou, something is compelling me forwards, as well as pulling me backwards in time. I have written fantasised lesbian accounts

of Anna and Dorothy's relationship, imagining their possible lives as openly queer women running the clinic for child psychoanalysis that became the Anna Freud Centre, but then deleted these histories because they are almost too painful to read, and because they too strongly 'trespass the boundaries of the archive' (Hartman, 2008, p. 9). It is difficult to stay with the disorienting combination of a deliberately incomplete archive and a complex, multi-faceted life and relationship in a distinctly past temporality. I will now consider this difficulty, these resistant moments, and the compulsive pleasure of returning to this puzzling relationship, in the context of psychoanalytic theory of sexuality and Jean Laplanche's refiguring of Freudian drive theory.

Infantile sexuality and the mythosymbolic

Sexuality has always been central to psychoanalysis, and always subject to repression, theoretically and clinically. French psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche's meticulous reading of Freud identifies ways in which Freud repressed ideas in relation to sexuality, calling these moments 'goings-astray' (Laplanche, 2014, p. 71). He identifies one of Freud's 'goings-astray' as his failure to develop a general theory of seduction from the clinical material of his early hysteric patients. Laplanche develops a general theory of seduction of the infant by the caregiver and, from this, the idea of *le sexual*, also known as the sexual unconscious or infantile sexuality. In what Laplanche calls the "fundamental anthropological situation", the adult's physical activity in taking care of the infant inevitably traumatises it by transmitting enigmatic messages from the adult's unconscious sexuality (1989). The child's attempts to translate these enigmatic messages form the child's ego; the child 'translates[s] and bind[s] them into its own signifying sequences and fantasies and its own evolving self-representation, and this includes the whole fantasmatic field of what Freud calls 'infantile sexual theories'' (Fletcher and Ray, 2014, p. 33). However, these translation attempts will inevitably fail

because the child does not yet have an adult sexuality, and because even the adult cannot understand these messages from their sexual unconscious. He emphasises the importance of the child's unique translation efforts as the enigmatic message is organised and bound into the form of the child's ego. And some part of the enigmatic message always remains untranslatable. This untranslatable residue, which Laplanche refers to as waste and fragmentary, forms the child's own sexual unconscious and is experienced as external and excitatory, forming the basis or 'source object' (2016, p. 293) for the drive. Laplanche's sexual unconscious represents a powerful force, always ready to trip us up, not subject to the forces of logic or rationality. It relates to a non-genital, polymorphous, perverse, wild, unruly, illogical sexuality. It never matures, and is never integrated into the conscious mind. Throughout life, unbound elements from the unconscious continually make their presence felt, resulting in new attempts at binding into the ego and translation: '[t]he human being is, and will go on being, a self-translating and self-theorizing being' (1989, p. 131). For Laplanche, the life drive – which he calls the 'sexual life drive' – is related to these ongoing attempts to bind repressed elements into the totalising structures of the ego. The sexual death drive relates to the unbinding effects of the repressed elements of the sexual unconscious, that '[go] together with the attack, destructiveness and persecution' (Laplanche, 2004, p. 465). The life and death drives exist in 'grandiose opposition' to each other as forces of binding and unbinding of the psyche at work 'on the inside of the psychical apparatus' (Laplanche, 2004, p. 465).

Laplanche's model, especially as elaborated recently by Avgi Saketopoulou and others, is attentive to how the mythosymbolic – broadly speaking, cultural myths about gender, sexuality, race and class – are transmitted from parent to child, and inevitably become part of the structure of both the ego and the sexual unconscious (Saketopoulou, 2022b). For example, the Oedipus complex is a culturally contingent structure, relevant to families of

particular cultures. In analysis, the patient's fundamental anthropological situation is re-opened due to the analytic frame, unbinding the structures of the ego, and 'deconstructing old constructions' (Hutfless, 2021, p. 17). The analyst does not simply explain or interpret the analysand's history to them, but represents the enigmatic message that has an unbinding effect on the analysand's psyche and stimulates the analysand to create new translations of this enigmatic material. Analysis therefore inevitably deals with the sexual unconscious, infantile sexuality, and the mythosymbolic.

Enigmatic encounters with the archive of psychoanalytic history

I suggest that encounters with the archive of material about Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham's relationship set up an encounter through time between historic enigmatic material and the sexual unconscious. Since it's easy to read the two women as potentially asexual in today's terms, or as 'ascetic' in Twentieth century language, it's important to remember that both Anna and Dorothy were libidinal subjects: Anna struggled to stop herself from masturbating all through her teenage years and into her mid-twenties; we know from her early clinical writing that her self-pleasure was linked to queer, gender-swapping, sado-masochistic fantasies (Young-Bruehl, 2008; Stewart-Steinberg, 2011; Mossop, 2025). And Dorothy fell in love with a man her father deeply disapproved of, waited a year to marry him, then gave birth to four children (Burlingham, 1989). Both women clearly had a capacity for sexual enjoyment, whether normative or transgressive. The accepted psycho-historical narrative of their lives is that, helped (or, perhaps, traumatised) by their analyses with Freud, they sublimated their respective sexualities into work and caring for children. I am suggesting that this narrative is satisfyingly complicated if we leave space for the sexual unconscious – which of course means more than genital sexuality – to appear in different and potentially disruptive forms in their life and work together. Since this relationship between two women went against the pervasive compulsory heterosexuality of their time (Rich, 1980), it would

have been very much subject to repression, both socially and psychically. Due to this repression, at whatever level it operated in the two women's psyches, we shouldn't expect their lives to appear logical, neatly defined, or settled. Potentially contradictory positions – being in a loving same sex relationship, and practicing anti-gay conversion therapy – arise from the unbinding machinations of the infantile unconscious, or from the ego's desperate attempts to repress it.

Because of this relationship's paradoxical, sexual (in a Laplanchean sense) nature, it has an enigmatic effect today. I find that spending time in contact with the archive, reading letters and biographical material, looking at photographs, and thinking about small details about their lives, has a fascinating and irritating effect on me. I want to understand it, but I can't, and that forces me to think about myself and the social world in different ways. In Laplanchean terms, something from my own sexual unconscious is stimulated, something re-opens at the site of my own original and entirely ordinary trauma from my fundamental anthropological situation. This contact with enigmatic material unsettles the structures of the ego that have been formed from past translations of this enigmatic material, and I am forced again to self-theorise. I create what Laplanche might call "infantile sexual theories" about their lives: "Anna Freud was a lesbian", or "Anna Freud was an ascetic who sublimated her sexuality through her work", or even "Anna and Dorothy were in a Boston marriage". These theories are, inevitably, infused with cultural codes from the mythosymbolic structures that surround me, and these cultural codes become further embedded in the structure of my psyche. These fresh translations resolve the psychic tension caused by the unbinding intrusion of this enigmatic message from the past. However, this resolution is only temporary. When I read a letter describing their domestic intimacy and small quarrels, see a photograph of them looking happy and relaxed on holiday together, encounter the private telephone line that joined their bedrooms in Vienna, or read a clinical paper describing Anna Freud's

theories about the origins of pathological homosexuality, this infantile theory is again disturbed. I have to produce more theory, fresh translations. Sometimes, my theories satisfy my desire to find a queer history of psychoanalysis; at other times, my theories satisfy my wish *not* to know – a position that is sometimes fetishised in psychoanalysis. But it is difficult to hold either position for long. Each iteration, each contact with the unbinding archive, produces more nuance and complexity to my understanding of the past. This effect of unbinding and retranslation is pleasurable as well as unsettling. And it always has the potential to create something.

This Laplanchean explanation for my fascination with a possibly lesbian enigmatic relationship from the history of psychoanalysis has much in common with the queer historiography of Cvetkovich, Hartman and Freeman and Eloit and Hemmings' proposal of a "lesbian ghosts feminism" discussed above. However, I don't experience this as only traumatic, grief-inducing, erotic, or violent, as they suggest. Infused with the mythosymbolic, these encounters across time can be any or all these things. In addition, they are encounters with and between my own interiority – the non-translated content of my sexual unconscious – and the enigmatic material from Anna and Dorothy's complex relationship. These encounters are unpredictable, often traumatophilic, following the whims of the sexual death drive. They act as an unbinding and stimulating force, a maddening drive, to think, to self-theorise, to create new theory. They have something in common with Dinshaw's writing about subject formation through 'cross-identifications in the realm of sexuality and gender as they….relate to other realms' (Dinshaw, 1999, p. 170). However, these cross-identifications are not accidental or incidental; rather, they are set up by the restless source-object of the drive, the repressed remnants swirling in my unconscious. And they are infused with and structured by elements of the mythosymbolic, especially the racialised cultural expectations and prohibitions in respect of queer female sexuality in the post-colonial, Western society that I

inhabit, resonating with the energy of queer intergenerational trauma. The lesbian has been seen as 'too anachronistic, too backward or too essentialist… too much of a Western spectre of colonial imposition' (Eloit and Hemmings, 2019, p. 353, also see Habib, 2008); the appearance of a lesbian ghost unsettles and reveals mythosymbolic structures that are unbound through these archival encounters with infantile sexuality. Allowing the enigmatic nature of Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham's relationship to continue to unsettle me, therefore, creates opportunities for fresh translations of this mythosymbolic material. I see my engagement with the archive as traumatophilic, in the sense that it 'take[s] up the energies roused by trauma to invent something new' (Saketopoulou and Pellegrini, 2023, p. viii).

I draw a loose parallel here between being the analysand in psychoanalysis and encounters with this enigmatic historic relationship. In analysis, the analyst represents the enigmatic messages from the analysand's infancy. In these encounters with the archive, Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham represent the enigmatic message. They do not literally transmit something to me – how could they? – but contact with this enigma, and the trace messages that it carries, has a similar effect, recreating something of the fundamental anthropological situation in me, and stimulating the production of new theory. I will never be able to fully account for the complexities of Anna and Dorothy's relationship and its interactions with their clinical work. But I have come to welcome its effects on me. It has stimulated me to write, to theorise, to engage with others who share this fascination. My own engagement with psychoanalysis – clinically as a patient and academically – would be much less rich without stories about Anna and Dorothy.

Thickening the mayonnaise of auto-theory

I have, so far, been careful only to speak of my own experience and, as far as I can, of my own infantile sexuality. As a queer- and more-or-less femme-identified person, who has been a patient in psychoanalysis and works with psychosocial theory, I have a particular

relationship to the history of the silencing and repression of queer female sexuality in psychoanalysis. This relationship has traumatic elements. Something about the liminal, opaque fragments of information about Anna and Dorothy's lives resonates with my sense of the opacity of my own sexuality, and the way that traumatic elements have been bound into the structures of my ego. In creating fantasies and infantile theories about Anna and Dorothy's lives, I am also theorising my own life, a process of subject formation that goes on continuously, and always has the potential to disrupt the temporarily stable structures of my ego. In writing this paper – an act of self-theorisation – I am intersecting with the rich field of auto-theory, one of the most important intellectual traditions of the twentieth century (Laubender, 2020). As Laplanche notes, 'all real theorisation is an experiment and an experience which necessarily involves the researcher' (Laplanche, 1989, p. 12). He outlines how Freud's self-described 'speculation' in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* thickens his theory, 'in the sense that a mayonnaise thickens' (Laplanche, 1989, p. 12) and suggests that we neither reduce such theory to pure illusion, nor forget that it originates with individual speculation. This is what I want to do with my own attempts at theorisation as I "thicken the mayonnaise" in the next section of this paper. I neither dismiss my theories as fantasy, nor forget that they arise from my own attempts to translate unconscious material, from my own exigency, as I expand them in two directions. I consider, first, what they might mean for the academic field of the history of psychoanalysis and, secondly, for an ethics of the psychoanalytic clinic.

The history of psychoanalysis as a traumatophilic encounter with the past

The history of psychoanalysis is a history of trauma: the destruction of the First World War, the split with Ferenczi over the seduction theory, the Holocaust and the resulting geographical fragmentation of psychoanalysis (Young-Bruehl and Schwartz, 2012). I would

add, to Young-Bruehl and Schwartz's list of traumata, institutional psychoanalysis' implicatedness in the oppression of racialised minorities, queer, trans, and working-class people. Young-Bruehl and Schwartz argue that this traumatic history has made psychoanalysis prone to 'dissociative fragmentation, loss of identity' (2012, p. 139). They argue that this traumatic sequence of events means that psychoanalysis has no proper history, and suggest that psychoanalysts have, instead, tried to 'master that trauma with story-telling, history-writing' (2012, p. 153). This means that the history of psychoanalysis, at least until the early 2000s, was made up of a series of psychobiographies in which writers – including Freud himself – attempt to psychoanalyse the practices of other analysts. Since Young-Bruehl and Schwartz wrote their article, historiographically conscious writing about the history of analysis has continued to flourish in the pages of this journal and elsewhere: for example, important work done by Elisabeth Danto and then the FREEPSY project to understand the history of free psychoanalytic clinics (Danto, 2005; ffytche, Ryan and Soreanu, 2022), Daniel Gaztambide's tracing of social justice movements within psychoanalysis (Gaztambide, 2019) and Carolyn Laubender's historiographic examination of the political life of the psychoanalytic clinic (Laubender, 2024). Young-Bruehl and Schwartz suggest that one of the reasons that historical work about psychoanalysis has become more culturally informed is that non-analysts, who approach psychoanalysis as a field and asset of theories, are now doing more of this work. However, as my own fascination with the story of Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham shows, it is equally possible for a non-analyst to become compulsively involved in analysing the history of psychoanalysis. We queers have our own complicated investments in the history of psychoanalysis (Dean and Lane, 2001; Kunzel, 2024; Sinclair, Punzi and Sauer, 2024). It is clear from Young-Bruehl and Schwartz's article that the reason why psychoanalysis had no history until the early 2000s was not because nobody *cared* about

the history of psychoanalysis. On the contrary, both analysts and non-analysts continue to care very much about its history.

I return briefly to Derrida's *Archive Fever*. Derrida turns psychoanalysis on itself and on its investment in its own history as a site of trauma and compulsive reworking. As Carolyn Steedman suggests, Derrida 'had long seen in Freudian psycho-analysis a desire to recover moments of inception, beginnings and origins which – in a deluded way – we think might be some kind of truth, and in *Archive Fever,* desire for the archive is presented as part of the desire to find, or locate, or possess that moment of origin, as the beginning of things' (2006, p. 3). Following my arguments above, I conceptualise historical work by analysts and non-analysts alike on the history of psychoanalysis as traumatophilic engagement with past wounds. Instead of trying to rid ourselves of the trauma of the history of psychoanalysis, perhaps we should instead ask, following Saketopoulou (2022b), what we can do with it. This suggests new approaches very much in tune with the ongoing historiographic work outlined above. Instead of wanting to possess the past in a deluded way, searching for truth, we can see encounters with the history of psychoanalysis as unsettling, personal, and creative, mobilising elements of the mythosymbolic in unexpected ways. Steedman suggests that in historical work, 'the [lost] object (the event, the happening, the story from the past) has been altered by the very search for it, by its time and duration: what has actually been lost can never be found. That is not to say that *nothing* is found, but that thing is always something else, a creation of the search itself and the time the search took' (2006, p. 77). Formulated in this way, perhaps analytic psychobiographies can be read as the "something else" that has been created by the search, as traumatophilic fantasies and queer fabulations – even when their subjects are not identified as queer. If, as Young-Bruehl and Schwartz suggest, every generation rewrites the history of psychoanalysis for itself, we can conceive of this rewriting as a generative, creative, traumatophilic act that reveals something about current and historic

mythosymbolic structures. The history of psychoanalysis that is being (re)written by the current generation of scholars – both analysts and non-analysts – is showing signs of being deeply attuned to the violence of mythosymbolic structures that is both enacted and revealed by psychoanalytic history.

Enigmatic messages, lesbian ghosts, and the ethics of the psychoanalytic clinic

The loud debates about author Willa Cather's possible status as a historic literary lesbian vividly illustrate the potential for becoming deeply invested in the straightness or queerness of historic figures, especially when we consider that Cather was a slightly older contemporary of Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham (Acocella, 2013; Adair, 2017). Questions about Anna Freud's sexual orientation have been rather more subdued, although always present, both during and after her lifetime (Young-Bruehl, 2008); she has been a relatively quiescent lesbian ghost. Given the long history of silencing and erasure of lesbian and queer female sexuality in psychoanalysis, the open questions about Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham's relationship, and the deliberate incompleteness of the archive, it is very tempting, as Hartman says, to 'fill in the gaps'. The portrayal of their relationship as homonormatively lesbian in *Freud's Last Session* could be seen as a symptomatic attempt to fill in the gaps in the history of psychoanalysis. We don't have any clearly queer female figures in the history of psychoanalysis: Anna and Dorothy can stand in for these imagined, lost, silenced ancestors. As an example of infantile theory, this fantasy has value even when it 'trespass[es] the boundaries of the archive' (Hartman, 2008, p. 9). However, I am suggesting, through working with Laplanche's theory of the enigmatic message, that we don't become too invested in these particular translations, however poignant or useful they might be. I suggest that, as a matter of psychoanalytic ethics, we allow the enigmatic messages transmitted by Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham, as liminally queer figures from the

history of psychoanalysis, to continue to unsettle us, and to leave the question of 'Was Anna Freud a lesbian?' open.

Unfortunately, psychoanalytic practice often closes down or reifies ideas about gender and sexuality. There is a horrific history and ongoing practice of harm caused by psychoanalysts who insist on closed, heteronormative, cis-normative, racially-structured answers to questions about their patients' gender and sexuality (O'Connor and Ryan, 1993; Drescher, 2008; Saketopoulou and Pellegrini, 2023; Kunzel, 2024). And very rigid psychoanalytic positions of 'not knowing' can also become oppressive if they are not attentive to mythosymbolic structures in the psyche, for example, when analysts refuse to use patients' pronouns in an attempt to remain "neutral" (Saketopoulou, 2022a). As a result, it feels like some of us – and not only queers – are left in a situation where we are 'angry with psychoanalysis forever' (Carter, 2024). I have suggested elsewhere that there is an ethical imperative 'to re-evaluate our relationship to historical figures in psychoanalysis who have elements of queerness in the lives and work…[to] create greater imaginative space for queer sexuality and gender in the psychoanalytic clinic today' (Mossop, 2025, p. 154). In this article, I have provided a speculative metapsychic model to account for our fascination with liminally queer historic figures like Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham, the reasons why we might create fixed "infantile sexual theory" about their lives, and sketched out the possible benefits of keeping such questions open. In Laplanchean terms, psychoanalysis has a history of "goings-astray" in respect of gender, sexuality, and race, as intersecting components of societal mythosymbolic structures. There is a rich emerging field of queer and trans psychoanalysis that considers how and why psychoanalysis is especially prone to these socially structured goings-astray, and how they become so readily encoded in institutions through training, training analysis, supervision, and psychoanalytic literature.[4] This suggests

[4] See Gherovici & Steinkoler, 2022 and Sinclair et al., 2024, for example

that, when confronted with their patients' – and their own – infantile sexuality in the clinic, some psychoanalysts find it difficult to resist the temptation to "fill in the gaps" with either claims to know what their patients' sexual orientation or gender identity is – enforcing racially structured, cis- heteronormative ways of thinking on their patients – or by rigidly holding to a position of "not knowing". If more psychoanalysts could resist these temptations to fill in the gaps, or to enforce rigid notions of not knowing, perhaps all patients, and especially queer and trans patients, would find more space to create their own self-theories in the clinic and in their lives. If analysts can learn to live with historic enigmas such as the liminal queerness of Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham's relationship, perhaps it is a small step towards being more capable of living with their patients' enigmas in respect of gender and sexuality.

Conclusion – whisking the mayonnaise

I conclude this article with an invitation to stay with these historic enigmas that fascinate and irritate us, to let Anna and Dorothy's liminally lesbian ghosts keep troubling us. My own compulsive returns to the archive feel like a traumatophilic spiral: not a straight line back to origins, but a helicoid movement that thickens theory as it moves. If Laplanche suggests that theoretical speculation emulsifies the mayonnaise, then perhaps our queer fabulations are the splash of vinegar that make the mayonnaise thick and glossy. Rather than smoothing the mixture into certainty, I propose we keep whisking; allowing opacity, contradiction, and pleasure to bind and unbind in ways that unsettle the ossified mythosymbolic structures of psychoanalytic history. In staying with this messy mixture, we can create space for new translations, for queer futures, and for the lesbian ghosts of psychoanalytic history to keep laughing at us.

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