

The Representation of Illness in Clinical Space (23rd November 2019)

Michael Molnar: 'Headache, Heartache & Other Illogical Disorders'

Monday, 20th April 1885

My good sweet darling,

Don't be distressed by the nonsense your horrible lover scribbles in some sort of delirium. What such a sick mind gives birth to in its torment! If you were by my side, the sight of you would hold it back, but so cut off from you like this, so deeply unhappy and filled with longing as I am. Anyway you understand how it is and won't let me keep on begging for forgiveness. I am really ill with something like smallpox, but it is a ridiculous, harmless form of smallpox. No pustules, only blisters, three on my forehead, two on my neck, one on my arm, actually nobody quite knows what to make of it. And I am certain of it, for today I was very weak and sleepy yet calm and in a good mood. So it cannot be anything nervous, it must be an illness. Do you remember the severe back pains I wrote about to you two or three weeks ago? They were part of it, I think. A doctor like me is in luck, illnesses treat him gently. But I would ask you to burn my last letter and the following ones, anyway nothing much will be lost as a result. I love you so much and only think, my lonely life, how many times a day I miss a word from you! But that is no use and I am beginning to be reasonable again.

I have now been ill for three days, have been writing and reading reports all day today, then invited Königstein here to do an experiment on cocaine with him -- my pharmacist has not yet shown any sign of himself -- and apart from that an excerpt from my next publication -- a case of polyneuritis acuta -- done for *The Lancet*. I am now sitting surrounded by paper, paper and ink, and am a proper book doctor.

I will rest a little these days.

A detailed letter from Rosa came today, which I will send you as soon as I have answered it. She behaves so bravely. I think I could never be happy if she were having a bad time. And you, my poor dear love, you put up with everything and my stupid accusations on top of it all with such goodness. I want so much to be loving towards you, yet all my intentions are no use, you don't get to know anything about them. One has to have a really vivid image of how lovely some things were that we imagined for so long, in order to believe that one will once again experience the fulfilment of a wish. Do you still recall how you waited for me that morning at the station and how we drove to Wandsbek? I was as if in a dream. It's true, it's true. And it was only four short weeks. But we loved each other and got on well together. And when one does not love, it shows first of all in one's day to day relationship. One torments the other a little at a distance because one is tormented oneself. -- It is so amusing that faced with decisive times -- the travel grant, the university dozent application, establishing oneself -- one lives on so ridiculously calmly, while apparently ill one feels so well, it is so delightfully quiet now and so beautifully green in the hospital courtyard. Spring has arrived in all its glory.

Be well, my darling little Martha, no kiss today from your

Sigmund.

[Letter from Sigmund Freud to Martha Bernays 20.4.1885 in: *Sigmund Freud / Martha Bernays: Die Brautbriefe*, Bd. 4: "Spuren von unserer komplizierten Existenz" hg. von G. Fichtner, I. Grubrich Simitis u. A. Hirschmüller unter Mitwirkung von W. Kloft. Frankfurt a. M. (S. Fischer) 2019.]

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