Figure dell' isteria. Dall' invenzione francese alla clinica psicoanalitica

F.M. Ferro, G. Riefolo

Métes, Chieti, 1996, pp. 308 , Lit. 32.000

This book should be read as a map that guides the reader through more than two centuries from the French invention of hysteria to the psychoanalytical studies.

According to the authors there are three intertwining ways to deal with this topic: nosography, semeiology and aetiology.

A rich French alienist anthology documents the nosographic aspects and draws the images and the stigmata of hysteria via classical psychiatric iconography. Morel, for example, through the cases of Lucie, Catherine and Françoise, identified some features of the hysterical mania and its erotic and religious contents. Azam explained by the case of Felidé the phenomenon of the double conscience. Lasègue detected the clinical characteristics of hysteria in some girls presenting active refusal of food, vomiting, amenorrhea (that is to say, anorexia nervosa). With reference to this last set of symptoms, Janet pointed out that the hysterical delusions that lead the patients to starve themselves and to die of hunger were frequent and dangerous.

Charcot showed the suggestibility of the hysterical patients and the experimental reproducibility of the clinical pictures. He

emphasized the link between symptoms and traumatic events and demonstrated the role that hypnosis played in the treatment of hysteria. His semeiological approach showed that symbolic factors were importantly involved in the formation of the symptoms and that words could be curative.

Charcot opened the road to the Freud's etiologic hypotheses that at first focused on the role of actual seduction (or other trauma) and then on the unconscious elaboration of the child's sexual drive.

Hysteria was not accepted as a diagnostic term in DSM-III (1980), in DSM-III-R (1987) in ICD-10 (1993) and in DSM-IV (1994).

A substantial question is: why did the diagnostic category hysteria recently disappear not only in psychiatry but in psychoanalysis too? Ferro and Riefolo offer a very interesting historical contribution to this subject.

Paola Biesta
APLI - Associazione Psicanalitica
Lacanianiana Italiana
Via Voghera 31
00182 Roma, Italia