

THE ORIGINS OF
PSYCHO-ANALYSIS

Letters to Wilhelm Fliess,

Drafts and Notes:

1887-1902

by

SIGMUND FREUD

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mood. This analysis is harder than any other. It is also the thing that paralyses the power of writing down and communicating what so far I have learned. But I believe it has got to be done and is a necessary stage in my work.

My cordial greetings to both of you, and after this brief disappointment please give me something new to look forward to.

Your
Sigm.

68

Aussee, 18. 8. 97

My dear Wilhelm,

... I see that I have been rather neglecting our correspondence, because a meeting was in prospect. Now that the prospect is over—in my thoughts—I intend to open the way again to the old, unjustly despised technique of exchanging ideas. My handwriting is more human again, so my tiredness is wearing off. Your writing, I see with pleasure, never varies.

Martha is looking forward to the journey, though the daily reports of train accidents do not make the father and mother of a family look forward to travelling with any pleasure. You will laugh—and rightly—but I must confess to new anxieties, which come and go but last for half a day at a time. Fear of a railway accident deserted me half an hour ago when it occurred to me that Wilhelm and Ida were also on their way. That ended the idiocy. This must remain strictly between us.

... This time I hope to go rather more deeply into Italian art. I begin to see your point of view, which looks, not for what is of cultural-historical interest, but for absolute beauty clothed in forms and ideas and in fundamentally pleasing sensations of space and colour. At Nuremberg I was still far from seeing it. By the way, have I already told you that Naples is off, and that the route is *via* San Gimignano, Siena, Perugia, Assisi, Ancona—in other words Tuscany and Umbria?

I hope to hear from you very soon, even if only briefly. For

the next few days I shall be here; from the 25th to September 1st my address will be Venice, Casa Kirsch.

My best wishes for the rest of the summer,

Your
Sigm.

69

21. 9. 97.

IX. Berggasse 19.

Dr. Sigm. Freud,
Lecturer in Nervous Diseases
at the University.

My dear Wilhelm,

Here I am again—we returned yesterday morning—refreshed, cheerful, impoverished and without work for the time being, and I am writing to you as soon as we have settled in again.¹ Let me tell you straight away the great secret which has been slowly dawning on me in recent months. I no longer believe in my *neurotica*. That is hardly intelligible without an explanation; you yourself found what I told you credible. So I shall start at the beginning and tell you the whole story of how the reasons for rejecting it arose. The first group of factors were the continual disappointment of my attempts to bring my analyses to a real conclusion, the running away of people who for a time had seemed my most favourably inclined patients, the lack of the complete success on which I had counted, and the possibility of explaining my partial successes in other, familiar, ways. Then there was the astonishing thing that in every case . . . blame was laid on perverse acts by the father, and realization of the unexpected frequency of hysteria, in every case of which the same thing applied, though it was hardly credible that perverted

¹ A reference to Freud's unusually late return from his summer holidays.

acts against children were so general.¹ (Perversion would have to be immeasurably more frequent than hysteria, as the illness can only arise where the events have accumulated and one of the factors which weaken defence is present.) Thirdly, there was the definite realization that there is no "indication of reality"² in the unconscious, so that it is impossible to distinguish between truth and emotionally-charged fiction. (This leaves open the possible explanation that sexual phantasy regularly makes use of the theme of the parents.)³ Fourthly, there was the consideration that even in the most deep-reaching psychoses the unconscious memory does not break through, so that the secret of infantile experiences is not revealed even in the most confused states of delirium. When one thus sees that the unconscious never overcomes the resistance of the conscious, one must abandon the expectation that in treatment the reverse process will take place to the extent that the conscious will fully dominate the unconscious.

So far was I influenced by these considerations that I was ready to abandon two things—the complete solution of a neurosis and sure reliance on its aetiology in infancy. Now I do not know where I am, as I have failed to reach theoretical understanding of repression and its play of forces. It again seems arguable that it is later experiences which give rise to phantasies which throw back to childhood; and with that the factor of hereditary predisposition regains a sphere of influence from which I had made it my business to oust it—in the interests of fully explaining neurosis.

Were I depressed, jaded, unclear in my mind, such doubts might be taken for signs of weakness. But as I am in just the opposite state, I must acknowledge them to be the result of

¹ Freud's attention had for months past been directed to the study of infantile phantasy; he had studied the dynamic function of phantasy and gained lasting insights into this field. See pp. 204 and 207 and Letter 62 *sq.* He had drawn near to the Oedipus complex, in which he recognized the aggressive impulses of children directed against their parents, but had still remained faithful to his belief in the reality of the seduction scenes. It seems reasonable to assume that it was only the self-analysis of this summer that made possible rejection of the seduction hypothesis.

²[See "Project," p. 429.]

³The next step from this was insight into the Oedipus complex.

honest and effective intellectual labour, and I am proud that after penetrating so far I am still capable of such criticism. Can these doubts be only an episode on the way to further knowledge?

It is curious that I feel not in the least disgraced, though the occasion might seem to require it. Certainly I shall not tell it in Gath, or publish it in the streets of Askalon, in the land of the Philistines—but between ourselves I have a feeling more of triumph than of defeat (which cannot be right).¹

How delightful that your letter should come just at this moment! It gives me the opportunity to make a suggestion with which I intended to finish this letter. If during this slack period I slip into the North-West Station on Saturday night I can be with you by Sunday midday and travel back the next night. Can you make the day free for an idyll for two, interrupted by one for three and three-and-a-half? That was what I wanted to ask. Or have you a visitor in the house or something urgent to do? Or, if I should have to leave and come home again the same evening, which would not be worth while, could the same arrangements apply if I went to the North-West Station on Friday evening and stayed one-and-a-half days with you? I mean of course this week.²

To go on with my letter. I vary Hamlet's remark about ripeness—cheerfulness is all. I might be feeling very unhappy. The hope of eternal fame was so beautiful, and so was that of certain wealth, complete independence, travel, and removing the

¹ See Introduction, p. 29 *sq.* In a footnote dated 1924 to the section on "the specific aetiology of hysteria" in "Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defence" (1896 b) Freud states:

"This section was written while I was under the ascendancy of an error which I have since then repeatedly acknowledged and corrected. I had not yet found out how to distinguish between patients' phantasies about their own childhood and real memories. I consequently ascribed to the aetiological factor of seduction an importance and general validity which it does not possess. When this error was overcome, the door was opened to an insight into the spontaneous manifestations of infantile sexuality which I described in my *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905 d). Nevertheless, there is no need to reject the whole of what appears in the text above; seduction still retains a certain aetiological importance, and I still consider that some of the psychological views expressed in this section meet the case."

² Freud went to Berlin and returned to Vienna on the 29th.

children from the sphere of the worries which spoiled my own youth. All that depended on whether hysteria succeeded or not. Now I can be quiet and modest again and go on worrying and saving, and one of the stories from my collection¹ occurs to me: "Rebecca, you can take off your wedding-gown, you're not a bride any longer!"

There is something else I must add. In the general collapse only the psychology has retained its value. The dreams still stand secure, and my beginnings in metapsychology have gone up in my estimation. It is a pity one cannot live on dream-interpretation, for instance.

Martha came back to Vienna with me. Minna and the children are staying away for another week. They have all been very well. . . .

I hope to hear from you soon in person—assuming your answer is yes—how things are going with you and whatever else is doing between heaven and earth.

Cordially your

Sigm.

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Vienna, 3. 10. 97.

My dear Wilhelm,

One advantage of my visit to you is that, as I now know the present outline of your work as a whole, you can keep me informed of the details again. But you must not expect an answer to everything, and in the case of many of my answers you will not, I hope, fail to make allowances for my limitations on your subjects, which are outside my sphere. . . .

Outwardly very little is happening to me, but inside me something very interesting is happening. For the last four days my self-analysis, which I regard as indispensable for clearing up the whole problem, has been making progress in dreams and yielding the most valuable conclusions and evidence. At certain

¹[Of Jewish anecdotes.]

points I have the impression of having come to the end, and so far I have always known where the next night of dreams would continue. To describe it in writing is more difficult than anything else, and besides it is far too extensive. I can only say that in my case my father played no active role, though I certainly projected on to him an analogy from myself; that my "primary originator" [of neurosis] was an ugly, elderly but clever woman who told me a great deal about God and hell, and gave me a high opinion of my own capacities; that later (between the ages of two and two-and-a-half) libido towards *matrem* was aroused; the occasion must have been the journey with her from Leipzig to Vienna, during which we spent a night together and I must have had the opportunity of seeing her *nudam* (you have long since drawn the conclusions from this for your own son, as a remark of yours revealed); and that I welcomed my one-year-younger brother (who died within a few months) with ill wishes and real infantile jealousy, and that his death left the germ of guilt in me. I have long known that my companion in crime between the ages of one and two was a nephew of mine who is a year older than I am and now lives in Manchester; he visited us in Vienna when I was fourteen. We seem occasionally to have treated my niece, who was a year younger, shockingly. My nephew and younger brother determined, not only the neurotic side of all my friendships, but also their depth.¹ My anxiety over travel you have seen yourself in full bloom.²

I still have not got to the scenes which lie at the bottom of all this. If they emerge, and I succeed in resolving my hysteria, I shall have to thank the memory of the old woman who provided

¹ Cf. *Interpretation of Dreams* (p. 483) where Freud refers to this piece of analytical insight in greater detail.

"My emotional life has always insisted that I should have an intimate friend and a hated enemy. I have always been able to provide myself afresh with both, and it has not infrequently happened that the ideal situation of childhood has been so completely reproduced that friend and enemy have come together in a single individual—though not, of course, both at once or with constant oscillations, as may have been the case in my early childhood."

For the possible bearing of this passage on Freud's relationship with Fliess it may be of importance to mention that Fliess's (dead) sister was named Pauline, as was Freud's niece, the sister of his older nephew John. See Introduction, p. 31.

² See Letter 68 and 77.