Sigmund Freud Avoids his Double, Theodor Herzl

by

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In August 1902, at Bozen, on his way to Naples, [Freud] related meeting his double . . . and in one of his superstitious moods asked: 'Does this signify Vedere Napoli e poi morire [See Naples and die]?' Death was seldom from his thoughts . . .

--Ernest Jones, Sigmund Freud’s official biographer.¹

. . . Incidentally my longing for Rome is deeply neurotic. It is connected with my school-boy hero worship of the Semitic Hannibal. . . .

. . . . It is a pity that one always keeps one's mouth shut about the most intimate things . . .

-- Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess in his letter dated 3 December 1897.²

In the last week of September 1902, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) mailed Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) a copy of The Interpretation of Dreams, ostensibly for him to review in the Neue Freie Presse. At the close of the accompanying letter dated September 28, Freud expresses his high regard for Herzl:
But in any event I ask you to keep the book as a token of the high esteem with which I--like so many others--have for many years regarded the poet and fighter for the human rights of our people.³

Yet Anna Freud, who was close to her father, doubted that Freud ever met Herzl.⁴ Presuming that Freud and Herzl never met, this is puzzling; moreso, since from 1896 until some time in 1898 Herzl had resided in an apartment at Berggasse 6, just a stone’s throw from Freud’s home and office at Berggasse 19.⁵ How then could we account for Freud’s not approaching or introducing himself to Herzl? Helpful here is the following from Freud’s letter to Arthur Schnitzler of 14 May 1922 on the occasion of the sixtieth birthday of this noted writer whose psychological insights uncannily resembled Freud’s:

But I will make a confession which for my sake I must ask you to keep to yourself and share with neither friends nor strangers. . . . I think I have avoided you from a kind of reluctance to meet my double.⁶

Freud could just as easily have made the same “confession” to Herzl: “I have avoided you from a . . . reluctance to meet my double [for I’m not ready to die].”⁷ Vis-a-vis Freud’s fear of meeting his possible “double,” Falk asserts, “Herzl scared Freud less than Schnitzler did.”⁸ On the contrary, Herzl scared Freud more. For, like Herzl, Freud was obsessed with saving the Jews. But unlike Herzl who broadcast his messianic ambition, Freud concealed his messianic ambition. Indeed, Freud deemed it essential that the public not associate the father of psychoanalysis with the father of modern Zionism: there must be no hint that his creation, psychoanalysis, like
Herzl’s Zionism, is a Jewish national affair, that is, a political movement to save the Jews—otherwise psychoanalysis and, ultimately, the realization of his messianic ambition would be forfeited.9

In The Interpretation of Dreams, Freud (1900) relates a dream of his which was instigated by Herzl’s The New Ghetto, a play concerning modern antisemitism; please note that Freud doesn’t mention that it was Herzl who had written the instigating play:

The dream was constructed on a tangle of thoughts provoked by a play which I had seen called Das neue Ghetto. The Jewish problem, concern about the future of one's children [die Zukunft der Kinder] to whom one can not give a country of their own, concern about educating them in such a way that they can move freely across frontiers. (p. 442, [original edition, p. 444]) literally, der Kinder means the children, not “one’s” children.)10

This dream concerning the Jewish problem was informed by Freud’s ambition to save the Jews. My son, the Myops is set in Rome, where Freud is "greatly depressed and almost in tears" (p. 441); associating to his melancholy, Freud (p. 442) recalls Psalm 137, the famous lament describing the anguish and despair of the Israelites during the Babylonian Captivity, the first line of which Freud quotes: "By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept" (translation of Luther's version). When Freud was quoting Psalm 137’s first verse it is likely that the lament’s last three verses (7-9) didn’t escape him, especially given his identification with the relentless avenging Semite, Hannibal:

Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.
O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.

Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

Over time, in Hebrew literature, Edom had come to signify Israel's enemies, especially Rome. It's easy then to infer with confidence that to Freud Edom signifies Christian Rome. By destroying the Law Freud would "rase [Christendom] . . . even to the foundation"; by dashing the Stones, that is, by destroying the Tablets of the Law, Freud would leave in the dust the Church, that seedbed for antisemites ("dasheth thy little ones against the stones"), and so save der Kinder: No Law, No God, no Judaism, no Christianity, no miserable antisemitism. Freud’s game plan called for the destruction of the Law by gaining universal acceptance of his notion that the idea of God the Father stems from the Father complex, specifically the Oedipal boy’s overvaluation of his father. Or in Freud’s words, “[God] is really the father, with all the magnificence in which he once appeared to the small child.” By cutting the ground from under religion and, thereby, felling Moses and Jesus, Freud would take possession of the field: Moses, Jesus, and now the new Moses or moral authority, Sigmund Freud.

Whereas Herzl's solution to "the Jewish problem" is to hand der Kinder a sovereign Jewish State ("a country of their own"), Freud's solution is to hand der Kinder a world free from persecution and oppression ("a way that they can move freely across frontiers"); and, in order to usher in his atheistic brotherly Promised Land, the establishment of which would secure die Zukunft der Kinder, Freud, with the assistance of his spiritual children, the psychoanalysts, would teach humankind about the Oedipal origins of that illusion, religion ("educate . . . in such
a way"). In this enlightened and just Promised Land there would be but one law—Freud’s law, "Know thyself!"

My Son, the Myops is just one of many of Freud’s dreams in The Interpretation of Dreams which I believe are informed by his secret messianic ambition. In one such dream, View of the Tiber, Freud, from a railway-carriage window, views a Roman bridge favored by messianic pretenders, the Ponte Sant Angelo. In rabbinical lore, dating from the second century, the Messiah is already on earth: waiting in hiding, he sits among the beggars and lepers at the entrance to Rome; accordingly, the pseudo-Messiah Shlomo Molcho (1500-32) enacted this symbolic ritual: dressed in rags, he sat with the beggars on the Ponte Sant Angelo. Freud, who was name-sensitive, was born Sigismund Shlomo (after his Hasidic paternal grandfather); interestingly, Sigismund means Savior of the world.

On 23 April 1900, two days after Passover, the season when the Messiah is expected to appear, Freud had a dream involving his B’nai B’rith lodge brothers. Freud related it to Fliess in a letter penned 25 April 1900; inasmuch as it is otherwise unpublished it is worth examining:

Yesterday I gave a lecture on Zola's Fecondite before my society [B'nai B'rith]. I am always ill prepared; actually I start only an hour before. . . . During the night . . . I dreamed inordinately of this lecture. I explained that I had to go home to fetch the book, did not find the way and got lost, the weather was miserable . . . . The brethren, moreover, were unkind and scornful of me--conduct that is apt, quite surely, to reduce my interest in the success of my lecture. (italics mine.)
In "J'accuse!" (13 January 1898) Zola denounced "that miserable antisemitism" ("weather was miserable"). And Freud, in order to eliminate the miserable antisemitism, is secretly prepared to do ill or evil ("ill prepared"), that is to say, he is prepared to destroy the Torah. Accordingly, it is "apt" or fitting that his brethren are "unkind and scornful of" Freud, a pretender who would destroy their Tree of Life. Does he really, then, want to follow through ("reduce my interest in the success") on his impious intention to become the new Moses by establishing his atheistic brotherly world, a world which parallels the utopia Zola envisions in Fecondite ("a lecture on Zola's Fecondite")?:

> And the divine dream, the generous utopian thought
> soars into the heavens; families blended into nations,
> nations blended into mankind, one sole brotherly people
> making of the world one sole city of peace and truth and
> justice! Ah! may eternal fruitfulness ever expand, may
> the seed of humanity be carried over the frontiers . . .
> (my italics; cf. Freud vis-a-vis My Son, the Myops:
> “... they can move freely across frontiers.”)19

As Freud well knows, it would take the moral courage of a Zola for him to stand up to the hatred and contempt of his people. So, it is understandable that this impious hero (who seems (to have "lost [his] way") "dreamed inordinately" of the lecture on Fecondite that he was to give the next day to his lodge brothers, other Sons of the Covenant. Maybe he should "go home," return to the Torah, and leave the "miserable weather" to Herzl and his band of Zionists. Ironically, in The Jewish State (in which he referred to antisemitism as “the misery of the Jews”
Herzl asserted, "Universal brotherhood is not even a beautiful dream." 20

Herzl died at the age of forty-four on 3 July 1904. And if, to Freud, meeting one’s double signifies that one is about to die, what then does the death of one’s “double,” Herzl, signify to him? And this would-be Moses of the Berggasse can’t afford to die prematurely, before preparing the ground for his atheistic brotherly world--especially since, with the passing of his rival for the mantle of Moses, the fate of the Jews, seems (despite the establishment of the Zionist movement) more than ever to depend solely upon him. Not surprisingly, in the period following Herzl’s death Freud was especially preoccupied with own death. 21

Freud’s ultimate double, of course, was Moses. Accordingly, this hero who would lead humankind to the Promised Land of Reason gathered courage and in September 1901 embarked for Rome, where, in order to set himself free from the Law (following which he would set others free from their chains), he would undergo, in the gloomy Church of San Pietro in Vincoli (St. Peter in Chains), his self-imposed task of facing, in the form of Michelangelo’s Moses, the shade of Moses with his shining visage Exodus 34: 29-35). But this topic calls for another paper.*

Notes


4. Ibid., p. 3.


6. Max Schur, FREUD: Living and Dying, New York: International Universities Press, 1972, p. 335. The following year, on 19 December 1923, while strolling through Vienna, Schnitzler chanced upon Freud, his wife, Martha, and his daughter, Anna, who had formerly taught the playwright’s daughter, Lili. Vis-a-vis this chance encounter, Schnitzler, who, like Freud, was born in May and had been trained as a physician, made the following diary entry: ”. . . met Professor Freud with wife and daughter; he spoke, after his surgery [for cancer of the mouth and jaw in October], only with much difficulty.” (In Uwe H. Peters, Anna Freud: a life dedicated to children, New York: Shocken, 1985, p. 53.) In addition to his recent oral surgery, did a state bordering on panic contribute to Freud’s speaking “with much difficulty” to his “double,” Schnitzler? On Saturday afternoons, Freud played cards (taroc) with Schnitzler's younger brother Julius, a prominent surgeon (Schur, 1972, 337, n.17); in my view, it was Freud’s sense of guilt over the death of his infant brother Julius that spurred him to save the children.


9. Leo Goldhammer alleges that about 1905 or 1907 he had heard Freud relate in a lecture on dream interpretation at the University of Vienna a dream of his involving Herzl. According to Goldhammer, Freud stated that Herzl, whom he had never met and whose ideas never really concerned him, was still alive when he dreamt the following:

   Herzl appeared to me, a majestic figure with . . . infinitely sad eyes. This apparition forced me to do something at once to clarify to myself what I must do should the Jewish people be saved. These words surprised me by their fierce logic and intense accompanying feeling. (Falk, ibid., p. 3)

   Though the above quote lends support to the thrust of my paper, I can’t picture Freud revealing his identification with Herzl, and, thereby, unnecessarily place at risk his secret messianic ambition; moreso, since Goldhammer is vague about when Freud related the alleged dream (1905 or 1907).

10. Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, S. E. 4-5, 1900. Ibid., Die Traumdeutung, Vienna, G. W. II/III, 1900. On Tuesday, 4 January 1898, the day before he saw The New Ghetto, Freud wrote Fliess that the play had already informed his dreams:

   On Wednesday we shall go . . . to a Jewish play by Herzl, in the Carl Theater--a first night, which has already played a role in my dreams.


In the 1920 edition of Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, Freud (1905) added a note in which he declared, “recognition of [the Oedipus complex] is the shibboleth that distinguishes adherents of psychoanalysis from its opponents” (p. 226 n). Recall, it was due to a victorious Jewish military campaign that the Hebrew word shibboleth became a catchword used to tell friends from foes: Jephthah the Judge used shibboleth (which means both stream and ear of corn) as a test word to distinguish his enemies, the fleeing Ephraimites, who couldn't pronounce sh, from his own men, the Gileadites (Judges 12:4-6). To this note Freud could have added: with the Oedipus complex he intended to eliminate “the neurosis of humankind,” religion, and, thereby, deliver his people from their enemies. Is it any wonder then that Freud abandoned the seduction hypothesis--adult psychopathology, namely hysteria, stems from father-child incest--for the Oedipus complex? Or that he made the Oedipus complex into a dogma or article of faith of psychoanalysis?

13. Because Freud was born in a caul, a Czech peasant woman had prophesied to his mother, Amalia, that "with her first-born child she had brought a great man into the world" (Freud, 1900, 192). Little did the proud young mama know that her "great man" ("mein goldener Sigi") would spend the second half of his life trying to kill the great man of their people, Moses (by destroying the Law).


19. Emile Zola, *Fruitfulness*, trans. H. Vizetelly, London: Chatto and Widus, 1925 [1899], p. 411. In 1907, Freud placed *Fruitfulness* fourth on the list of “ten good books” he drew up for the Vienna bookseller, Hinterberger. Prefacing the list, Freud wrote "... I assume that by ‘good’ you mean books with which one owes some part of one’s knowledge of life and philosophy, books one has enjoyed and like to recommend to others..." (*Letters of Sigmund Freud*, edited by Ernst L. Freud, New York: Basic Books, p. 269.)

21. See Freud’s letter to Carl Jung of 16 April 1909 vis-a-vis the surfacing of his superstitioustendencies on his visit to Athens in September 1904. [In *The Freud/Jung Letters: The Correspondence between Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung*, (W. McGuire, ed.; R. Manheim and R. F. C. Hull, trans.), Bollingen Series *XCIV*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974, pp. 219-20.] Despite his belief following Herzl’s death that his death was imminent, Freud will live another thirty-five years, long enough to become, like the fathers, an exile. In his new home, 20 Maresfield Gardens, London, just outside the doorway leading to his consulting room Freud will place an etching inspired by Rembrandt’s *Moses Breaks the Law* which will serve as an external daily reminder of his perduring goal of eliminating antisemitism by destroying the Law.

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**ADDENDUM**

On the evening of 15 April 1908 or the fiftieth anniversary of Julius’s death, the Psychological Wednesday Society was renamed, on Freud’s carried motion, the Vienna Psychoanalytic. In this manner Freud secretly dedicated the psychoanalytic movement to the memory of Julius—a movement which would instiute Freud's (and Julius's) Promised Land, a brotherly world in which, antisemitism being unknown, future Juliuses
(and Sarahs) could at long last live in peace.