ROBERT W. FLEISS (1895-1970):
A Beneficiary and/or Forsaken Casualty of Classic Freudianism?

by Lawrence M. Ginsburg
Elusive aspects about the subject’s life are the focus of this paper. Overlooked and distorted links in the historical *continuum* of his psychoanalytic heritage are re-examined¹ not only through the roles of parents, wife, personal analysts and colleagues; but, also *via* perspectives of Sigmund Freud’s immediate family, patients, disciples and friends. Future biographers are likely to reconsider progressions through his professional career as a reputed survivor of child-abuse and/or parricidal-like phantasies.

Parenthetically, an article in the mental-health oriented literature by Warwick
Middleton (2016) has been characterized as a “Presidential Editorial” and captioned: “Wilhelm Fliess, Robert Fliess, Sandor Ferenczi and Sigmund Freud” (pp. 1-12). The 
Journal of Trauma & Dissociation is the publication in which the cited work of the 
author (i.e., a psychiatrist) recently appeared as an “op-ed.” His ‘jumbled-retrospective’ synopsis—listing 39 references spanning 12 pages of text—distorts and glosses over readily available sources as shall become apparent to readers of the ensuing text.

Hopefully, your author’s digressions supplementing some segments may prove enlightening.

§1. A Child’s Estranged “Onkel Doktor” in Vienna

Robert Fliess was born in Berlin on 29 December 1895. Wilhelm Fliess (1858-1928) was his father; Ida née Bondy Fliess (1869-1941) was his mother. When they married, Fliess was 34-years of age and a prominent ear, nose, throat physician and surgeon. The couple’s daughter, Paulina née Fliess Jacobsohn a/k/a Jacobsen (1898-[circa 1989]) who emigrated from Europe to Palestine, was named after her maternal grandmother. Conrad Fliess (1899-1956), their second-born son (i.e., named after Conrad Ferdinand Meyer the famous Swiss author) changed his given first name to Charles after emigrating to England.¹ The culmination of their mother Ida’s last pregnancy resulted in the 1902 still-birth of another daughter. Then, Robert had been approximately 7-years of age. Concerning possible further back-ground about Robert’s biological heritage, it is noted that his paternal first-cousin Beate née Fliess Hermelin (1919-2007)—after fleeing to England—became a renowned experimental psychologist specializing in childhood psychosis and the savant syndrome.

In the Fliess’s ‘family myth,’ Freud was known as Robert’s ‘Uncle Doctor’
Over three decades ago, *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887-1904* appeared in print. It was translated and edited by J. M. Masson, 1985a) who inserted the ensuing footnote:

“1. Sulloway (1979, p. 190) says that ‘Fliess kept a daily record book in which he recorded his firstborn son’s every maturation milestone, affliction, and trace of sexual activity’….’ [For Sulloway’s source, see notebook compilation cited by Richard Pfennig (1912, pp. 381-382).

From Robert’s early boyhood, he and his siblings had dubbed their mother Ida as ‘The Dutchess’ (§IV):

“…trips back to [her] family in Vienna were high-points. His Aunt Mela, [mother of their first cousins, Margarethe née Rie Nunberg and Marianne née Rie Kris, each of whose spouses became psychoanalysts and emigrated to New York² after Ernst Kris, the latter’s husband, had been analyzed by Anna Freud in Vienna (Young-Bruehl, 1988, p. 271),³ was a favorite…” (E. Fliess, 1982, p. 196).

The ‘Onkel Doktor’ moniker may plausibly have been more applicable to Robert’s maternal uncle Oskar Rie (i.e., Freud’s weekly card-playing colleague and pediatrician to his children) than his father’s long-time former collaborator.

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1 Referenced *infra* is an untranslated German document entitled “Reminiscences of Conrad Fliess” (n.d.) archived at the *Library of Congress* in Washington, DC. He “emigrated to England in the late 30s; served in the British Army, becoming a British citizen…” (E. Fliess, *op. cit.*, 1974, p. 13). See possible allusion to referenced archival document in Rudnytsky/Swales (2000) colloquy in which a transcript of the latter’s oral history cited, in part: “…a long essay, I’ve had by now for 20 years, by Wilhelm’s son Conrad Charles about his father. It’s an embryo for a biography…that ‘Fliess’s daughter Pauline’ gave me’….” Further paraphrasing Swales’s quoted reaction, he observed that the “document by Conrad---Well this is wonderful, but it needs research…” (p. 319).

2 Later in life, Robert (1935) may have had second thoughts about a book by psychoanalyst
Herman Nunberg (i.e., 1st-cousin Margarethe’s husband) he had critically reviewed (pp. 514-527). It contained a “Forward” by S. Freud. Robert (1953b pp. 268-284) also came to Chair a Panel at the Scientific Proceedings of the American Psychoanalytic Association that included the aforesaid Herman Nunberg and Ernst Kris (i.e., his cousins-in-law and acolytes of A. Freud). Subsequently, Robert thanked psychoanalyst Marianne Kris, another 1st-cousin, for assisting him in furthering an additional is publications (R. Fliess, 1956, p. 59).

3 Biographer Elizabeth H. Young-Bruehl (1988) noted that her subject had been born on 3 December 1895 in Vienna; further noted that Anna Freud “…and her twin [i.e., psychoanalysis] were no longer rivals” (p. 15). Both the Masson so-called ‘hunger dream’ of Robert and her so-called ‘menu dream’ appeared in print (, 1985a, op. cit., p. 365). The Freud and Fliess families were at that time so close that the former pater-familias had once planned to name a child after the latter. Neither Anna nor the 26-day younger Robert were destined to serve as conduits for the replication of their genetic DNA. A more recent biographer of Anna (Stewart-Steinberg) entitled her work Impious Fidelity: Anna Freud, “For indeed because of my piety I was called impious.”

§II. A ‘LONER’

“It has taken me time to recognize my isolation as another blessing: I had never to please anyone and have been undisturbed in listening to my own ‘critical institution’…”

---“Postscript,” Symbol, Dream and Psychosis (R. Fliess, p. 411) [posthumously published in 1973]

Exactly when and where Elenore [née Stratton Fliess (1900-circa 1985)] married Robert is uncertain. She initially became acquainted with him in 1935 when he treated her for colds as a physician in “sooty” New York City (E. Fliess, 1982, p. 200).¹ Elenore’s 1974 memoir about Robert’s life with her covered the last 3½ decades before his demise.² It was privately published, cited by Sulloway (op. cit., pp. 191, fn. 28 & 535) and continually catalogued (i.e., at readily accessible libraries) within the public domain listed upon the World Wide Web.³ Contrary to data supplied by the aforementioned Middleton (op. cit.), Robert did not relocate in New York City until 1936 according to erroneous data quoted by the aforementioned Middleton (op. cit., p. 3).⁴
By 1982, Elenore (1982) came to allude---from afar⁸---about Robert’s early family life as having included “a forbidding father, a subservient mother and meals with the servants” (p. 196). Retrospectively, she sought to echo her deceased husband’s coveted memories about his early childhood:

“Another favorite was Anna Mattausch, clear eyed, strong, with fine features, wore a little white jabot on her ample bosom. She fed the boy from Berlin steaming cups of cocoa…Over other cups of cocoa, decades and an ocean away, I would come to know of her and love her for those many kindnesses” (E. Fliess, pp. 195-196).

Elenore (1974), in an earlier account, portrayed her long-deceased father-in-law as “…charming to patients and acquaintances” while “a tyrant at home.” Continuing with her remote 2nd-hand opinion:

“…children were second class citizens, from diet to schooling. The mother, intelligent and quite efficient, would appear to have been more impressed with her husband’s off-beat (and quite unsubstantial) physiologic theories than with her parental responsibilities…” (p. 10).

Elenore (1982, op. cit.) was not known to have ever met Ida Fliess, whom she termed “a Viennese heiress, daughter of a cultured family…an accomplished amateur pianist…gracious hostess” who led a salon in Berlin frequented by musicians, artists and literary figures (p. 195). Her mother-in-law presumably had also doubled as the manager of husband Wilhelm’s home-office facility prior to his death.

¹ According to E. Fliess (1974), Robert had inherited from his ear, nose and throat specialist-father a special technique in treating such an “enflamed area” with “a light anesthesia” or “a locally applied drug or an ice cube(!)…There was no other medication…in the cold-inflicted city
of New York…” (p. 12).

² E. Fliess declared in what seems an over-simplistic passage of her highly personalized memoir that “I loved children. He didn’t!” Moreover, she openly reflected about her status as Robert’s help-mate spouse: “…what did a brilliant person, and a Jew find compatible in a renegade Wasp with only an average education, trying to learn in her thirties, the teaching of the young?” (1974, p. 22). Overlooked is the fact that she (1976) was the lead co-author of an academic paper with her husband that they wrote for American Imago. See also her coda in which she (1974) stated: “In America, although never an active Zionist, he [Robert] deeply rejoiced when from a home-land won the Jewish state was created. By the terms of his and his wife’s (parallel) wills his residual estate passed to the State of Israel” (footnoted at bottom of p. 13).

³ Masson (1985b), in a companion publication, acknowledged that “the late Elenore Fliess, widow of Wilhelm’s son Robert, became a personal friend during the writing of this book…” (p. xi). Although he, in his land-mark study (1985a), omitted any reference to her elusive memoir, privately published in 1974), he did dedicate his sequel (i.e., The Assault on Truth: Suppression of the Seduction Theory “TO THE MEMORY OF ELENORE FLIESS.” Sulloway’s (1979, op. cit.) contribution to the psychoanalytic literature included mention of one of E. Fliess’s biographical tomes about her deceased husband (pp. 191, fn. 28 & 535).

⁴ Other sources more accurately listed the year 1933 as the appropriate date in question. Prophetically, perhaps, Freud (1933b) wrote to E. Jones: “Berlin is lost, Budapest devalued by the loss of Ferenczi, and one cannot tell in which direction they are drifting in America” (p. 726).

⁵ E. Fliess (1974) opined that “Often a wife is not the best biographer, but there is no one left who knew him so well. So I will try” (p. 21). While continuing, she declared, in what seems an over-simplistic passage of her highly personalized memoir that “I loved children. He didn’t” (ibid.). Moreover, she openly reflected about her status as Robert’s help-mate spouse: “…what did a brilliant person, and a Jew find compatible in a renegade Wasp with only an average education, trying to learn in her thirties, the teaching of the young?” (ibid., p. 22). Overlooked is the fact that she (1976) was the lead co-author of an academic paper with her husband that they wrote for American Imago. See also her coda in which she (op. cit., 1974) stated: “In America, although never an active Zionist, he [Robert] deeply rejoiced when from a home-land won the Jewish state was created. By the terms of his and his wife’s (parallel) wills his residual estate passed to the State of Israel” (ibid., footnoted at bottom of p. 13).

§III. ‘The Princess’ and ‘The Dutchess’

Elenore (1982, op. cit.) was not known to have ever met Ida Fliess, whom she termed “a Viennese heireess, daughter of a cultured family…an accomplished amateur pianist…gracious hostess” who led a salon in Berlin frequented by musicians, artists and literary figures (p. 195). Her mother-in-law presumably had also doubled as the manager
Fig. 1
of husband Wilhelm’s home-office facility prior to his death.

‘The Princess’ a/k/a Marie Bonaparte (i.e., with whom neither Ida nor her husband were known to have ever had any contact), was one of Freud’s most loyal analysands and devotees. She found it expedient to disparage Ida as “the witch” and then “as a bad woman” in an “unpublished note-book” quoted by Masson (op. cit., 1985a). As he ultimately reiterated:

“The friendship with Fliess began to decline as early as 1900…Ida Fliess, moreover…out of jealousy, did everything possible to sow discord between the two friends..” (p. 3 & pp. 196-197, fn. 1).

Less than a decade after having effusively praised Ida in letters to her husband, Freud:

“…is conversations with Marie Bonaparte about his relationship to Fliess the …called her a ‘böses Wib’ ['malicious skirt']---this quote only in the German edition of Freud…” (Falzeder, 2002, p. 128, fn. 1).

The history of Bonaparte’s discovery of the accumulated Freud-to-Fliess letters et al. has been fully chronicled elsewhere (Masson, 1975a, op. cit., pp. 1-13). While pondering their reverberations, one is warranted in speculating about the extent---if any---to which her denigrating portrayals of the parental Fliess couple may have tarnished the legacies facing their surviving descendants. Her own body of psychoanalytic thinking was to become suffused with sublimated parental-symbolizations.¹

§IV. A Tri-partite Dilemma

The middle-aged Freud still revered Fliess as his esteemed literary and scientific sounding-board (i.e., a so-called ‘Alter Ego’). More than anyone else, Fliess had served as Freud’s co-navigator in laying the emotionally supportive and indispensable groundwork for what began as the prototypical dyad in the historical development of psychoanalysis as a therapy.

The authors (Borch-Jacobsen & Shamdasani, 2012) of *Freud Files: An Inquiry into the History of Psychoanalysis*, in Chapter 4 (sub-titled “Policing the Past”), noted that “…Ernst Kris was confronted with the problem of how to square the content of Freud’s letters to Fliess” (pp. 241-242). So too, was he faced with the quandary of validating the historical plausibility of Freud’s notion that both he and Fliess had once contemplated their collaboration upon a future publication to be entitled “Human Bisexuality.”

The so-called “Freud/Swoboda/Weininger Plagiarisms” that emerged in 1903 and beyond were destined to further rupture the Freud/Fliess estrangement. Hermann Swoboda had been a psychoanalytic patient of Freud when he told Otto Weininger that Freud believed that all humans were bisexual and then wrote a best-seller entitled *Sex and Character* (1903). Freud eventually admitted to Fliess that he had forgotten ever reading Weininger’s manuscript and acknowledged that his forgetting had represented an unconscious wish to steal Fliess’s ideas.

Maneuvering forward toward early 1937, Marie Bonaparte purchased what then remained of Freud’s letters to Wilhelm from Reinhold Stahl, a Berlin bookseller. He had acquired them from Ida Fliess. Soon after, Bonaparte had an opportunity to examine
Freud’s side of his correspondence with Fliess. Then, Freud urged her to have the cache of letters burned. Notwithstanding the intimately private nature of Freud’s cache of correspondence, Bonaparte declined to re-sell the historically sensitive trove, she then owned, back to him.

By 1954, Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud and Ernst Kris ultimately came—via omission or commission—to employ Freud’s private strategy of pathologically portraying Fliess and hence his theories as having bordered upon the ‘paranoid ravings’ of a sad and delusional figure. The confluent thinking of Freudian stalwart Ernest Jones (1953, op. cit.) vis-à-vis K. R. Eissler (1971) is striking. From one of the latter’s perspectives:

“…In my opinion, the correct biographical approach would be to cite Fliess as the prototype of the scientist whose efforts are hampered by his paranoid tendencies …” (p. 171).

As Sulloway (1989, op. cit.) finally concluded about the Fliess father/son axis:

“It is not without significance that that the principal subject of Wilhelm Fliess’s pioneering infant studies should have become a psychoanalyst who had little good to say about his own father. Yet prior to the 1930’s, Robert Fliess actively supported his father’s controversial periodicity theories (Schlieper, 1928)…” (p. 191, fn. 28).

Amongst to the false innuendoes articulated in the cited “op-ed” by Middleton (2016, op. cit.) is the conclusion that Wilhelm Fliess “…in the observations of his son Robert and Robert’s wife Eleanor was an ambulatory psychotic…” (p. 9). One may plausibly inquire at long last, whether or not Middleton was ever privy to any proof that E. Fliess had any personal contact, either direct or indirect, with Wilhelm or Ida Fliess?¹
1 Unfortunately, the confusing time-lapses in the aforementioned Middleton’s “op-ed” (2016, op. cit.) failed to spare his readers from being stymied by skipped data (such as [Social Work Prof.]
“…Leontine Young’s unpublished doctoral thesis Parents Who Neglect and Abuse Children (see Young, 1964)…” (p. 7). During 1964, the only readily apparent publication she was widely known to have authored was entitled Wednesday’s Children: A Study of Child Neglect and Abuse. Included in its bibliography (Young, p. 188) was Robert’s 1961 work (infra). Strangely missing from Middleton’s listed references in his 2016 article was any mention of Prof. Young’s earlier tome (1954?): Out of Wedlock: A Study of the Problems of the Unmarried Mother and Her Child. In only a single instance therein had she mentioned Sigmund Freud (p. 21); her treatise was otherwise devoid of any Freudian commentary. Both the “Foreword” and “Post-script” were indeed written by Robert. In the former segment, he (1954c) lauded Prof. Young for having “eschewed much psychological lingo” (p. v). In the latter segment, she was lauded by him (1954d) for having a “fortuitous lack of acquaintance with Freud’s writings that has enabled her to independently draw clinical pictures replete with detail and indicative of both the active and the passive [woman’s] wish for a baby” (p. 244). Yet, the thrust of his ancillary remarks (ibid.), had undeniably been steeped in Freudian jargon. In his counter-points about Freud’s (1933a) conceptualization of the “preœdipal phase” advanced in The Psychology of Women (p. 164), Robert (ibid.) came to espouse what he came to characterize as “the twin wish.” Unlike Sulloway (1979, op. cit.), who had obviously accessed E. Fliess’s initial biographical profile of her deceased husband’s life (p. 535), Middleton (2016) refrained from following an analogous bent as the author of “Wilhelm Fliess, Robert Fliess, Sandor Ferenczi and Sigmund Freud” (pp. 1-12).

§V. Post-World War I

We may never become privy to whatever childhood and adolescent traumata or abuse Robert may have been exposed to at the hands of either parent. Apart from back-dated perceptions about the eternal qualities of early memories, little data remains readily accessible concerning developmental mile-stones in Robert’s upbringing (cf., Masson, 1985a, p. 199, fn. 1).

During four years of service along the German front-lines in World War I, Robert rose to the rank of Lieutenant and received the Iron Cross. He later felt that:

“…his original faculty of memory…had been irreparably damaged from shellshock; whence also the slight facial tic in times of stress would return… (The ‘analytic memory’ however, he always said was something else again. One
acquired it as an essential to practicing analysis and it had little to do with the ordinary memory faculty” (E. Fliess, 1974, p. 11).

E. Fliess (1982, p. 197) alluded to “a charming girl named Elise” as Robert’s French-speaking war-time mistress. His 1961/1962 volume (Ego and Body Ego) would be dedicated to the memory of one “Paula Shimmeck.” E. Fliess (1974) wrote that her deceased husband had characterized her as “…a girl he had deeply loved. They knew each other only a few weeks. She killed herself in long-ago Germany” (p. 32).

After medical school, Robert interned at the Charité Hospital in Berlin. He was nearly 33-years of age when his father died. Two years earlier, when Ernest Jones (1926) wrote an obituary for Karl Abraham (1877-1926), he eulogized him, in part:

“….of more lasting significance was that [medical expertise] rendered by Dr. Wilhelm Fliess, whom Abraham got to know a few years later and for whom he conceived a great regard; it was Fliess who was mainly responsible for his treatment during his last illness…” (p. 158).

Abraham had been a significant authority in the respective lives of the senior Fliess4 and his eldest son. The latter had occasion to receive referrals for the otorhinolaryngological treatment of Abraham’s analysands such as Alix Strachey (Falzeder & Hermanns, 2015, p. 279).

Robert’s formal psychoanalytic training began at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute shortly after founder Abraham’s early death:

“…Karen Horney was there and Ernst Simmel. Ferenczi would have put in guest appearances. But more than lectures, however, what the student group would remember was the “Kinder Seminars…” (E. Fliess, 1974, p. 14).
E. Fliess (1982), credited Hanns Sachs (1881-1947) with having participated in her deceased husband’s didactic analysis in Berlin (p. 198).² It is likewise noted that throughout most of Robert’s adult life, “stashed on the bookcase beside his desk” was *Webster’s English Dictionary* and the collected works of both “Freud and Abraham” in their native German (E. Fliess, 1974, p. 46).

Robert was 37-years of age when he graduated from the *Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute*. According to a later account of his wife, he had been employed as:

“a medical journalist³ for the foremost Berlin daily. He reported on at least one psycho-analytic Congress, probably in Berlin [*i.e.*, Freud hadn’t attended the 12th International Congress actually held in 1932 at Wiesbaden] because in a conversation about it with Freud,⁴ the latter nodded his head, commenting to the son of his one-time friend: ‘Very courageous, Very courageous’…” (E. Fliess, 1982, p. 198).

As a beginning practitioner of internal medicine and neophyte practitioner of psychoanalysis, the then fatherless Robert had

“…lived through an extraordinary period in world history…Before he was permitted to leave [Germany, he] had to watch the Berlin authorities rip out… the walls of his beautiful new two offices…” (E. Fliess, 1982, p. 195).

Unbeknownst to Robert, perhaps, was the fact that his professionally active father had been the subject of an earlier letter from Freud (1911b) to Abraham, stating:

“You must not think Fliess so crude as to betray any intention in the first hour. Unfortunately he is the opposite, sly or, rather, vicious. You will certainly come across this complex. Do not forget that it was through him that both of us came to
understand the secret of paranoia (cf. psychosexual differences). What you say about the of his work strikes me as remarkably true; I once loved him very much and therefore overlooked a good deal. Above all, beware of his wife…” (p. 131).

For historical context, it is meanwhile noted that Ferenczi undertook a training analysis of Ernest Jones during 1913, pursuant to Freud’s suggestion, in Budapest. Jones, not unlike Freud before him, had ultimately characterized the senior Fliess’s disorder as paranoia; but, he also came to diagnose Ferenczi—contrary to the opinions of many other expert observers—as having been afflicted with paranoia (Dupont, 2000, p. xxxviii).

¹ By letter dated 26 February 1911, Abraham wrote to Freud: “Now I must tell you about Fliess. I had a very friendly reception. He refrained from any attacks aimed at Vienna…He met me without prejudice, has meanwhile visited me in turn and I must grant him that he made no attempt to draw me (in the way [you] feared) to his side. I have heard many interesting things from him and am very glad to have made his acquaintance—perhaps the most valuable I could make among Berlin doctors” (pp. 130-131).

² Contrary to the statement of Henry F. Smith (2007, p. 699), amongst others (cf., Falzeder, 2015, p. 101) that Robert “trained in Berlin with Abraham as his analyst” (p. 699), such purported evidence remains unfounded. In the quoted testimonial of Robert (1950) “Since the editor [R. Fliess] was denied the good fortune of a personal contact with Dr. Abraham, he may be permitted to complete the picture, after the fashion of a mosaic, by excerpting a few memorial remarks, made by Abraham’s friends” (p. 289).

³ It is believed that Robert wrote a three-part series of articles entitled “Das Echo Der Psychoanalyse.” His reports centered upon proceedings of the German Psychoanalytic Society (i.e., 28-30 September 1930) in Dresden. They were published on 2 October 1930, 21 October 1930 & 9 November 1930 in the Berlin Vossische Zeitung; further cited in Psychoanalytische Bewenung, vol. 3: pp. 85-90.

⁴ A statement by E. Fliess (op. cit., 1982) that Freud responded on 21 June 1934 to a letter from Robert (p. 199, fn.) awaits further corroboration. Freud (E. Fliess, 1982, op. cit., p. 216, fn.) reputedly would have been glad to again meet with Robert whether before or after an impending Congress [i.e., the 13th Congress had been scheduled for late August of 1934 in Switzerland’s Lucerne], viz.: “I…am ready and eager to hear your thoughts which state your scientific goals, since these seem so important to you, that you want to devote your life to them.” It is not believed that they ever had another occasion—either in Europe or in New York—to meet one another.
§VI. Musings Overseas and Back in America

Six years after Wilhelm’s death, Robert succumbed to his wanderlust and finally departed for his “New World.” His sister later escaped from Europe, settled in Palestine and learned Hebrew. Charles matured as a distinguished artist. Portrait of a Woman, completed by him in 1949, is among his celebrated works. Ida Fliess, who passed away in 1941, was his painting’s subject. Robert donated it to The London Jewish Museum of Art (i.e., a 1987 Ben Uri Collection acquisition).¹ The host-repository describes itself as the only specialist museum in Europe that addresses issues of identity and migration.

In Robert’s “Postscript” [1973] to what became his last American work, he nostalgically reminisced:

“Freud was another Columbus; no one but he could detect a Continent. But as administrator, as had Columbus, he failed. Even in Abraham’s life-time some to whom he entrusted his work were ill-chosen. After Abraham’s death, his propensity to choose wrongly went unchecked…” (p. 411).

In the later words of Robert’s widow:

“The relationship with my husband’s father that had once meant so much to Freud had dwindled and died while my husband was still a small boy. Once, probably in the 20’s and certainly before 1933, my husband visited Freud and discussed among other things, his one-time friend.” (E. Fliess, 1982).

Many of Robert’s scholarly publications, principally in English, were authored after his respective analyses in America. One, written by him as a European journalist, is known to have been amongst a series of his articles published in German (Fig. 2).¹

On 28 August 1944, Robert wrote to Siegfried Bernfeld about the “strongly
She would rather be a man

Psychoanalysis of woman

Actually it is more or less impossible to describe psychoanalysis to the public. How do we tell our child what Dr Karen Horney meant in her lecture to the Sexology Society on «The woman's masculinity complex»? Rather as the child tells us? But then we should at least have to remember Little Sister's well-known words: when she saw her little brother performing by a tree, she shouted «Oh, isn't that practical!» And that would only work if we could put things right with the assurance that of course such an innocent child only means it in a «harmless» sort of way. But it is just this conception that psychoanalysis disputes. Sigmund Freud, who partly learnt the language of the mind in the nursery, was in the habit of taking its meaning very literally; and his school believes, in fact, that an «anatomically conditioned» envy of the boy fills the little girl's mind. Dr. Horney, aiming to explain inter difficulties analytically, mainly through the experiences of the baby and the toddler up to four years of age, is of the opinion that on the basis of this envy the woman's psychology is «a psychology of the disappointed wish to be a man». For the envious person wishes herself in the place of the one she envies; such a woman wants to be a man, and this unattainable wish turns into a neurosis.

Even these meagre indications give us a glimpse of how fascinating it must be to look at the whole masculine ambition of our female contemporaries from this point of view. Are they annoyed with themselves for being women? Do they think it is better to be a man? And do they imitate men for that reason? Dr. Horney thinks they do. And she describes a vicious circle: As a girl's upbringing forbids sexual life, it is precisely the feminine part of her impulses that is repressed at an early stage. So her specifically female role is yet another source of anxiety, and she has every reason to substitute for it the «masculinity complex». But this gives rise to such an underevaluation of her own being that it later becomes almost impossible to strive with all her strength for the despised femininity. But side by side with this surface motivation, Dr. Horney does not forget a deeper reason: There is, as it were, an innate fear of assault which acts in every woman, independently of experience. And moreover all children first experience the well-known «Oedipus situation» from which, it seems, they are gradually released only by healthy development.

The symptoms which the masculinity complex may bring about can be as various and as strange as those of any hysteria or psychoneurosis, from inferiority feelings to marital conflict or «fetish fixes». Dr. Horney told of a patient with agoraphobia; of a second, who rushed into every museum to compare the shape of the statues' feet, and a third who, because she felt a needle in her flesh, had succeeded in getting herself operated on five times...

But with all this, the spirit of the times suggests the inevitable question: «Why precisely now?» Why is it the woman of today who is dominated by such a complex? When Grandfather married Grandmother, little boys looked different from little girls, and yet that was no reason for public argument! A slim figure, top hats, high boots and short hair were as little known as the practices of Greek poetesses. But today...? Our speaker sidesteps the question with the clever remark that changes in outward circumstances — such as the total equality of the sexes — would not be capable of removing the woman's wish to be a man. It might then exist a little more in the unconscious, be a little more «ego-justified», but it will never be extinguished.

But one consideration had already been mentioned earlier, basic enough perhaps to justify a discussion on «Why precisely now?»: Dr. Horney pointed out that Wilhelm Fliess was of the opinion that every living being was made up of two different substances; every single cell, every part of a cell was bisexual, that is, it contained male and female substance within it. What is more, the interaction of the two types of living substance was the basic condition of life. And, says Fliess, it is only because the man has more male and the woman more female substance that they are man and woman. (It is obvious that this is not, as a participant in the discussion claimed to assume, identical with the ancient knowledge of hermaphroditism, that is to say «sexual between stages».

But if we now assume that the quantitative proportions of this mixture of substances vary, we may consider our time as particularly strongly «heterosexual», that is, we shall find that there are especially many masculine women (and feminine men) born. Cause and effect are usually confused here, but is a narrow pelvis the result of fasting? Does sport make us grow a moustache? Does free love make the voice break excessively? No, we are what we are because a decree, impervious up to now, has given us a little more of the substance belonging to the other sex. To give an extremely up-to-date example, if women had not been so much more masculine, they would never have penetrated into male professions.

And what has that to do with psychoanalysis? Does that «heterosexual» component predispose humans to psychological illness? To say yes would be premature; to say no would probably be wrong. But it is certain that present-day women's resemblance to men makes it more difficult for them to play their own natural part, that women who are like men to such an extent must wish actually to be men and that all too often this leads to conflict.

Dr. Robert Fliess
emotional character” of the Sigmund/Wilhelm relationship, in part, as follows:

“I have heard a good deal about this from both of them—over a long stretch of years, of course, from my father, and in a long conversation with Freud in 1929 in which he spoke with a frankness apparently not too customary to him in personal matters.”

The ‘curb-stone’ diagnoses of others about the questionable mental health of Robert’s father did not become publicly full-blown until after the successive deaths of Abraham, Wilhelm and Freud. During the interim, however, Jones’s wide-spread gossip about Wilhelm became the subject of venomous second-hand ‘hearsay.’ One such author surmised, absent any concrete proof, that: “…when [Wilhelm] Fliess wrote to Freud on hearing of Freud’s cancer, Freud disregarded the letter” (Khan, 1974, p. 108).

¹ As disclosed in Robert’s above referenced newspaper account at the Dresden Symposium, his report focused upon Karen Horney’s presentation during the meetings of the German Psychoanalytic Society. By the time they reunited as colleagues in New York, one of her biographers noted that “Robert Fliess, who often discussed therapeutic problems with her, both at her home and at the New York [Psychoanalytic] Institute” had been a visitor (Rubins, 1978).

According to Rubins, “…In his analyses, he [Robert] often tended to worry excessively about his patients’ families. In one such informal discussion at the institute, in which Karen participated, someone remarked that she seemed to know how deep to go, when not to get too close to the patient during the analytic relationship. Her advice to him—and to several other analysts taking part—was that it was sometimes wiser to pay less attention to the traditional sexual problems. She has a special ability to activate others and therefore always gathered a small circle of listeners. Those around her noted that she seemed to be different from the other immigrant analysts…” (p. 195).

§VII. The Stigmatum of Having Metaphorically “Bitten a Parent”

Bertram D. Lewin (1896-1971), had been born and attended college in Texas followed by medical school training at the Johns Hopkins Medical School in Germany so that he could attend the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute and undergo a training analysis in
1925 with Franz Alexander as well as supervision by Sandor Rado and Hanns Sachs (Thompson, 2010, p. 86). Thereafter, Lewin became a founding member of the New York Psychoanalytic Institute where he resumed a full practice.¹

While the educational careers of Robert and Lewin may have possibly overlapped for a short interval in Berlin; there is no doubt that Abraham’s œuvré became central to their respective careers. As indicated in one biographical essay (Falzeder & Hermanns), his life’s work left its mark upon:

“…the theories of René Spitz, author of The First Year of Life [1965], Bertram Lewin, Robert Fliess and many other creative psycho-analysts…” (2015, p. 267).

Robert pre-deceased his first American-born analyst, by a year. Unlike Ruth Mack Benedict, his second American-born analyst, whom he out-lived, Robert finally identified her therapeutic role prior shortly before his death. By Elenore’s eventual reckoning (1982, p. 209), Lewin brought his analysis of Robert “to a then successful conclusion.” By way of contrast, Benjamin M. Spock² was not shy about identifying Lewin as his New York analyst (Shengold, 2006, pp. 1-19).

By 1950, Lewin had been the progenitor of a cluster of ideas that became popularly known as the “Oral Triad.” In the psychoanalytic literature, his formulations have been distilled as “the wish to devour, the wish to be devoured and the wish to sleep.” As he had put it:

“In childhood phobias, the fear of being bitten or eaten was seen to stand as a fear of castration. It expresses in regressive oral terms a fear of retributive castration for sexual wishes toward the mother and castrative wishes toward the father… Often they are seen as retribution for wishes to bite, eat, or attack with the mouth
---a talion punishment of the form, the biter bit” (pp. 104-105).

Paul Denis (2016), more recently, has posited how an analysand may reformulate the expression of his/her wishes and fears in the form of symbolic representations:

“If one wanted to reformulate briefly Bertram Lewin’s ‘oral triad’ in terms of the duality mastery-satisfaction, the ensemble *eating, being eaten, sleeping* would become, approximately: exerting mastery, being the object of mastery, experiencing satisfaction. Eating would thus correspond to the exercise of mastery, being eaten to being the object of mastery exerted by others, sleeping being the result of satisfaction” (p. 767).

Robert had been reserved about referencing Lewin’s work before 1953, where-upon he cited one of Lewin publications in “Countertransference and Counter-identification” (1953a, p. 275-277). Coincidently, in his “Forward” to *The Revival of Interest in the Dream*, he (1953b) again credited Lewin for encouraging him to present at a “symposium on dreams” (p. 5). In his preface to Chapter IX (i.e., The hypothesis of the ‘Dream Screen’), he (1953c) declared:

“Bertram D. Lewin…has contributed more than any other author toward revival of interest in the dream. His work is much discussed and his concept, the ‘dream screen,’ adopted by some and rejected by others, has almost created factions. The controversy appears to concentrate upon the existence or non-existence of this screen; and in doing so does, in this reviewer’s opinion, an injustice to the author” (p. 110).

Having done so, Robert nevertheless, refrained from identifying Lewin as the first of the “two expert and thorough analyses” from which he had presumably ‘profited.’
After detailing an extensive critique of Lewin’s theses, Robert concluded:

“[Lewin’s] convictions are, of course, arguable; they are not, for instance, shared by the present reviewer who has intimated his standpoint on p. 108, and would maintain it here in spite of the fact that there it was expressed as an instance of a ‘bioanalytic’ communication. It is true that Freud has eventually gone further…” (ibid., pp. 111-112).

In 1954, Robert wrote a paper entitled *The Autopsic Encumbrance---Some Remarks on an Unconscious Interference with the Management of the Analytic Situation* (pp. 8-12). It was framed as an allegorical counter-narrative to a 1946 paper authored by Lewin (1946) likening how “much of the psychological relationship to the cadaver is [unconsciously] carried over [by the analyst] to living patients…” (p. 8). Robert’s 1954 commentary about Lewin’s 1946 thesis merely seemed to illustrate “…at least one of the difficulties is enforcing the analytic rule…” (p. 12).

Robert (1955) subsequently composed a “Letter to the Editor” of *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* (i.e., Lewin was a co-founder and frequent contributor). He began by faulting Lewin for criticizing a passage (i.e., “the wish to sleep is ‘biological’…”) from Robert’s work (1953b, p. 108). The letter in question charged that Lewin’s use of the English word “biological” was a misreading of a term from Freud’s original German text which should have been properly translated as “physiological.” Pursuant to Robert’s (1955, p. 329) ‘corrected’ reading of Freud, certain aspects of Lewin’s (1953) so-called ‘dream screen’ espoused in “Sleep, Narcissistic Neurosis, and the Analytic Situation” (p. 493, fn. 3) were “vitiating or at least called into question Dr. Lewin’s subsequent argument” concerning his oral triad formulations. In his rejoinder, Lewin (1955) stated:
“Dr. Robert Fliess is entirely correct in his statement…” [while acknowledging a narrowly framed ‘slip of tongue’] (p. 482).

Robert (1956b), continued to persevere in attempting to illustrate actual proof of the human infant’s “cannibalistic affect” (pp. xviii, fn. & 88 et seq.). During the same era, the so-called “child development wars” (i.e., Anna Freud versus Melanie Klein controversies) continued to simmer. Melanie Klein³ had been Abraham’s former analysand. While Robert occasionally alluded—without formal attribution—to phraseology she often used in her publications, he primarily relied upon examples from his own clinical experience together with citations from seminal works primarily authored by Freud and Abraham.

¹ See the B. D. Lewin Papers archived at the Library of Congress (Washington, DC) referenced a 1936 congratulatory letter from Anna to Lewin explicitly circumventing Jones in their ‘round-robin loop’ of correspondence that likewise included Ruth Mack Benedict and Helen Ross. The last-named woman had not only been Anna’s American-born analysand; but, she also was to become the co-author of a text written with Lewin (1960, infra). Meanwhile, Anna continued to favor the multi-lingual Lewin as her German-to-English translator of choice in her planning for projected publications of certain of her father’s writings. See also a 1926 letter in the aforementioned repository disclosing that Lewin had acted as a trans-Atlantic courier for Freud while sailing from America to Germany. Mention may also be made that Lewin’s “„family had preserved the roots they had transplanted from Germany…He experienced his first taste of anti-Semitism and marginalization in the USA when his outstanding student performance won him the opportunity to sail for Europe on Henry Ford’s ‘Peace Ship’ during the First World War but Ford would not permit him to come along because he was Jewish…” (Meszaros, 2008, p. 107).

² It may be of historical interest to parenthetically note, in an ancillary context, that E. Fliess (1974, p. 60) referenced a work entitled Decent and Indecent: Our Personal and Private Behavior (1971) authored by pediatrician Benjamin M. Spock. He was a student at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute while Robert had been an active faculty member (Spock, 1963, pp. 361-364). Elenore had been acquainted with Spock’s first wife who had also acted as her then husband’s amanuensis, editorial collaborator et al. in several of his early publications.
³ For further notable parent/progeny impasses, cf. a gender-symmetrical configuration in which the Melanie Klein and Melitta Klein Schniedeberg (i.e., mother/daughter) pairing became extremely volatile; their adult estrangement evoked clashing dilemmas among colleagues. In striking contrast, see the text of Broken Fathers/Broken Sons: A Psychoanalyst Remembers (Cargiulo, 2008) culminating upon a more positive note.

§VIII. Ruth Mack Brunswick (1897-1946)

Meanwhile, Anna had been one of the closest confidants of Ruth’s in Vienna and London as well as upon each side of the Atlantic. It is further noted that Anna utilized her and Lewin, amongst others, to by-pass the ubiquitous Jones’s prying eyes.

In the ‘Wilhelm’ vis-à-vis ‘Sigmund’ chain of authority figures, Robert’s father was two years younger than his counter-part within their duo; in the Lewin vis-à-vis Robert dyad, the first-named participant was the 11-month younger collaborator; in the Mack-Brunswick vis-à-vis Robert therapeutic alliance, she was the junior colleague by a span of two years.

E. Fliess (1982) indicated that Robert had been “recovering from a heart attack in 1945” (p. 207). Since Mack-Brunswick had relocated in New York city by 1938 and died early in 1946, it seems likely that her analysis of Robert continued throughout much of World War II.

Notably, few of Robert’s doctrinaire stances were published until after Mack-Brunswick had analysed him. She, as the leading doyenne of psychoanalysis in New York, had not only been Freud’s long-term analysand; but, also the trusted disciple to whom he referred his famous patient (i.e., the “Wolf Man”). It seems plausible for Robert to have then concluded that few others were better qualified than her in re-analyzing him.

At this point, let us back-track in an attempt to unravel a series of Mack-Brunswick’s inter-twined alliances with mainstream cohorts of the extended Freud
family. When she accepted Robert as an analysand, the underlying genesis of their therapeutic dyad became germane for further scrutiny. The disdain harbored by Marie Bonaparte against each of Robert’s parents was noted in §III. She---arguably more than any other person apart from Freud---had a partisan, if not proprietary, interest in his intensive ‘treasure-trove’ of letter-writing to Wilhelm (Bonaparte et al., 1954 & Masson, 1985a).

§IX. Conscious and/or Unconscious Aesthetic Predilections

Elsewhere, Robert has been credited for articulating the role that may be attributed to ‘The Maternal Body in the Development of Psychoanalytic Theories of Aesthetics’ (Ginsburg & Ginsburg, 1992, pp. 361-362). An illustrative passage---replicated in a contrasting typescript---posited that:

“We have indirect evidence that Freud had a theory of aesthetics which he did not publish. Robert Fliess (1962) began his discussion of a section entitled ‘Oral Mouth and Aesthetic enjoyment’ in Chapter 3 (‘On the Pleasure-physiologic body-ego’) of Ego and Body Ego with a remark attributed to Freud, who reputedly ‘saw the origin of the experience of “beauty” in the infant’s perception of the milk flowing from the breast’ (p. 255). A personal communication from Ruth Mack Brunswick is cited by Robert Fliess as his source for the quoted remark (p. 255). According to Paul Roazen (1975), ‘Freud…at least once made a point of giving Ruth a ‘present’ of an idea; he said that he was giving her this insight, that for the development of the aesthetic sense the relation of the infant to the mother’s breast is of exceptional importance…’ (p. 34).”

In an elucidation illustrating the projection of pleasure-physiologic parts of the mother’s body upon the environment in general and/or ‘upon parts of the analytic office,’ Robert Fliess quoted the last verse of Baudelaire’s sonnet La Génte which, for him, ‘epitomizes, without, however,
stressing the identification, the projection of both at the subject and object into the environment, in
this case onto a landscape’ (p. 251):

“...And sometimes in summer, when the unwholesome suns,/Have made her, tired, stretch
herself out across the countryside./To sleep unheeding in the shade of her breasts/Like a
peaceful hamlet at the foot of a mountain.”²

From the viewpoint of Robert Fliess in an ensuing interpretation: “The woman is visualized as
stretching herself out across the countryside and the child, sleeping in the shade of her breasts, as
a peaceful hamlet at the foot of a mountain range (p. 252).”²

Robert (1953a) became familiar with Freud’s acceptance of certain phallic inter-
pretations about the so-called ‘Bismarck’s Dream’ articulated by Hanns Sachs in 1913
although they hadn’t been incorporated in editions of The Interpretations of Dreams until
1919. While reconsidering the impact of an unconscious parricidal dream-wish upon the
infantile phantasy-life of ‘Little Hans,’ the outlook of Robert (ibid., pp. 49-52) then likely
had likely served to validate aspects of the manner in which landscape symbolizations
may have revived the ‘psychic climate,’ atmosphere or aesthetic predilections of his own
persona (Cf. §XIII for comparisons of a confining environment as opposed to a liberating
sylvan setting) manifested by the classic screen memory Freud (1899) camouflaged via
his so-called ‘Alter Ego’ (p. 313 et al.).

In an abbreviated vignette illustrating Robert’s phallic interpretation of a woman
patient’s reveries:

“[She] found herself on a walk in a beautiful semicircular little bay filled with
water and rocks. Wanting to urinate, she went about looking for a ‘secret place,’
felt a mounting excitement. For a fleeting moment, she imagined an older woman
friend as an onlooker to the impending urination, but was soon seized by the phantasy of her mother to whom she was showing herself and urinating most forcefully as though the stream had the power of penetration. She had the choice, her report continues, between two types of rocks filling the inlet, split rocks with the crevices underneath which ‘one could hear the rumble’ and whole rocks with a smooth surface. She selected eventually one of the latter and describes it as of granite, ‘so that it could not be hurt.’ She squatted and indulged in a forceful and sexually pleasurable urination on the rock with the afterthought of exhibiting toward the sun able which might burn the area, not ordinarily so exposed. The episode was concluded by only a partly enjoyable masturbation accompanied by one fleeting and one extensive phantasy …” (1956., pp. 51-52).

A careful reading of extended Case Study is recommended as it may lead the reader to ponder the possible significance of a maternal presence in his patient’s reveries.³

¹ "Although Robert Fliess (1962) was writing ‘for the benefit of…the research of the future aesthetician analytically trained’ (p. 255), Jack J. Spector (1973) overlooked his work according to the bibliography of relevant literature for The Aesthetics of Freud in which he hypothesized as follows: ‘Freud sees early infancy governed purely by physiological need like hunger; and, until he comes to sense his own lips and bowels as his own, the child attempts to engulf the mother’s breast, but failing this ingesting, he is cast out in the world where hard and cold things surround him. Driven from his nest, where his identity is fused with his mother’s, the child must let sight and hearing, senses operating at a distance, replace the warm touch of the breast, and feeling that the provident parents (The father being more and more included) are the most satisfying beings in the world, he seeks to “ingest” not their bodies but their qualities of power and love—-in a word, to identify with them. Now, when the child starts imitating his parents, ideational mimetics is introduced as a mechanism directly linking the perceiver to the object perceived. Ideational mimetics, even more than empathy, which it resembles, might offer a starting point for the development of a sound Freudian aesthetics, for it reveals the interdependence of perceiver and object rather than making the object a blank screen on which the person projects his ideas and feelings’ (pp. 136-137). It is significant to note how another psychoanalytically-informed author arrived at a similar conclusion without the benefit of the Sigmund Freud/Ruth Mack Brunswick/Robert Fliess communications” [Ginsburg, L. M. & Ginsburg, S. A., 1992, pp. 301-302, fn. 11].
In his clinical experience, Robert (1962) always found such an object-world (p. 251) 'to be one, not only of object-libido but also of an intense pathological identification (Ginsburg, L. M. & Ginsburg, S. A., 1992, p. 301, fn. 12).

A complete reading of Robert’s symbol-laden Case Study may appear—for him—reminiscent of the phallic salience of the late-adolescent Freud’s ‘walk in the woods’ remembrances. Cf. with a series of communications emanating from the latter’s pen in The Letters of Sigmund Freud to Eduard Silberstein, 1871-1881 (1990) in which the editor’s “Introduction” (pp. xiii-xxvii) alluded to differing ‘Frau Eleonore/daughter Gisela Fluss’ images of womanliness (i.e., mature vis-à-vis pubescent) contemporaneous with Freud’s solitary walks in the beautiful woods near his birthplace. Referenced in the 9 August 1872 missive from Freud to Silberstein is the “…paradise without equal…” phraseology (1872a, p. 9) while the same locale was cited in his 4 September 1872 sequel as “…my little paradise, where I spend a most pleasant hour. I have soothed my turbulent thoughts and only flinch slightly when her mother mentions Gisela’s name at table…” (1872b, p. 16). Cf. with passages from the 1 May 1873 (Freud, 1873a, p. 423) and 14 June 1873 (Freud, 1873b, pp. 425-426) correspondence with Emil Fluss.

§X. To Expurgate or Not Expurgate?

Anna Freud’s brief ‘insider’ imprimatur, in her “Foreword” (pp. vii.-viii.) to The Selected Works of Ernst Kris (1975), seems significant for its brevity. She evaded grappling with the multi-faceted links she shared with protégé Kris. The adjective “Selected,” presumably endorsed by his Estate’s literary-executors for inclusion in the aforesaid title, may remind readers that Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud and Ernst Kris, had co-edited their publication of The Origins of Psycho-Analysis (op. cit., 1954).

As a triumvirate, it ultimately became obvious that they initially suppressed any reference to “The “Emma Eckstein Case” from an estimated ten letters Marie Bonaparte had acquired. The Selected Works of Ernst Kris simultaneously happened to include a previously composed “Critical Essay (1954c)” by Kris entitled “New Contributions to the Study of Freud’s The Interpretation of Dreams” (pp. 180-191).

The allegiances of Ernst Kris to Anna—-as a likely channel of partiality—-may have been weighted with several risky influences. He had been: (a) married to Robert’s
first cousin; (b) was the son-in-law of the senior Freud’s life-long friend and tarot-playing partner; (c) Anna’s editorial assistant and ex-analysand; (d) became one of Robert’s important professional colleagues. As previously suggested, future historians are confronted with the task of assessing several, albeit scanty, labyrinths of circumstantial evidence as may have then re-surfaced.¹

In Kris’s cited “Critical Essay” (1953c, op. cit.), he found fault with a particular chapter in a treatise written by Robert (p. 403). The chapter in question had been sub-titled “On the ‘Spoken Word’ in Dreams” (ibid.). Kris outspokenly defended Lewin against Robert’s earlier critique. In doing so, he made no secret of the fact that undocumented ‘insider data’ had been shared with him about a Freudian thesis purportedly enunciated by another of their colleagues. Paraphrasing, in part, the passage written by Kris, he noted that:

“...I was privileged to see a paper that Isakower gave at the…1948 Panel Meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association, [in which he had reputedly] advanced the hypothesis that spoken words in dreams are a contribution of the superego… [while Robert’s] comments are based upon a brief report...by Robert Waelder (1949) [where] Isakower points [sic] to the fact that Freud’s original thesis, according to which spoken words in dreams are derived from remembered speeches, is not integrated into Freud’s dream psychology or psychoanalysis as a whole…” (ibid.).

In Psychoanalysis and Positivity by Mariam Alizade, published in 2010, she wrote:

“The domain of the inaudible and the domain beyond speech is part of the
listening. Working with silence and the extensive field of the affects, the parameters of which do not lend themselves to formalization, constitutes a non-representational field in which the elements that lie outside speech possess a semiology of their own…” (p. 101).

She, like Robert long before her, understood in another tongue (El silencio en psychoanalysis) that “what is not expressed in words” may amount “to subliminal messages that spring from the depths of the unconscious.”

1 Conflicting attitudes about historical research and personal discretion occasionally bump into one another. Conventional physician/patient and specialist/consultant configurations are often blurred. At times, the sanctity of the Hippocratic Oath becomes an issue. In the Freud/Fliess correspondence, a letter posted to Fliess on 27 April 1898, disclosed Freud’s awareness that his sister had consulted Fliess in Berlin. She (i.e., “poor Mitzi”) was the mother of Martha Gertrud, her then 5-year old “rather gifted” daughter. While doing so, Freud went out of his way to disparage and characterize his brother-in-law and niece’s father as “half-Asian” (Ginsburg, 2003, pp. 205-272). On the reverse side of the same coin, Freud confirmed by letter dated 4 December 1896 the Vienna arrival of a patient Fliess had referred to him for treatment. Fliess’s wife in Berlin was a relative of Freud’s new patient (i.e., “Miss G. de B[uda]”). Freud queried Fliess about “who also in Ida’s family had a speech defect or was a stutterer” perhaps in an effort to unmask a potential child molester (p. 205, fn. 1). One may be justified in speculating that Freud’s associational network initially led to his recollection of the Anna O. case (i.e., involving a similar impediment). Then, it presumably veered toward the physician in Vienna who had been treating Fliess’s mother-in-law (i.e., Paulina née Hoffmann Bondy), namely Josef Breuer. The companion and caretaker of “Bertha Pappenheim’s mother before she died” coincidentally—a ‘hearsay’ account—was one Selma Fliess (Freeman, 1972, p. 210).

2 A segment of The Psychoanalytic Reader, an anthology edited by Robert (1950), was the subject of a 1988 Spanish translation.

§XI. Across Developmental Sequences

At the beginning of The Psycho-Analytic Reader (1950), Robert found it expedient to label his anthology (i.e., sponsored by The International Psycho-Analytical Library and edited by E. Jones) as “Freudian” in orientation. Unlike Anna Freud’s residential War Nursery (London) or the day-care team led by Margaret S. Mahler at the
Masters Children’s Center (New York), none of Robert’s other publications were funded by institutional grants or subsidies. It is noted that The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant: Symbiosis and Individuation (Mahler et al., 1975), didn’t fully appear in a consolidated format until after Robert’s death,

The text from Chapter 1 of Robert’s Ego and Body Ego (1961/1962) illustrated how Robert endeavored to distinguish and compare clinical data from his own experiences and other sources then available to him. Yet, he always gave appropriate credit, within his own psychoanalytic œuvré, for contrasting developmental time-lines espoused by other investigators.

Robert (ibid.) had steadfastly voiced the following mantra:

“…we have Freud’s method that enables those who master it to remove amnesias from the beginning of the second year on, not infrequently down to about ten months of age” (p. 10).

In an earlier context, Freud (1907) had actually written to Abraham concerning the aetiology of neurosis, in part, as follows:

“My impression is that the age of from three to five is that to which the determination of symptoms dates back. Later traumas are mostly genuine, earlier ones or those falling within this period are prima facie doubtful. So here is a gap to be filled by observation…” (pp. 1-4)

Two years later, Freud’s quoted dictum was broadened when he (1909) reiterated another such cautionary caveat in his “Introduction” to Little Hans:

“I have for many years urging my pupils and my friends to collect observations of the sexual life of children----the existence: of which has a rule been cleverly
overlooked or deliberately denied” (p. 6).

§XII. An Aspirational Impasse?

Whether or not a so-called ‘establishment eminence’ such as K. R. Eissler ever interviewed Robert is presently unknown. Paradoxically, Eissler---again paraphrasing Sulloway (1979, op. cit.)---speculated that:

“…[Wilhelm] Fliess’s greatness is…underestimated in psychoanalytic circles…one day biology may discover…that the totality of life…that we can observe are variations of an all-embracing principle…That it is not inconceivable that Fliess may, in some far distant future, come to high honors” (p. 146).

It seems as though Eissler was hypothesizing about the dawning of our genomic era; perhaps presaging the advent of an expanding vocabulary for gender and sexual identities awaiting mankind.

Robert ostensibly strove, over much of the first half of his life (Fig. 3), to belatedly understand his father. In America, he fomented a dispute with Lewin---one of his former analysts (§VII)---over the appropriate German translation for a medically-oriented term Freud had used. From middle-aged onward, Robert passively acquiesced in discarding the plausibility of his father’s side of the intellectual quarrel with Freud whom he only met once as a mature adult. Meanwhile, he continued to defend the existence of infantile amnesia, as a reality, throughout his life.

§XIII. A Revivified Psycho-Historical Fragment

“…Actual incest has been pointed out by many analysts, most notably Ferenczi (1933) and most recently Robert Fliess (1956, 1961, 1973). Masson (1984) has made it the subject of recent controversy.”
“...It makes no sense to me that all neurotics (and this means everyone) have been traumatically abused and seduced in their childhood, as Freud first assumed and as [Robert] Fliess and Masson assert…”

Judging from several instances in which Robert cited the work of Shengold in his publications, one may infer that the former author’s theoretical stances became well known to the latter. He (1992) more recently explicated his viewpoints elsewhere (p. 52).¹

*Kaspar Hauser and Soul Murder: A Study of Deprivation* was the subject of a paper by Leonard Shengold (1978) about a seriously impaired historical figure. Shengold, amongst others before him, described Kaspar as a 17-year old youth who had been locked alone in a cellar since early childhood. The term “soul murder” was first used in 1832 by Anselm Ritter von Feuerbach in his publication entitled *Kaspar Hauser: An Account of an Individual Kept in a Dungeon, Separated From all Communications With the World, From Early Childhood to About the Age of Seventeen.*

After the 1903 publication of the autobiographical book entitled *My Mental Illness* by the legal scholar Daniel Paul Schreber, Freud (1911a) later enshrined the term “soul murder” in *Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoïades).* In recapitulating what others have described as The Kaspar Hauser Complex,” Shengold (ibid., p. 26) focused upon literary narratives---both biographical and autobiographical---beginning with the aforementioned von Feuerbach’s 1832 publication together with further such 19th-century sources of
similar vintage as well as Schreber’s 1903 account. *The Case of Schreber* by Freud (*op. cit.*, 1911a), as a psycho-historian and psycho-biographer, appeared in print 8-years after Schreber’s *My Mental Illness*.

Shengold had---at least upon one occasion---communicated directly with Robert. The former’s 1978 essay included the following excerpt:

“…The incident confirms the statement of Robert Fliess (personal communication) that, to the unconscious, the black man is the father (here the father figure) in the dark…” (pp. 8-9).

The purported ‘incident’ in question, as narrated by Shengold (*ibid.*), had arisen in conjunction with a failed attempt to murder Kaspar after “he had lived for over a year” with a care-taker (p. 8), to wit:

“The confrontation may not have been an actual recognition---Kaspar had not remembered ever seeing the ‘man.’ The blackness could have connoted the darkness of the ‘hole’ of his early life. Kaspar described the walls of his prison as ‘very black’…Whether or not the would-be killer was the ‘man,’ Kaspar’s ‘black’ expectation of him shows, beneath his need to love the murderer” (p. 9).

One, of course, cannot retrospectively know how the personal communication conveyed to Shengold by Robert may have mirrored and alluded to the latter’s own personal *angst* or whether it had been gleaned by him in his professional capacity as the ‘midwife’ of a patient’s ‘truth.’ What remains clear is that Robert’s interpretation of the literary vignette cited by Shengold opened a window of understanding into the dark recesses of a suffering figure’s representational world.

In composing *The Case of Schreber*, Freud (1911a) hadn’t tip-toed around the
issue of paranoia in his correspondence with Wilhelm (op. cit., p. 4). The celestial universe described by Schreber in his autobiography included two divine realms grounded, in part, upon mythological constructs:

“…Schreber can tell us no more than that the lower God was more especially attached to the peoples of a dark race (the Semites) and the upper God to those of a fair race (the Aryans)…” (ibid., p. 24).

In his Postscript, Freud (1912) the following year, revisited his subject’s autobiography:

“Since [then I am in a better]…position to appreciate one of his delusional beliefs [Schreber] more adequately, and to recognize the wealth of its bearing upon mythology. I mentioned on p. 53 the patient’s peculiar relation to the sun, and I was led to explain the sun as a sublimated ‘father symbol’ (p. 80)…‘In dreams and neurosis,’ so our thesis has run, ‘we come once more upon the child and the peculiarities which characterize his modes of thought and his emotional life’…” (p. 82).

Robert’s recollections about features of “The Kaspar Hauser Complex” (i.e., as transmuted by Shengold) coupled with details discerned by Freud in The Case of Schreber seemingly brought disparate literary, biographical and psychohistorical streams of thought into sharper focus.

¹ Robert, before his death, had presumably been privy to the anguishing associations upon which Shengold tried to shed further light via his so-called ‘case study.’ Shengold (1994) had also authored a German-language article entitled “Freud, Fliess und Abraham.” It was prefaced by an English-language synopsis, to wit: “…The juxtaposition of murder, incest and sex in the Oedipus of examples from literature and history about individuals abusively tortured by merciless authoritarian forces…” Elsewhere, he has pondered the implications of psychoanalysis upon society as a consequence of such aberrant behaviors. How does one---if he or she survives---go about attempting to recover the sense of identity and personal autonomy his or her “soul murderer” failed to crush?
Concluding Thoughts

Robert perceived himself—apart from his wife—as a “loner.” He seemed unable to unshackle himself from what one may characterize as a difficult early childhood. His admiring wife, albeit occasionally chiding, became an indispensable ‘help-mate’ throughout their late-in-life marriage. She collaborated with him throughout the last 3½ decades of his life in readying his psychoanalytic œuvre for publication. After his demise, she authored a couple of extensive memoirs about him. The evidentiary accuracy of assorted passages from such narratives as she wrote await further corroboration.

In the process, Robert seemingly isolated himself from ‘after-shocks’ occasioned by assorted intra-mural disputes. He undoubtedly became familiar with Ferenczi’s stance as a visiting lecturer at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute advocating “for a special ‘hygiene’ for the analyst” (E. Fliess, 1982, p. 206). Exposure to the Freud/Ferenczi schism following the 1932 Wiesbaden Congress was inevitable. So too had been aspects of the Abraham/Ferenczi rivalry as well as the Jones/Ferenczi and Anna Freud/Melanie Klein controversies.

The tenure of Ernest Jones, as the Freudian movement’s official ‘gatekeeper’ in London, prevailed. Few of Anna’s quasi-incestuous collaborators (i.e., her father, Marie Bonaparte or Ernst Kris) ostensibly undertook any efforts to spare Robert from the ‘fall out’ they at least tolerated along the way. Much still remains uncharted about the Hanns Sachs, Bertram D. Lewin and Ruth Mack-Brunswick psychoanalytic dyads with Robert.

Had Freud “gone too far ‘in favoring fantasy at the cost of memory’…?”² Or—echoing one of the credos of Ferenczi’s position as explicated by Dupont (2000)—had:

“[Ferenczi] thought that psychoanalysis was much too one-sidedly concerned
with obsessional neurosis and character analysis (ego psychology), neglecting the organic-hysterical basis of analysis, owing to the overestimation of fantasy and the underestimation of the traumatic reality of pathogenesis” (p. xxx).

¹ “My husband’s conviction on the issue of parental abuse, sexual or aggressive, and its crucial position in the neurosis of the severely damaged adult had only deepened with time since he had first voiced it in 1956. But he was of another generation. He had not had to rely on a self-analysis as had the founder. He had younger colleagues who backed him up…” (E. Fliess, 1982, p. 205).

**Bibliography**


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