

## Freud's Signorelli Lapse in Context

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It may interest you to hear that my father did indeed come from a Chassidic background. He was forty-one when I was born and had been estranged from his native environment for almost twenty years. My education was so un-Jewish that today I cannot even read your dedication, which is evidently written in Hebrew. In later life I have often regretted this lack in my education. --Sigmund Freud to A. A. Roback, letter dated February 20, 1930, (Freud, 1960, 249)

In the most proper sense [Paul, a Roman Jew from Tarsus,] was a man of an innately religious disposition: the dark traces of the past lurked in his mind, ready to break through in conscious regions.-- *Moses and Monotheism* (Freud, 1939, 86-7)

...the realization of a secret wish ... might mature at the same time as Rome ...  
--Letter of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, dated March 2, 1899.

... there is plenty of evidence that the fulfillment of this great wish [to visit Rome] was opposed by some mysterious taboo which made Freud doubt that if the wish could ever be realized . -- *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 2 (Jones, 1955, 16)

... works of art ... exercise a powerful effect on me, especially those of literature and sculpture, less often of painting. "The Moses of Michelangelo" (Freud, 1914, 211; initially published anonymously.)

My study of totemism [*Totem and Taboo*] and other work are not going well. I have very little time, and to draw on books and reports is not at all the same as drawing on the richness of one's own experience. Besides, my interest is diminished by the conviction that I am already in possession of the truths I am trying to prove..  
... ---Sigmund Freud, letter to Carl Jung, Dec. 17, 1911.

In September 1898, on a carriage ride on the Adriatic coast Sigmund Freud, then 42, failed to recall the name of the Italian Renaissance master whose *Last Judgment* (1499-1503) informed Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* (1536-41), Luca Signorelli. Shortly afterward, Freud, on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, wrote Wilhelm Fliess, then his best friend and confidant, the following account:

I could not find the name of the renowned painter who did the *Last Judgment* in Orvieto, the greatest I have seen so far, Instead, Botticelli, Boltraffio occurred to me, but I was sure these were wrong. At last I found out the name, Signorelli, and immediately knew, on my own, the first name, Luca--as proof that it had been only a repression and not a genuine forgetting. It is clear why Botticelli had moved into the foreground; only *Signor* was repressed; the Bo in both substitute names is explained by the memory responsible for the repression; it concerned something that happened in Bosnia and began with the words, "Herr, [Signor, Sir] what can be done about it?" I lost the name of Signorelli during a short trip to Herzegovina, which I made from Ragusa with a lawyer from Berlin (Freyhau) with whom I got to talking about pictures. In the conversation, which aroused memories that evidently caused the repression, we talked about death and sexuality. The word *Trafio* is no doubt an echo of Trafoi, which I saw on the first trip [that summer]. How can I make this credible to anyone? (Freud, 1985, 326-7)

In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud (1901) states that the Signorelli slip was due to his having repressed the tragic news that had reached him a few weeks earlier in Trafoi, a village in the Tyrol:

A patient over whom I had taken a great deal of trouble had put an end to his life on account of an incurable sexual disorder. . . . I forgot *the one thing against my will* [Signorelli's name], while I forgot the other thing *intentionally* [the suicide]. ( 3-4; Freud's emphasis .)

On a potentially suicidal trajectory himself, Freud, as in his guarded account to Fliess, does not here reveal, nor will he ever, his actual analysis of the lapse—he must not show his hand, jeopardize the realization of his Promised Land, which he will allude to in his 1927 attack on religion, *The Future of an Illusion*:

. . . New generations, who have been brought up in kindness and

taught to have a high opinion of reason, and who have experienced the benefits of civilization at an early age . . . will feel civilization as a possession of their very own and will be ready for its sake to make the sacrifices as regards work and instinctual satisfaction that are necessary for civilization's preservation. . . . If no culture has so far produced human masses of such a quality, it is because no culture has yet devised regulations which will influence men in this way, and in particular from childhood onwards. . . .

By withdrawing their expectations from the other world and concentrating all their liberated energies into their life on earth, they will probably succeed in achieving a state of things in which life will become tolerable for everyone and civilization no longer oppressive to anyone. Then, with one of our fellow-unbelievers, the great poet Heine, they will be able to say without regret:

"We leave Heaven to the angels and the sparrows."

(Freud, 1927 ,8, 50)

After his father, Jakob, passed away at the age of eighty-one on October 23, 1896, Freud, feeling uprooted, began to study himself in depth. In 1897, several months into his detailed, systematic self-analysis, he discovered to his horror that he is a Cain, believing that his jealous, hateful wishes had killed his baby brother, Julius (letter to Fliess dated October 3, 1897, Freud, 1954, 219); at the time Freud was 23 months old and Julius six or eight months old. Unable to shake this conviction despite his better judgment, Freud, oppressed by his fratricidal sense of guilt, secretly resolved to make an atonement by delivering the children--other Juliuses (and Sarahs)--from that perpetual scourge, anti-Semitism. For Freud, as well as for Theodor Herzl, the miserable Dreyfus Affair in "fraternal" France with its attendant virulent Jew hatred portend the return of

the Middle Ages, when Jews were blamed for all epidemics.<sup>1</sup> And that very year, 1897, Freud “discovered” not only the Oedipus complex but also a dazzling derivative: the God-idea stems from the Father complex. That is, God the Father is a projection out on to the universe of the oedipal boy's idealized perception of his father. With this godsend (or God-send) which for now he keeps close to his chest, this haunted Cain would purchase his redemption: no God, Law, no Judaism, no Christianity, no miserable anti-Semitism to misshapen or destroy the lives of *der Kinder*. At the cost of Judaism, Freud would redeem *der Kind-r--* anhimself. In his last major assault on religion, *Moses and Monotheism*—it was completed in exile in London late 1938—Freud at last reveals his explanation for anti-Semitism:

The [Christians] have not got over a grudge against the new religion which was imposed on them; but they have displaced the grudge on to the source from which Christianity reached them. The fact that the Gospels tell a story which is set among Jews, and in fact deals only with Jews, has made this displacement easy for them. Their hatred of Jews is at bottom a hatred of Christians. . . . (Freud, 1939; 91-2.)

In other words, the good Christian, not having the moral courage to acknowledge his hatred for his religion which obliges him to renounce his aggressive and illicit sexual impulses, displaces this disavowed hatred on to the people who had made his life miserable by shackling him with his chains, the Jews. This hostility, Freud adds, can be traced back to Moses: “. . . we venture to declare that it was the one man Moses who created the Jews. It is to him that this people owes its tenacity of life and also much of the hostility it has experienced and still experiences.” (Freud, 1939, 106). Hence it follows: In order to annihilate anti-Semitism, it is essential that the Jews' Tree of Life, the Torah--and their Great Man, Moses--be sacrificed.

But before setting others free from their religious chains, it is essential, Freud understands, that he set himself free his religious chains, both Jewish and, thanks to his Czech nanny, Roman Catholic. After Julius died (April 15, 1858), she became in all but name his mother, as 22 year-old Amalia, then pregnant, was suffering from a double grief-- just four weeks earlier she had lost her younger brother, also named Julius.

Until dismissed from the Freud household and jailed for pilfering, including Freud's toys, his faithful nanny took Sigismund to Mass at Freiberg's Church of The Nativity of Our Lady, and "told [him] a great deal about God Almighty and hell" (Freud, 1985, 268).

Overly burdened, 42-year-old Jakob, a struggling textile merchant, in all likelihood, did not give much thought to Freud's church--going, even though Jakob had named him *Schlomo* after his deceased father.

**"only Signor was repressed; the Bo in both substitute names**

At any one time, depending whether his Jewish or Roman Catholic sensibility is stirred up or operative, Freud's Lord or *Signor* is either Jesus Christ of the Last Judgment or Jehovah of the Torah portion *Bo* covering the first Passover, Exodus 10:1-13,16; which begins:

And the Lord said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh: for I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might show these my signs before him.

A major focus of Freud's beloved Hebrew and Scriptures instructor Professor Samuel Hammerschlag's curriculum at the *Sperlgymnasium* (Rice, 1990, 49; 53), *Bo* with clear "signs" reveals both Jehovah's Mercy, the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, and His terrible Justice, especially the last and most horrific of the *Bo* plagues, the death of the first-born son (Exodus 13:15). At the Passover Seder, Jakob Freud, who

was able to conduct the service in Hebrew by heart (Klein, 1985, 42), dutifully related what Jehovah “[had] wrought in Egypt” that first Passover, thereby fulfilling the *Bo* commandment *Mitzvah Lesaper* (“You must tell”):

And that thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son's son what things I have wrought in Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them, that ye may know how that I *am* the Lord. (Exodus 10:2)

In “The Psychological Mechanism of Forgetfulness,” Freud (1898) unwittingly reveals that during the lapse his fear of Jehovah’s Justice was stirred up but disowned, denied consciousness:

The repetition of the sound “Bo” in the two name substitutive names [Botticelli and Boltraffio] might perhaps have led a novice to suppose that it belonged to the missing name as well, but *I took good care to steer clear of that expectation*. (291; my emphasis).

Having spared the first-born sons of the Israelites when He “slew all the firstborn” sons of the Egyptians, Jehovah, as Freud well knows, makes a claim on his first-born son (Exodus 13:15); it is only by being pious—by not transgressing—can Freud redeem Martin.

Accordingly, bent on destroying the Law, this impious Jew “took good care to

steer clear of that expectation” of trouble, *der Liebe Gott’s heimsuchungen* (visitations):

We had several talks on occultism and kindred topics....When they were concerned with clairvoyant visions ...or visitations from departed spirits I ventured to reprove him for his inclination to accept occult beliefs on flimsy evidence....I then asked him where such beliefs could halt: if one could believe in mental processes floating in the air, one could go on to a belief in angels....He closed the discussion at this point (about three in the morning!) with the remark. "Quite so, even *der liebe Gott*." This was said in a jocular tone as if agreeing with my *reductio ad absurdum* and with a

quizzical look as if he were pleased at shocking me. But there was something searching also in his glance... (Jones, 1957, 381; Ernest Jones became a follower in 1908.

**The *Last Judgment* in Orvieto, the greatest I have seen so far**

Bent on doing away with both Judaism and Christianity, and possessing both Jewish and Roman Catholic sensibilities, Freud dreads divine retribution--be the Lord Jehovah of the visitation-filled Passover portion *Bo* or Jesus Christ of the Last Judgment when resurrected unrepentant sinners are condemned to roast in hell everlasting, and if there is indeed a hell he deserves, Freud understands, to be consigned there—both for having played Cain to Julius's Abel, and for intending to ultimately destroy Christendom. Freud's position vis-à-vis Hell parallels that of Mark Twain, who was a favorite of his, and which goes something like, "Hell no, I don't believe in Hell, I'm just scared of it." Consider the following bit of Freud's whistling in the dark humor that Twain could have penned :

Once [Freud] said to me good humouredly: "The most unnecessary expenditure I know of is for all the coal that's needed for hell-fire. It would be much better to go through the usual procedure, have the sinner condemned to so many hundred thousand years of roasting, then lead him into the next room and just let him sit there. To have to wait would soon become a worse punishment than being actually burned. (Sachs, 1944, 81)

As George Brandes (1967) points out, Signorelli's *Last Judgment* frescoes informed Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel:

As for the nudity of the figures, the dead rising from the ground and Charon and his ferry, Luca Signorelli pointed the way. (385)

The above accords with the guidebook Freud consulted at the time (Burke, 2006, 119):

Signorelli's fertile imagination, mastery of form, and boldness in execution stamp him as the immediate precursor of Michael Angelo" (Baedeker, 1909, 190).

Accordingly, to steel himself for Michelangelo's over 2,100 square foot incense-blackened *Last Judgment*, before which he anticipates his greatest struggle against acknowledging Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, Freud crossed the threshold of the Orvieto Cathedral and, there, in that example of Italian Gothic, subjected himself to "the greatest [*Last Judgment* he has] seen so far.'" During his anticipated trial before Michelangelo's Doomsday, as Freud well understands, his stirred up or broken through suppressed Roman Catholic sensibility could render him powerless to resist "bending the knee," for in addition to guaranteeing this haunted Cain redemption, converting to Catholicism holds out the promise, although Julius died unbaptized, that he'd be reunited with his baby brother in Paradise; that is, his suppressed wish to acknowledge Christ as his Lord could very well be realized in the Sistine Chapel. Apposite here is the following penned by Freud five days before Christmas, on December 20, 1883, to his future wife, Martha Bernays:

But the picture [in Dresden's Zwinger Museum] that really captivated me was the "Maundy Money," by Titian . . . This head of Christ, my darling, is the only one that enables even people like ourselves to imagine that such a person did exist. Indeed, it seemed that I was compelled to believe in the eminence of this man because the figure is so convincingly presented. And nothing divine about it, just a noble countenance, far from beautiful yet full of seriousness, intensity, profound thought, and deep inner compassion; if these qualities do not exist in this picture, then there is no such thing as physiognomy. I would love to have gone away with it, but there were too many people about . . . So I went away with a full [heavy] heart. (Freud, 1960, 82-3)

Titian's painting which "captivated" Freud is actually titled *The Tribute Money*, not, as he writes, "Maundy Money"—a telling slip of the pen: Maundy money refers to alms distributed on Maundy Thursday (the Thursday before Easter)—a tradition stemming from



Jesus' "love one another" commandment at the Last Supper (St. John 13:34); Maundy Thursday or Holy Thursday is observed in commemoration of the instituting of the Eucharist. So much, then, for "nothing divine" about Christ! In other words, despite his "nothing divine" disclaimer, Freud, although at the time still unaware of it, was "really captivated," held in thrall, by Lord Jesus who is "full of ... deep inner compassion." Is he, then, destined to remain stuck with his "Catholic head"?

On September 11, the day after arriving in Orvieto, Freud makes a 12-mile side trip to the small town of Bolsena (cf. *Boltraffio*), where a miracle of note occurred in 1263: in the Church of S. Cristina, drops of blood seeped from the Communion Wafer. For the faithful, the blood-stained chalice-cloth *is the* treasure of the Orvieto Cathedral or Duomo which was built to commemorate the miracle. Today, the *Santo Corporale* is on open display daily, but wasn't when Freud visited. The sacred chalice-cloth was then stored, as it had been for centuries, in a silver-gilt and enamel reliquary depicting the miracle. In 1512, two hundred and forty-nine years after the alleged miracle, Raphael--he was a favorite of Freud's--depicted the miracle in *The Mass of Bolsena*. Commenting on this mural in the Papal Palace, Vasari, a contemporary of Raphael, makes the following observation in his *Lives of the Painters*, which, as part of his preparation, Freud very well may have read. (In the 1890's Freud referred to Vasari's *Lives* in his correspondence; Jones, 1957, 346.):

One sees the priest, as he says Mass, flushing with shame as he realizes that through his disbelief in the doctrine of transubstant-

iation he has made the Host on the corporal turn to blood. *With terror in his eyes, distraught and dumbfounded* in the presence of the congregation, *he hardly knows what to do*; and in the movements of his hands one can almost see the fear and trembling to be expected in such circumstances. (Vasari, 1978, 218; my emphasis)

(On the fresco's right side, anachronistically taking in this extraordinary 13th century scene, is the figure of Raphael's, and Michelangelo's, patron, Pope Julius II.)

Freud arrived in Orvieto the evening of September 10th (Jones, 1953; 334). The *Corporale* was then shown only on two holy days: Easter Sunday and the Holy Day instituted by Pope Urban IV in 1264 in memory of the miracle, Corpus Christi, a.k.a. The Feast of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament --“this is my body ...this my blood”--which falls on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. So, unless he bribed the Duomo's sacristan, Freud wouldn't have been able to further steel himself for Michelangelo's Day of Judgment: Would I, overwhelmed by the sight of that bloody evidence of Transubstantiation, acknowledge, on the spot, that God is not a mere wish-fulfillment stemming from a longing for the father but that He actually exists--and that He is indeed Jesus Christ “whose blood cleanseth us from all sin”—even that of a Cain?

During the trial or ordeal before Michelangelo's Day of Judgment, were Freud to maintain self-possession, prevail over or resist the temptation to acknowledge Christ which he anticipates would be at peak intensity, then his nanny's and the Church's teachings would no longer have a hold on him (or so Freud believes) --and he could then get on with his Messianic mission.

Now, if Freud's “Roman Catholic” head believes in the Last Judgment, it must also

believe that Satan exists. Suggestive here is the following from Freud's 1898 essay on the Signorelli lapse, "The Psychological Mechanism of Forgetfulness":

. . . I was able to conjure up the pictures with greater sensory vividness than is usual with me. I saw before my eyes with especial sharpness the artist's self-portrait--with a serious face and folded hands--which he has put in a corner of one of the pictures, next to the portrait of his predecessor in the work, Fra Angelico da Fiesole. (Freud, 1898, 296)

As Paul Vitz (1988, 161-2) notes, this fresco is *The Preaching and the Fall of the Anti-Christ*. Did Freud identify with the bearded Anti-Christ, who "[by] medieval tradition was to have been a Jewish avenger—a last desperate attempt by Satan to win the souls of the elect and overthrow the Christian Church"? (Isbitzer, 1985, 79.) In the mural, Lucifer (cf. Luca Signorelli) or one of his demons whispers in the Anti-Christ's left ear, counseling him. And what's to keep Freud from contemplating, however briefly, a Faustian bargain with Lucifer? What's he to lose? His inner torment? But sell his soul for what? Time to prepare the soil (already 42, he fears "51 years being the limit of [his] life")? (Freud, 1900, 513 ). Or, perhaps, charisma sufficient to draw others to him?

I consider it a great misfortune that nature has not granted me the indefinite something which attracts people. I believe it is this lack more than any other which has deprived me of a rosy existence.

(Letter of January 27, 1886, to Martha Bernays; Freud, 1960, 199).

In addition to exorcising his "Catholic head," Freud would deliver himself from the "yoke of the Law," Judaism's hold. But how? What better way than to take his stand before the world's greatest representation of Jehovah's Lawgiver, Michelangelo's Moses (1513-15), stationed in the Church of St. Peter in Chains, so-named because it was built to store the prison chains of St. Peter which miraculously fell away in Peter's Jerusalem jail cell just before he was to be executed. (It had been the titular church of Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere [1443-1513], who, later, as Pope Julius II, commissioned Michelangelo to sculpt Moses for his tomb. And to make his Jewish chains, the Law, fall away, Freud in

that gloomy church would “go in unto” Moses--and, as we shall see, it is for good reason that Freud will state (albeit initially anonymously), “no other piece of statuary has ever made a stronger impression on me ...” ) (Freud, 1914, 213).

Now, at this time Freud still holds to the cathartic method of cure for neuroses:

. . . [we] lead the patient's attention back from his symptom to the scene in which and through which that symptom arose; and having thus located the scene, we remove the symptom by bringing about, during the reproduction of the traumatic scene, a subsequent correction of the psychical course of events which took place at the time. (Freud, 1896, 193).

In other words, when a patient in the relative safety of the psychoanalyst's office relives a traumatic event, there is a purging of the emotions that sustain the neurotic symptom which arose from that event; hence, the symptom collapses. Freud's major neurotic symptom is submission to the Will of the Father, be the father Jakob Freud, Moses, or Jehovah.

Like the patient whose suicide was repressed or evoked at the time of the Signorelli slip, Freud has, he fears, an “incurable sexual problem”-- his emotional or libidinal ties to his father, Jakob; that is to say, his unresolved Father complex. But were Freud to heal himself, transcend his Father complex, become his own person, then, no longer submissive to Will of the father—again, be the father Jakob Freud, Moses, or Yahweh—he could get on with his Messianic mission.

Inasmuch as the situation before Michelangelo's Moses would be reminiscent of his oedipal days when he wanted to kill his father in order to possess his mother, Freud, secretly bent on killing Moses (by destroying the Law) in order to possess Mother Earth,

understands that there would be uprushes of feelings and attitudes from his childhood concerning Jakob when he wanted to bed his mother, Amalia. It is essential that he prevail over these broken though uprushes, especially the parricidal rage and the terror while awaiting the dreaded anticipated retribution, castration.

Moment by moment Freud must be vigilant, recognize that he is experiencing but new editions of feelings and attitudes from his childhood pertaining to his papa. Maintaining his emotional balance is essential if he is to set himself free from the Will of the Father, again, be the father Jakob Freud, Moses, or Jehovah.

On his 35<sup>th</sup> birthday, May 6, 1891, Jakob presented Freud with a re-bound volume of the family Bible, the *German-Hebrew Philippsen Bible*; his dedication penned in Hebrew closes: “And I have presented it to you as a memorial, and as a reminder of love from your father, who loves you with everlasting love” (Yerushalmi, 1991, 71; Yerushalmi’s translation).

Because he loved his Talmud-reading papa “who [loved him] with everlasting love,” Freud understands that guilt or filial piety could sabotage his intention not to preserve, but to destroy the Law--see to it that there'd be no remnants of the Torah to re-bind, not one leaf, not one law. Moreover, not having surmounted his belief in what he'll call “the Bible Story” (Freud, 1925, 28), this would-be Moses--both as the new moral authority (with but one law, “Know Thyself”) and as deliverer of his besieged nation--fears Jehovah and His terrible Justice or visitations, especially that his little ones, his three boys and three girls, will suffer, pay for their father's transgression. Fearing paternal

retribution, Sigi abandoned his intention to kill his papa, Jakob, in order to possess his mama, Amalia; dreading Jehovah's visitations, would Sigismund abandon his intention to kill his and every Jew's primal or ur-father, Moses (Freud, 1939, 42, n.4), in order to take possession of Mother Earth? Or would he, on the other hand, risk sacrificing to his ambition his little ones, and unto "the third and the fourth generation" (Exodus 20:5)? Again, the death of one child, his brother Julius, is already on his hands—or so he believes.

Like Janus, the two-headed Roman guardian of the threshold, Freud must be ever vigilant or he'd never resolve his father problem, never be his own person, never govern his own life, forever be bound to the Law. One momentary lapse in the gloomy Church of St. Peter in Chains, and he could kiss goodbye his longed-for Promised Land, an enlightened brotherly world in which *der Kinder* can move freely across frontiers, develop their talents, and satisfy their needs.

Michelangelo's magnificent Moses, however, is more than a mere prop for Freud to set himself free from bondage to the Law--much more. For when it comes to his vast secret ambition, Freud is superstitious:

. . . My own superstition has its roots in suppressed ambition (immortality) and in my case takes the place of that anxiety about death which springs from the normal uncertainty of life. . . .  
[Freud's jottings for his eyes only in the interleaved copy of the 1904 edition of *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (Freud, 1901, [1904], 260, ed. n.)]

And because “murdering” the biblical Moses (by doing away with the Law) and supplanting him— as both the new moral authority and the deliverer of the Jews— guarantees Freud immortality, Michelangelo’s terrible, 8-ft, 4-inch bull-horned, tablet-bearing representation of that great man of his people so excites his superstitious tendencies that the statue is his personal totem, that is, Moses himself (or the shade of Moses), possessing all his qualities, including his awful supernatural radiance or *mana* which had been transferred from Jehovah on to him—and that had so unnerved the Israelites at the foot of Mt. Sinai, which Freud (1921) will reference in *Group psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*:

Even Moses had to act as an intermediary between his people and Jehovah, since the people could not support the sight of God; and when he returned from the presence of God his face shone— some of the *mana* had been transferred on to him. (125)

For a sense of Freud's uncanny experience in the gloomy church before the statue, we turn to the famous passage from “The Moses of Michelangelo,” referencing the original, “*Der Moses des Michelangelo*”:

How often have I mounted the steep steps from the unlovely Corso Cavour to the lonely piazza where the deserted church stands, and have essayed to support [*standzuhalten*] the angry scorn of the hero's glance [*Blick des Heros*]! . . .  
Freud, 1914, 213 [“*Der Moses des Michelangelo*,” 175]]

As I had written elsewhere (Lippman, 2009, 587-8):

According to *The New Cassell's German Dictionary* (1962), *blick* (“glance”) means “touches of light,” and *blicken*, in addition to meaning “to glance,” means “to shine” ( cf. Exodus 34:35: “the skin of Moses' face shone”). And in the *Cassell's* edition of 1914 (Bruehl, 1906 [rev. 1914]), the year that “*Der Moses Des Michelangelo*”

was published, we find that *anblitzen*, which stems from the same root, in addition to meaning “to cast a furious look upon,” means “to throw a ray upon.” (In the frontispiece of the Freud family Bible, the illustrated *German-Hebrew Philippon Bible*, rays emanate upward in 'bundled' fashion from both sides of the forehead of the Tablet-bearing Biblical Moses.) The year before, 1913, in *Totem and Taboo*, Freud quoted a pertinent observation by the anthropologist, Northcote W. Thomas:

. . . 'Persons or things which are regarded as taboo may be compared to objects charged with *electricity*; they are the seat of a tremendous power which is transmissible by contact and may be liberated with destructive effect . . . ' (20; italics mine.)

This mysterious force or *mana* is comparable, then, to lightning or *blitz*. Turning from “*blick*,” we now look at the word, “*standhalten*” (“to support,” above). The 1914 edition of *Cassell's* defines *standhalten* as follows: “To withstand; to resist; to hold one's own; to stand firm.” Freud's “choosing” “*standhalten*” suggests strongly that whenever he entered the Church of San Pietro in Vincoli that Freud--his superstitious tendencies excited--attempted to resist the *blick* or *mana* of *Moses/Moses* (cf. “How often have I . . . essayed to support . . .”). Applying this decoding of *blick* and *standhalten* . . . , we arrive at the following rendering: Vis-a-vis the *mana* [*blick*] of *Moses/Moses*, I intend to [“*standhalte*”] withstand, resist, hold my own, stand firm.

Feeding Freud's “totem” superstition is, I suspect, his Roman Catholic sensibility: If bread, a Communion Wafer, is Jesus, what's to keep stone, Michelangelo's marble Moses, from being Moses? Here it is worth noting that when Freud was growing up in the small heavily Catholic Moravian town of Freiberg where he learned that symbols (Wine and Wafer) can be what they represent (the Blood and Body of Jesus), a statue inspired by Michelangelo's Moses was stationed in its town square: this imposing Israelite writes on a



stone tablet and wears a helmet with horn-like projections (Lippman, 2003, 34, n.9).

And as this impious striver knows only too well, in his shadowy Roman chamber *Moses/Moses* won't be covering up his *mana*.

Having been born in a caul (Jones, 1953, 4), which is a sign of greatness--and which his mother, Amalia, never let her "goldener Sigi" forget, Freud superstitiously believes, that he, himself, possesses *mana* from birth, and, so, just may be able to support or withstand the terrible *mana* or destructive supernatural power of *Moses/Moses*:

. . . kings and chiefs are possessed of great power, and it is death for their subjects to address them directly; but a minister or other person of greater *mana* than common can approach them unharmed . . . . This power is attached to all *special* individuals, such as kings, priests or newborn babies, to all *exceptional* states, such as the physical states of menstruation, puberty or birth, and to all *uncanny* things . (Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 1913, 20; 22, Freud's emphasis)

Having had signs of heart trouble dating from 1893, Freud, while readying himself, probably understood that under the anticipated strain he could suffer a fatal heart attack before *Moses/Moses*. (Max Schur [1972, 62], who was Freud's personal physician from 1928 until his death on Yom Kippur 1939, believed that Freud had "suffered an organic myocardial lesion in 1894.) And what if he were to suffer a breakdown, have a psychotic break? To have such a grand ambition and to believe that he could pull it off, maybe this big dreamer is already a *meschugganah* lunatic, just another messianic pretender, one more deluded Messiah of the Jews who comes on the scene during times of especial Jewish misery.

On the evening of August 8, 1901, less than four weeks before detraining in Rome, Freud attends a performance in Salzburg of *Don Giovanni* (Freud, 1985, 446). Having seen Mozart's opera once before, Freud, who would sacrifice *Moses* to his impious ambition, is only too aware that to steel himself for his face-off with *Moses/Moses*, and, on

the other hand, to ready himself for Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, one would be hard pressed to come up with a more fitting scene than the opera's riveting climax, the confrontation between Don Juan and the marble statue of the Commandatore, the father-figure he had killed. Refusing to repent, Don Juan wrests his hand free from the icy clasp of the *Commandatore*/Commandatore, thereby sealing his fate: smoke and flames envelop Don Juan; the *Commandatore*/Commandatore, backing away, announces, "Ah! there is no more time"; from below a chorus of demons summons Don Juan to Hell where "worse is in store for you"; terrified ("*Ah! che inferno, che terror!*"), the parricide sinks to Hell, uttering one final scream ("Ah").

To my mind, it'd be a wonder if that gripping dress rehearsal or trial run hadn't evoked in Professor Hammerschlag's former prize student (Rice, 1900, 48-9) a structurally similar scene--uncannily so--in the Fourth Book of Moses:

And it came to pass, as [Moses] had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them. And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that *appertained* unto Korah, and all *their* goods. They, and all that *appertained* to them, went down alive into the pit; and the earth closed upon them and they perished from among the congregation... And all Israel that *were* round about them fled at the cry of them ... And there came out a fire from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and men that offered incense. (Numbers 16:31-35)<sup>2</sup>

Summoning courage, Freud at long last enters the city of his dreams on Monday, September 2, 1901. As far as I know, he never gave an account of his experience before Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*. But from the following written to Fliess upon returning to Vienna--Europe's most anti-Semitic city--it's clear that Freud had resisted, prevailed over, his aroused or broken through Roman Catholic tendencies:

I should write to you about Rome now... I found it difficult to tolerate the lie concerning man's redemption, which raises its head to high heaven—for I could not cast off the thought of my own misery and all the other misery that I know of. (Letter dated September 19, 1901; Freud, 1985, 449)

(In *The Jewish State* published five years earlier, Theodor Herzl termed anti-Semitism *Judennot*, the “misery of the Jews.”)

In the letter, Freud states, “Rome... was a “high point of my life.” Actually, it was a turning point--for both Freud and his creation, psychoanalysis. By the following fall not only do disciples gather around this former forty-five year-old Jew-boy from the miserable streets of Vienna, but transference, which Freud had seen as a nuisance--as something to be gotten out of the way--becomes the key instrument of analysis. Freud’s first mention of the crucial significance of transference appears in his 1905 Postscript to *Fragments of a Case of Hysteria*:

...it is only after the transference has been resolved that a patient arrives at a sense of conviction of the validity of the connections which have been constructed during the analysis. (16-17)

Freud, however, will never reveal what alerted him to transference’s therapeutic significance. Nor will he reveal when, in order to isolate the transference, and, thereby, make the analysand aware of what is being repressed, he had come up with the so-called analytic incognito:

The doctor [psychoanalyst] should be opaque to his patients and, like a mirror, show them nothing but what is shown to him. (“Recommendations to Physicians Practising Psycho-Analysis”; Freud, 1912, 118.)

In other words, the analyst is to be like a statue, stone-faced; that is to say, like *Moses/Moses*, an opaque, impenetrable figure upon whom Freud threw--transferred--uprushes of attitudes and emotions he had had as a young boy pertaining to his gray-haired papa.

It was on Thursday, the 5th of September, his fourth day in the Eternal City, that Freud crossed the threshold the Church of St. Peter in Chains, and had “gone in unto” *Moses/Moses*. Because he prevailed, stood his ground, during this dreaded face-off, this striver emerged from that gloomy church transformed; that is, as an exceptional being, possessing the divine and terrible biblical radiance of Moses (or so his superstitious

side believed):

The source of taboo is attributed to a peculiar magic which is inherent in persons and spirits and can be conveyed by them through the medium of inanimate objects. ... The strangest fact seems to be that anyone who has [successfully] transgressed one of these prohibitions himself acquires the characteristic of being prohibited--as though the whole of the dangerous charge had been transferred over to him (Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 1913, 21-2).

“The strangest fact seems to be...”-- indeed! (Which raises the rhetorical question: had Freud not gathered courage and “gone in unto” *Moses/Moses*, would there today be a psychoanalytic movement, let alone one that’s international in scope? Moreover, Michelangelo and Pope Julius II, aren’t they deserving [with a nod to Signorelli and Mozart] of at least a footnote acknowledging them as co-creators of the Classical Psychoanalytic technique?}

On April 15, 1908, fifty years to the day of Julius Freud’s death, the Psychological Wednesday Society is-- on Freud’s carried motion—renamed the Vienna Psycho-Analytic Society (Nunberg and Federn; 1962, 373). Freud, thereby, secretly dedicated the psychoanalytic movement to the memory of Julius, a movement which would, were all to go according to plan, institute his --and baby Julius’s--Promised Land, a boundless, peaceable brotherly world in which Jew hatred in unknown.

## NOTES

1. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud (1900) acknowledges that his (undisclosed) thoughts about Captain Dreyfus on Devil’s Island informed the following dream-image of Cliff in Bocklin Style (date unknown):

A man standing on a [steep] cliff in the middle of the sea, in the style of [the Swiss symbolist] Bocklin. (166).

The editor, James Strachey, omitted translating the significant adjective, “*steilen*” (steep). The precipitous fall of Dreyfus wasting away on Devil’s Island over a fraudulent charge of

treason, selling military secrets to the Germans (December 1894), signifies for Freud the precarious standing of Jews in Christendom: each and every Jew a potential Dreyfus.

2. Before arriving in Orvieto, it is likely that Freud, a self-described “obsessional type,” (Freud, 1974, 82), studied the religious works of Renaissance masters, especially the Sistine Chapel murals surrounding Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment*; conceivably, then, during the Signorelli lapse *The Punishment of of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram* was evoked -- especially since in this work Botticelli (“instead Botticelli... occurred to me”) clearly depicts rays of light shooting up from both sides of Moses’ forehead. (In the painting’s bottom left corner, Moses’ right arm is raised in judgment and his head with its destructive radiance is tilted in the direction of those rebelling against his authority, ultimately against Jehovah.) When the Torah was translated into Greek, the Hebrew for "rays of light" was mistranslated as horns, and in the fourth century, St. Jerome carried this error over to the Latin version of the Scriptures, the Vulgate. Hence one and the same feature—Moses’ crown of horns— not only is a symbol for the *mana* of Moses; it also calls up the dreadful paternal retribution, castration.

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