ESSAY IV

THE ALIQUIS LAPSE: PREPARING THE GROUND WITH MINNA

> *En cas de doute, abstien toi.* [When in doubt, abstain.]
> —Inscription questionably attributed to St. Augustine by Sigmund Freud's friend Ernst von Fleischl-Marxow, and embroidered in 1883 by Martha Bernays for Freud's room in the General Hospital of Vienna; at Freud's request (Jones, 1953, p. 66).

> . . . when he told me about the [shipboard] dream in which his wife and her sister played important parts, I asked Freud to tell me some more of his personal associations with the dream. He looked at me with bitterness and said, "I could tell you more, but I cannot risk my authority."
> —Carl Jung to John M. Billinsky in 1957 (Hogenson, 1983, pp. 167–168).

> For each of us fate assumes the form of one (or several) women [sic] . . .
> —Freud to Sandor Ferenczi, letter dated July 9, 1913 (Freud, 1993, p. 499).

In August 1898, Sigmund Freud (42) and his sister-in-law Minna Bernays (33), while vacationing in the Swiss Alps, stayed two nights at the *Schweizerhaus* in Maloja. One hundred and eight years later, after reading Freud's inn entry of August 13, "Dr. Sigm Freud u frau," Dr. Franz Maciejewski concluded, "By any reasonable standard of proof, Sigmund Freud and his wife's sister, Minna Bernays, had a liaison" (Blumenthal, 2006). Three years after the "liaison," Freud (1901) will offer an analysis of a failure to quote correctly Dido's cry, "Let someone arise from my bones as an avenger!" According to Freud, the individual who failed to recall "*Aliquis*," Latin for someone, was a travel companion troubled by the possibility that his lover was pregnant. As Swales (1982) asserts, this young Jew and his Italian lover are actually screens for Freud and his sister-in-law Minna. But given that he is dissembling, Freud may have been fantasizing: ' . . . but were we to make love, Minna could get pregnant!' [Again, Freud had firsthand knowledge of contraceptive failure, the birth, five years earlier, of Anna Freud (Shapiro, 1996, p. 557).]

The lapse occurred in the summer of 1900, while Freud and Minna were on vacation in Italy, which included a visit to Trent in the Tyrol (Jones, 1953, p. 363). A member of the Freud household since late 1895, Minna, whom Freud called "*Schwester*" (McGrath, 1986, p. 280, n.15), followed Freud's work much more closely than did his wife, Martha, who was four years older. Here it is worthwhile to quote Paul Roazen (1975):

> Minna was more intellectual than Martha, read foreign languages easily, was quite literary, and became a real support on his work. . . . Minna . . . really understood his ideas, and he was far more likely to discuss his cases with her than with Martha. . . . In conversation Freud remembered that in his loneliest and yet most creative years, the 1890's, only Minna and his friend Wilhelm Fliess had been able to sustain his faith in himself, for they believed in his intellectual achievement . . . (p. 61).

Presenting this disguised bit of self-analysis, Freud writes:

> . . . [On a holiday trip last summer (1900)] I renewed my acquaintance with a certain young man of academic background. I soon found that he was familiar with some of my psychological publications. We had fallen into conversation—how I have now forgotten—about the social status of the race to which we both belong; and ambitious feelings prompted him to give vent to a regret that his generation was doomed (as he expressed it) to atrophy, and could not develop its talents or satisfy its needs. He ended a speech of impassioned fervour with the well-known line of Virgil's in which the unhappy Dido commits to posterity her vengeance on Aeneas: '*Exoriaire* . . .' Or rather, he *wanted* to end it in this way, for he could not get hold of the quotation and tried to conceal an obvious gap in what he remembered by changing the order of the words: *'Exoriar(e) ex nostris ossibus ultor.'* At last he said irritably: 'Please don't look so scornful: you seem as if you were gloating over my embarrassment. Why not help me? There is something missing in the line; how does the whole thing really go?'
>
> 'I'll help you with pleasure,' I replied, and gave the quotation its correct form*: 'Exoriar(e) ALIQUIS nostris ex ossibus ultor.'* ['Let someone (*aliquis*) arise from my bones as an avenger!'] (pp. 8–9; Freud's italics.)

To make it easier to refer back to, I am presenting in dialogue form the core of the remainder of this "conversation" in which "ambitious feelings" were stirred up:

> —How stupid to forget a word like that! By the way, you [Freud] claim that one never forgets a thing without some reason. I should be very curious to learn how I came to forget the indefinite pronoun "*aliqui*s" in this case.
> — . . . I must only ask you to tell me, *candidly* and *uncritically*, whatever comes into your mind when you direct your attention to the forgotten word without any definite aim.
> —Good. There springs to my mind, then, the ridiculous notion of dividing up the word like this: *a* and *liquis*.
> —What does that mean?
> — I don't know.
> —And what occurs to you next?
> —What comes next is *Reliquen [relics], liquefying, fluidity, fluid*. . . .
> I am thinking [," he went on," Freud writes, "with a scornful laugh"] of *Simon of Trent*, whose relics I saw two years ago in a church at Trent. I am thinking of the accusation of ritual blood-sacrifice which is brought against the Jews again just now, and of *Kleinpaul*'s [1892] book in which he regards all these supposed victims as incarnations, one might say, new editions of the Saviour.
> —The notion is not entirely unrelated to the subject we were discussing before the Latin word slipped your memory.
> —True. My next thoughts are about an article . . . in an Italian newspaper. Its title, I think, was "What St. *Augustine* says about Women." . . . And now . . . . I am thinking of a fine old gentleman I met on my travels last week. He was a real *original*, with all the appearance of a huge bird of prey. His name was *Benedict*, if that's of interest to you. . . . Anyhow, here are a row of saints and Fathers of the Church: St. *Simon*, St. *Augustine*, St. *Benedict*.There was, I think, a Church Father called *Origen*. Moreover, three of these names are also first names, like *Paul* in *Kleinpaul*. Now it's St. *Januarius* and the miracle of his blood that comes into my mind—my thoughts seem to be running on mechanically.

—Just a moment: St. *Januarius* and St. *Augustine* both have to do with the calendar. But won't you remind me about the miracle of his blood?
—Surely you must have heard of that? They keep the blood of St. Januarius in a phial inside a church at Naples, and on a particular holiday it miraculously liquefies. The people attach great importance to this miracle and get very excited if it's delayed, as happened once at a time when the French were occupying the town. So the general in command—or have I got it wrong? was it Garibaldi?—took the reverend gentleman aside and gave him to understand, with an unmistakable gesture towards the soldiers posted outside, that he *hoped* the miracle would take place very soon. And in fact it did take place . . .
—Well, something *has* come into my mind . . . but it's too intimate to pass on . . .
—Well, go on. Why do you pause?
— . . . . Well then, I've suddenly thought of a lady from whom I might easily hear a piece of news that would be very awkward for both of us.
—That her periods have stopped?
—How could you guess that?
— . . . Think of *the calendar saints, the blood that starts the flow on a particular day, the disturbance when the event fails to take place, the open threats that the miracle must be vouchsafed, or else* . . . In fact you've made use of the miracle of St. Januarius to manufacture a brilliant allusion to women's periods.
— . . .Without being aware of it. And you really mean to say that it was this anxious expectation that made me unable to produce an unimportant word like *aliquis*?
—It seems to me undeniable, You need only recall the division you made into *a-liquis*, and your associations: *relics, liquefying, fluid*. St. Simon was *sacrificed as a child*—shall I go on and show how he comes in? You were led on to him by the subject of relics.
—No, I'd much rather you didn't. I hope you don't take these thoughts of mine too seriously, if indeed I had them. In return I will confess to you that the lady is Italian and that I went to Naples with her. . . . (pp. 9–11; Freud's italics).

Summing up, Freud offers the following reconstruction:

> The disturbance in reproduction occurred . . . from the very nature of the topic hit upon in the quotation, since opposition unconsciously arose to the wishful idea expressed. The speaker had been deploring the fact that the present generation of his people was deprived of its full rights; a new generation, he prophesied like Dido, would inflict vengeance on the oppressors. At this moment a contrary thought intruded, 'Have you really so keen a wish for descendants? This is not so. How embarrassed you would be if you were to get news now that you were to expect descendants from the quarter you know of. No: no descendants—however much we need them for vengeance' (p. 14).

"A huge bird of prey . . . . St. Benedict"

According to Gregory the Great (540–604), who is the authority on St. Benedict (480–550), the greatest temptation of the flesh the father of Western monasticism had ever experienced happened on a day when the holy man was alone and the Devil or "Tempter" appeared in the form of "a small [persistent] *dark bird,* commonly called *a black bird*":

> . . . the evil spirit brought back before his mind's eye a certain woman whom he had once before seen. So intensely did the Tempter inflame his mind by the sight of that woman that he could hardly control his passion. He was overcome by sensuality, and almost considered abandoning his solitary retreat . . . [To contain himself] he "flung himself naked upon . . . stinging thorns and burning nettles . . . roll[ing] around there for a long time, and came out with his whole body wounded by them (Gregory, 1977, p. 7).

The extreme measure taken by St. Benedict to "control his passion" strongly suggests that Freud, during their visit in Italy in the summer of 1900, lusted after Minna—as does the proximate evocation of the early Church Father Origen ("St. *Benedict* . . . a Church Father called *Origen*") who, "to work freely instructing female catechumens," purportedly castrated himself (*Encyclopaedia Britannica,* 1973, p. 1094).

"*What St. Augustine says about Women"*

According to Augustine, women, unlike men, do not possess "the power of reason and understanding" to restrain themselves when sexually aroused; this being the case, he counsels:

> A wife's body should be . . . subject to the sex of her husband as the appetite of action is subjected by reason of the mind, to conceive the skill of acting rightly (St. Augustine, *Confessions,* 1943, pp. 378–379).

Because Freud recalls "What St. Augustine says about Women," it is reasonable to suppose: at the time of the lapse, Freud senses, correctly or not, that Minna on this trip desires him, and, following Augustine, he believes that whether or not they give in to their mutual lust is ultimately up to him, for, being a man, he possesses "the power of reason and understanding" to prevail over sexual desire.

"*St. Augustine, St. Benedict"*

Inasmuch as Freud and his *Schwester* Minna were alone on this trip, it's not a stretch to surmise—especially given St. Augustine's take on women—that the following incident involving St. Benedict and his determined sister, Scholastica, came to Freud while studying the lapse: Scholastica implores Benedict, "Please don't leave me tonight, but let us us talk until morning about the joys of life in heaven." But he answered, "What are you saying, sister? I certainly cannot stay outside my monastery for any reason." Whereupon Scholastica silently prays to God; the fair weather changes to a torrential downpour—and she prevails over Benedict's resistance: he spends the night (Adapted from *Dialogues of Gregory the Great, Book II, St. Benedict,* 1977, pp. 42–43).

"I am thinking of Simon of Trent, whose relics I saw two years ago . . ."

In 1475 in Trent, Jews allegedly killed two-year-old Simon for blood to prepare the Passover matzoh. According to Ben-Sasson (1976):

> The entire [Jewish] community was arrested and subjected to torture, which led to conflicting confessions. Those sentenced were promptly executed, while the remaining Jews were expelled. The impact of the [blood] libel was felt far and wide. . . . In 1582 the infant Simon was officially proclaimed a saint of the Catholic Church. [In 1965 the Church withdrew its canonization and acknowledged that a judicial error had been committed against the Jews of Trent in this trial (p. 580).]

In addition to the fourteen Jews who went up in flames in Trent (Wistrich, 1991, p. 34), Dido's funeral pyre could have easily called up in Freud's mind the auto-de-fes of New Christians or *Conversos*, as well as the countless members of his detested "race" burnt to death in the Middle Ages—more so, given Freud's identification with the Semitic queen's *ultor* or avenger.

"a new generation, he prophesied like Dido, would inflict vengeance on the oppressors"

When Virgil (70-19 B.C.) penned Dido's cry for an avenger, he had in mind "the favorite hero of [Freud's] later school days," Hannibal (247-182 B.C.):

> And when in the higher classes I began to understand for the first time what it meant to belong to an alien race, and anti-semitic feelings among the other boys warned me that I must take up a definite position, the figure of the semitic general rose still higher in my esteem. To my youthful mind Hannibal and Rome symbolized the conflict between the tenacity of Jewry and the organization of the Catholic church. And the increasing importance of the effects of the anti-semitic movement upon our emotional life helped to fix [*fixieren*] the thoughts and feelings of those early days (Freud, 1900b, p. 196; 1900a, p. 202).

The above amounts to a confession: " I . . . understand . . . I must take up a definite position [against] . . . the Catholic church, . . . the increasing anti-Semitism . . . fixing these thoughts and feelings." In other words, this modern Hannibal or relentless Semitic avenger is bent on destroying the new Romans, that seed-bed for anti-Semites like the good Christian who had knocked off Jakob Freud's new *shabbos* hat, his *Shtreimel*, into the mud and ordered him off the pavement: the Roman Catholic Church (cf. "ambitious feelings . . . vengeance").

"*St. Simon . . . sacrificed as a child*"

In the first edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud (1900b, p. 197) refers to Hannibal's father (Hamilcar Barca) as Hasdrubal, which was actually the name of Hannibal's *younger* brother. This is an understandable slip: the 'father' of Hannibal/Freud is not so much Freud's

beloved humiliated father, Jakob, as it is Freud's infant brother Julius whom Sigismund at 23 months of age had "sacrificed" with his evil wishes (Freud, 1985, p. 268). Again, in 1897, after discovering in his self-analysis that he had played Cain to Julius's Abel in their birthplace, Freiberg in Moravia (now Pribor, in the Czech Republic), Freud, oppressed by his fratricidal sense of guilt, secretly resolved to atone for having "sacrificed" Julius by instituting his ideal Promised Land, an enlightened secular world in which the seed of Abraham—future Juliuses (and Sarahs)—can thrive, can at last "develop [their] talents [and] satisfy [their] needs." Again, at the cost of his people's Tree of Life, the Torah, this haunted Cain would redeem *der Kinder*—and himself.

"so keen a wish for descendants"

Aeneas, through his son, Iulus or Julius Ascanius, will become the ancestor of an enlightened line—a line which is "just by choice" (Virgil, 1983, p. 202). And Freud, too, would have his own humane "Julius" or Julian line, the inhabitants of his socially just Promised Land. St. Benedict's prevailing over his lust enabled him to sire the Benedictines. Similarly, in order to sire his own spiritual line—his "Julius" line—Freud must, he understands, successfully prevail over his desire for his muse and secret love, Minna (e.g., Lippman, November 18, 2009). Benedict's spiritual descendants Christianized Europe (there were as many as 37,000 Benedictine monasteries); Freud's spiritual descendants, on the other hand, would de-Christianize the entire world. [Benedict's Rule—with its demand for *life-long obedience,* under threat of expulsion—enabled Benedict's "children" to Christianize Europe. On the afternoon of Sunday, May 25, 1913, when he formally instituted his secret watchdog council, the Committee, at Berggasse 19, did Freud have Benedict's Rule in mind? After all, for one's counter-movement why not take from the enemy what works?]

In addition to the suffering it would cause Martha and their three young boys and girls, a sexual scandal, especially one involving his wife's sister, would jeopardize the realization of Freud's Promised Land. Given his cruel predicament—being torn between his Promised Land and his desire for Minna—there is no better model for Freud to follow than the legendary Trojan hero who, to save *his* homeless, wandering nation, sacrificed personal happiness; once again, we turn to Augustine:

> Even though passions may disturb the inferior part of the soul, a mind . . . firmly resolved never permits passion to prevail over rational resolve. On the contrary, the mind is the master and by refusing consent and by positive resistance, it maintains the sovereignty of virtue. Such a man, as Virgil describes him, was Aeneas:
>
> > 'With mind unmoved he doth remain,
> > While [Dido's] tender tears run down in vain.'
> > (*City of God,* 1958, Book IX, p. 177.)

Here, it is worth recalling: it was not Aeneas, but Dido who pressed for sex. (Cupid, in the form of Julius Ascanius, had infected her with passion for that legendary Trojan, Freud's classical double.)

Four months prior to the Aliquis lapse, and just three days after Passover, Freud on Tuesday, April 24, 1900, gave a talk on Emile Zola's *Fecondite* (1899) at his B'nai B'rith lodge, which he had joined on September 29, 1897. Because it mirrors his Promised Land, Freud could easily have penned the "divine dream" envisioned in this utopian novel completed by Zola while in voluntary exile in England:

> And the divine dream, the generous utopian thought soars into the heavens; families blended into nations, nations blended into mankind, one sole brotherly people making of the world one sole city of peace and truth and justice! Ah! may eternal fruitfulness ever expand, may the seed of humanity be carried over the frontiers . . . (Zola, 1899 [1925], p. 411).

With regards to the couple who co-founded this brotherly world of "peace, truth and justice," Zola asks rhetorically, "And would they not forever live in their children—forever be united, immortal, in their race?" (p. 410). Similarly, were his envisioned Promised Land to become a reality, wouldn't Freud and his beloved *Schwester* Minna "forever live in their children, forever be united, immortal in their race," that is, in their spiritual children, their "Julius" line—a line "just by choice"? [Not surprisingly, Freud, in 1907, will place *Fecondite* on a list of "ten good books. . . . books to which one owes some part of one's life and philosophy" (Freud, 1960, p. 269)].

Fourteen summers after the Aliquis lapse, Freud will give Sabina Spielrein, then twenty-eight, advice with regards to her longing for her

ten-year older former lover, Carl Jung—advice which, vis-a-vis his longing for Minna, Freud adhered to faithfully:

> . . . Warm your life's intentions with your fire instead of burning yourself up with it. Nothing is stronger than controlled and sublimated passion. You can achieve nothing while you are at loggerheads with yourself (Letter of June 12, 1914; in Carotenuto, 1982, p. 122).

Which is reminiscent of Pope Gregory's observation regarding St. Benedict: "He had put out the forbidden flame within. . . . by transforming the fire" (*op. cit*., p. 7).

On May 25th of the previous year, Freud handed each member of the Committee an ancient intaglio engraved with a scene from classical antiquity to be mounted into a gold ring like his own. When dispensing these five precious stones that Sunday afternoon did one more 'recipient' come to Freud's mind, arguably the person most deserving of such a stone, a stone, moreover, that had already been set in a gold band?

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