

SÉANCE AT BERGASSE 19

EXCERPT from “THE STRUGGLE is NOT YET OVER” in The Unknown Freud: Five Plays and Five Essays

Robert L. Lippman, Ph.D.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

- DR. DONALD CUNNINGHAM, M.: A child psychoanalyst at London’s Travistock Clinic, where he doubles as a training analyst.
- DR. PIETRO LUZZATTI, M.D.: A professor of psychiatry at the University of Perugia Medical School. A psychoanalyst, he has written several books and numerous articles on psychoanalysis and art history.
- DR. SOLOMON MAIER, M.D., Ph. D.: A training and supervising analyst at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute.
- DR. MIMI ROSENTHAL, M.D.: A training and supervising psychoanalyst at the Boston Psychoanalytic Medical School, she specializes in the treatment of children.
- SIGMUND FREUD’S GHOST: The ghost of the father of psychoanalysis (1856-1939) looks like a vigorous 45 year-old. The 5 ft. 7-inch, 126 pound Freud has penetrating brown eyes--eyes that have been known to strike terror in disciples who crossed him. Impeccably groomed and carrying a gold-handled cane, he is wearing a 3-piece gray suit with a blue gardenia in its lapel.

SETTING

Sigmund Freud’s study, Berggasse 19, Vienna, Austria. The set approximates Rita Ransohoff’s description in E. Engleman’s book of photos, Berggasse 19, Sigmund Freud’s Home and Offices, Vienna 1938, University of Chicago Press, 1981:

The couch is piled high with pillows so that the patient would be in a near-sitting position, but eminently comfortable . . . The patient could cover himself with the shawl at the foot of the couch to protect against a possible draft. Freud would sit behind the couch in an easy chair with a footstool. The room is cluttered in late Victorian style, but in an organized and “interesting” manner. The antiquities have their place; they do not take over. The wall covering is plain, almost dark; pattern and color come from the Oriental rugs on the floor, the couch, and its adjacent wall.

TIME

Several minutes before midnight, September 23, 1989, fifty years to the day of Freud’s death

FREUD

....Now, before setting others free from their religious chains, I must, I understood, set myself free from the Law. So, Pietro, this hero, summoning courage, boards the train to your immortal city, where four days later, September 5, 1901—

(Plants self defiantly before the large poster of Michelangelo's Moses.)
(Bewildered, DRS ROSENTHAL, MAIER
& CUNNINGHAM look at one another.)

DR. LUZZATTI

Ah! I see!

DR. MAIER

I'm glad that you see, Pietro!

DR. LUZZATTI

Some psychologist! Solomon, before setting others free from their religious chains, the Professor would set himself free from the Law. And to deliver himself from the Mosaic legislation, what better object than Michelangelo's magnificent Moses?

DR. MAIER

(Cued in, he puts handkerchief on his head; from the back of Dr. R's chair he takes and kisses her shawl as though a Tallith; placing it on his shoulders, he plants himself before the Moses poster:)

Moses, if Yahweh exists, where is His strong hand? His Chosen People, have they not suffered enough? Why doesn't He put a stop, once and for all, to the perpetual persecutions? Moses, given the unremitting suffering, how can you justify governing my life with your 'Divine Law'? What right have you to be in charge of my life? Well, Moses, here I stand! No More! The miserable anti-Semitism must end, become a thing of the past. The time for Jewish martyrdom. it is over!--

(As DR. MAIER removes the "skull cap," there is lightning and thunder with radiance emanating from MOSES' face.)

The radiance! I'm doomed!

(Terrified, as if facing a wild, raving beast.)
(‘Blinded’ by Moses' radiance, Dr. MAIER
tries seeing his own hand.)

I'm blind! I can't see!

(THE OTHERS are of no help, as they, too, are terrified, having averted or covered their eyes from Moses' terrible radiance.)

FREUD (By window, views the storm.)

When I, at last, stood before Moses that Thursday, it was storming like this . . . A storm that Michelangelo might have made ...

DR. CUNNINGHAM

The Professor's nanny prepared him well—

DR. MAIER (Recovering)

Don, what are you implying?! Spit it out!

DR. LUZZATTI

May I, Donald?.... If bread can be Jesus, it follows that stone, marble, can be Moses, the spirit of Moses.
(Handling 18-inch statuette of Moses.)

DR. MAIER

Pietro, that's crazy, simply craz—

DR. LUZZATTI

And, Sol, you, you can speak?!
(Mocks DR. MAIER before Moses.)
'The radiance... I am doomed!'

FREUD (Touching Janus' left head.)

As meschuggah as it sounds Schlomo, that is precisely what my non-rational head believes, er, believed. Reason enough, my wicked son, for my so-called Rome phobia?

DR. ROSENTHAL

That's what this is--a dream, a bad dream. (Pinching self.)

DR. CUNNINGHAM

If I may, Professor, I'll spell it out to both my Jewish brother and sister... Inasmuch as he aspired to become the new Moses, what's more fitting than the world's greatest representation of that great man of his people to excite the Professor's superstitious tendencies?

DR. LUZZATTI (Gets book, addresses Others.)

The Professor, he even hints at this in "The Moses of Michelangelo," which, as you remember, he insisted be published anonymously:

. . . I used to sit down in front of the statue in the expectation
that I should now see how it would start up on its raised foot, dash the
Tables of the Law to the ground and let fly its wrath.

FREUD

A dream, believe me, my lovely Minna, er Mimi, this evening is not. For four years I prepared. In September 1901, it was now or never. You see, I was already forty-five, and my time was running out –

DR. ROSENTHAL

But, Professor, you come from healthy stock. Your father died at eighty-one and your mother was still well and active—

DR. MAIER (an awareness)

That's what it is, the 'critical age' business! According to Fliess' bizarre biological theory, fifty-one is a critical age--

FREUD (Wilhelm Fliess photo projected)

A fatal age for men.

DR. MAIER

Professor, I still can't believe that you swallowed Fliess's, er, numerology. He should have stuck with the, nose and throat—

FREUD

And yet, my dear Schlomo, here you are contending with a ghost. And if this shade judges correctly, you are just shy of fifty-one, aren't you?

(Unnerved, DR. MAIER. catches self, as he's about to light cigar.)

DR. LUZZATTI

Courage, Schlomo!!

FREUD

Having had heart difficulties, I understood that I might not leave that gloomy, deserted church alive. Worse, I could have a psychotic break. Let's say it's August 1901, the month before my departure (Lays on couch):

Doctor . . . this is so difficult . . . telling you my real reason for going to Rome . . . It's to enter the Church of St. Peter in Chains (Trance-like.) And once inside, to, to, stand defiantly before the shade of Moses, who is there . . . who is there ... in the form of my personal totem, the terrible Moses of Michelangelo. (Sits up.)

Doctor, tell me, do I need to be put away?

Withholding my diagnosis from me, my brave band? . . . Well, just in case I cracked up -- and who's to say I wasn't already a *meshuggunah* lunatic? --I brought my brother Alexander along . . . We were like a book--the brothers, the covers, and the five sisters, the pages.

(A mental projection: We hear them all singing at the Passover Seder: Da-da ye-nu, da-da-ye-nu, da-da ye nu, da--ye-nu, da-ye nu!--)

DR. ROSENTHAL

A book with a missing page—

FREUD

Julius never knew the joy at the Passover Seder of asking that sweet soul, our father, "Why is this night different. . . ?"

(ANOTHER mental projection: a Young Boy's voice: Ma nishtanah halailah hazeh mikol haleilot?)

(Simultaneously, FREUD also recites:)

Ma nishtanah halailah hazeh mikol haleilot?

(JAKOB FREUD, 45, dips his right forefinger into a silver cup of red wine, dropping the wine from his finger onto a saucer which already has some wine on it: The Finger of God. THE LITTLE BOY, about 5, is enthralled. JAKOB is acting out the 8th plague, the LOCUSTS: miming the Locusts gobbling everything. [For the LOCUSTS we can have a LIGHT SHOW, such as a rock group might put on, with appropriate SWARMING SOUNDS .]. . . We again hear the FREUD family of long ago: Da-da ye-nu, da-da-ye-nu, da-da ye nu, da--ye-nu, da-ye nu.)

(FREUD, wiping away tears, 'comes back')

DR. LUZZATTI

Professor, your vast ambition, it is to become not only the savior of your people but also the Lawgiver of humankind--

FREUD

And your point, Pietro? (Studying his 'card hand.')

DR. LUZZATTI

Did you then not fear that by merely being in the statue's presence that you would die? --

FREUD (Folds 'card hand.')

That Thursday, September 5th, 1901, I did die.

(Sensually handling the Venus figurine.)

DRS. LUZZATTI, ROSENTHAL & CUNNINGHAM

What?!

DR. MAIER

I understand.

(HE heads for Moses print).

The Professor's face-off with Moses was transformative. He became his own person. So, in a very real sense he did die.

DR. CUNNINGHAM

Hm! No longer bound by the Law, the Professor is no longer a boy or son, but his own man who is free to act as he himself chooses and to govern his life as makes sense to him and him alone. . . .

(Enjoying this, FREUD lights a cigar.)

DR. ROSENTHAL

The Professor matured? Okay?

DR. LUZZATTI

Solomon, Donald, you miss the essential mark! --When the Professor emerged from the gloomy Church of St. Peter in Chains, he returned not as a mere mortal, no matter how free. He returned

(Covering his face with a photo of the face of Moses.)

as Moses.

DR. CUNNINGHAM

Balderdash!

DR. MAIER

Pietro, you're out of your ever-loving Latin mind!

DR. ROSENTHAL

For our Winter convention, Pietro, please remind me to propose your interesting thesis for a panel-- a panel on wild analysis.

DR. LUZZATTI

Follow me.—

DR. MAIER

What? ! And risk excommunication from the psychoanalytic fold?

DR. LUZZATTI

Bear with me! In the religions of antiquity, the hero enters a dark pit; there, he kills the bull god, and emerges as the sacred bull himself, endowed with all of that god's qualities. It is through such an initiation rite that Mithras became the Persian god—

DR. CUNNINGHAM

Pietro, Moses may have a bull of a man, but as great as he was, he wasn't a deity.

DR. LUZZATTI

Donald, that may be so. But the radiance transferred from Yahweh onto Moses and which so terrified the Israelites at the foot of Mt. Sinai, is that not divine?

DR. MAIER

Yeah, as "divine" as Zeus' thunderbolts—

FREUD

According to the Bible story, "till Moses had done speaking with the Israelites he placed a veil on his face." But, this evening, I have no such veil.

(Now brilliant lightning--orange-red light with splashes of violet, purple and scarlet; FREUD'S face glows, terrifying the OTHERS, who avert their face or cover their eyes.

Then, a mental projection of FREUD'S: A slide of MOSES' scowling, radiant visage superimposed on FREUD'S face.)

You can open your eyes my children. The terrible radiance of this Moses, it won't blind you—

DR. ROSENTHAL

Professor, for a moment I was a believer!

FREUD

So, too, it appears, dear Mimi, were your brothers.

DR. MAIER

How did you do that, Professor?!

DR. CUNNINGHAM

Professor, you sincerely don't really believe that as a consequence of squaring off successfully with your "personal totem" that you now possess the radiance of the biblical Moses, that it was transferred onto you?

DR. MAIER

Now that's what I call transference!

DR. ROSENTHAL

Sol! (An admonition!)

FREUD

(Glowers at Dr. MAIER.)

It's far better than coming away with a limp, don't you agree, Cunningham? One moment, I'm a 45-year-old Jew boy from the miserable streets of Vienna and the next I'm Moses! Not bad, if I say so myself. And several months after returning to Vienna I have my first adherents.

(Addressing DR. MAIER:)

Chance coincidence?-- Schlomo, why suddenly so shy? . . . Now, of course, my rational head
(Touching right head of Janus)

didn't believe that by withstanding the radiance of Moses that I, like Prometheus, had stolen fire from the heavens.

DR. LUZZATTI (Handling left head of Janus)

But not so your non-rational or mystical head. In this regard, Professor, your 'Catholic mama,' she left her impress.

FREUD

Yes, Resi left her stamp. ('Stamping' forehead). After Julius died, Resi took me to Mass regularly--that is, until I was about 2¹/₂, when she was jailed for stealing. . . my toy soldiers even. With a grief-stricken young wife in the tiny Catholic town of my birth, Freiberg in Moravia, my 42-year-old father--he was a struggling textile merchant--had more pressing matter to attend to than my traipsing along with my devout nanny to the Church of The Nativity of Our Lady, where I was exposed to the sacrament of the Eucharist, bread and wine becoming the actual body and blood of Christ--and learned also about Doom's day, of souls burning in hell--and about which I dutifully instructed my parents.

(Another mental projection; Kneeling at the foot of his bed, LITTLE SIGI makes sign of the Cross; wide-eyed and with expressive motions, he tells his amused parents about how Jesus Christ conducts His affairs and about Heaven and Hell everlasting.)

(FREUD catches self as he's about to kneel and cross himself.)

DR. MAIER

The Last Judgment, Professor, you didn't believe that?!

FREUD

(Oblivious)

The candles, that music... the mystery. (To self.) ...

Now, my brilliant ones let us examine the situation. I am in the Eternal City, in order, ultimately, to do what to Moses, the Moses of the Bible story?

DR. ROSENTHAL

Simple. To bury him in order to take his place—

FREUD

Sound familiar?

DR. LUZZATTI

But the mama you now passionately wish to possess is Mama Earth.

DR. CUNNINGHAM

And, Professor, because the situation before Moses is reminiscent of your oedipal days, you are flooded with the feelings you had had when you wanted to murder your father, Jakob, in order to sleep with your mother, Amalia--

FREUD

And with full force. The patricidal rage—

DR. CUNNINGHAM

Along with the fear of paternal retribution, namely castration--

(FREUD projects: JAKOB, 43-45 and AMALIA, 23-25, are in bed. A knife in his hand, JAKOB is about to lunge at his little rival, who is not actually in the scene: it might be too traumatic for a child actor.)

DR. LUZZATTI

Which Moses' crown of horns most certainly calls up.

(With his fingers as horns, DR. LUZZATTI 'charges' DR. MAIER'S groin, who, in mock horror, holds on to his genitals.)

FREUD

(FREUD projects: AMALIA giving LITTLE SIGI'S 3-year-old sister ANNA a bath; seeing ANNA naked horrifies LITTLE SIGI, 5.)

The sight of my younger sister Anna . . . without a penis (Shudders). You see, quite naturally, I thought that she had come with one.

DR. ROSENTHAL

And, needless to say, the gruesome expectation, Jakob cutting off his wee-wee made little Sigi abandon his impious ambition.

FREUD

Essentially, yes, Mimi. But little Sigi's love for his papa was also an inhibiting factor. . .
Accordingly, before making my pilgrimage to Moses, I anticipate the reawakening of those earlier feelings, including my love and longing for my grey-haired father —

DR. LUZZATTI

In September, 1901, Professor, when you first face Michelangelo's Moses you hold still to the cathartic method of cure, that is to say, a washing away or purging of neuroses by a reliving of the very emotions which sustain them.

DR. CUNNINGHAM

Professor, care if I take a stab?

FREUD

Only if it's not fatal, Cunningham.

DR. CUNNINGHAM

When taking your stand against Moses, as these anticipated early childhood emotions and feelings surface, it is crucial that you contain yourself, recognize them for what they are—

FREUD

Yes, as new editions of those feelings and attitudes pertaining to my father long ago.

DR. CUNNINGHAM

Stay in control as these, these, new editions of your earlier feeling states and attitudes return, and you resolve or master your Father complex; that is, you no longer submit to the Will of the Father--be he Jakob, Moses, or the Lord God Jehovah. —

DR. ROSENTHAL

But get carried away or overwhelmed by this 'return of the repressed,' and, Professor, you may as well close up shop.

DR. LUZZATTI

(Handling the 2-headed god, Janus.)

Like Janus, the guardian of the threshold, you must be constantly on guard, ever vigilant. One momentary lapse, and, Professor, it is all over.

DR. MAIER

My God. Don, lie down on the couch!

DR. CUNNINGHAM

Why?

DR. MAIER

It's all right, isn't it, Professor?

FREUD

Jones, er, Cunningham, the couch is not taboo.

(Removing shoes, DR. CUNNINGHAM lies down.)

DR. MAIER

Now, Don, you know the drill. Just say what comes into your head--

DR. CUNNINGHAM

Not on your life!

DR. MAIER

Then fake it.

DR. CUNNINGHAM

Mumble, mumble, mumble, mumble, frikkin, frikkin mumble.

I'm sorry Professor, Mimi.--

(After miming his intention and getting DR. MAIER'S 'okay,' DR. LUZZATTI places the statuette of Moses on the easy chair at the head of the sofa, out of DR. CUNNINGHAM'S view.)

DR. MAIER

Now, Don, turn and face the Professor's chair.

DR. CUNNINGHAM

Very funny! What am I to make of? -- No!

FREUD

(Arm around DR. CUNNINGHAM'S shoulders, HE whispers:)

My dear Jones, my loyal disciple and gifted editor of our journal, what I am about to say you must not tell a soul: I got the neutral or non-responsive stance of the psychoanalyst--the so-called 'analytic incognito'--from my psychologist, old stone-face himself, the Moses of Michelangelo.

DR. MAIER

(Whispers in DR. CUNNINGHAM'S other ear.)

Not a lot of people know that! (a la Groucho Marx)

DR. ROSENTHAL

Jones would have *plotzed*.

FREUD

Fortunately, he could have fallen back on a former vocation--teaching figure skating.

(Taking DR. ROSENTHAL'S hesitant hand, FREUD mimes instructing her.)

DR. CUNNINGHAM (To DRS. LUZZATTI and MAIER)

That the transference, the key instrument of psychoanalysis to cure our patients, came from his trials before the statue, this is simply unbelievable.

(FREUD is oblivious.)

DR. LUZZATTI

This, Donald, is the reason no one has made the connection. It is inconceivable, too incredible even to imagine.

FREUD

One day, during my afternoon stroll, it came to me.

(Bows to DR. ROSENTHAL: 'skating session' over')

That's it! I'll model my behavior after Moses. I'll be stone-faced--a silent blank screen, a shadowy image onto whom my patients can throw--transfer their oedipal feelings and attitudes –

DR. LUZZATTI

And, Professor, in order to facilitate the transference, you even darken this, your chamber here at Berggasse 19.

DR. CUNNINGHAM

So, Professor, had you never faced Moses, psychoanalysis as we know it today wouldn't exist?

FREUD

My dear Cunningham, had I not summoned courage and crossed the threshold of that gloomy Church only a few persons would remember that such a thing as psychoanalysis had ever existed.

(FREUD blows smoke rings.)

And you would not be.

(The stage darkens; brilliant radiance emanates from FREUD's face)

END of EXCERPT

Staged readings of earlier versions of this One-Act were given at The Actor's Edge Workshop In Elizabethtown KY (2004) and at the Floyd County Workshop Playhouse in New Albany, Indiana (August 1989).