

“Séance at Berggasse 19” (One-Act), an Excerpt: “And you would not be!”

Robert L. Lippman

As per Sigmund Freud's death-bed behest, a seance is held at Berggasse 19, fifty years to the day of his death, September 23, 1989. Comprising the cast are four psychoanalysts--an Italian, an Englishman, and two Americans, both Jewish, one the lone female (Dr. Rosenthal)—and Freud’s ghost, looking a vigorous 45 year-old (instead of the cancer-ravaged shrunken 83 year-old when he lay dying in self-exile in London).

DR. LUZZATTI

In September, 1901, Professor, on your first visit to Rome and faced Michelangelo’s magnificent *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 which pertain to my father long ago.

DR. CUNNINGHAM

Stay in control as these, these, new editions of your earlier feeling states and attitudes return or break through, and you resolve or master your Father complex; that is, you no longer submit to the Will of the Father--be the father Jakob, Moses or 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!

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 to you.

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 range of sight.)

DR. MAIER

Now, Don, turn around 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 dat!

(scoots away 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; THEY dance.)

DR. CUNNINGHAM

(To DRS. LUZZATTI and MAIER)

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

(FREUD is oblivious.)

DR. LUZZATTI

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

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 analysands can throw—transfer-- their Oedipal feelings and attitudes –

DR. LUZZATTI

And, Professor, to facilitate the transference, you even darken your own 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 the gloomy Church of St. Peter in Chains only a few persons would remember that such a thing as psychoanalysis had ever existed.

(FREUD blows smoke rings.)

And you would not be!

(End of Excerpt)

