

## SIGMUND FREUD: THE SECRETS OF NATURE AND THE NATURE OF SECRETS <sup>1</sup>

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'He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret.' [Freud commenting on the meaning of Dora's playing with her reticule.] (1905a, p. 77.) 'But don't tell this to Mummy or Tini ... It's a secret.' [Little Hans commenting to his father about the stork bringing his sister.] (1909, p. 71.)

This paper focuses on two aspects of Freud's work and life: (1) the development of his theory and technique, as a life-long pursuit of Nature's secrets and (2) the sources of Freud's motivation to unveil those secrets.

We present in this paper the following points:

(1) Freud's passionate attempts to uncover secrets ran like a *leitmotiv* throughout his life. Periods of elation and dejection revolved around his success or failure in unveiling Nature's secrets.

(2) Freud's personal character reveals paradoxical attitudes: openness towards sharing information of a personal 'nature in order to advance psychoanalysis yet pronounced secretiveness about his private life, in particular his personal history and his marital life.

(3) These character traits seem to relate to his ambivalence towards his mother and 'unspeakable' family secrets.

(4) The evolution of central aspects of his theory and technique follows Freud's progressive discovery of how elusive human secrets are.

(5) Freud started out with a concretely focused search for some specific aetiological secret, factual events or trauma. His life work revealed the deep and pervasive significance of secrets, as part of complex, repressive and expressive ambiguous processes such as resistance, transference and defense. The concept of the 'secret' may be viewed as a construct uniting Freud's theory with pervasive elements of his character and personal history.

### FREUD'S CHARACTER, THE ORIGIN OF HIS INTEREST IN SECRETS AND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS MOTHER

#### *Nature's Secrets and Freud's Decision To Be a Scientist*

As a young man, Freud had been hoping for a promising career as a lawyer. On 1 May 1873, shortly after his seventeenth birthday, he attended a public reading of what he believed was Goethe's essay, 'On Nature'. In his autobiographical study, Freud (1925) commented:

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## THE FREUD STUDY GROUP AT PINE

'it was hearing Goethe's beautiful essay on Nature read aloud at a popular lecture by Professor Carl Bruhl just before I left school that decided me to become a medical student' (p. 8). The recollection of the experience reappeared in a dream, in Freud's early forties, and in it he relates the word 'nature' to sexual urges and castration (1900, pp. 662-3).

The essay describes Nature as enticing, enigmatic, and unwilling to surrender her secrets:

Nature! We are surrounded by her, embraced by her-impossible to release ourselves from her and impossible to enter more deeply into her. Without our asking and without warning she drags us into the circle of her dance and carries us along until exhausted we drop from her arm.

She creates ever new forms; what exists has never existed before; what has existed returns not again; everything is new and yet always old.

We live in her midst, and yet we are strangers to her. She speaks constantly with us, but betrays not her secret to us. We are continually at work upon her, yet have no power over her... She is the sole artist... always with some soft covering spread over her... She delights in illusion... To no one is she niggardly but she has favorites upon whom she lavishes much and to whom she shows great devotion... She veils mankind in darkness and forever spurs him toward the light (Wittels, 1931, pp. 31-2).

Nature is portrayed here as a seductress-fickle, mysterious, unyielding, powerful, capable of great love for 'her favorites'. Soon after hearing this essay, Freud wrote about his career decision to his friend, Emil Fluss, playfully and teasingly announcing his change of mind:

I was not more specific at the time, partly because of the suspense, which would have greatly flattered me, partly because I was not yet sure of myself. Today it is as certain and as fixed as any human plan (any being can turn into a Tower of Babel). Now I can also speak freely. When I lift the *veil of secrecy*, will you not be disappointed? Well, let's see. I have decided to be a Natural Scientist and herewith release you from the promise to let me conduct all your law.

2 Strachey (footnote 4) explained: 'According to Pestalozzi (1956) the real author of the essay (written in 1780) was G. C. Tobler, a Swiss writer'. Second, Goethe himself falsely claimed authorship of the essay. Strachey added, 'Goethe came across it half a century later, and, by a paramnesia, included it among his own works'.

3 Another example of Freud's fascination with secrets during his adolescence was his 'secret language'. Jones suits. It is no longer needed. I shall gain insight into the age-old dossiers of Nature, perhaps even *eavesdrop* on her eternal processes, and share my findings with anyone who wants to learn. As you can see, *the secret* is not so *frightful*; it was *fearful* only because it was altogether too *insignificant* (Freud, 1969, p. 424, our italics).

In his letter, the adolescent Freud initially concealed his secret-a fearful secret-from his friend, then finally revealed it. He would discover Nature's hidden processes by 'eavesdropping'. The work of psychoanalysis, listening for secrets and hidden meanings, was already foreshadowed in the letter of the 17-year-old correspondent, as was his own ambivalence. 'Frightful' and 'fearful' as the secret was, Freud trivialized it as 'too insignificant'.

### SECRECY AND FREUD'S CHARACTER

Freud's exploration of the role of secrets in mental life became an inextricable part of his research. In August 1895, he wrote to Fliess: 'Psychology is really a cross to bear... All I was trying to do was to explain defense, but just try to explain something from the *very core of nature!*' (p. 136, our italics). On 15 October of the same year, Freud described his 'fever' to his friend:

For two weeks I was in the throes of writing fever, believed that I had found *the secret*, now I know that I still haven't, and have again dropped the whole business... Have I revealed the great clinical secret to you, either orally or in writing? (p. 144, our italics).

Freud initially exulted in the discovery of his *neurotica*, believing he had touched on one of the 'great secrets of nature' (Letter to Fliess, 21 May 1894, p. 74, our italics). His exultation turned to dismay when, on 21 September 1897, he confessed to Fliess 'the great secret' of his erroneous theories:

1953, p. 164) commented: 'No one in Freud's family knew how he came to have such a good knowledge of Spanish. The mystery was disclosed in a letter he wrote to Martha on the occasion of his coming across an old school friend, Silberstein, whom he had not seen for three years. He was Freud's bosom friend in school days and they spent together every hour they were not in school. They learnt Spanish together and developed their own mythology and private words, mostly derived from Cervantes'.

## SECRETS OF NATURE AND NATURE OF SECRETS

And now I want to confide in you immediately the great secret that has been slowly dawning on me in the last few months. I no longer believe in my *neurotica* [theory of the neuroses] (p. 264).

Freud did not make public the collapse of his '*neurotica*' until he completed 'The interpretation of dreams' (1900). With the sweeping conviction of what he considered to be his most important contribution, Freud used his own dreams to demonstrate that he had revealed the 'secret' in the psyche-secret wishes, secret meanings (p. 146), and secret intentions (p. 170). He proclaimed, 'Insight such as this falls to one's lot but once in a lifetime' (p. xxxii).

On 6 June 1900, he envisioned glory arising from his discovery of the secret of dreams. He fancied a festive celebration of his achievement and imagined a marble tablet commemorating the place where he had the Irma dream. The plaque would read: 'Here on July 24, 1895 the secret of the dream revealed itself to Dr. Sigmund Freud' (Freud, 1895, p.417). His wish was finally fulfilled more than three quarters of a century later when such a plaque was placed there on 6 May 1977.

Freud (1910b) expressed admiration for Leonardo's method of extracting Nature's secrets through careful observation, and quoted approvingly from Leonardo's biographer Solmi, who noted Leonardo's 'insatiable desire to understand everything around him' (p. 73). Freud appeared to identify with Leonardo's passion for uncovering nature's secrets. The affective tone of his essay contrasted with the clinical detachment of many of his other writings. Freud believed that

biographers are fixated on their heroes... they have chosen their hero as the subject of their studies because-for reasons of their personal emotional life-they have felt a special affection for him from the very first. They then devote their energies to a task of idealization, aimed at enrolling the great man among the class of their infantile models... (p. 130).

Freud commented significantly on the character of Leonardo:

The core of his nature, and the secret of it, would appear to be that after his curiosity had been activated in infancy in the service of sexual interests he succeeded in sublimating the greater part of his libido into an urge for research (pp. 80-81).

The nature of Freud's identification with (and perhaps idealization of) Leonardo was suggested by his view of Leonardo as a scientific pioneer:

Thus he became the first natural scientist, and an abundance of discoveries and suggestive ideas rewarded his courage for being the first man since the Greeks to probe the secrets of nature while relying solely on observation and his own judgment (p. 122).

Although Freud himself steadfastly dedicated his efforts to unearthing the secrets of nature, he was markedly ambivalent about revealing 'secrets' about his private life. We quote at length from Jones' biography (1955) to illustrate this point:

We touch here on an arguable point. Freud always held very strongly that only he had the right to decide how much of his personality he would reveal to others and how much not: in a general way a quite understandable position. But there were features about his attitude that would seem to pass beyond that and to justify the word privacy being replaced by secrecy. For it would obtain when there were no particular reasons for the privacy or concealment; and then, again, its strength was really remarkable... somehow he managed to convey the impression that only what he vouchsafed about his personality was a permissible topic and that he would resent any intimate questioning. He never spoke to his children about his youth and early years... Above all, as we have noticed earlier, there was a striking contrast between the rather unflattering picture he revealed to the world concerning his inner life, notably in the analysis of his dreams, and the quite complete reticence on the matter of his love life. The sacredness undoubtedly centered there, and we have remarked on the quite extraordinary precautions he took to conceal a most innocent and momentary emotion of love in his adolescence. His wife was the only person on earth to know anything of that side of his life and she was the only person to whom he related the Gisela incident in question [Freud's only known adolescent infatuation] (pp. 408-9).

Freud's (1930) description of Goethe's admired character appears almost as a description of himself: 'Goethe was not only, as a poet, a great self-revealer, but also, in spite of the abundance of autobiographical records, a careful concealer' (p.212). Kohut (1978) too has commented on the tendency of the poet to conceal" even when the artist professes to be prompted by an urge toward confession or self-revelation. Clearly, Freud seems to have assumed that the wish to hide was an important factor in the motivation of the poet, as the following report by Hanns Sachs demonstrates: 'We were standing in front of... Goethe's works which filled three... bookshelves. Freud said, pointing towards it, "*All this was used by him as a means of selfconcealment*"' (Sachs, 1944, quoted in Kohut, 1978, p. 281, our italics).

Given the identification of Freud with Goethe, might we not assume that Freud's insight in this statement carried with it an autobiographical implication?

Jones went on to speculate about the source of Freud's secretiveness:

One must suppose that in Freud's earliest years there had been extremely strong motives for concealing some important phase of his development—perhaps even from himself. I would venture to surmise it was his deep love for his mother (p. 409).

In 'The interpretation of dreams' Freud made ample use of his own dreams to illustrate his theory of dream structure and formation, but he felt compelled to justify censorship:

I might draw closer together the threads in the material revealed by the analysis, and I might then show that they then converge upon a single nodal point, but considerations of a personal and not a scientific nature prevent my doing so in public. I should be *obliged to betray* many things which *had better remain my secret*, for on my way to discovering the solution of the dream all kinds of things were revealed which I *was unwilling to admit even to myself* (Freud, 1900, p. 640, our italics).

Although Freud had elected to use himself and his dreams to reveal the hidden structure of dreams, he simultaneously retained the right to be the guardian of his own secrets. Andre Breton alluded to this paradox of revealing and concealing secrets at the same time when he complained that Freud's dreams lacked the sexual content of those of others. In response to Breton, Freud stated:

the cause is only rarely timidity with regard to the sexual. The fact is, much more frequently, that it would have required me regularly to discover the secret source of the whole series of dreams in relation to my father, recently deceased (Clark, 1980, pp. 178-9). Schur (1966) commented that he felt the deeper secret contained in the censored dream material pertained to Freud's ambivalent trans-ferential relationship with his friend and correspondent at the time, Wilhelm Fliess. It was Freud's wish to conceal all letters written to Fliess during that same period. When Marie Bonaparte later discovered those letters, Freud advised her to burn them (Freud, 1887-1904, p.9).

An earlier example of Freud zealously guarding his privacy occurred at the age of 28, during his engagement to Martha Bernays. In 1885, he wrote to her:

I have just carried out one resolution which one group of people, as yet unborn and fated to misfortune, will feel acutely. Since you can't guess whom I mean I will tell you: they are my biographers. I have destroyed all my diaries of the past fourteen years, with letters, scientific notes and the manuscripts of my publications...I cannot leave here and cannot die before ridding myself of the *disturbing thought* of who might come by the old papers (Jones, 1953, p. xii, our italics).

According to Jones, in 1907 Freud once again completely destroyed all his correspondence, notes, diaries and manuscripts.

When Arnold Zweig, in 1936, approached Freud about writing his biography, Freud vehemently refused, stating that biographical truth was unobtainable (Freud, 1970, p. 127). Earlier, in the above-mentioned letter to his fiancée, Martha, (28 April 1885) Freud with pointed humor imagined the difficulties of future biographers.

Let the biographers chafe; we won't make it too easy for them. Let each one of them believe he is right in his' Conception of the development of the hero': even now I enjoy the thought of how they will all go astray (Jones, 1953, pp. xii-xiii).

Freud's concern for secrecy also influenced his relationships with his followers in his nascent psychoanalytic organization. He eventually reduced the number of colleagues he felt he could rely on to five, referred to as 'The Committee', consisting originally of Abraham, Ferenczi, Jones, Rank, and Sachs. Freud gave each member of the group an antique Greek intaglio to be worn in a ring to signify their membership in this secret society. Freud's one injunction was, 'This Committee would have to be *strictly secret* in its existence and in its actions' (Jones, 1955, p.153). Secrecy, too, enshrouded the publication of his essay 'The Moses of Michelangelo'. Freud published it anonymously in *Imago* (1914c), and he delayed ten years before revealing his authorship.

We hypothesize, together with Jones, that underlying and permeating these multiple levels of early and later transformations of a character logical disposition to secrecy lay the archaeological bedrock, concealed even from Freud himself—the essential nature of his relationship with his mother.

## FREUD AND HIS MOTHER

Freud, the devoted unveiler of Nature's secrets, was born and grew up entangled in a web of complex and confusing human relationships, full of sphinx-like riddles.

Freud's father, Jacob, was twenty years older than his mother. Jacob's two sons from his first marriage were of a similar age to his wife. His brief second marriage to Rebecca, and her seemingly abrupt disappearance, remains a mystery not yet unraveled by historians. Whether Freud was aware of this second marriage is unclear, though there is much to suggest that he had at least a disturbing preconscious intuition about it (Schur, 1972, pp. I 84ff; Freud, 1900, pp. 435ff; 441ff).

Emmanuel, Freud's oldest half brother, had a son John, Sigmund's nephew, already a year old when Freud was born. Freud entered this world in Freiberg, Moravia, nine months after the wedding date of his parents. They lived in one room in the upper storey of a small house where the Zajic family had their locksmith business on the two rooms of the ground floor (Eissler, 1978, p. II). The Zajic family used the second room in the upper storey as their family quarters. There was also a helper, Monica Zajic, a woman of Freud's father's age who worked for Emmanuel and for Freud's parents (Clark, 1980, p. II). She was Freud's beloved nurse, whose unexpected disappearance when Freud was 21 years old deeply affected him. In 1897, when he was 41 years old, he learned from his mother the circumstances of his nurse's abrupt departure. The nurse had been jailed for ten months after Freud's half brother, Philipp, had reported her to the police for stealing money from the 2~ year-old Freud. Freud's mother, whose husband was the same age as Freud's nurse, nonetheless described the nurse to the adult Freud questioning her as 'an old, ugly, elderly, but clever woman'. This is in sharp contrast to Freud's description of his mother as young and beautiful (Freud, 1887-1904, pp. 268-70, n. 1). Freud, reporting his mother's description of the nurse, gives no indication of being aware that the 'elderly' woman was his father's contemporary.

As a child, Freud was faced with the confusing perception that Philipp, a year younger than his mother, was of a more natural age to have been his father than was his own father, who was old enough to have been his grandfather. Freud's father was, in fact, the grandfather of Freud's nephew John and his niece Pauline, who were Freud's contemporaries. Yet, being in the same room Freud could witness each night that his father Jacob and his mother Amalie slept together. According to Gay (1988, p. 7) and Anzieu (1986, pp. 247-8), Freud seemingly believed Philipp to have something to do with his mother and making babies. His father and his beloved nurse, meanwhile, were a more natural match for each other in terms of age.

Another area of mystery includes his mother's parents and relatives of whom there seems to be no historical record, not even from the time when they apparently lived in Vienna. No biographer speaks about them, except to mention their names. Freud himself referred only once in his associations to the death of his maternal grandfather when he was 7 or 8 years old (1900, p. 583).

Furthermore, babies arrived in rapid succession for Amalie and Jacob. Freud was seven months old when his mother conceived Julius, twenty-three months old when Julius died at seven months in April 1858 (Gay, 1988, p.8). His mother was already pregnant at the time, with his sister, Anna. From that point on, his mother was continuously either nursing or pregnant until Freud was 10 years old. He was surrounded by females-his mother, the maids and five sisters-until a brother was born, in 1866, and the 11-year-old Sigmund was allowed to name him Alexander in honor of the Greek emperor, military leader and destroyer of Thebes.

Freud's family romance and sense of specialness to his mother makes it hard to realize that he was the oldest of seven children, and the child of a mother who was always giving birth to new babies until he was prepubertal. By contrast, reading Freud, one gains the impression that he was the absolute focus of his mother's love, unrivalled by competitors. Perhaps there was fantasy, wish, and some truth in these reminiscences.

In 1866, shame descended upon the Freud family. Joseph Freud, Jacob's brother, was sentenced to ten years in prison for dealing in counterfeit rubles. According to Gay (1988), Jacob's hair turned grey in a few days, grief was mingled with anxiety: there is evidence that he and his older sons, who had emigrated to Manchester, England, were implicated in Joseph Freud's schemes (p. 8).

This may have brought to Freud echoes of the abandonment by the imprisoned nurse. The 'evidence' remained a secret, never referred or alluded to in Freud's dreams around the disclosures about his father.

We have a description of Jacob Freud from his granddaughter, Judith Bernays Heller, who had lived with Amalie and Jacob from time to time and who had shared a room with Jacob for a year at the age of 6. She remembered her grandfather as 'kind and gentle and humorous' but 'aloof from the others in the family, reading a great deal... and seeing his own friends away from the home', where during meals he 'took no real part in the general talk of the others'. In the midst of an emotional household with at least six women 'he remained quiet and imperturbable, not indifferent, but not disturbed, never out of temper, never raising his voice'. The house was run by his wife Amalie, who 'had a volatile temperament, would scold the maid as well as her daughters and rush about the house... [acting] shrill and domineering' (Bernays Heller, 1956, pp. 335-6).

In his self-analysis and subsequent writings Freud scrutinized in depth his relationship with his father, and described his father's death as 'the most important event, the most poignant loss, of a man's life' (1900, p. xxvi).

Freud barely mentioned the significance of a mother's life and death for her child except to romanticize the significance of a son as a love object to his mother. He described the relationship between mother and son as the only relation free from hostility and 'not disturbed by subsequent rivalry' (1921, p. 101, n.2). Her significance to him was left unwritten, except for a few emphatic statements such as 'A man, especially, looks for someone who can represent his picture of his mother, as it has dominated his mind from his earliest childhood' (1905b, p. 228). Amalie's death at 95 brought-as Freud wrote to Ferenczi-' no pain, no grief' and 'a feeling of liberation, of release. I was not free to die as long as she was alive' (Freud, E.L., 1960, p. 400). To Jones he said the same in stronger language, 'I can detect... an increase in personal freedom since it was always a *terrifying* thought that she might come to hear of my death...' He concluded dryly, 'Her value to me can hardly be heightened' (Jones, 1957, p. 152, our italics).

Who was Amalie Freud for him that as an elderly man he was 'terrified' that his mother might hear of his death? We have only brief portraits of her. Her granddaughter Judith Bernays Heller describes Amalie Freud as a stately, domineering, efficient, social woman, who was very attentive to her clothing and looks, and who 'preferred the male members of her brood'. She forced her daughter, Pauline, even into Pauline's thirties, to go with her to play cards 'whether she liked it or not'. She became 'very angry' if her grandson 'did not play with concentration'. When Sigmund, her 'golden son', celebrated his seventieth birthday, she demanded a new dress and insisted on attending, even when she had to be carried up and down the stairs of her own home and Freud's. The same happened two months before her death, when she insisted on going to her beloved summer place, Ischl, against the collective opinion of 'her sons, the doctors, her daughters'. Her granddaughter concluded that with her family she always was 'a tyrant, and a selfish one' (Bernays Heller, 1956, pp. 334-40).

Freud's son Martin (1967, p.207), who remembered his grandmother well, described her as 'a typical Polish Jewess, with all the shortcomings that that implies. She was certainly not what we would call a "lady", had a lively temper and was impatient, self-willed, sharp-witted and highly intelligent' (cited by Gay, 1988, p. 504). The evidence we have suggests that she did not hear what she did not want to hear. When her 22-year-old granddaughter Sophie died tragically while pregnant, she did not ask a word from her bereaved son Sigmund or his wife. She gave no indication that she knew about it, even when she seems according to Bernays Heller-to have been fully aware of what had happened (1956, p. 339).

On Sundays Amalie Freud would gather around her every member of the family, from oldest to youngest. 'Professor Freud' writes Judith Bernays Heller (1956), 'would always find time to pay his mother a visit and give her the pleasure of petting and making a fuss over him' (p. 339, our italics).

What was Freud's relation to this handsome, imposing, willful mother, who had selected him as her favorite, her 'golden' son, one whom she expected would fulfill the gypsy's prophecy made when he was an infant, that she had brought a great man into the world? Freud himself asked the question, 'Could this have been the source of my thirst for grandeur?' (1900, p. 192).

There is much to suggest that Freud's relationship to his mother was not only ambivalent but also fraught with complex wishes linked to fear of death and to feelings of neglect. Perhaps we could say that his mother, like Nature, was a compelling enigma to him. 'We are surrounded by her, embraced by her, impossible to release ourselves from her and impossible to enter more deeply into her'. It seems difficult to imagine this formidable woman entering into 'the mutual search for truth' hungered for by the creative and questioning mind of the young Freud. A more likely conjecture would be an atmosphere in which externally-directed intellectual questions might not only be permitted, but encouraged, while

curiosity regarding the many family issues might encounter a powerful unspoken taboo (with the gate of secrets being guarded by the sphinx-like mother). As an adolescent of 17 years, Freud complained in a letter to his friend Silberstein (4 September 1872) that in the case of their mothers the 'spiritual development [of Silberstein and Freud] has been taken out of their [mother's] hands' (Stanesco quoted by Clark, 1980, p. 26).

On the one hand, it could be suggested that Freud had two 'mothers', his own and his nurse. On the other, it can be said that he barely had his real mother only to himself. The birth of his brother, Julius, his jealousy of him, and Julius' death at seven months marked Freud for life, as he himself indicated on many occasions. This first rival--conceived when Freud was seven months old--may have deprived him of emotional closeness to his mother and certainly deprived him of her full attention. When Freud was twenty-three months old, his mother was in a state of mourning over Julius' death and over the death of her 20-year-old brother, also named Julius (Krull, 1986, p. 116). Her pregnancy with his sister Anna may have aggravated his loneliness even more. Anna was born before Freud was 2 years old, soon after he lost his nurse, who had been in charge of his physical care and who had taken him out with her, even to church. He had become terribly fond of her. She ministered to his bodily needs, something Freud later connected to his belief that she had been his teacher 'in sexual matters' (4 October 1897, p. 269). Freud acknowledged his debt to her with moving words: 'I shall be grateful to the memory of the old woman who provided me at such an early age with the means for living and going on living' (3 October 1897). One can hear in his words the desolation of a young child struggling for survival.

Hardin (1987, 1988a, b) has argued that in his self-analysis Freud's nurse was largely concealed behind the figure of his mother. Hardin concludes:

unable in his self-analysis to relive the latent tie with his nursemaid and the anguish following her loss, Freud again turned to his mother and, consequently, to oedipal issues (1987, p. 643).

Hardin believes that, despite poor health at the time, Freud's decision to send his daughter Anna as his surrogate to his mother's funeral (attended by the entire family, was a *para praxis* based on the talion law. He 'sent a surrogate son to his mother's funeral, just as his mother... had given over a major part of his care to a surrogate...' (1988a, p. 85).

Only once in his entire opus does Freud use a loving word to refer to his mother, and it is in the highly ambivalent context of an anxiety dream about her death. When he was 7 or 8 years old, "he saw his comatose maternal grandfather's facial expression. A few days later, in a vivid nightmare that woke him up 'in tears and screaming', he saw 'my beloved mother, with a peculiarly peaceful, sleeping expression on her features, being carried into the room by two (or three) people with birds' beaks and laid upon the bed' (our emphasis). Freud states that the expression of the maternal face was a 'copy' of that of the dying grandfather. He commented that the 'secondary revision' interpretation 'must... have been that my mother was dying'. He did not attribute the anxiety to her dying but rather 'to sexual cravings' (1900, pp. 583-4). Whatever the sexual component, it is curious that he would refer to his mother so lovingly only once in his writings-in describing his dream of her death. Is it not possible to surmise that he might have wished her dead to be 'free', as he was, by his own account, when she actually died? Her death might have permitted him a less demanding and frustrating life, and also allowed him to be less 'terrified' about his survival debt to her (see below), in addition it might have satisfied rageful feelings about his deprivation and her contradictory behavior. He was her 'goldener Sigi' but at the same time she had neglected him. It was his nurse who had given him 'the means for living and going on living'.

Could it have been hostility and fear that led him to suggest that there were no hostile feelings in the relationship of a mother to her son (1933, p. 133)? Might Freud at twenty-three months have held his mother responsible for his brother Julius' death and consequently feared that she was dangerous? In fact, in his writings Freud repeatedly held himself responsible for Julius' disappearance. Perhaps his sense of guilt might have helped to reassure him that he was not in danger from a mother on whom he was so totally dependent after the loss of his beloved nurse. As Lehmann (1983, p.242) has conjectured, Freud as the only surviving son may have felt an obligation to remain alive for his mother, and to please her as a compensation for her grief.

Evidence that Freud connected his mother with deadly powers can be found in the 1898 dream of the Three Fates (1900, pp. 204-8, 233). In the dream, Freud was hungry and waiting to be fed. He felt 'impatient' and 'a sense of injury'. His associations led to the Three Fates who give 'great happiness and sorrow' in life, and to 'the mother who gives life'. In further associations, he remembered that when he was 6 years old, his mother rubbed her palms together to demonstrate that 'we were all made of earth and must therefore return to earth'. The young child was astonished and, believing the demonstration to be real, associated it later with the words 'Du bist der Natur einem Tod schuldig' (Thou owest *Nature* a

death). This was a para praxis. The quotation evidently referred to a line from Prince Hal in Shakespeare's Henry IV, v. 1: 'Thou owest *God* a death'. The substitution of Nature for God in relation to mother, like a Fate demonstrating oncoming death, appeared to Freud to be significant. God, nature and mother were in a continuum, and could be interchanged. The sentence could then read 'Thou owest mother a death'. Julius had paid his debt, but Freud had not. Could this be the obverse of Freud's 'terrifying' possibility of dying before her? Further associations led Freud to cocaine, a substance connected with 'one of the most troubling episodes in Freud's life' (Gay, 1988, p. 45). At this point Freud chose not to continue the analysis of the dream: 'I must desist... because the personal sacrifice demanded would be too great' (1900, p. 206). The choice suggests a resistance to looking more deeply into his associations to death and into other issues pertaining to his mother.

Many authors have believed that Freud could not deal with the questions of his pre-oedipal development and that his analysis stopped at the oedipal level. Schur (1955) said it most explicitly: 'There are many evidences of complicated pre-genital relations with his mother which perhaps he never fully analyzed' (quoted by Gay, 1988, p. 505, footnote). Gay concluded:

there is no evidence that Freud's systematic self scrutiny touched on his weightiest of attachments, or that he ever explored, and tried to exorcize his mother's power over him (p. 505).

Similarly his relative neglect of the maternal transference has been noticed, as has his limited exploration of the psychology of women and of the maternal role in psychological development. His patients' mothers are passing ghosts, 'exiled to the margins of his case histories' (p. 505).

Gay concluded that Freud's ignorance of women had a willful component, a defiant refusal to deal with them and to know about them. In his adolescence he had proposed a pact to his friend Emil Fluss, which was the obverse of his own wish to ignore women-a, pact to keep them ignorant:

Let us, therefore, pledge-each within his own circle to keep all the ladies known and accessible to us-in ignorance, especially in *matters concerning nature*, so as to make them lovable (Freud, 1969, p.422, our italics).

The word 'lovable' suggests that women who are ignorant about nature are safer objects of love, perhaps less dangerous than the very nature they represent. At the end of his life he declared the sexual life of adult women a 'dark continent' for psychology (1926a, p.212) and especially 'obscure to me' (Abraham & Freud, 1965, p. 376). Freud confided to Marie Bonaparte his failure to unravel the feminine desire:

The great question that has never been answered and which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is "What does a woman want?" (Jones, 1955, p. 421).

This statement is all the more remarkable given his own history with a mother who reportedly made her conscious wishes explicit and demanded their fulfillment. Freud must have suspected other wishes and set himself out to eavesdrop on Nature, the great mother. But nature, the maternal and eternal female, did not betray 'her secret' to him.

We may now attempt to summarize our reconstruction. Freud's temperamental, willful, demanding mother selected him as her golden child. Her commitment to him was restricted by her continuous childbearing, and her surrendering of his care to a surrogate mother, his nurse. He was jealous of his first sibling and fearful, because, taken by death, Julius had vanished. To that frightful tragedy was added the sudden disappearance of his nurse just at the time of his mother's confinement and delivery of her next child, Anna. He was now deeply bereft and greatly confused about who was father of whom. His oedipal development confronted him with more riddles than Oedipus himself faced. However much he loved his mother, her repeated pregnancies must have allowed less and less time for him, and for his 'spiritual development'.

Rage, frustration and fear were likely concomitants of his confusing psychological and factual reality. As we have suggested, he seemed to have linked his mother with death and with the power to bring it about: to die before her was 'terrifying'. He never did rid himself of the belief that his own death was imminent.

For Freud to scrutinize the various aspects of his relationship with an imperious mother who not only demanded his love but also would not die to free him, may have been a psychologically impossible task. Curiosity, fear, and exhilaration came upon him while hearing the essay 'On nature'. There it was—a magnificent opportunity to explore, in *displacement* and *disguise*, the dark and dangerous maternal continent to which he 'owed a death'. Danger and safety, daring and caution were possible from the safe eavesdropping position of a 'Natural Scientist'. As the essay 'On nature' suggested he might be, he was 'dragged' inexorably into Nature's 'circle', much as his mother had done by making him her favorite child—and he committed his life to her. At the end of his life, having unraveled more psychological mysteries than any man before him, he *felt* the weight of her unrelenting secrecy: 'Here we have approached the still shrouded secret of the nature of the psychical' (1940, p. 163). A similar mood of quiet resignation had come upon him when his mother died. He could read only his own surface without knowing what could have changed in his 'deeper layers' (Letter to Jones-IS Sept 1930, cited by Gay, 1988, p. 573). His mother had kept her secrets to the last.

## FREUD'S THEORIES AND THE RELATION TO THE UNVEILING OF SECRETS

*Early discoveries and*

*early complications*

Our preceding exploration of Freud's family history, childhood predicaments, and conflicts with his mother document our main points. *Firstly* we suggest that his ambivalent relationship with his mother and the 'secrets' in it provided the motivational source for his sublimated and displaced wish to find scientific means to unveil the secrets of nature. Conversely, his relationship with his mother may also have provided motivational sources for Freud's own conscious and unconscious 'secretiveness' about his and others' prephallic ties to the mother, with all attendant implications for the avoidance of pre-oedipal development and theories. In other words, rooted here were his conscious and unconscious efforts both to reveal and to keep secrets from himself and from others. *Secondly* we endeavor to describe the vicissitudes of Freud's scientific search for the secrets of the mind as a dialectical process. Repeatedly, Freud found a 'secret', then lost it, and then found it again in an altered form. The body of Freud's theory may be presented historically as Freud's successive creation of conceptual models to describe his progressive understanding of the mind's processes to keep and to reveal secrets.

Freud's commitment to unveiling the secrets of nature began with biological studies in Brücke's laboratory. There he showed a sharp capacity for observation, the ability to follow through on comprehensive systematic research, and an unusual tenacity to pursue his studies until they yielded results. In the mid 1880s two events brought Freud to focus on the human mind's capacity to harbor secrets and secret processes. They were Breuer's revelation in 1882 of his treatment of Anna O and Freud's trip to Paris in 1885 to study with Charcot. That Anna O was relieved of her symptoms by being induced 'to express in words the affective fantasy by which she was at the moment dominated' (1925, p. 20) impressed Freud very deeply. He believed it to be 'of so fundamental a nature' that he began to repeat Breuer's investigations to the point that with his usual passion he 'worked at nothing else' (p. 21). In this way he launched a career in pursuit of the secrets of the mind.

In his early work on hysteria (1895) and dreams (1900) Freud conceptualized the secrets which the patient needed to put into words as:

- 1) Historical sexual events and their associated affects.
- 2) Conscious fantasies related to people of or the present, including the physician.
- 3) Unconscious fantasies and affects related to figures from the past or the present.

With time Freud's clinical interest in secrets shifted from a focused search for specific hidden aetiological events, to a complex appreciation of the pervasive role of secrecy in psychic life.

Conceptually he began with the notion of a consciously suppressed secret historical event, shifted to that of a conscious/unconscious amalgam of fact and fantasy, and finally to the idea that the unconsciously repressed secret

fantasies continuously exerted their influence on the emotional lives of patients. Furthermore, his understanding of the secret-keeping process began with pathogenesis, and progressed to include normal development.

The first phase of his interest is exemplified by 'Studies on hysteria' (1895), in which he conceptualized secrets as traumatic events of childhood, hidden from conscious awareness by suppression, and consisting of *mental contents related to factual events*. Secrets caused illness through their association with strangulated affects, which led to dissociative splits in the psyche. The pathogenic secret acted like a foreign body in a passive host:

We must presume rather that the psychical trauma or more precisely the memory of the trauma-acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work... (Freud, 1893-5, p. 6).

In his 'Preliminary communication' of 1893, Freud stated, 'Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences' of traumatic historical events (p. 7). At this point, Freud's techniques of exploration included hypnosis and the pressure of hands applied to the patient's forehead. He thought of the 'secret' as residing either in, or close to, the patient's awareness, but suppressed by the patient. He had not as yet evolved a theory of repression.

The analyst conducted the search for secrets using active approaches such as hypnosis and suggestion. Freud commented:

The principal point is that I should guess the secret and tell it to the patient straight out; and he is then as a rule obliged to abandon his rejection of it (p. 281).

Implicit in this approach was the belief that there was something pathogenic about an unspoken secret; revealing it to the patient was felt to be curative.

Freud's technical recommendations in later chapters of 'Studies on hysteria' (1893-5) suggested a beginning change in emphasis from one in which past events were suppressed but could easily be made conscious, to one in which past events were repressed, and therefore unconscious. Hence:

The complete consent and complete attention of the patients are needed, but above all their confidence, since the analysis invariably leads to the disclosure of the most intimate and secret psychical events (p. 265).

In his writing at that point, there was still considerable ambiguity regarding the nature and the topographical level of the secrets he was trying to discover.

In his concluding essay on the psychotherapy of hysteria, Freud indicated his suspicion that there is a relation between secrets and hidden *motives*. A breach in a train of thoughts can be attributed 'to the existence of hidden unconscious motives' (p. 293). Freud introduces here the notion of 'secret motives' beyond secret mental contents.

At this stage, the analytic physician was in charge of extracting the secret. Soon Freud realized that the patient's acquiescence to his request was not enough; the patient's active participation was required if the secrets were to come to light. Freud had to consider the patient's 'will' as a factor to be dealt with, and the importance of the patient's trust in, and attachment to, the physician. In 1898 he reflected:

It would be a great advantage if sick people had a better knowledge of the certainty with which a doctor is now in a position to interpret their neurotic complaints and to infer from them their operative sexual aetiology. It would undoubtedly spur such people on to abandon their secretiveness from the moment they have made up their minds to seek help for their suffering (p. 266).

Freud's writings during this period suggested a subtle shift in the technique of discovering secrets, from one in which the physician was active and the patient passive, to one involving the patient's conscious willingness to trust the physician with thoughts and memories leading to the underlying secrets. Accompanying this shift was a growing sense of the role of resistance in the secret-keeping process.

Hysterical people do not know what they do not *want* to know... the bringing back of those lost memories is opposed by a certain resistance which has to be counter-balanced by work proportionate to its magnitude (p. 296).

Freud went through a transitional period in which he oscillated between the belief that the locus of the secret was in the external event (the memory of which may or may not be available to consciousness) and the belief that the locus was internal (the defense against conflicting wishes). He consolidated his understanding in a second phase, exemplified by 'The interpretation of dreams', in which the secret had become clearly intrapsychic—an unconscious childhood wish.

This unconscious wish could cause illness because of associated psychic conflict, but could also be thought of as part of normal mental functioning. This phase was related to the discovery of his own oedipal wishes.

Despite his discovery of the secret of dreams, Freud realized that, however much is revealed by them, still much remains concealed. In two remarkable passages, Freud described the partially revealed, partially shrouded secret as intrinsic to the dream: '-There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable -a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown' (1900, p. 111, note 1). The next major step in the evolution of Freud's thinking about secrecy came about as he tried to apply his insights about dreaming to the clinical situation. He was searching for an entry to the patient's innermost secrets. In the same way that he conducted a subtle search for secrets in specimen dreams, he tried to search for Dora's secrets by paying attention to seemingly insignificant details. The treatment's failure led to the discovery of the deeper central secret, the transference.

In conjunction with his developing grasp of the complexities of secrets and their relation to unconscious conflict, Freud refined his investigative impulses. He moved from actively trying to force Nature and his patients to reveal their secrets, to receptively 'eavesdropping' on their subtle processes of self-revelation. As the multilayered structure of the secret-keeping processes of the human mind began to reveal itself, Freud found himself repeatedly caught up in a dialectic of finding a new secret, losing it, and rediscovering it in an altered form.

### PURSUING NATURE'S SECRETS: EVOLUTION OF TECHNIQUE

In his 'Fragment of an analysis of a case of hysteria', Freud focused his concern with secrecy on matters of technique. In attempting to apply the technique of dream interpretation to a case of hysteria, Freud described the Dora case history as 'in fact a continuation of the dream book' (1905a, p. 4).

His shift in emphasis from conscious to unconscious mental processes was more solidly in place. In addition, Freud was strengthening his view of patients as active participants in the therapeutic process. Unlike the patients in 'Studies on hysteria', who, according to his view at the time, suffered passively from reminiscences, in presenting Dora's case Freud described hysterical symptoms as 'the expression of their most secret and repressed wishes' (pp. 7-8).

From the outset of the case, Freud stated that much would remain secret. While he considered it to be 'the most subtle thing I have yet written' (p. 4), he also conceded to the reader that 'it is incomplete to a far greater degree than its title might have led him to expect' (p. 112). Although Freud organized the explanation of the case around two dreams, he was nonetheless explicitly focused on the mental processes Dora used to keep her secrets. He said of a doctor who failed to understand the masturbatory implications of Dora's childhood bed-wetting:

This physician was the only one in whom she showed any confidence, because this episode showed her that he had not penetrated her secret. She felt afraid of any other doctor... and we can now see that the motive of her fear was the possibility that he might guess her secret (p. 73, n.1).

Like Nature, Dora did not want to betray her secret. Freud was intent on 'lifting the veil' of her secrecy.

After analyzing the masturbatory meaning of Dora's playing with her reticule, Freud proclaimed, 'He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret' (p. 77). He did not, however, notice Dora's secret wishes towards him within her erotic transference love; Freud's own counter transference remained unexplored and, therefore, secret.

Freud now described a further complication of the treatment, Dora's concealment of a letter of indifferent content as she entered the waiting room:

I believe that Dora only wanted to play 'secrets' with me, and to hint that she was on the point of allowing her secret to be torn from her by the doctor (p. 78).

As exemplified here, Freud repeatedly used aggressive and invasive imagery to describe the treatment process, as in 'tearing the secret' from Dora. His counter transference wish to penetrate her secret may thus have colored his technique.

Freud summarized his conclusions about the case in the following way:

The reproaches against her father for having made her ill, together with the self-reproach underlying them, the leucorrhoea, the playing with the reticule, the bed-wetting after her sixth year, the secret which she would not allow the doctors to tear from her-the circumstantial evidence of her having masturbated in childhood seems to me complete and without a flaw (p. 78).

Freud was very much aware of Dora's conscious and unconscious secrets in the past. Captivated by the secret of Dora's masturbation and its symbolic re-enactment in the analytic situation, he responded technically with an attempt to 'tear' the past secret from her and, in the process, lost Dora as a patient and the secret of the transference she held. At that point Freud had not yet realized that the conscious/ unconscious 'secret' had become a transferential one.

Dora ended the treatment unexpectedly and in so doing frustrated Freud's pursuit of her secrets. Characteristically, he nonetheless capitalized on his mistake; in losing one secret, he found another of even greater value. In his postscript to the case, Freud speculated about the reasons for the patient's untimely departure. He realized that while actively pursuing the masturbatory secret, he had overlooked the transferential secret in the treatment.

Freud's passion for penetrating Dora's secret confronted him with the reality of a patient who would rather leave the treatment situation than surrender her transferential secret. He learned that it could not be forcefully extracted. Perhaps she was resonating with Hamlet, who, Freud observed, had angrily rejected the attempt of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to 'drag the secret of his depression out of [him]' (1905c, p. 262). Freud quoted Hamlet's response to illustrate the powerful resistance of the secret keeping process:

'Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me; ... you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass; and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ; yet you cannot make it speak. *'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me'* (Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 2) (1905c, p. 262).

His selection of the excerpt describing Hamlet's protest illustrates Freud's reflective, perhaps even chastened mood, and his growing respect, stemming from his experience with Dora, for this patient's tenacity in preserving her secrets. He had learned from Dora that no mortal can keep a secret, but he had also learned that no mortal is going to relinquish that secret without a fight.

In the postscript to the case (1905a), Freud added:

It is easy to learn how to interpret dreams, to extract from the patient's associations his unconscious thoughts and memories, and to practice similar explanatory arts: for these the patient himself will always provide the text. Transference is the one thing the presence of which has to be detected almost without assistance and with only the slightest clues to go upon, while at the same time the risk of making arbitrary inferences has to be avoided (p. 116).

Although Freud never used the word 'secret' to refer directly to the transference itself, we can detect his pursuit of Nature's secrets in his fascination with the transference. Recall, in this regard, Goethe's essay on Nature: 'She creates ever-new forms... everything is new and yet always old'.

Freud's experience with Dora led to a period of intense reflection regarding the art of uncovering patients' secrets. The tone of his writings on the subject became more dispassionate, and his technique correspondingly shifted from one in which the analyst attempts to extract the secret as a foreign body to one in which the analyst observes the secret betraying itself in subtle ways.

In his essay, 'On psychotherapy' (1905c), Freud warned that actively pursuing a patient's secrets might paradoxically serve to conceal them. In presenting his recommendations on technique to the practicing therapist, he gave another reason for moving away from a more active, potentially invasive approach:

This method [suggestion]... conceals from us all insight into the play of mental forces; it does not permit us, for example, to recognize the *resistance* with which the patient clings to his disease and thus even fights against his own recovery; yet it is this phenomenon of resistance which alone makes it possible to understand his behavior in daily life (p. 261).

Up to this point, Freud's conceptualization of Nature's secrets had evolved

- 1) From the conscious factual secret.
- 2) To the repressed (unconscious) factual secret.
- 3) To the unconscious wish and fantasy in the past.
- 4) To the unconscious wish and fantasy in the present-the transference which at first 'seems ordained to be the greatest obstacle to psychoanalysis, [but] becomes its most powerful ally' (1905a, p. 117).
- 5) To the phenomenon of resistance as the patient's protection from revealing his secrets.

Seasoned by his own experience, Freud admonished the therapist who might hope for a quick cure, who might still

clinging to the notion that a patient's secrets are easily obtainable, that it is unlikely that the patient will make him a present of his secrets: such expectations might injure rather than benefit the patient (1905c, pp. 261-2).

Freud's increased respect for the psyche's subtle process of hiding and revealing secrets led him in the following year (1906), in his paper 'Psychoanalysis and the establishment of the facts in legal proceedings', to make a conceptual emendation.

Indeed, we are on the look-out for remarks which suggest any ambiguity and in which the *hidden meaning* glimmers through an innocent expression... After all, it is not difficult to understand that the only way in which a carefully guarded secret betrays itself is by subtle, or at most ambiguous, allusions. In the end the patient becomes accustomed to disclosing to us, by means of what is known as 'indirect representation', all that we require in order to uncover the complex (p. 110, our italics).

An echo of this process is heard later in 1914 in 'The Moses of Michelangelo', in which Freud analyzed the sculpture by paying attention to 'the significance of minor details' as he did in psychoanalysis, where he was 'accustomed to divine secret and concealed things from despised or unnoticed features from the rubbish-heap, as it were, of our observations' (1914c, p. 222).

Freud summarized the technical consequences of his new understanding:

We quite generally regard even slight deviations in our patients from the ordinary forms of expression as a sign of some hidden meaning, and we are quite willing to expose ourselves for a while to the patient's ridicule by making interpretations in that sense (1906, p. 110).

As Freud's understanding of the pervasive role of secrecy in psychic life developed, so did his awareness of the need for quiet eavesdropping until the secret might betray itself. In his essay on 'Wild psycho-analysis' (1910a), he warned the analyst against undue haste in pursuing the patient's secrets:

Attempts to 'rush' [the patient] at first consultation, by brusquely telling him the secrets discovered by the physician, are technically objectionable. And they mostly bring their own punishment by inspiring a hearty enmity towards the physician on the patient's part... (p. 226).

The above passage illustrates the great distance that Freud had traveled in his search for Nature's secrets. His tone had moderated. His imagery was no longer aggressive and penetrating but had become more neutral, subtle, patient, and reflective.

Freud had learned that patients were like Nature herself. 'She speaks constantly with us, and betrays not her secrets to us.' He had, however, not given up. He knew 'she has favorites upon whom she lavishes much and to whom she shows great devotion'.

## SECRETS AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

Next Freud entered a period (1912-1915) of creative elaboration and systematization of his theory and technique. In the metapsychological works, his ideas reached a new level of abstract synthesis, while his papers on technique showed a growing respect for the transference and resistance as concealing and revealing the patient's hidden mental processes.

In his essay, 'Remembering, repeating and working through', for example, he described the technique for dealing with the secret of compulsive behaviors:

We render the compulsion harmless, and indeed useful, by giving it the right to assert itself in a definite field. We admit it into the transference as a playground in which it is allowed to expand in almost complete freedom and in which it is expected to display to us everything in the way of pathogenic instincts that is hidden in the patient's mind (1914a, p. 154).

In his essay on 'Transference love', Freud once again emphasized the use of the transference to uncover the patient's secrets. Transference love has become a tool for 'bringing all that is *most deeply hidden* in the patient's erotic life into her consciousness...' (1915a, p. 166, our italics).

In the papers of this period there is little mention of secrets or of secrecy *per se*. Freud had come to understand that the pursuit of particular secrets was fruitless or even harmful. What was needed was the conceptualization of the mind as containing hidden answers to the clinical paradoxes of the secret-keeping processes, which would be revealed to the carefully attentive analyst. His major metapsychological theorizing in this period can be seen as an effort to

accommodate all aspects of the secret-keeping process within a theoretical system which would explain the clinical data. For example, in his essay, 'The unconscious', though he did not specifically mention secrets by name, Freud was trying to produce a topographical and descriptive model for what is hidden from consciousness and for the dynamics, which kept some mental processes from entering awareness. These were no longer secrets in the narrow clinical sense. The dynamically repressed was the result of the complex mental processes far beyond the conscious act of keeping secrets. The role of the patient's conscious knowledge of secret events was reversed. Now, the patient had no conscious access to material that had been repressed earlier. The repressed had become segregated, and therefore secret, kept away from the patient himself.

The word secret has changed its meaning. It was in this new sense of the word that Freud referred to Leonardo's artistic inspiration:

*Kindly nature* has given the artist the ability to express his most secret mental impulses, which are hidden even from himself, by means of the works that he creates; and these works have a powerful effect on others who are strangers to the artist, and who are themselves unaware of the source of their emotion (1910b, p. 107, our italics).

Artists too are favorites of a kindly Nature. In 'The unconscious' Freud's described both the mechanism of the secret-keeping process, i.e. repression, and the location and energetic characteristics of the hidden, i.e. the dynamic unconscious:

The essence of the process of repression lies, not in putting an end to, in annihilating, the idea which represents an instinct, but in preventing it from becoming conscious. When this happens we say of the idea that it is in a state of being 'unconscious', and we can produce good evidence to show that even when it is 'unconscious' it can produce effects, even including some which finally reach consciousness... (1915b, p.166).

What had been before a secret or secrets is now an entire category of mental processes, qualitatively unconscious, dynamically active, topographically located in one component of the mind. What are hidden are aspects of the mind itself, and no longer discrete pieces of history, whether they are external or internal events.

Freud left no doubt at this stage in his theorizing that the locus of what is hidden, including secrets, was in the topographic unconscious. He compared the perception of all unconscious mental processes by means of consciousness to the perception of the external world by means of the sense organs. He cautioned, however, against assuming that the conscious perception was identical to the thing being observed, regardless of whether the object of observation was external or internal. He had learned about the multi-layered system of the mind, which protected its privacy. As Kant had before him, Freud cautioned against being deceived by appearances:

our perceptions are subjectively conditioned and must not be regarded as identical with what is perceived though unknowable, so psychoanalysis warns us not to equate perceptions by means of consciousness with the unconscious mental processes, which are their object. Like the physical, the psychical is not necessarily in reality what it appears to us to be (1915b, p. 171).

Freud knew that Nature 'delights in illusion' and was determined not to be fooled by her. He was prepared to keep his commitment to continue 'eavesdropping' on her processes. He was willing to learn how to listen to the repressed voice of the unconscious, Nature's clever device to keep secrets hidden from the minds that had repressed them. To guide himself, Freud mapped the territories of the mind. He described the dynamic nature of the secret-keeping process, the conflicting relationship between the censorship of the system and the pressure of unconscious processes to find some expression. He located the censor at the border separating the system *Ues.* and the *Pes.*, and then described the process of enticing the *Ues.* to unveil the hidden and repressed contents both by loosening the censorship and bypassing it through 'indirect representation' in free association. Freud described the specific mechanisms used by the mind to keep certain ideas hidden from conscious awareness at the service of avoiding - anxiety.

The [Preconscious] cathexis that has taken flight attaches itself to a substitutive idea, which, on the one hand, is connected by association with the rejected idea, and, on the other, has escaped repression by reason of its remoteness from that idea (1915b, p. 182).

Implicit in this process is the notion that the repressed is partially concealed through the remoteness of the substitutive idea and partially revealed by associative connections. In Freud's description of the antagonistic relationship between unconscious ideas seeking substitutes to enter awareness and the censor standing guard to prevent this from happening, one is reminded of Nature's *modus operandi*: 'She veils mankind in darkness and forever spurs him toward the light'. Through his understanding of the dynamic processes of keeping from awareness repressed unconscious ideation, Freud described a unique affect 'used as a signal' to prevent the development of anxiety that had been prompted by the resurfacing of the repressed material, the repressed 'secrets'. These were no longer solely events, which had already occurred; they were also events, which were about to occur, i.e. wishes which push forward to enter awareness (1915b, p. 183). Foreshadowing his 1926 work, 'Inhibitions, symptoms, and anxiety', he recognized that the territory of

consciousness must offer safety against the surfacing of unconscious processes.

Freud repeatedly demonstrated that the secret-keeping process was inextricably bound to the theory of repression and therefore centrally linked to the very essence of psychoanalysis: 'The theory of repression is the cornerstone on which the whole structure of psychoanalysis rests' (1914b, p. 16). At this stage of his thinking, he equated the process of unveiling the repressed with the loosening of rigorous censorship. The lifting of repression required the reestablishment of the connections that led to the original memory traces, and to the moment when a thought had become repressed, and as a result, unknown to the person who had it, i.e. a secret from the person himself.<sup>4</sup>

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word 'secret' is derived from the Latin, *secretus*, meaning to separate, to put aside and apart. With this core meaning in mind, Freud's relentless search to uncover the hidden processes of the unconscious can be viewed as an attempt to reunite, through reasoned observation, that which could not be consciously borne, and which the mind has to put aside.

## SECRETS AND THE STRUCTURAL THEORY

Whereas Freud had previously located the secret -now broadly understood as the complex processes of repression-as residing within or between different systems of the mind, in 'The ego and the id' he began to speak of intrasystemic conflict. He focused on ego identifications, which were split off from one another:

Perhaps the secret of the cases of what is described, as 'multiple personality' is that the different identifications seize hold of consciousness in turn. Even when things do not go so far as this, there remains the question of conflicts between the various identifications into which the ego comes apart, conflicts which cannot after all be described as entirely pathological (1923a, pp. 30-31):

Significantly, Freud extended this description of identifications split off from awareness to include normal as well as pathological development.

Previously, in his topographic theory, he conceptualized 'the secret' as residing primarily in the system *Ucs.*, and secondarily as being in transit between the *Ucs.* and the *Pcs.* In his structural theory, he spoke of the unconscious elements of the ego. The 'secret' could now be contained in the ego itself, as part of an unconscious identification or between shifting identifications.

As he developed the structural theory, Freud's theoretical and technical concerns reflected his changing understanding of the process of keeping 'secrets'. He became progressively more alert to the interpretation of ways of keeping 'secrets' in the context of resistance analysis. In an example from 1923, 'secretiveness' has become part of the patient's defensive posture, her resistance to the work of the analysis. Freud described a girl who had difficulty talking during analysis. His unveiling of the secret of her dream yielded yet another secret hiding behind it. When the patient was a child of 3 or 4, she had slept in the same room as her father and 'used then to throw back her clothes in her sleep to please her father. The subsequent repression of her pleasure in, exhibiting herself was the motive for her *secretiveness* in the treatment, her dislike of showing herself openly' (1923b, p. 119, our italics).

Secrecy and the secret-keeping process had now acquired greater significance than was the case during the period of his topographic theory.

<sup>4</sup> Freud further explored the connection between secrets and repression in 'The uncanny' (1919). He linked repressed thoughts with the concepts of antithetical ideas and ambivalence. He viewed 'the uncanny' as something at once strange and familiar. Even the German title of the essay, 'Das Unheimlich', was intimately connected to secrets in that the words *unheimlich* (uncanny) and *geheimnis* (secret) both contain the root word of home (*heim*). The uncanny refers to experiences, affects, sense impressions, situations, and qualities that have hidden ties to the familiar, ultimately to the home. The uncanny is consequently nothing new, but rather something familiar and long established that has become alienated through the process of repression.

With his increased knowledge of mental structures and of intra-systemic conflict, Freud described the interior landscape as containing divisions within divisions, secrets within secrets. Mental processes were fragmented and layered with multiple secrets hidden from and by the subject himself:

Perhaps he may himself notice that a very remarkable psychological phenomenon begins to appear in this situation-of a thought of his own being kept secret from his own self. It looks as though his own self were no longer the unity, which he had considered it to be, as though there were something else as well in him that could confront that self (1926b, p. 188).

Freud was describing a mental system in which secrets were hidden from certain parts of the self, while at the same time they were observed by other parts of the self.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, these processes were the normal result of psychic development.

In 'The question of lay analysis', Freud spoke of the complex system he had unveiled and outlined its technical implications. Freud's imaginary interrogator commented:

'You assume that every neurotic has something oppressing him, some secret. And by getting him to tell you about it you relieve his oppression and do him good. That, of course, is the principle of Confession...'<sup>5</sup> (p. 189).

Freud then pointed out the difference between the approaches of confession and of psychoanalysis:

Confession no doubt plays a part in analysis-as an introduction to it, we might say. But it is very far from constituting the essence of analysis or from explaining its effects. In Confession the sinner tells what he knows; in analysis the neurotic has to tell more (1926a, p. 189).

Freud went on to contrast the 'personal influence' of the hypnotist with the analyst's. 'special personal influence' which may promote the initiation of the treatment but 'later on it opposes our analytic intentions and forces us to adopt the most far-reaching countermeasures' (p. 190). Freud's comments on the differences between the confessional and the analytic approaches suggest how far he had moved from his early efforts to get patients to confess their secrets. His increasing understanding of the complex structure within which secrets were hidden led him to adopt equally complex technical maneuvers in order to bring them into awareness. Psychoanalytic technique had evolved to become a disciplined, attentive, respectful process of 'eavesdropping' to help the patient to transform progressively the defensive measures that, in hiding what he feared to know about himself, had made him ill.

## CONCLUSION

Freud had promised himself, in his vigorous seventeenth year, to unveil the secrets of Nature so enticingly presented in the essay 'On nature'. In his fortieth year he was deeply impressed with the secret he had discovered in his self-analysis, namely his ambivalent relationship with his father. In his seventies just prior to and immediately following the death of his mother in 1930, and in the years leading up to his own death, he returned to the discovery of his own secret as a key to understanding civilized society. He connected it to 'my reaction to my father's death-that is to say, to the most important event, the most poignant loss, of a man's life' (1900, p. xxvi). During the period 1927-1931, ominous years of his worsening cancer and of darkening social forces in Europe, most of Freud's references to secrets pertain to his ambivalent relationship with his father. He applied his knowledge of that once secret ambivalence towards the father to the development of his theories about the origins of civilization, religion, and the death instinct.

In 'Civilization and its discontents' (1930b) Freud wrote:

If the human sense of guilt goes back to the killing of the primal father, that was after all a case of 'remorse' ... There is no doubt that this case should explain the *secret* of the sense of guilt to us and put an end to our difficulties. And I believe it does. This remorse was the result of the primordial ambivalence of feeling towards the father. His sons hated him, but they loved him, too (p. 132, our italics).

<sup>5</sup> Freud's use of the German 'selbst' in this context did not convey the meaning of the self as a supra-ordinate concept, but instead connoted the sense of the subjectively experienced self.

Later in the same work, Freud indicated how deep a secret he felt he had uncovered when he stated that 'the struggle between Eros and the death instinct... revealed the secret of organic life in general' (p. 139). In these late works, Freud's insistent reference to 'secrets' *per se* is reminiscent of his earlier writings.

In elucidating the appeal of religion to mankind, Freud pointed out that behind those [religious] ideas lay the oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind. The *secret* of their strength lies in the strength of those wishes. As we already know, the *terrifying* impression of helplessness in childhood aroused the need for protection-for protection through love-which was provided by the father; and the recognition that this helplessness lasts throughout life made it necessary to cling to the existence of a father, but this time a more powerful one (1927, p. 30, our italics).

In his imaginative reconstructions of social life, and in his clinical cases, the absence of the mother as a source of protection against infantile helplessness is striking. Early maternal objects are absent as well in Freud's conceptualizations in 'The ego and the id', where he commented that

the effects of the first identifications made in earliest childhood will be general and lasting. This leads us back to the origins of the ego ideal; for behind it there lies hidden an individual's first and most important identification with the father in his own personal pre-history (1923a, p.31).

Though he emended his comments with a footnote, 'perhaps it would be safer to say "with the parents"', his correction only highlights the original omission. One is reminded here of Jones' (1953) earlier comments on secrecy and Freud's character: One must suppose that in Freud's earliest years there had been extremely strong motives for concealing some important phase of his development-perhaps even from himself. I would venture to say it was his deep love for his mother (pp. 408-9). However, the loving aspect of the maternal presence is only one side of the ambivalence. Freud's writings-in spite of Jones' comment, point also in another direction.

Our hypothesis is that he conceived of the maternal object both as seductive and destructive to her children. Freud alluded to both sides of the ambivalent maternal presence in emphasizing the contrasts which dominate the erotic life of women... the contrast between reserve and seduction, and between the most devoted tenderness and a sensuality that is ruthlessly demanding-consuming men as if they were alien beings (1910b, p. 108).

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In 'The future of an illusion', Freud underscored the personification of Nature's destructive side as female:

It is true that nature would not demand any restrictions of instinct from us, she would let us do as we liked; but she has her own particularly effective method of restricting us. She destroys coldly, cruelly, relentlessly, as it seems to us, and possibly through the very things that occasioned our satisfaction. It was precisely because of these dangers with which nature threatens us that we came together and created civilization... For the principal task of civilization, its actual *raison d'etre*, is to defend us against nature (1927, p. 15).

Perhaps, in Freud's personal case it was to defend against a mother who could 'destroy him' (as Julius appeared to have been destroyed). To experience his father as the great protector may have been for him a matter of life and death, particularly after the loss of his nurse who gave him 'the means for living and going on living' (1897, p. 269).

For Freud, we suggest, it was this mysterious maternal presence which he recognized in hearing the essay 'On nature' that originally tempted him to embark on a scientific career:

Nature! We are surrounded by her, embraced by her-impossible to release ourselves from her and impossible to enter more deeply into her. We live in her midst, and yet are strangers to her.

In 'The future of an illusion', Freud returned to his scientific beginnings, to his fascination with secrets and to this maternal image:

Science has many open enemies, and many more secret ones, who cannot forgive *her* for having weakened religious faith and for threatening to overthrow it. *She* is reproached for the *smallness* of the amount *she* has taught us and for the incomparably greater field

*she* has left in obscurity. But, in this, people forget how *young she is, how difficult her beginnings were* and how infinitesimally small is the period of time since the human intellect has been strong enough for the tasks *she* sets ... (1927, p. 55, our italics).

Freud, the scientist, seems to be defending the value of his young science's smallness, and his own in facing the overwhelming task he had set for himself: to extract Nature's secrets. One may also hear the small voice of a brilliant, but fearful toddler, who now as an adult went on to defend science against those who devalued it because of its meager gains.

People complain of the unreliability of science-how she announces as a law today what the next generation recognizes as an error and replaces by a new law whose accepted validity lasts no longer... whilst the real nature of things outside ourselves remains inaccessible (1927, p. 55).

His comments once again recall the maternal figure of Nature with which he had begun his quest, although in his metaphor he has replaced Mother Nature with a youthful Mother Science, which was his intention all along. The 'science' Freud describes is an ambivalently held feminine object. For, in addition to all that he defends about her she is indeed young, female, destructive of the father, depriving, demanding, unreliable, and forever limited in her access to Mother Nature. Freud had struggled long to understand this older Mother Nature, but he would leave it to future generations devoted to youthful Science to plumb Nature's pre-oedipal secrets. Freud concluded his essay still confident of his quest: 'No, our science is no illusion. But an illusion it would be to suppose that what science cannot give us we can get elsewhere' (p. 56).

Through all his changes in theory and technique, Freud pursued 'the secret' which he had found, while others had nonetheless eluded him. In his final published work, 'An outline of psycho-analysis', Freud restated the essence of his lifelong quest to unveil Nature's secrets and made it clear that he considered them still beyond reach:

What... is the true nature of the state which is revealed in the id by the quality of being unconscious and in the ego by that of being preconscious and in what does the difference between them consist? But of that we know nothing. And the profound obscurity of... our ignorance is scarcely illuminated by a few glimmers of insight. Here we have approached the still shrouded secret of the nature of the psychical (1940, p. 163).

#### SUMMARY

The hypothesis of this paper is that Freud's creation of psychoanalysis, as a scientific discipline appears related to his decision as a 17 year old to eavesdrop on the secrets of Nature as a 'Natural Scientist'.

We further hypothesize that his relationship to his mother, fraught with ambivalence and early pregenital trauma, provided the motivational source of his wish to pursue the secrets of nature as a sublimated and displaced manner of dealing with her, and with his love and his fear of her.

We suggest that the development of psychoanalytic technique and theory, as presented in the light of Freud's search for the 'secret', reveals a dialectical process in which he found 'a secret', lost it, and then, rediscover it again in an altered form. We suggest that the body of analytic theory may be presented historically as Freud's successive creation of conceptual models to describe his progressive understanding of the mind's processes to keep hidden, that which must not be revealed.

#### TRANSLATIONS OF SUMMARY

Cet article part de l'hypothese que la creation de la psychanalyse par Freud, comme discipline scientifique, semble etre liee a la decision qu'il prit a 17 ans d'essayer de decouvrir les secrets de la Nature en suivant des principes 'scientifiques naturels'.

Nous suggerons que le developpement de la technique et de la theorie psychanalytique, tel qu'il apparait a la lumiere de la quete Freudienne du 'secret', revele un processus dialectique au cours duquel, il decouvrit un 'secret', en perdit la trace, puis le decouvrit it nouveau SOUS une forme differente.

Nous suggerons que le corps de la theorie analytique peut etre presente historiquement comme la creation successive par Freud de modeles conceptuels servant a decrir sa comprehension progressive des processus employes par l'esprit pour garder secret ce qui ne doit pas etre revele. .

Es ist die Hypothese dieser Arbeit, das Freuds Erschaffen der Psychoanalyse als wissenschaftliche Disziplin mit seiner Entscheidung als siebzehnjähriger Junge in Verbindung zu stehen scheint, die Geheimnisse der Natur als ein 'Naturwissenschaftler' zu belauschen.

Ferner stellen wir die Hypothese auf, daß die Beziehung zu seiner Mutter, voll von Ambivalenz und frühen pregenitalen Traumata, die motivierende Quelle für seinen Wunsch erstellte, den Geheimnissen der Natur nachzuspüren; eine sublimierte und verschobene Art und Weise sich mit seiner Mutter auseinanderzusetzen, mit seiner Liebe für sie, als auch mit seiner Furcht vor ihr.

Wir machen den Vorschlag, das die Entwicklung der psychoanalytischen Technik und Theorie, im Licht von Freuds Suchen nach dem 'Geheimnis', einen dialektischen Prozess aufzeigt, im Verlaufe dessen er ein 'Geheimnis' fand, es wieder verlor, und es schließlich in veränderter Form wiederfand. Wir schlagen vor, daß das Gebilde der analytischen Theorie geschichtlich gesehen als Freuds allmähliche Schaffung von begrifflichen Modellen dargestellt werden kann, die ihm dazu dienten, sein voranschreitendes Verständnis der psychischen Prozesse zu beschreiben, die darauf abzielen, das, was nicht aufgedeckt werden darf, versteckt zu halten.

La hipótesis de este artículo es que la creación por parte de Freud del psicoanálisis como una disciplina científica, aparece relacionada con su decisión a los diecisiete años de penetrar los secretos de la naturaleza en tanto 'Científico Naturalista'.

Luego hipotetizamos que la relación con su madre, plagada de ambivalencias y trauma pregenital temprano proporcione la fuente motivacional para su deseo de investigar los secretos de la naturaleza como manera desplazada y sublimada de relacionarse con ella, con su amor y su miedo hacia ella.

Sugerimos que el desarrollo de la técnica psicoanalítica, tal como se presenta a la luz de la búsqueda que hace Freud del "secreto" revela un proceso dialéctico en el cual el encuentro un secreto, lo perdió y luego lo re-encuentra nuevamente en una forma diferente. Sugerimos que el cuerpo de la teoría analítica debe ser presentado históricamente como la creación sucesiva por parte de Freud de modelos conceptuales para describir su comprensión progresiva de los procesos mentales utilizados para guardar escondido aquello que no debe ser revelado.

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