

The Return of the Repressed: The Second Coming of Sigmund  
Freud, in the Norton Paperback Series

By Peter Jay Stein, MD

The roots of psychotherapy and of psychoanalysis of course reside in the works of Sigmund Freud, the brilliant physician who first systematically formulated the fundamental dynamic structures and processes of the mind. Freud's penetrating insights into the concepts of unconscious conflict, the pleasure principle and primary process thinking, diphasic human sexual development, the Oedipus complex and castration anxiety, aggression, repression and infantile amnesia, the resistance to self-understanding, the meaning of dreams and neurotic symptoms, the formation of conscience, the ego's battle for self-preservation, transference, and the roots of religious beliefs, are available in a series of elegant, inexpensive paperbacks from Norton Publishers. Represented within this comprehensive, authorized, 19 volume 'Standard Edition' of paperbacks, which one can purchase for under \$200.00, are many of Freud's major works, and lecture series, including *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, *On Dreams*, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, *Five Lectures On Psychoanalysis*, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His*

*Childhood, Totem and Taboo, On the History of the Psychoanalytical Movement, Introductory Lectures On Psychoanalysis, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, The Ego and the Id, Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety, The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, New Introductory Lectures On Psychoanalysis, and An Outline of Psychoanalysis. (The Interpretation of Dreams, and Studies On Hysteria, as well as several important contributions, including "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality", "On Narcissism", "The Unconscious", "Instincts and their Vicissitudes", "Repression", and "Mourning and Melancholia", are not included in this Norton series). Each paperback volume, which represents a single work, begins with Peter Gay's synopsis of Freud's contributions, "Sigmund Freud: A Brief Life", sometimes followed by an Editor's Note and/or preface which clarifies the particular translation, or which may refer to Freud's added footnotes in a newer, authorized, reprinted version.*

The availability of these inexpensive editions prompts a review of some of Freud's seminal concepts. (The titles and page numbers cited below are all from the paperback editions.) Reading Freud, one is struck by the clarity of

his prose, the astuteness of his observations, the genius of his intellect, the independence of his thinking, and the strength of his clinical convictions. A research pioneer and profound thinker who many consider to be one of the greatest intellects of all time, Freud in his writings exposes the contradictory, dual nature of the soul of mankind, and forever transforms humanity's vision of itself. Freud excelled in his medical, biological, and neurological knowledge, having great expertise in neurology and neurohistology, renown, for example, for his understanding of the histopathology of the medulla oblongata, and of the cerebral paralyses of children (*An Autobiographical Study*, 1925, p.10, 12).

An emotionally sensitive, attuned, and loving man, Freud recognized the lifelong consequences on psychic development of the unparalleled, uninhibited poignancy, tenderness, and bliss of the mother-infant relationship: "...A mother's love for the infant she suckles and cares for...is in the nature of a completely satisfying love relation...and...it represents one of the forms of attainable human happiness..." (*Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, 1910, p. 76).

Passionately engrossed in unraveling the mind's secrets, Freud initially worked in relative isolation, in a rejecting academic environment which was repulsed by concepts of infantile sexuality and unconscious psychodynamic conflict, while pursuing clues towards identifying and demystifying the unconscious: "...At that period I was completely isolated...the silence which my communications met with, the void which formed itself about me...like Robinson Crusoe, I settled down...on my desert island..." (*On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement*, 1914, pp. 19, 21, 22).

Resounding throughout Freud's works is the theme of the primacy of genital sexuality as a condition for good mental health, happiness, and healthy adult relationships: "...Sexual love has given us our most intense experience...of pleasure and has thus furnished us with a pattern for our search for happiness...(genital) love provided [man] with the prototype of all happiness..." (*Civilization and its Discontents*, 1930, pgs. 33, 56).

Placing the irrational nature of the emotions under the microscope of his powerful, clinical gifts of observation, abstraction, and synthesis, Freud dissects and analyzes the

paths of instinctual development, describing the transformation and fate of inhibited or displaced, objectionable instinctual demands, which can sadly result in tragic, compulsive constrictions of the personality. Fortunately, under healthy circumstances, intermittent direct instinctual gratification is attainable, "...from the (preferably sudden) satisfaction of needs that have been damned up to a high degree...from its nature...an episodic phenomenon..." (*Civilization and its Discontents*, 1930, p. 25). In addition, substitutive satisfactions, via sublimation, can enrich one's life through the pursuit of gratifying social, intellectual, and cultural interests and achievements.

Freud thus brought order out of the chaos of seemingly random psychic phenomena, as he unraveled the riddles of human psychological development, thus illuminating the hidden conflicts of the embattled ego, "...owing service to three masters...menaced by three dangers: from the external world, from the libido of the id, and from the severity of the superego..." (*The Ego and the Id*, 1923, p.58).

Consistently throughout his works, Freud acknowledged the tentative nature of many of his hypotheses, including the

transient nature of his topographical model: "...Such ideas as these are part of a speculative superstructure of psychoanalysis, any portion of which can be abandoned or changed...the moment its inadequacy has been proved..." (*An Autobiographical Study*, 1925, p.35) Freud even anticipates the advent of psychotropic medication.

Though repression is the cornerstone, and transference and resistance the defining features of psychoanalysis (*On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement*, 1914, pp. 14, 15), up to the very end, in his last major work, Freud affirmed that the Oedipus complex was one of his greatest discoveries of psychoanalysis, hidden behind a violent wall of repression. It is "...the greatest trauma of life...the central experience of the years of childhood...and the strongest source of later inadequacy..." (*An Outline Of Psychoanalysis*, 1938, pgs.26, 74).

The Oedipus complex, which adults so often overlook "...by a strange intellectual blindness...", then gives way to the formation of it's 'heir', the superego, which "...represents the ethical standards of mankind..." (*An Autobiographical Study*, 1925, p. 66). Freud had explained, years before, that the adult's 'intellectual blindness'

occurs as the result of the sexual repression of childhood, "...where curiosity remains inhibited and the free activity of intelligence may be limited for the whole of the subject's lifetime..." (*Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, 1910, p. 28). The child's superego, having internalized the prohibitions and ideals of the parental superego, thus becomes the building block of morality, of religion, and of civilization, itself. Because "...every renunciation of instinct...becomes a dynamic source of conscience, and every fresh renunciation increases the latter's severity and intolerance..." (*Civilization and its Discontents*, 1930, p. 90), the superego too often becomes the source of great psychic pain in its malignant condemnation of the ego.

Freud makes no apologies regarding his views on religion's doctrine of "...an enormously exalted father..." that is "...so patently infantile, so foreign to reality...that...it is painful to think that the great majority of mortals will never be able to rise above this view of life..." (*Civilization and its Discontents*, 1930, p. 22). The 'higher side' or 'moral nature' of man is not a transcendent, paternal deity, but the superego, "...the representative of our relation to our parents. When we were

little children we knew these higher natures, we admired them and feared them; and later we took them into ourselves..." (*The Ego and the Id*, 1923, p. 32).

To his 'disciples' and detractors who would deny the central importance that Freud placed on human sexuality and instinctual life, Freud stated, unswervingly, with the utmost confidence and conviction, that: "...these people have picked out a few cultural overtones from the symphony of life and have once more failed to hear the mighty and primordial melody of the instincts..." (*On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement*, 1914, p. 74)

Freud's maturity of thought, his capacity for detached observation alloyed with empathy, and his integrity of character continue to serve as enduring signposts for psychoanalytically oriented psychiatrists, who, through the structure of a psychotherapeutic relationship, search with the patient for psychological understanding. He inspired future generations of psychiatrists as a tenacious and devoted seeker of empirical, psychological truth, and the psychiatric community is fortunate to be the heir of Freud's life's work.



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