

Freud's Nose

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A man must get himself talked about.

(Letter from Freud to Martha Bernays, Jan 16 1884)

The best of what you know, you must not tell the boys.

(Freud's favourite Goethe passage, quoted in Freud 1900, 223 and 587)

Intricate Network

Freud's dream of Irma's Injection is the first which he 'submitted to a detailed interpretation'; and hence stands as a major event in the history of psychoanalysis. It is the 'Specimen Dream' which forms the centrepiece of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud 1900). Naturally, a great deal can be added to the account which Freud made public. The honesty of his analysis is unimpeachable: its limits and intentions frankly indicated: yet, through historical scholarship and historic distance, we are enabled to pursue the dream-thoughts as they run 'into the intricate network of our world of thought' (Freud 1900, 672) -- to re-map the 'tangle' of that 'meshwork', bringing into relief a bluntly *ad hominem* reading (plain as the nose on Freud's face) -- the figure/ground relationships of which, however, suddenly reverse on us, so that Freud fades back and is subsumed into the physiognomy of psychoanalysis itself.

A great deal has of course already been written about the Irma's Injection dream (refs). This paper does not offer any new research material -- indeed, for specialists, some of it will be all too familiar -- but attempts rather to make new and significant connections and associations within the material already available, discovering some key nodal 'points'. A central theme of the *Interpretation* is that the unconscious forms an endless associative network or meshwork, so that a dream represents a particularly condensed area of that network, a structure of 'nodal points' (ref). This idea functions also as a rhetorical device, a justification for the limits that Freud places on his associations to and interpretations of his own dreams: repeatedly he says that some particular association would 'take us too far afield'.

So beyond what boundary or frontier is 'too far afield'? I want to follow up some of the associations to the dream of Irma's Injection which Freud himself leaves out or disguises -- to see where they do lead us. Sometimes they lead to themes which Freud would undoubtedly have found embarrassing to pursue, though not always for personal reasons. We will see that many of the dream's themes relate to psychoanalytic theory itself, and its emergence from an intricate network of thought which Freud preferred to leave largely underground. We'll also look at the striking, and not unrelated, isomorphism between the dream of Irma's Injection, and Freud's much later cancer. I will be referring extensively in what follows to Freud's analysis of the dream in Chapter II of the *Interpretation* (Freud 1900, 180-99).

DREAM OF JULY 23RD-24TH, 1895

A large hall -- numerous guests, whom we were receiving. -- Among them was Irma. I at once took her to one side, as though to answer her letter and to reproach her for not having accepted my 'solution' yet. I said to her: 'If you still get pains, it's really only your fault.' She replies: 'If you only knew what pains I've got now in my throat and stomach and abdomen -- it's choking me.' --I was alarmed and looked at her. She looked pale and puffy. I thought to myself that after all I must be missing some organic trouble. I took her to the window and looked down her throat, and she showed signs of recalcitrance, like women with artificial dentures. I thought to myself that there was really no need for her to do that. -- She then

opened her mouth properly and on the right I found a big white patch; at another place I saw extensive whitish grey scabs upon some remarkable curly structures which were evidently modelled on the turbinal bones of the nose. -- I at once called in Dr M, and he repeated the examination and confirmed it Dr M looked quite different from usual; he was very pale, he walked with a limp and his chin was clean--shaven My friend Otto was now standing beside her as well, and my friend Leopold was percussing her through her bodice and saying: 'She has a dull area low down on the left.' He also indicated that a portion of the skin on her left shoulder was infiltrated. (I noticed this, just as he did, in spite of her dress.) M said: 'There's no doubt it's an infection, but no matter; dysentery will supervene and the toxin will be eliminated. We were directly aware, too, of the origin of the infection. Not long before, when she was feeling unwell, my friend Otto had given her an injection of a preparation of propyl, propyls propionic acid trimethylamin (and I saw before me the formula for this printed in heavy type) Injections of this sort ought not to be given so thoughtlessly And probably the syringe had not been clean.

(Freud 1900,182)

Have A Sniff On Me

The dream's associations to cocaine summarise on a micro-level many of its larger themes. Freud in his interpretation moves from the scabs on Irma's turbinal bones to some symptoms in his own nose which he was treating with cocaine -- and thence to a patient who has developed 'an extensive necrosis of the nasal mucous membrane' by 'following Freud's example' and using cocaine.

During the 1880s cocaine, that 'magical drug' (Jones 1964, 92)¹, was the main focus of Freud's quest for a golden key, a 'source of the Nile' -- a major scientific discovery which would give him fame and fortune and the chance to marry his fiancée Martha Bernays. For some years, he was an enthusiastic publicist for the wonder drug, recommending and prescribing it widely, writing lavish papers about it, pressing it on his friends and on Martha -- and, of course, taking a great deal of it himself, as a treatment for nasal ailments and for 'neurasthenic depression'.

In fact, as Ernest Jones puts it, Freud was 'rapidly becoming a public menace' (Jones 1964, 92). Only under extreme pressure, and by gradual, bitterly-fought stages involving the rewriting and effective falsification of his own earlier positions, did Freud come to accept the orthodox view that cocaine was in many circumstances dangerous: potentially addictive, cumulatively toxic, destructive of the nasal mucous membrane. Hence the associations he makes around issues of professional incompetence.

But cocaine was also, as I have said, a focus for issues of ambition. And here too Freud has reason to reproach himself: for missing what he called, strikingly, 'the fundamental fact' -- the capacity of cocaine to revolutionise eye operations². Someone else took priority -- a theme which is overtly central to many of the dreams in the *Interpretation*, and implicitly of great importance in this dream too (see the associations around Oscar, Leopold, and 'Dr M' -- who is, of course, Breuer). Freud also tried to use cocaine to ease the pain of trigeminal neuralgia through injecting cocaine; he failed, but others were later to succeed. Since the trigeminal nerve innervates both nasal and oral cavities, it represents a further association behind trimethylamin in the Irma dream (see below).

Cocaine obviously associates to both noses and needles, two key elements in the dream. A little deeper down, cocaine associates to sexuality. Injection and needles have a sexual significance (brought out clearly in German, where *spritzen* is both 'to inject' and 'to spurt'): but cocaine is itself an intensely erotic drug. One only has to quote the well-known 1884 letter to Martha:

¹ I have used Ernest Jones in preference to later biographers -- except where he has been specifically shown to be in error -- because his style is so in tune and in dialogue with Freud's own, and his relationship with the material so close.

Woe to you, my princess, when I come. I will kiss you quite red and feed you till you are plump. And if you are forward you shall see who is the stronger, a gentle little girl who doesn't eat enough or a big wild man who has cocaine in his body.

(Quoted in Jones 1964, 95)

One further doubling-back of all this material around cocaine is that -- at any rate by Freud's own account -- it was because of a journey to see Martha that he neglected to investigate the drug's anaesthetic properties. (Clark 1980, 60--2)

Only fairly recently have discussions of Freud and cocaine considered the drug's actual *effects*; and then only from a clinical rather than an experiential viewpoint. It could be argued that this is a peculiarly 'psychoanalytic' drug, with its way of eroticising thought and intensifying connectivity. There is a case to be made out for cocaine's positive role in the intellectual concentration, daring and originality of this phase of Freud's life. But of course cocaine, whether or not a source of psychoanalytic ideas, certainly functioned in some sense as an *alternative* to them: an alternative to self-analysis as a means of dealing with Freud's neurotic symptoms: an alternative which Freud ultimately sacrifices. This theme of alternatives to psychoanalysis will be important in what follows.

Remarkable Connections

And this theme takes us to Wilhelm Fliess: the friend connected with trimethylamin, who 'had drawn scientific attention to some very remarkable connections between the turbinal bones and the female organs of sex' (Freud 1900, 194). Fliess, a nose specialist, had recently performed two operations on Freud's own nose, cauterisations of the turbinal bones. This procedure, a favourite of Fliess's, had the physical objective of relieving Freud's empyema (pus) of the maxillary sinus, from which he suffered on each side in succession; and the psychophysical one, in line with Fliess's 'remarkable' theories, of relieving Freud's neurasthenia (Jones, 266-7).

But beyond these purposes, the operations must be seen as a means by which bodily expression was given to the love relationship between the two men: an opening to desire³. Fliess was explicitly committed -- with, at this time, Freud's enthusiastic support -- to the idea that the nose is effectively a sexual organ. As Jones rather nicely puts it, there was 'an inordinate amount of interest ... taken on both sides in the state of each other's noses' (Jones 1964, 266); Fliess too suffered during this period from nasal ailments (suppurative rhinitis), which he treated -- naturally -- with cocaine; prescribing it also for Freud.

Unknown to medicine at the time, cocaine actually causes and intensifies the sorts of nasal ailments from which Freud and Fliess both suffered, and which they 'treated' with it. E M Thornton (1986, 172) further suggests that Freud's neurotic symptoms themselves were caused by cocaine, which he also used as a treatment for them. This is undoubtedly an oversimplification, but not an irrelevant one: Thornton, a bitter critic of psychoanalysis, herself is using cocaine, again, as an alternative to it.

It seems that Fliess was led towards his choice of profession by his father's death from erysipelas originating in nasal suppuration. Freud's father too is strongly involved in the web of events to which the dream refers: he was anaesthetised with the new drug cocaine for a glaucoma operation attended by all three men associated with the discovery of its use: Freud, Koller and Konigstein.

³ We should also mention here the pivotal role in the dream material of Ernst von Fleischl--Marxow, a dear friend and colleague of Freud. Freud had dealt with the libidinal energy of this relationship by singing Fleischl's praises to Martha, and even, weirdly, suggesting that she should marry Fleischl in place of himself! Fleischl, who was a senior colleague/rival of Freud's, addicted himself to morphine to ease the pain of a bungled amputation; Freud persuaded him to substitute cocaine, and so apparently hastened his death. (See Jones 100--102)

(Jones, 97-8. Several other dream analyses in the *Interpretation* connect Freud's father with issues of ambition and rivalry, and with Fliess, Fleischl and Breuer (refs.)

Do we seem, as Freud puts it, to be rambling too 'far afield'? All these elements have important places in the 'meshwork'. Notice, for example, the alliterations: Koller, KOnigstein, KOkain; FLiess and FLeischl. And although the proliferation of medical terminology may be irritating, it is one of the central languages used by both Freud and his dreams to at once describe and disguise their concerns. In fact, we need now to look at Fliess's medical and biological theories to see how important they are in the construction of the dream -- and of psychoanalysis.

Freud and Fliess supported each other in a tendency to daring speculative syntheses, of which psychoanalysis is now the only respectable survivor. But at the time it by no means stood out as obviously more sensible, more rational, more meaningful, than the others. The notions which assembled themselves into psychoanalysis originated in a stew of other ideas which to most modern eyes are cranky indeed. For example, two years after the Irma's Injection dream, Fliess publicly announced the 'Nasal Reflex Neurosis' (Jones, 251-2; Sulloway, 1980, 139-40), with symptoms including headaches (from which both men suffered badly); vertigo; widely distributed neuralgia; and disturbances of the circulation, respiration, digestion, and sexual functions. All relieved by the application of cocaine to the nose.

As we have said, for Fliess the nose is a sexual organ. This is by no means a foolish idea, even physiologically speaking: the nasal septum is made of erectile tissue like that of the genitals and the nipples, and no other part of the body. The turbinal bones swell during menstruation, which, like pregnancy, can be accompanied by nosebleeds; while it is also generally accepted that nasal doses of cocaine can cause abortion. There is a quite alarmingly large amount of evidence that Fliess's procedures of cauterisation and cocaine treatment are actually effective (see Sulloway 152 for a survey.) However, Fliess's concentration on the sexual nose -- like that of Freud on the sexual unconscious -- is clearly determined by more than the scientific data (as we have seen, Fliess's father died as a result of a nasal problem.) He looks so hard at the inside of the nose that he finds 'Genital Spots' there (Sulloway 1980, 140), nasal sites with a reflex action on the female genitals: spots before the eye which reappear in Irma's dream mouth.

The Nasal Reflex Theory is deeply bound up with Fliess's other major theoretical interests, which were all of great importance at this time to Freud too: bisexuality, periodicity, and menstruation (Sulloway 138-41). The first and second of these remained significant for Freud -- the first as part of his public theory, the second privately; but menstruation seems to drop out of the picture, playing in fact extraordinarily little part in psychoanalytic theory. I believe, though, that menstruation is actually a crucial connective in Freud's life and thought⁴.

It was certainly important during the period of Irma's Injection. In a letter to Fliess of March 1896, Freud writes;

It is only now that I dare to understand my [*sic*] anxiety neurosis: the menstrual period as its physiological model; the anxiety neurosis itself as an intoxication, for which an organic process must furnish the physiological foundation.

(Masson 1985a, 174)

⁴ I was initially upset when, while writing this paper, I discovered Mary Jane Lupton's splendid book *Menstruation and Psychoanalysis* (Lupton 1993). As with E M Thornton's book with regard to cocaine, I had been pre-empted! After a while, though, I was struck by the recurrence of priority issues in this context -- as if the material still extends a magnetic field of influence. It is helpful, too, to have support for my reading of the material; though there is remarkably little overlap between Lupton and myself.

Even more startlingly we find Freud writing to Fliess more than once about his 'bad period days'! (Sulloway 144) This stems from the cycle diary which he kept for his friend, to provide data for Fliess's theory that both men and women are affected by emotional and physiological cycles running, for both sexes, in 23 and 28 day rhythms: in effect, the theory of biorhythms. As Fliess puts it in the preface to one of his major works:

Woman's menstrual bleeding is the expression of a process that appertains to both sexes and the beginning of which is not just connected with puberty...(The two cycles) have a solid inner relation with male and female sexual characteristics. And it is only in accordance with our actual bisexual constitution if both -- only with different stress -- are present in every man and woman.

(Quoted Sulloway, 1980, 140)

Something That Smells Like Fish

Menstruation is related to the nose not only by Fliess's theories -- and by the recognised physiological connection which makes the turbinal bones swell and sometimes bleed during menstruation -- but through the theme of smell. Freud several times in his work emphasises the importance of human beings' learning to stand upright and separate our sense of smell from our genitals and anus, from

the coprophiliac instinctual components which have proved incompatible with our aesthetic standards of culture, probably since, as a result of adopting an erect gait, we raised our organ of smell from the ground.

(Freud 1912, 258)

He first suggests this in a letter to Fliess in 1897 (Masson 1985, 279--80), where he makes clear that it is not only the smell of faeces which erect humanity finds disgusting, but the smell of sexual secretions -- in particular, of menstrual blood. And in fact, in early 1896 he and Fliess are agreeing that *all* strong-smelling bodily substances are disintegrated products of sexual metabolism! (Extraordinarily, trimethylamin, the substance identified in the dream, has since been found to be the causative factor in the 'unpleasant' smell of certain individuals previously understood as prey to neurotic fantasy.)

What the two men seem to be trying to sniff out, in fact, is the alchemical Elixir Vitae. But a double elixir, positive and negative: a 28-day 'anxiety substance', and a 23-day libidinal substance. We have here a well-known theme of alchemy and schizophrenia: that there is a special substance associated with orgasm and capable of giving health and immortality. Maybe it's true, maybe not; one imagines the effect as rather like cocaine. One traditional, worldwide approach is to swallow a mixture of sexual fluids and menstrual blood: the Snow White and the Rose Red, Luna and Sol, whose union is true unity (ref). The source of the Nile?

This is only one form of menstrual magic. But the 'magical substance' (as Freud called cocaine -- Sulloway 26) of menstrual blood is, as I have said, strikingly absent from psychoanalytic theory. The handful of references which do exist in Freud's work, though, are extremely interesting. In *The Sexual Theories of Children* (Freud 1908), he describes the theory that babies are born through 'the mixing of blood'. In *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (Freud 1930), Freud connects human culture with our 'rising above' the smell of menstrual blood. This theory is a later version of one developed in dialogue with Fliess, as appears in Freud's letter of January 1st 1896, where Freud is in search of a theory of migraine:

Olfactory substances -- as you yourself believe, and as we know from flowers -- are breakdown products of the sexual metabolism... During menstruation and other sexual processes the body produces an increased Q[quantity] of these substances and therefore of

these stimuli...Thus the nose would, as it were, receive information about internal olfactory stimuli by means of the corpora cavernosa...one would come to grief from one's own body.

(Masson 1985a, 161)

In Chapter II of *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (Freud 1904, 45--52) Freud examines a slip which associates, among other things, menstruation and the accusation against the Jews of child sacrifice. And many years later, in *The Question of Lay Analysis*, which contains so many intriguing thoughts (Freud 1926), he portrays menstruation, along with menopause, as 'normal models' of neurosis, returning to the theme of his letter to Fliess in March 1896 which I have already quoted above:

It is only now that I dare to understand my anxiety neurosis: the menstrual period as its physiological model; the anxiety neurosis itself as an intoxication, for which an organic process must furnish the physiological foundation.

(Masson 1985a, 174)

Feelings of a Very Obscure Nature

But let us return to Irma's Injection, and how it can be read as a debate on psychoanalytic theory. All the symptoms presented by Irma in the dream fall within the (admittedly wide) ambit of the Nasal Reflex Neurosis. And when Freud looks in Irma's mouth -- psychoanalysis, the talking cure -- he discovers there the bones of her nose, specifically the turbinal bones -- Fliess's alternative, physiology--based theory. On one level, 'Irma's Injection' is concerned with a theoretical debate between the two men over the nature of neurosis. But also, Freud looks in the mouth and discovers the symbolic vagina (turbinal bones/female genitals) -- behind the resistance, the false teeth -- 'in spite of her dress'. And as a further overdetermination, a natural medical diagnosis of the white spots and the scabs would be syphilis⁵ -- which Freud also hypothesised at one point as a cause of neurosis. ('Probably the syringe had not been clean'.) The dream, on a deeper level, is conflating all these theories of neurosis, saying: Look, they all mean the same thing.

The dream, then, juggles and conflates the alternative etiologies of neurosis which Freud was considering at the time. But the issues, of course, are not coolly objective; they carry intense libidinal charge. All of Freud's early theories of neurosis are also attempts at explanation of his own neurotic/neurasthenic condition, and can only be understood within the poignancy of this context. One may consider, for instance, how much *relief* Fliess's physiological account offers Freud: an explanation of his depression and illness which denies the need for a painful self-analysis (begun, in a sense, with this very dream); which puts aside the hatred of his father demonstrated by that analysis, and so central to the dream's themes of guilt and achievement; and which not only allows, but positively encourages Freud to go on using cocaine as a way out of his symptoms and a source of pleasure. Most specifically, Fliess's theory stands at the opposite explanatory pole from the so-called 'seduction theory', with which Freud is currently wrestling (ref), and which if maintained seems likely to blight his career. It is fascinating to see how hints of this theory enter the dream within the same image as the physicalist theory: 'Injections of that sort ought not to be made so thoughtlessly... Probably the syringe had not been clean.'

Freud rejects the temptation of Fliess's belief system; but simultaneously he *resists* in the psychoanalytic sense. He resists Fliess's theory of innate bisexuality; and resists his own attraction

⁵ I am grateful to Dr David Leibel for clarifying this point. It was, of course, made to Freud himself in 1908, by Abraham, and was met with a forceful denial: see Freud--Abraham 1965, 18-20.

to Fliess. In fact, he later uses the former in order to dispose of the latter, alienating Fliess by claiming the bisexuality theory as his own in total amnesia of Fliess's telling him about it -- and of his own objections (Jones 271-2)! Issues of priority appear again here; and psychoanalysis emerges as a symptom, a meeting point of unconscious material and the repressing forces.

Something from the deepest depths of my own neurosis set itself against any advance in the understanding of the neuroses, and you have somehow been involved in it. For my writing paralysis seems to me designed to inhibit our communication. I have no guarantees of this, just feelings of a highly obscure nature.

(Letter to Fliess, July 7 1897: Masson 1985a, 255)

It is fascinating to see how, in finding his way through to psychoanalysis, Freud spends the 1890s falsifying his own actions, knowledge and beliefs in the most ruthless way -- yet all somehow suffused still by that extraordinary, painful, ironic self-awareness so characteristic of Freud's whole achievement.

Ferns and Mushrooms

It is well known how much Freud was influenced by Fliess's theory of innate bisexuality; rather less so, that Fliess preceded Freud in the realisation of infant sexuality. There is a charming and resonant passage in an 1897 letter from Freud to Fliess:

In Aussee I know a wonderful wood full of ferns and mushrooms where *you* must reveal to *me* the secrets of the world of lower animals and the world of children.

(Masson 1985a, 254, my italics)

Ferns and mushrooms: the curled scroll of the turbinal bone, and the phallic focus of the dream--wish, emerging 'at some point where this meshwork is particularly close.. .like a mushroom out of the mycelium'. On their great walks (the structure, Freud tells his friend, of the *Interpretation* itself is a walk -- ref), the two men ranged over a tremendous number of ways to speak the central secret, of which they themselves were at best cloudily aware: the secret of hidden sexual meaning. After all, what is the connective between Fliess's concerns -- menstruation, periodicity, bisexuality? They circle the two central Oedipal riddles which Freud later articulates so clearly: How are men and women different? and Where do babies come from? (see e.g. Freud 1905, 112-5). The so-called 'seduction theory' is often presented as just another confused version of infantile sexuality. But it can be and has been cogently argued (ref) that in rejecting this theory Freud was yet again acting ruthlessly, in defence of his own respectability and in pursuit of his own ambition. We shall see another version of this ruthlessness in what follows next.

The Poor Creature Unrecognisable

A few months before the dream took place, Freud had referred a patient 'Emma' to Fliess for cauterisation of her turbinal bones and sinuses, to treat her 'Nasal Reflex Neurosis'. Clark (1980, 49) even states that 'Emma' is the same person as 'Irma' (whose real name was Anna), as does Max Schur (1972, 79--89); Masson (1985b, 213) clearly establishes that she was Emma Eckstine, a different person altogether, but the dream identification between Anna/Irma and Emma emerges plainly in this mistake, emphasised by Freud's choice of 'Irma', a partial homonym of 'Emma', as an alias for Anna.

As with Irma, Freud gets Fliess to examine Emma to discover whether her stomach pains are of nasal origin (again the theme of organic versus psychic etiology). In Freud's correspondence with

Fliess, the whole, truly bizarre story is revealed (Masson 1985a, 116-24). Fliess operates on Emma's nose; a few days afterwards she haemorrhages massively; a surgeon (whom Schur wrongly identifies with Breuer -- perhaps because he is thinking of 'Dr M') is called in and extracts 'at least half a meter of gauze' from her nasal cavity, left there by Fliess. 'The next moment came a flow of blood' for about half a minute,' enough to make the poor creature ... unrecognisable.' Freud feels sick, flees the room, returns to be told by the 'condescending' Emma -- who was conscious throughout -- that 'this is the strong sex'. 'We had done her an injustice; she was not at all abnormal.' Yet Freud still exonerates Fliess; and a year later is writing to him, irrationally, that 'I shall be able to prove to you that you were right, that her episodes of bleeding were hysterical, were occasioned by desire (*Wunsch*), and probably occurred at the sexually relevant times' (Masson 1985a, 183). Hysteria certainly seems to be present; but whose hysteria?

A grotesque act of intellectual violence towards this woman, in defence of psychoanalysis; of Fliess (both as a surgeon, and by using his menstrual theories); and, surely, of patriarchy -- 'You may be the strong sex, but we make the rules'. A parallel with Freud's intellectual rejection in 1897 of the historicity of (some) child sexual abuse. And Freud cannot relax about it; in January 1897 he is still picking it over, this time relating Emma's bleeding to diabolic possession!

Emma has a scene [phantasy] where the diabolus sticks needles into her fingers and then places a candy on each drop of blood. As far as the blood is concerned, you are completely without blame!

(Masson 1985a, 225)

The story of Emma has a clear role in the 'Irma' dream, where the mass of gauze is represented as a 'white spot', and the 'menstrual' haemorrhage as 'dysentery' which will 'eliminate the toxins', and where the turbinal bones appearing in the mouth symbolise Freud's ambivalence over the etiology of Emma's symptoms. The connection between hysteria and menstruation (acting supposedly as an erotic stimulus) is made by Freud in several early papers. (see e.g. Standard Edition 3, 133)

Completely Without Blame

Freud's other associations to dysentery in the dream support the reading that he is struggling between physiological and psychic modes of explanation. 'Elimination' of the toxic material through dysentery can also be seen as symbolic of the talking cure, and the first high hopes for an almost automatic elimination of symptoms. The situation is complex. On the one hand, an organic ailment in Irma would relieve Freud of responsibility for failing to cure her through analysis; on the other hand, he would stand convicted of false diagnosis and false treatment. The dream reveals a powerful anxiety, a violent accusation oscillating between ignorance and carelessness, as a practitioner or as an investigator. In either case, there is the threat that Freud's career will fail, destroyed by scandal or frustrated by lack of ability.

Such fears have a very real basis. In the mid-1890s, Freud was a bare inch away from losing all semblance of respectability, even in the unusual milieu of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. First hypnosis; then wild prescriptions of a dangerous and addictive drug; now dream interpretation and sex! (Also, soon, parent-child incest.) And to add to his money worries, at the point of the dream Martha is pregnant with their sixth -- and, by Freud, unwanted -- child: who will be named Anna, after the real 'Irma', Anna von Hammerschlag (Appignanesi and Forrester 1992, 125-7).

This all adds significance to some odd details in Freud's account: Martha's 'birthday' at which Irma is to be a 'guest', for example. It clarifies the guilty wish bound up with questions of blood

and menstruation (apparently referred to in a cryptic footnote about Martha's 'abdominal pains' and 'shyness'): perhaps Martha will either miscarry, or turn out not to be pregnant after all.

A Perfect Likeness

A central image thrown up by the material so far: The Diagnosis. (I'm thinking of this phrase as the title of a painting, something like Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson*: a dark group of medical figures gathered around the supine and helpless patient.) Irma's Injection is saturated in medical terminology -- but in a mode best described as satirical. As Freud himself indicates, the dream is making fun of the medical model; for highly overdetermined motives. It is a way of excusing Freud from internal charges of failure and incompetence -- 'medicine itself is ridiculous'. It is also part of a debate with Fliess about the etiology of hysteria: the tip of a metapsychological iceberg.

The dream goes further than Freud waking ever did -- which in itself was much further than institutional psychoanalysis -- in dissociating analysis from medical--objectivist notions of cause and effect, illness and cure. By portraying medicine as meaningless, the dream stresses that symptoms are meaningful -- *as a text*: asserts what it embodies, overdetermination. Thus the dream presents the crucial psychoanalytic redescription of the symptom as a point of interface between the repressed and its repression: as ambiguity: a phenomenon of the symbolic order.

But the Doctors poring and pawing over the passive body of the dream include *Herr Doktor* Freud himself. The body is not only symbolic -- it is also Irma/Emma/Anna, so cruelly mistreated in the cause of theoretical insight. And by a further massive irony, it eventually transpires that Anna's 'hysterical' stomach pains, the root of the whole issue, are either symptom or premonition of a physical illness, gallstones (ref). It is true (in my view) that analysis leads us to a dissolution of the whole spurious barrier between psyche and soma. But Freud is putting the cart before the horse in his interpretation of Anna's pains, which amounts to accusing her (like Emma) of deception; and his own dream in turn accuses him, in the heart of his insight.

A Stream of Blood

Freud's cancer, diagnosed in 1923, led to a great series of operations removing large parts of his palate: led, that is, to *the union of his nasal and oral cavities* -- the exact phenomenon which the dreamer discovers in Irma, and which has such significance for psychoanalysis. In Freud, this condition made speaking and eating impossible without the insertion of a painful and clumsy artificial palate, for which he depended on the help of his youngest daughter Anna -- born in 1895, and the namesake of 'Irma'.

However firmly one may be committed to a naturalistic theory of disease, it is surely impossible to see such an affliction -- in Freud of all people -- as less than meaningful. As this *stigmatum* is inscribed on his body, Freud's life passes for a while into the surreal intensity and condensed significance of a dream --or rather a nightmare. The night in the hospital...choking on his own blood.. unable to speak...the bell out of order...his life saved by a friendly, cretinous dwarf (Jones 548). Then later the Italian holiday with Anna -- on the way to show her Rome, Freud's holy, buried, stratified city of all destinations: breakfast on the train -- and, suddenly, 'a stream of blood spurted from Freud's mouth. ... There was no doubt of its significance in either of their minds' (Jones 552).

The blood signifies death. In the light of what we have discovered, though, there is one significance of this event which one wonders if either of them perceived. It is in appallingly bad taste. Freud is here menstruating over his daughter.

Had the incident been dreamt, it would not be hard to establish the relevance of this interpretation: a classic displacement from pelvis to head -- a set of associations carrying great personal charge for Freud -- and, of course, the glaring absence of menstruation from his theory. The spurt of blood represents the very equations put forward by Fliess, and resisted by Freud until he could filter them through the screen of his own censorship. Nose as genitals; nose specifically as female genitals; bisexuality of all human beings. Freud's cancer eats away the barrier between his femaleness and his speech; and in so doing, eats away speech itself. What it makes possible is this uncontrolled gush in which Freud pays his debt to Fliess, his debt to Martha, and his debt to Anna/Irma/Emma.

In the dream, Irma's body was, on one level, the body of psychoanalysis itself, subjected to the interpretation of the Doctors. In Freud's cancer, his own body becomes the body of psychoanalysis; giving way to the pressure of disavowed desire at a crucial stress point, a point of distortion created by its submission to patriarchy. Freud becomes Irma: who cannot, will not speak: who cannot, will not, accept the truth of her own condition.

If You Only Knew

But this is 'Irma', Freud's straw woman -- equivalent to the Straw Woman described and diagnosed throughout psychoanalysis, the mythical creature who must give up her clitoris for vaginal satisfaction: the woman who doesn't know (or won't tell) what she wants. And this woman, of course -- Freud's own theories assert it -- is man too: is all of us, victims of the suppression of bisexuality. The blood which pours from Freud's mouth is the blood of which he so seldom speaks, the menstrual blood so terrifying to men, blood of our mutual universal castration.

Or is that the true issue? Is there not a more profound jealousy, which emerges in the male puberty rituals and operations which imitate menstruation? Menstruation signifies, not lack, but difference. In the 1880s and 90s, especially in his relationship with Fliess, Freud consciously and unconsciously touches upon a level of human truth more profound even than the truth he speaks -- which is a truth only about the male. There is a betrayal behind 'Irma's Injection': a betrayal of love, which returns as blood. Freud is being punished, of course, for speaking out; but also, for keeping silent.

To Grief From One's Own Body

Freud's nose is a Jewish nose. And why is the Jewish Nose such a potent symbol? Well, it can (mythically speaking) smell out a profit, sniff out the muck and brass; noses also as penises, but primarily associated with bad smells -- the smegma of gentile foreskins? The clever, dangerous Jew, who shoves his penis-nose into other people's dirty business: one can see this imagery surfacing quite clearly in the Freud-Jung split, which divided analysts very largely along racial/religious lines.

Freud as Jew as bad-smeller. But Freud has a *good* nose: he can follow a scent, sniff out a solution -- uncover the shit, as he smells out Irma's false teeth, and his own adulterous and incestuous desires. Especially, he can smell what's fishy. And pays for it, in headaches, in sinus trouble, in chronic catarrh -- and finally in the cancer which eats away all separation, all interruption, between what he smells and what he speaks.

I believe we can identify a 'precipitating trauma' in relation to Freud's cancer. In 1917, he involved himself in yet another priority fight; this time with Georg Groddeck, perhaps the most original and autonomous figure, besides Freud himself, in the analytic movement. The two men had only recently begun a correspondence, Groddeck having discovered Freud's work and realised how

closely it related to his own ideas. At first Freud actively courted Groddeck -- there is no other word: 'I have to claim you, I have to assert that you are a splendid analyst who has understood for ever the essential aspects of the matter' (Groddeck 1977, 36). In a scintillating and enthusiastic letter, there is only one sour note, an oddly familiar one:

...only one disturbing circumstance, the fact that you have not managed to overcome the trivial ambition of claiming originality and priority. ... Can you be sure in this respect? ... Could you have absorbed the main ideas of psychoanalysis in a cryptamnestic way? ... What's the use of struggling for priorities against an older generation?

(1977, 36-7)

After some further argument, Freud puts his foot down in a curt and oddly commanding letter:

I believe you should consider yourself somebody who is close to us in spite of the fact that your position on the question of the distribution between the somatic and the mental is not quite ours, and that you should help us in our work. Our journals are open to you.

(1977, 41)

There is a long pause while Groddeck digests this fiat. In October 1917, he responds by sending Freud his paper, 'Psychic Conditioning and the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Organic Disorders' (1977, 109-31). 'It may interest you a little,' he writes (1977, 41), 'to see these fruits of your suggestions'. What he may be referring to is the strange piece of 'self-analysis' which opens the paper, and which he dates to early June (around the time of his second letter to Freud, which produced Freud's 'ultimatum'). Associations to the name 'Dora' and to *an inflammation of the palate* become 'the instrument by which my conscious recognition of Freud's priority tried to penetrate into my inner unconscious mind'. (Is Groddeck being penetrated by Freud the father?)

How fitting that Groddeck, the person who understood most clearly how illness is an expression of the unconscious, should be the messenger who brings back to Freud's attention the crucial connections between intellectual honesty, the role of the unconscious, and the palate. After all, the substantive difference between the two men was around the nature of the unconscious -- around, so to speak, how much to *trust* it.

So what is the unpalatable truth that unpalates Freud, that eats away at his internal barriers and steals his speech? We can see it operating on several levels, over the range from private to public. The treatment of Emma Eckstine; of 'Irma' as Woman; and of sexually abused children, are all sacrifices made in the interests of psychoanalysis -- truths sacrificed to Truth, means to an end. We can add other sacrifices to the list: Fliess; bisexuality; menstruation. I want to look at one chain of connectives which brings up a little-noticed sacrifice, an editing-out -- of Freud's sister. If Groddeck is the precipitant, this sister may be seen as the original irritant.

A Scene Occurs To Me

It has been pointed out by more than one commentator that Anna Freud, according to her father, was named after Anna von Hammerschlag, the 'real Irma'. (Had she been a boy, she would have been named Wilhelm after Fliess.) It has somehow gone unremarked that Anna has another obvious namesake: Freud's sister Anna, born two and a half years after him. Within the family Anna's name could scarcely have been seen otherwise than as a borrowing from, a reference to, her aunt. So why does Freud elide this and ascribe the name to his patient?

The first Anna Freud's gestation and birth are entwined with events as significant for Freud as the dream of 'Irma's Injection': the well-known dismissal of his 'ugly ... clever' old nurse (who, he

believed, washed him in water stained with menstrual blood), for theft in which Freud later felt himself to be implicated (ref).

If the old woman disappeared from my life so suddenly, it must be possible to demonstrate the impression this made on me. Where is it then? Thereupon a scene occurs to me....My mother was nowhere to be found; I was crying in despair. My brother Philipp (twenty years older than I) unlocked a wardrobe [*Kasten*] for me, and when I did not find my mother inside it either, I cried even more until, slender and beautiful, she came through the door...When I missed my mother, I was afraid she had vanished from me, just as the old woman had a short time before. So I must have heard that the old woman had been locked up and therefore must have believed that my mother had been locked up too -- or rather, had been 'boxed up' [*eingekastelt*].

(Masson 1985a, 271)

Guilt and self blame -- for stealing money (as Freud believed), and for 'clumsiness', 'uncleanliness', being 'unable to do anything' (ref). The two poles of self--recrimination which re--emerge in the Irma dream -- being unable to do anything, and doing the wrong thing. Taking patients' money under false pretences: 'just as the old woman got money from me for her bad treatment, so today I get money for the bad treatment of my patients'. But also, surely, tied up with and concealing guilt over his feelings about his little sister, on whose behalf his mother 'had vanished from me', just like the nurse. Here we touch on Freud's jealous, murderous wishes, suppressed so firmly as to 'vanish' sister Anna, to read her out of the picture entirely, to make her an unperson (so wholly 'disappeared' that she is missing from the index to Appignanesi and Forrester's monumental *Freud's Women* [1992]) -- to steal her name⁶.

In the relationship with his sister, then, appears a primal form of Freud's lifelong concern, which appears so many times in the dream's associations, with priority. The wish to be first.

Magical Substances

There is a point in Freud's analysis of 'Irma's Injection' where revelation and concealment, self--excuse and theoretical insight. meet quite precisely:

I had a feeling that the interpretation of this part of the dream was not carried far enough...If I had pursued my comparison between the three women it would have taken me far afield...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.

(Freud 1900, 186n)

Freud then drops this crucial theme for another three hundred pages. He is making a complex, perhaps only partly conscious, classical allusion: to the Omphalos, the Navel Stone at Delphi, which marked a passage to the underworld -- and marked also the grave of the Python slain by Apollo. (See e.g. Graves 1960, Vol. I, 178-82. According to his Index, 'Delphi' means 'womb'.) The Navel Stone because it marks the centre -- of the nation, the world, the dream: boundary between upper and lower. Also, the navel where we are fed by the umbilicus: the buried serpent is also the cord, a true 'point of contact' where the blood enters and leaves. And again, the navel is the point from which, according to the childhood theories so much emphasised by Freud, we are born: out of the dreamtime into the world. From what we know of Freud's interests, the Delphic

⁶ There is another dream in the *Interpretation* (pp 335-8, 346-7) which links the old nurse and the old lady whom Freud was afraid he had given phlebitis ('probably the needle was not clean'), with an ugly old concierge -- and with a whole series of pollutions. And it seems as though this old lady was the victim of a further, separate error of Freud's: instead of giving her eyedrops and a morphine injection, he put the morphine in her eyes -- a slip which, in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, he explicitly connects with Oedipal desire for his mother (Freud 1901, 231--3).

omphalos is certainly the primary reference here; but there are navel stones, world-centres, all over the world -- including at least one Jewish one:

The Most Holy One created the world like an embryo. As the embryo grows from the navel, so God began to create the world by the navel ... The rock of Jerusalem ... is called the Foundation Stone of the Earth, that is, the navel of the Earth, because it is from there that the whole Earth unfolded

(Eliade 1959: 44)

So the Python is the umbilicus, and the winding passages of the underworld. ('Unplumbable' refers to Lake Alcyone, widely regarded in antiquity as a gate to the underworld through which Dionysus sought his mother Semele, and which, as Shakespeare mentions in *King Lear*, Nero failed to plumb⁷). But also, the symbol of the Goddess, from whom Apollo stole Delphi, already a place of prophecy; renaming it after the Dolphin which moves between water and air (this 'theft' is generally seen as symbolising a physical capture by patriarchal groups). The priestesses were even named Python; and the serpent is a worldwide Goddess emblem, partly for the connections outlined above, and also because it is symbolically reborn as it sheds its skin. The 'three women' now become the Triple Goddess! – indeed a re-tripled trinity: the old woman (nurse/concierge/patient), the young girl (Irma/Emma/Anna), and the mother (Martha/Amalie/nurse as nurturer)⁸. These triplicities refer to and extend the triple patterns found in the dream by Lacan (ref), which he relates to the chemical structure of trimethylamin. This passage, then, associates to patriarchy's capture by violence of the link with the unconscious, the caverns of prophecy and dream symbolised by Delphi: caverns which are also the nasal cavities, the sinuses, the corpora cavernosa -- as this 'spot' is the '*Genitalstelle*' of Fliess, the 'white spot' of Irma's mouth/nose, the bleeding, gauze--stuffed spot of Emma's nasal cavity.

When Freud does return, after three hundred pages, to the theme of a central, unplumbable spot in dreams, he reworks the imagery:

The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought. It is at some point where this meshwork is particularly close that the dream wish grows up, like a mushroom out of its mycelium.

(Freud 1900, 671-2)

What a superb condensation! A mushroom is *made out of* mycelium, is literally a condensed and tight woven 'expression' of the underground tangle of threads, which springs up overnight into the surprised daylight world -- *Phallus Impudicens*, the phallic, sexual-smelling, mysterious mushroom; yet also the umbilicus again, leading from the placental mycelium, the placental dream which feeds and twins us.

And, of course, an echo of the 'ferns and mushrooms' of Aussee. Freud's and Fliess's interest in mushrooms was part of a nineteenth-century craze, following on from the quite recent realisation that fungi are not, in fact, spontaneously generated, perhaps through thunder or some sort of fermentation of the earth, but that they appear lawfully, so to speak, as a minor adjunct, an occasional fruiting body, of the 'real' organism. The mycelium has many of the properties of the unconscious: it is enormous, ancient⁹, hidden, and composed of a network of branching and interwoven threads. A modern mushroom writer (Mabey 1993) echoes Freud's language in the

⁷ The Arden edition of *King Lear* (1963) gives the source as Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, II.37.

⁸ '...What is represented here are the three inevitable relations that a man has to a woman -- the woman who bears him, the woman who is his mate, and the woman who destroys him...the mother herself, the beloved one who is chosen after her pattern, and lastly the Mother Earth who receives him once more...the third of the Fates alone, the silent Goddess of Death, will take him into her arms.' (Three Caskets, SE XII, 301)

Interpretation, apparently spontaneously: ‘what we call toadstools are ... the tip of an immense and intricate network of threads’.

Yet again, Freud’s expression embodies what it describes, the union of form and function -- just as ‘Irma’s Injection’ is a dream fulfilling the wish to understand dreams as wish fulfilment! -- just as psychoanalysis itself is both a description of the unconscious, and the unconscious *speaking for itself* through the theoreticians’ phantasies (Samuels 1989 217; cf. 5).

‘The analysis ends only when the patient realises it could go on for ever’ (Hanns Sachs). Even such a sketchy ‘analysis’ as we have here achieved leads off ‘in every direction into the intricate network’ -- not only of ‘our world of thought’, but also of the other worlds we live in, of politics, of the body, and into past, present and future. The palate between mouth and nose becomes a perfect representation of the *boundary* which is so vital to Freud’s work: between primary and secondary process, between instinct and reason, sexuality and speech, and that quite different yet so often conflated difference, female and male: the boundary that Freud worked so hard simultaneously to dissolve and to shore up.

But one must stop somewhere; only the network goes on for ever. And our end is in our beginning, as it is for Freud, whose failure of nerve, or accession of good scientific sense, drew him back within the pale of patriarchy, and in some ‘wholly obscure’ sense planted the seeds of his death. The cancer is certainly bound up with despair -- the daily, stubborn, grinding despair of Freud’s last decades, when he had withdrawn his love from the world. And this despair in turn has roots in the events of his life, the deaths of those for whom he cared most. Yet it surely stems also from the pessimism of his theory: the position that the most we have to hope for is ‘ordinary human unhappiness’ -- that culture demands the sacrifice of joy.

Culture here equates with patriarchy. Freud ultimately refuses to look beyond, to break any more taboos. ‘Irma’s Injection’ forms a prelude to his development over the next two years of the so-called ‘seduction theory’: the view that the major cause of adult neurosis is child sexual abuse, mainly incestuous. Well, we are currently living through the rediscovery that such abuse is a fact, and on a massive scale: a fact which Freud soon displaced (though never denied): a daily, silent catastrophe at the heart of our society.

Jeffrey Masson attacks Freud with an eloquent passion (Masson 1985b, *passim*) for his ‘betrayal’ of abused children -- possibly including Freud himself. The realisation that this was where his logic was leading him is a powerful factor in Freud’s ‘abandonment’ (as it is often and significantly described)¹⁰ of the abuse theory. The bitter irony is that only by ‘abandoning’ this trail, these victims, did Freud develop the structure of psychoanalysis, which permits insight into the structure of neurosis -- into the ‘sexual abuse’ we all suffer as our initiation into patriarchy.

Yet there is a betrayal; and on many levels. It is as if Freud made a devil’s bargain to gain the social/intellectual space for psychoanalysis. The scotomisation of child sexual abuse is just one strand in the tapestry of fictions Freud erects to screen off the deepest implications of what he himself uncovers.

The drastic ambivalence of his relations with other men is a part of it. Each must move in turn from love object to rival to hate object. It was with Fliess, mutually supporting each other’s nerve, that Freud achieved his most radical positions.

⁹ In North America, single individual fungi have been found whose mycelium pervades more than 15 hectares and is probably 1,500 years old (Mabey 1993).

¹⁰ I puzzled for some time over why this phrase, ‘the abandonment of the seduction theory’, has become almost the standard description of Freud’s change of mind. After all, something like ‘the revision of the incestuous abuse theory’ would be a good deal more cogent. It occurred to me eventually that the phrase buries within itself a figure who has been ‘seduced and then abandoned’ -- a classic heroine of Victorian fiction, and a suitable victim of denial and rewriting.

I am accustoming myself to regarding every sexual act as a process in which four persons are involved.

(1.8.99; Masson 1985a, 364)

During this period, Freud and Fliess are operating right out on the edge, using the paranoiac-critical method (as Salvador Dali called it) to lay bare the bone of human reality: using their own unconscious fantasies, in effect, as a mode of communication from the unconscious about its own nature. We cannot be surprised if many of their realisations are thoroughly crazy. The question is, which ones? The process is shamanic, asserting a radical unity between inner and outer, subjective and intersubjective. Freud's neurosis is, as Ellenberger says (Ellenberger 1970, 444--50) his shamanic wound.

But there is another wound. a counter-wound, a tearing away-and-apart of the androgyne, negating the shamanic-alchemical wedding: rupture with Fliess, denial of the female.

Something from the deepest depths of my own neurosis set itself against any advance in the understanding of the neuroses...I have no guarantees of this, just feelings of a highly obscure nature.

(Masson 1985a, 255)

The blood must be denied. The power of the Men's Hut, the call of the bullroarers, is too strong. Denial also of the body; substituting for it the mental body, the 'body image', the body of words; as desire is to be repudiated, disavowed -- just as Freud's own sexual activity (in the everyday rather than the analytic sense) comes to an end. We have been shown in detail by many writers (refs) how Freud, in these crucial years, treks from one account of neurosis to another, from nasal reflex to magical substances to 'seduction theory', weaving in and out of physical, psychic and 'exogenous' versions: so that psychoanalysis arises from a rich compost of abandoned hypotheses, virtually all of which are represented in 'Irma's Injection'.

But what was abandoned, what was repressed? What returns, as the repressed always will, over and over again, scratching at the door, at the window, in our hair like moths, erupting out of the body, eating away at it -- streaming from the mouth in a rich, uncensored current of blood?

Later in the same work where he describes his associations to an inflammation of the palate, Groddeck speaks with profound insight of

the complexity of the unconscious operations when a particular spot is chosen to be a local disposition and a guardian of human survival.

(Groddeck 1977, 127)

Groddeck's 'spot', Irma's 'spot', Fliess's 'spot', Freud's 'spot' -- in the *Interpretation*, and in his palate: all the same spot, the spot of overdetermination, of the symptom. As well as the 'central spot', Freud speaks of 'the weak spot in the dream's disguise', like the embroidered cross on Siegfried's cloak which marked his vulnerability (Freud 1900, 659). And as Freud also tells us, even a fatal symptom may ultimately be the 'guardian of human survival': sometimes one can only survive by dying.

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