

Chapter 2

From the Pharaohs to Freud: Psychoanalysis and the Magical Egyptian Tradition

I don't wish you to understand what I have created without effort with which I have devised, not entirely without effort.

– After Petrarch

Relationships between psychoanalytic theory and ancient Egyptian myth	
Freudian theory	Ancient Egyptian beliefs
<i>Basic instinctual drives</i>	
Libido	Ra and Osiris
Aggression/death instinct	Seth
<i>Sexuality</i>	
Bisexuality	Mut
Incest/Oedipal complex	Geb/Nut
	Osiris/Isis
	Shu/Tefnut
Psychosexual stages	Mut
Penis envy	
<i>Mental dynamics</i>	
Unconscious	Ba-Ka-Akh
Superego	Thoth
Association	
Fantasies and dreams	The Egyptian book
Wish Fulfillment	Of the dead
Magical words and thoughts	Ren
Doppelganger	Ra/Dung Beetle
	Ka-Ba-Akh

Introduction

If we find ourselves invited into the home of a new friend and left alone for 5 or 10 min, most of us I suspect would use the time to examine the books on the shelves. Such a surreptitious inspection will generally provide us with a sense as to our host's interests, his tastes, and even his obsessions. Were our host Sigmund Freud, we might discover some surprises among his collection. There would be, for instance, a disproportionate number of books about ancient Egyptian history, art, and mythology. In fact, Freud amassed more books on ancient Egypt than any other subject apart from psychology and allied disciplines. The titles in Freud's library offer only one example of his enthusiasm for ancient Egypt (Appendix A in Chap. 4, Fig. 4.2). In a letter to his wife, dated October 8, 1885, he writes: "I just had time for a brief visit to the Egyptian rooms at the Louvre in Paris. I must visit several times. Egyptian reliefs, real sphinx, a dreamlike world ..." (Freud, 1975, p. 173). In another letter, he records his delight at coming across an Egyptian obelisk from Luxor in the Place de Concorde "scribbled over with the most beautiful birds' heads, seated little men and other hieroglyphs at least 3,000 years older than the vulgar crowds" (Freud, 1975, p. 173). His fascination for Egypt never wanes. In 1931, in the last decade of his life, in a letter to Stephen Zweig, dated February 7, he remarks that he has been reading more books about Egyptology than he has books about psychology (Grotjahn, 1961, p. 470).

Freud was also an ardent collector of Egyptian art, which he appreciated for its elegance and grace, its celebration of the body, and its sublime clarity and precision. Moreover, Freud's favorite art form was sculpture, a form that the Egyptians excelled in. And theirs was sculpture built for the ages. The Egyptians were wonderful engineers as well. For Freud, who worried about the survival of psychoanalysis, the pyramids of Giza must have served as an inspiring example (Burke, 2006, p. 223). He avidly followed news of the latest archeological finds in Egypt and even tried to decode hieroglyphics. Freud became smitten with Egypt at an early age. We know that as a boy of seven, he was entranced by The Philippon Bible, which was filled with illustrations of Egyptian gods, monuments, and landscapes (Davies and Fichtner, 2006, p. 21).

It is hardly a secret that Freud tapped the wellspring of Egyptian beliefs and mythology for three of his more problematic works – *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of Childhood*, Freud's first attempt to interpret art and biography using psychoanalysis; *The Moses of Michelangelo*; and *Moses and Monotheism*. But it is my contention that ancient Egyptian mythology and art shaped his theories of the unconscious and sexuality in a much more profound way than he was willing to admit. For example, as Burke notes in her book on Freud's art collection, much of the Egyptian art that Freud collected was destined for the tomb, hardly surprising in light of the ancient Egyptians' obsession with the afterlife. "It was an art of mourning that Freud began to collect while mourning his father and it expanded until his rooms, crowded with magical artifacts, began to resemble the tombs from which they were taken" (Burke, 2006, pp. 222–223). This is not to say that Freud had any

interest in the afterlife – far from it – but there is a substantial body of evidence to indicate that he saw in the Egyptian conception of the afterlife an analog for the unconscious. Just as archeologists were engaged in the excavation of the dark chambers of the pharaohs' tombs, so would he dig down into the dark chambers of the human mind.

Before I go on, I should like to say a few words about Egyptology. There is a significant difference between the practice of scholarship about ancient Egypt prior to Napoleon's conquest of the country and afterward. Referring to the earlier generation of Egyptologists, Jan Assmann observes: "Spencer, Warburton and Reinhold were all working within a paradigm of memory. Not observation. But this paradigm vanishes with the rise of Egyptology and all the carefully collected and interpreted body of knowledge about Egypt fell into almost complete oblivion as soon as the primary sources begin to speak" (Assmann, 1997, pp. 144–145). The Rosetta Stone is surely the best known of the primary sources, discovered by French archeologists under the supervision of Champollion. It should be noted, however, that while Freud drew on the work of both the earlier Egyptologists and the archeologists and scholars who came later, he seldom credited any of them.

Although Freud was notoriously reticent when it came to revealing the sources that he relied upon in developing his theories of psychoanalysis, he was especially so in regard to the influence of Egyptian mythology. I am not arguing that the debt that Freud owes to ancient Egypt has escaped scholars – on the contrary. In spite of Freud's various attempts to camouflage his intellectual antecedents, many scholars have taken note of the currents of ancient mythology that seep into many of his seminal texts. However, a survey of the literature has led me to conclude that biographers and historians of psychoanalysis alike have failed to connect the dots. Most of you are no doubt familiar with the Sherlock Holmes story "Silver Blade" in which the solution to the mystery is the dog in the night that did not bark. It is that deafening silence, that inexplicable absence, which gives the game away.

It is at this point that we might stop and ask: Why resort to mythology at all? What did psychoanalysis hope to gain from plundering ancient myths that it could not find anywhere else? Forrester contends that psychoanalysts looked to philologists for guidance about how to go about this enterprise: "In their struggle to secure the specifically psychoanalytic theory of myth, they (the psychoanalysts) sought both to present themselves as living under the same roof as the philologists, while at the same time providing the later with a key that could stop all the wrangles between partisans of differing mythological systems ..." (Forrester, 1980, p. 180). We mention this because it is relevant to our discussion, even though it is still speculative.

For example, consider what Freud had to say about the history and evolution of cultural institution. Here, Freud discusses the relationship of psychology and linguistics to the deeper mental strata of the mind. "If one adhered to the psychological views gained through the study of dreams, it was only one step forward to proclaim psychoanalysis as the theory of the deeper psychic processes not directly accessible through consciousness, and as a psychology of the deeper mental strata (Tiefenpsychologie) to apply it to almost all the mental sciences." This step consisted

in the transition from the psychic activity of the individual to the psychic functions of human communities and races, that is, from individual to group psychology, and one was forced to it by many surprising analogs. Thus, it was found that the deep strata of unconscious mental activity contrasts are not distinguished one from the other, but are expressed by the same element. But the philologist K. Abel had already made the assertion in 1884 (*Über den Gegensinn der Urworte*) that the oldest languages known to us have treated the contrast in the same manner. Thus, the old Egyptian language had originally only one word for strong and weak, and only later were the sides of the antithesis distinguished by slight modifications. Even in the most modern languages, one can demonstrate distinct remnants of these contrasting meanings; thus, the German *Boden* signifies the upper most as well as the lowest part of the house, and similarly *Altus* means high and deep in Latin. The equalization of contrasts in dreams is thus a common archaic feature of human thinking (Freud, 1924, pp. 520–521).

We need to consider why Freud might have been drawn to mythology and dreams in the first place, since they are notoriously subject to conflicting interpretations. A possible explanation might be found by comparing Freud's approach to that of the French structural anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. They both have a good deal in common. Levi-Strauss, like James Frazer, is sufficiently critical of his source material regarding the relationship between magic, myth, and totemism. His treatment of the structure of myth is very clever, as was Freud's. Freud, too, had read Frazer. But whether they engaged in much more than clever speculation remains a matter of opinion. Myth is a very murky and not very well-defined category. Some scholars use it as an example of erroneous history: something about the past which we know to be inaccurate or something that did not happen at all. The religious use of the word is much different and takes on the cloak of mystery: something unobservable but nonetheless credible, like a sacred tale. The religious view of myth is exemplified in creation myths and the origins of culture. Freud's treatment of the origins of humanity is somewhat similar to that of Levi-Strauss and Freud's in many respects – for instance, his theory that the Oedipal myth and the unconscious played as much of a role in the formation of society as it did in the individual. Like Freud, Levi-Strauss seeks to discover the way in which humans form thought. He assumed that our brain/mind interaction system is universal and that this could be established by examining the thought processes of primitive or indigenous peoples in different cultures at different times. Levi-Strauss asks us to accept a universal hardwired apprehension of the world, primarily nonrational in nature, which is shared by all humanity and manifests itself in primitive mythology. His analysis of myth is similar to Freud's interpretation of dreams and it also suffers from the same shortcomings. The Freudian argument is similar to the Straussian argument about symbolic associations and different levels of consciousness in the sense that if they were entirely false, it would not be possible to prove the opposite. In other words, Levi-Strauss' theories may just be so many elegantly phrased arguments with no possibility of empirical validation. Levi-Strauss is influenced by Freud in the sense that Freud also maintained that all human beings have an unconscious and a conscious and that the unconscious Id is the naturally occurring universal component of the mind.

By contrast, the conscious Ego is both culturally specific and universal. Levi-Strauss' approach primarily relies on language structures. His linguistic model employs an older variety of linguistic strategies which he uses with great skill. It is strongly influenced by Jakobson and the Prague School of Linguistics. He believes that at a particular level of language analysis, humans evolved to communicate and form social relations. At another level of analysis, however, humans engaged in a rather mysterious process of cognition in the sense in which it is first necessary to categorize the environment and then represent the categories by symbols and the elements of language before it is possible to engage in thinking about them. It involves a highly complex interaction between an individual's thought processes and the environment which he is thinking about. In the final analysis, the reductionist methods of both Freud and Levi-Strauss seem to defeat their own purpose. Reduced to a method which was lacking in all analytical value, psychoanalytic theory was forced into a predetermined model predicated on whatever evidence was available to support it, no matter how contradictory the facts might be. It is in this respect in particular that Levi-Strauss' method shares a great deal with Freud.

We also need to consider another influential body of thought – in some respect, one that is closer to home (that is to say, Freud's home) – and one similarly unacknowledged by the father of psychoanalysis: Jewish mystical tradition, which has its roots in ancient Hebrew beliefs. Although the Hebrews marched to a distinctly different drummer than the ancient Egyptians – the ardor for the afterlife displayed by the latter is altogether absent in the former – there is sufficient evidence to suggest a vigorous exchange of ideas between the two peoples. This cross-pollination is most palpably manifest in one historical personage close to Freud's heart – namely, Moses. But before we begin to burrow about in the bulrushes, let us begin ... well, at the beginning: the creation of the universe as envisioned by the ancient Egyptians.

Ancient Egyptian Creation Myths

"The Egyptians regarded the history of the gods as the only important history and that of human events as inconsequential," Hankoff writes in his chapter in *Body and Mind: Past, Present and Future*. He continues: "History for the Egyptians was a fixed matter...The universe for the Egyptians was created in complete, permanent form" (Hankoff, 1980, p. 21).

Ancient Egyptian religion is not easily understood by the contemporary mind; it lasted 5,000 years during which it produced no less than three cosmologies. Moreover, the religion meant one thing to the priesthood and another to the believers: what for the masses was polytheism was closer to a monotheistic system for the initiates. The gods and goddesses were actually personified ideas – truth, justice, or humidity, for example – and so represented different attributes of a god. Ra, for example, is the Sun, while Man-ra signifies his intellectual attribute. So you can see how easily one god could become two, three, or four, creating the illusion that there

was a multiplicity of deities when it was only one seen from different angles. This issue is quite similar to the controversy regarding dissociative identity disorders (Rieber, 2006).

The three Egyptian cosmologies are all variations on a single theme which is characterized by the emergence of order out of disorder. The primordial state of chaos was known as Nun; an undifferentiated mass but containing within it the seeds of all life. Chaos, as is evident from the world around us, did not disappear upon the creation of the universe but was essentially sidelined, becoming a refuge for dark forces waiting in ambush at the edges of the cosmos, always ready to interfere in the world if circumstances allowed them to. This was the dwelling place for stillborn infants or distressed souls who had not received proper funerary rites, all floating about – in Hankoff’s phrase – “like drowned bodies” (Hankoff, 1980, pp. 42–44).

It was from this chaos that the sun emerged in the person of the self-created god Ra. Ra took the form of an obelisk called the benben. This obelisk was considered the petrification of the sun’s rays. Ra was also manifested in the form of Khepri (a name which signifies “transformation”) and was represented by an image of the beetle rolling its dung ball along the road. As the sun, Ra creates life by dispelling the dark. Ra begets a son Shu and a daughter Tefnut out of his own seed. Shu is the god of dryness and Tefnut, the goddess of humidity. The marriage of the two siblings is only the first of a succession of incestuous unions in which Egyptian mythology abounds. Their example was followed by the royal families. We will see how the incestuous impulses of these ancient deities and their putative human descendants bore fruit many millennia later in Vienna. I would even go so far as to say that the mythology of ancient Egypt might well have provided Freud with the inspiration, and possibly the impetus, to put forward a model of infantile sexuality based on the child’s progression through oral, anal, and phallic stages.

But let us continue. From the union of Dry (Shu) and Humid (Tefnut) arose a second divine couple: the sky goddess Nut and the earth god Geb. Shu and his successor Geb (the earth god) play the same roles as Kronos and Zeus do in Greek mythology, which makes Geb, like Zeus, the father of humanity. The Sky and the Earth produce a pair more familiar to us – Isis and Osiris – and their siblings Seth and Nephthys. Osiris was the Sun and Isis was the Moon. Osiris was also the masculine, propagating principle in nature sometimes depicted with several phalli.¹ Isis was the feminine principle whose symbol was the Lotus flower (Budge, 1904, p. 204). Freud seems to have been attracted to her. One of the prized artifacts in his collection was a statue of the goddess suckling the infant Horus, which occupied an honored place on his desk. Burke describes her as a “goddess as Madonna, svelte as a girl,” a study “in harmony and balance” who “provides an image of femininity that

¹ Because Osiris is almost always viewed as a chthonic deity, it is hard to see him as the sun. Ramessid images that depict the fusion of Ra and Osiris do so as a kind of fusion of the body (Osiris) and soul (Ra) of god with the idea being more one of the totality of opposites as in earth + heaven. My thanks to Professor Richard Wilkinson of the University of Arizona for informing me of the received view of this matter.

attracted Freud...” Isis was regarded as “the highest type of faithful wife and mother and it was in this capacity the Egyptians honored and worshipped her most.” And as a symbol of the annual Nile food, she also represented fertility –mother goddess, emblematic of fecundity and renewal (Budge, 1904, pp. 281–284).

Osiris, too, was associated with the life-giving Nile. By contrast, his brother Seth was the god of droughts and deserts. If Osiris embodies the organizational force, his brother Seth represents its violent opposition (Grimal, 1994, pp. 42–44). Simply put, Osiris signifies the positive principle, his brother Seth the negative. The two were perpetually locked in an intractable struggle. In a fratricide reminiscent of the Cain and Abel story, Seth slays Osiris, causing Isis and his sister to scramble for pieces of his dismembered body in hope of reconstituting him. In his resurrection, which prefigures the death and resurrection of Jesus, Egyptians saw the promise of their own eternal life after death. Osiris was particularly beloved because he combined the roles of man, god, and savior. Yet at the same time, Osiris was the lord of the underworld responsible for guiding the dead in their journeys in the afterlife.

In those visits to the Egyptian rooms at the Louvre or later at the British Museum, Freud must have been struck by the recurring depictions of bisexuality and incestuous entanglements in Egyptian mythology. After all, Freud believed that his patients harbored many of the same desires and fantasies that the old gods did; the only difference being that the gods did what the frustrated Viennese secretly wished to but did not dare admit even to themselves.

In this brief survey of ancient Egyptian mythology, we can see the emergence of the themes that would be elaborated upon and explored throughout Freud’s career: the conflict between the libido and the death wish; the Oedipal myth and the journey into the underworld which in psychoanalysis are analogous to the unconsciousness. “The male deities appear first as sons beside the great mothers,” Freud wrote, but once the matriarchy was overthrown, “a patriarchal order” was established (Freud, 1939, p. 92). Historically, there is evidence that a matriarchal culture did relinquish its power to a patriarchal culture in some but by no means all cultures. Nonetheless, this scenario suited Freud’s purposes. The conflict between the brothers – Osiris and Seth – is replaced by a conflict between the two brothers on the one hand and the now dominant father on the other. The brothers rebel against the father because of the monopoly he enjoys over the mother and by extension all women. Yet after slaying the father, the brothers are stricken – consciously or unconsciously – by guilt over what they have done. “*Totem and Taboo* was concerned with nothing less than the origins of human society,” as Paul Roazen notes. Freud “had found that the Oedipus complex threw a light of undreamt-of importance on the history of the human race and the question of religion and morality” (Roazen, 1974, p. 250). It was guilt and fear Freud believed that lay at the root of the Oedipus myth and underlay all social systems. In tribal societies, Freud wrote, it was due to the threat of castration that the older males controlled incestuous longings among younger men, because only the severest prohibitions could “deter this persistent infantile tendency from realization” (Freud, 1926, p. 252). Freud argued that as children, girls and boys both experienced the Oedipus complex but its manifestation was different for girls as they grew older. As soon as they notice the penis of brother or playmate,

Freud asserts, they “at once realize it as the superior counterpart of their own small and inconspicuous organ, and from that time forward fall a victim to envy for the penis” (Freud, 1910, p. 134). Because of penis envy – the most controversial aspect of a controversial paper – girls extend to their mother and to all females a sense of disappointment, of lack, even of shame.

Where did Freud come up with the idea of childhood sexuality in general and penis envy, in particular? If we were to rely solely on Freud’s own assertions, we would have to believe that these concepts originated with him. Certainly he was vehement in his denunciations of rival claimants, as vividly illustrated in his attacks against his contemporary, Berlin physician Albert Moll. Moll came up with a theory of childhood libido in 1898 and *The Sexual Life of the Child* did not appear until 1905. Psychoanalysts of the Vienna Society accused Moll of “an intrusion into the personal domain” of scientific competition. Freud derided him as “inferior” and “dishonest” and called him a “brute with the intellectual and moral constitution of a pettyfogging lawyer” (Roazen, 1974, pp. 193–195). Moll, it was alleged by Freud’s partisans, “must have read Freud selectively” because he missed Freud’s central points. In addition, Moll practiced hypnosis, a practice which Freud had abandoned. Also, Freud did not bother to credit Wilhelm Prior who not only proposed that children underwent distinct stages of development but also maintained that it was by studying abnormal processes that it was possible to understand the normal processes, another idea that Freud claimed as his innovation. We know that Freud had read Prior and even owned his books, something that Anna Freud confirmed to me in a letter. But she also emphasized that Prior’s work had had no influence on her father (Rieber, 1975, pp. 7–11).²

I believe, though, that in trying to pin down the origins of his theories of childhood sexuality, a case can also be made that there was an Egyptian connection as well. In Freud’s psychological study of Leonardo – what has been referred to as Leonardo’s childhood “Egyptian phantasy,” Freud focuses on a childhood memory of Leonardo’s. According to this peculiar “phantasy,” Leonardo was lying in his cradle when a vulture swooped down and forced open the child’s mouth with its tail, striking his lips several times. It is an unusual and jarring memory to be sure and Freud makes the most of it. Actually, he makes too much of it. The vulture stands for the mother, Freud asserted. That was the same association that the ancient Egyptians made. How did Freud make such an odd connection? Here is instructive to examine the hieroglyph Mut which consists of a vulture-headed woman or a woman wearing a vulture for a crown. Mut translates as “mother,” and not just any mother but *the* great mother goddess of Egypt, a kind of cosmic matron, who even outranked Isis. But – and here is where the concept of penis envy comes in – Mut was

² Signed letter from Anna Freud to Robert W. Rieber, May 8, 1975, printed stationery (in R.W. Rieber’s papers and letters). Thanking me for my letter on May 1 to speak at the New York Academy of Sciences Conference and gives an apology for not being able to attend. She continues, “To answer your further question: Yes, my father had the book by Dr. Preyer in his library and he gave it to me to read when I was a young teacher. But, I do not think that his own work was influenced by Dr. Preyer’s writings. Yours sincerely, Anna Freud.”

also frequently portrayed as an androgyne – that is, she had a penis. Mut reappears after a fashion in Freud's theory of infantile sexuality in which the child ascribes a penis to the mother. There is further elaboration on this symbolic equation in that the vulture's tail represents the penis. In "Leonardo," Freud associated Mut with Leonardo's mother Catalina, who as the sole parent of an illegitimate son in his early years was also a mother–father figure. According to Freud, it followed that Leonardo's homosexuality was a result of his erotic, dependent relationship with his mother (Freud, 1910, p. 61). The premise is problematic to say the least. What is at issue here, though, is not the validity of Freud's theories but their origin, and in this case there can be no doubt: Freud was so dazzled by ancient Egypt that he was willing to plunder their tombs – metaphorically speaking – to find what he needed to prop up his theories.

A similar process was at work in his efforts to develop a theory of the psyche. Egyptian society was a daily reenactment of creation. The Egyptians did not make a distinction between mythology and history; the gods had not abandoned them and left them to their own devices, but were an ever-present reality. Their system of organization was designed to emulate that of the universe as a whole. The struggle between Osiris and Seth loomed large in the minds of people contemplating their passage from this world to the next. We find prayers against Seth on talismans, in *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, and in inscriptions on the pyramids' walls. If the deceased had not led a righteous life, or if proper funerary rites had not been conducted, the afterlife could turn out to be a nightmarish experience; starvation and thirst could be one's lot (Carus, 1969, pp. 17–20). As we noted, it was to Osiris, who was both a god and a savior of humanity, that the Egyptians looked to guide them through this difficult passage and watch over them in the afterlife. But before achieving eternal life, they would first have to stand trial. This trial was known as the Weighing of the Heart. It is equivalent to Judgment Day in the Christian tradition.

Nevertheless, it is the trial itself that concerns us here. Among other relics in Freud's possession was a heart scarab on which there was an inscription from *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, which in Wilkinson's translation reads: "O my heart...Do not stand against me" (Wilkinson, 1994, pp. 113). Budge's translation is even more intriguing: "My heart whereby I came into being! My heart, my mother... May it not stand up to oppose me at judgment" (Budge, 1923, p. 150). In this variation, a direct connection is drawn between the heart and the mother; indeed they are synonymous. Why would the heart condemn its owner? To Freud, the answer would be obvious. The heart is rendering judgment on behalf of the superego. The superego retains the character of the father, Freud wrote in *Ego and Id*, and dominates the ego in the form of either conscious or unconscious guilt. The superego represents both the higher nature of man and also the moral censor – "the germ from which all religions have evolved" (Freud, 1926, pp. 34–37). The superego decrees Thou shalt. Not only can it act independently of the ego, Freud asserted, but its "destructive component" could drive "the ego into death."

The concept of the afterlife is inextricably bound up with the theme of duality of the soul and the self that recurs throughout Egyptian mythology and that is seen again and again in Freud's writings. That duality was also manifest in Freud's art

collection. On the desk in his office, for instance, he prominently displayed a statue of Janus, “who,” he wrote, “looks at me with his two faces in a very superior manner.” Janus, the Roman god of doorways, looked two ways at once to guard both the interior and exterior of the home; as the god who gave us January, he was also the deity of beginnings, the promoter of all initiatives, a great “father,” and solar god, who was placed at the head of all human enterprises (Burke, 2006, p. 162). Freud also owned an Etruscan bronze vase decorated with a Maenad on one side and a satyr on the other. The chaste Maenad faced him, while the grinning priapic satyr faced away, yet because of the artfulness of the sculptor, each face was dependent on the other – the woman’s ecstatic, spiritual gaze and the libidinous male’s alert, mischievous look.

In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, published in 1905, Freud wrote that “in human beings pure masculinity or femininity is not to be found in either a psychological or a biological sense.” “Every individual on the contrary displays a mixture of the character-traits belonging to his own and to the opposite sex” (Freud, 1901–1905). We have already noted the inherent duality in Mut, who is both human and bird as well as an androgynous figure – a woman with a penis.

For the ancient Egyptians, the very conception of the self was inseparable from the soul and this link remained in the afterlife; while still alive, the individual’s self is known as Ba, which is also translated as soul. The soul is roughly identified with breath. Its symbol was a falcon or a stork-like bird with a human head – it is also the hieroglyph for wind (Breasted, 1999, pp. 55–56).

“Personifications may assist the culture and the individual in defining or delineating emotions and motivations. It is, however, a concrete and externalizing approach to psychological truth” (Hankoff, 1980, p. 22). Hankoff compares Ba to the much later Greek winged representation of Psyche, although it would be a mistake to draw an analogy between the two (Hankoff, 1980, p. 23). “The Ba of the living,” he writes, is “a kind of reflective ego or voice for mental or spiritual matters.” Ba is paired with Ka. In contrast to Ba, Ka was a vital spirit or force which guided and protected the individual in the afterlife and – here is the crucial point – functioned as the individual’s invisible duplicate (Hankoff, 1980, p. 14). Ba and Ka are inseparable; they are two sides of the same coin.

But upon sloughing off the mortal coils, the individual’s essence, if I can use that word, did not dissolve into thin air. For instance, a statue of the deceased was treated as if it were the individual himself. The statue was the deceased’s “new dwelling place” (Hankoff, 1980, p. 23). Even inscriptions honoring the deceased were imbued with the spirit of the deceased. The emanations or noncorporeal aspects of the deceased assumed at least three forms: the Ka, the Ba, and a third manifestation called the Akh. Akh means glorious or shining and, like Ba, was depicted as a bird – the ibis. The Akh is regarded by historians as another ghostly aspect of the deceased, but one more transcendent and impersonal than its two companions – “a general celestial influence” (Hankoff, 1980, p. 25). All three of these aspects were present in some form during life but achieved their greatest importance and definition when death made the “corporeal part of man less imposing.” The tendency to personify different aspects of a god applies as well to different aspects of the self or soul.

All three emanations – Ba, Ka, and Akh – were probably viewed by Egyptians both as distinct entities and as “overlapping phenomena of the deceased and as indissoluble elements of man as a psychophysical unity” (Hankoff, 1980, p. 24). If Ka is the individual’s guarding genius, charged with ensuring that he will enjoy a comfortable afterlife, Ba is the birdlike ghostly presence that simultaneously inhabits both the world of the living and the world in which the individual will spend eternity. As Breasted noted: “The actual personality of the individual in life consisted, according to the Egyptian notion, in the visible body and the invisible intelligence, the rest of being considered the ‘heart’ or the ‘belly’ which indeed furnished the chief designation of the intelligence” (Breasted, 1999, p. 220). It is no surprise then that ancient Egyptians would try to capture this duality in symbols. We need only think of the dung beetle, depicted on so many scarabs, which is a symbol of fertility and resurrection because it lays its eggs in its own dung. In *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, the glyph for duality (Ka) is depicted as a breast with two outstretched arms forming an incomplete square (Budge, 1899, p. 57). In fact, the very survival of the personality, irrespective of the physical death of the individual, depends upon the preservation of the “double” or his “other self,” which is said to reside in the mummies or in his statues or inscriptions in his honor.

It is difficult to imagine that the dual nature of man – a duality that transcended the passage from life to life after death – could not have failed to make an impression on Freud. An individual could not be understood, even by himself, without taking the various, and sometimes warring, aspects of his personality – and of his nature – into account. Even though psychoanalysis abandoned all notions of a soul or a concern with the afterlife, we can still see how it appropriated such features of this ancient belief system to suit its purposes.

Until now I have been talking about the debt, sometimes acknowledged, more often not, that Freud owes to ancient Egyptian beliefs for many of his seminal theories. At this point, I would like to turn to the way in which he possibly appropriated ideas from the Egyptians for his therapeutic techniques.

Ancient Egyptian Symbols, Magic, and Free Association

The relationship of form, symbol, and magical function may be seen in just about any class of objects in Egyptian culture as Wilkinson (1994, p. 113) points out in his book *Symbols and Magic in Ancient Egypt*. The basic principle is that the symbolism is both primary and secondary – primary in terms that objects have certain direct associations and secondary in that forms, shapes, and symbols can also make an oblique reference to other symbols. A scarab is directly connected to a dung beetle, which in turn is associated with death and resurrection. Taking another example, an open seashell can also signify the female genitalia because of the similarity in shape. By the same token, the ankh, the famous life symbol of ancient Egypt, was depicted in such a way that its top part also formed a pubic triangle. Similarly Osiris, the god of resurrection, was invariably shown with his phallus exposed.

The concept of primary/secondary associations that we find in ancient Egypt is central to Freud's interpretation of dreams. For ancient Egyptians just as for contemporary analysts, objects could even symbolize two different, contradictory things (Wilkinson, 1994, p. 113). In *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, we find the image of two gods facing opposite directions with a stork in the middle. Below the image, an inscription appears which anticipates Freud's thinking by some 5,000 years. "I am Yesterday," it reads, "I know today" (Budge, 1923, p. 94). Only by understanding the past of an individual's life is it possible to understand his present. Those ancient Egyptians knew a thing or two.

For ancient Egyptians, though, these symbols with their multiple allusions and associations were also invested with powers. Whether these symbolic images adorned the wall of a pyramid or appeared on an amulet, they had the capacity to realize wishes and prayers (Budge, 1923, p. 94). Rabbit's legs and four-leaf-clovers may represent a comedown from elegantly crafted amulets, but the impulse that leads people to think of these objects even as a whimsical instrument of wish fulfillment stems from the same basic impulse. Freud's theory of wish fulfillment acknowledges that these longings are deep rooted and potentially a key to the unconscious.

The power that inhered in statues and in amulets also inhered in names. To the ancient Egyptians, an individual's name – *ren* – holds considerable magical significance "as an extension of its bearer, a source of his power, and a possible route to the inner being." So a name engraved on a statue was viewed as "a very real part of the dead person and a participant in all of his needs and procedures" (Hankoff, 1980, p. 14). Names, he writes, are "material parts of things, or even as the things themselves" (Hankoff, 1980, p. 256). The names of the devil, for example, alternately called the Great Dragon, Old Serpent, and Prince of Devils, possessed a fearsome power in this life as well as in the life beyond the grave. Because some names possessed magical power, they could only be used under prescribed circumstances; deities had public names and secret names. The same god could be identified by several names, some of which were reserved for special rites. Humans, too, had secret names. Names were assigned to different manifestations, as the example cited earlier of Ka, Ba, and Akh clearly illustrates. Certainly Freud was highly aware of the power of names, which may explain the omission of his own name from his famous essay on Moses of Michelangelo in *Imago* (Freud, 1914, pp. 15–36). Credit is not always given where credit is due even in this case by Freud to himself.

"In magic," Hankoff writes, "diffuseness means that the power is not focused compactly, but exists homogeneously throughout the whole ego halo, each part representing the whole" (Hankoff, 1980, p. 256). Put another way, the same magic found in a name or an amulet can attach itself to other material objects associated with the individual such as hair and pieces of clothing. (We find the same belief in voodoo.) "Symbols," notes Forrester, "are privileged since they refer us back to a time when the name and the thing matched each other perfectly" (Forrester, 1980, p. 129).

To the primitive mind, Paul Ricoeur observes, the symbol held an immediacy that is alien to modern man. In later eras, another relationship between symbols and consciousness took hold – what Ricoeur calls "truth at a distance," which is based

on a comparison of symbols. We cannot apprehend a symbol without first processing it through our intellect in an effort to explain it. Yet a third relationship exists, which Ricoeur describes as “a return to the immediacy of belief and therefore the powerful immediacy of religious symbols.” Ricoeur argues that psychoanalysis “displaces immediacy through its distinction between surface ego” and what he calls “depth factors that lie beneath the surface sense of reality.” He continues: “Psychoanalysis also focuses its work on language rather than on perception, recognizing that language always exceeds any immediacy of knowing” (Ricoeur, 1967, pp. 354). But for the meaning of the symbol to become known, the ego must be bypassed in order to uncover the patient’s true motivation – and that leads through narcissism, the desire of the ego for immortality. That insight has led Ricoeur to call psychoanalysis a “semantics of desire”; only by taking desire into account can psychoanalysis reach a correct interpretation of the symbol (Ricoeur, 1974, pp. 186). The question boils down to this: is religious belief “a vestigial traumatic memory or is it a symbol capable of providing the first stratum of meaning to an imaginative presentation of origins, more and more detached from its function of neurotic and infantile repetition and more suitable for the investigation of human destiny?” Can it “rise above its own archaism” (Donald, 1999, p. 217)?

These are questions, Ricoeur writes, that only Freud’s work makes possible (Donald, 1999, pp. 213–214). Freud’s method, he believes, is based on a hermeneutics that juxtaposes “an infantile, idolatrous consolation and a higher consolation, the consolation of the spirit.” If Ricoeur is correct, Freud was using an ancient religion as a convenient means of investigating neuroses and repressed desires, and in the process laying the cornerstone for a system that had much higher ambitions: an investigation of the human spirit.

But Freud could not escape the trap that he was laying for his patients if my supposition is correct. In the innovations he brought to the nascent practice of psychoanalysis and in the experiments he conducted in his attempt to treat and cure his patients, Freud himself was following in the path that had already been carved out by his ancient Egyptian antecedents. To practice as a physician in third millennium BC, Egypt was to combine rational and supernatural elements. Ancient Egyptian physicians made no distinction between the mental and physical functions of their patients – they were both part of a psychophysical unity (Hankoff, 1980, p. 7). In psychoanalysis, it is the Ego that has the ability to control the drives, but the patient cannot know what those drives are without the lid being pried open to expose the Id, revealing how the patient is being misled by those unconscious drives. Paradoxically, the theory of psychoanalysis is deterministic and reductionistic, but the therapy based on it is not. The history of psychoanalysis has been characterized by a continuing attempt to make the theory fit the therapy. The Egyptians did not have this problem.

In 1922, Levi-Bruhl³ proposed the term *prélittéraire* for thinking that was neither logical nor antilogical. He described a “law of participation,” which was based on the idea that the primitive mind perceived a connection between all the representations

³ Levi-Bruhl semiretracted his views in later life, and other anthropologists in England such as Evans-Pritchard and Rivers had little time for the primitive man/primitive mind connection.

in his mind. This view echoes Ricoeur's. Primitive man was believed to apprehend symbols with an immediacy that is no longer accessible to contemporary man. Levi-Bruhl's "law" would explain how Egyptians could look upon a statue not just as a representation but as a substitution – an embodiment really – of a dead pharaoh. Heinz Werner took this a step further and referred to a lack of differentiation in perceptions and meanings. Werner (1948, p. 69) maintains that a nonliterate's perception is physiognomic in quality. Moreover, Werner makes an interesting distinction between physiognomic perception and the anthropomorphic concepts of nature in nonliterate man. How nonliterate man would conceptualize his worldview would depend on "whether the original physiognomic experience of nature develops into a purely magical or an animistic daemonic, or a religious-theistic view of the world" (Werner, 1948, p. 80). The world of the nonliterate, he added, is "near at hand" (Werner, 1948, p. 404) – that is to say, it is more immediate and more direct. "There is less distinction between subject and object than in the modern mind" (Hankoff, 1980, pp. 6–8). It is curious that psychoanalysis found, in such a supposedly primitive conception, a potentially fruitful approach to treating patients.

One can easily see why as he immersed himself in the study of the ancient Egyptian mind, Freud might have been inspired to see in human development an evolution that retraced the steps that nonliterate, allogical societies underwent. After all, we see many of the same attributes: the dominance of magical thinking, the omnipotence of thought in young children, the wholesale incorporation of experience into a belief system without the intervention of a logical construct, and the conviction that objects are endowed with special powers. We can imagine that in his quest to unlock the infantile fantasies that motivated his patients, Freud was repeatedly reminded of the way in which ancient Egyptians experienced and mediated the world. It was for the Egyptians and for infants alike a world always and perpetually "near at hand."

But symbols of the kind we have been referring to could only become therapeutically useful in revealing the hidden recesses of the unconsciousness if they could be expressed. And that required words which are, after all, only another type of symbol.

In an inscription found on an ancient papyrus, we find written: Erta-na-hekau apen: "May be given to me the words of power" (Budge, 1966, p. 100). Certain words, it was believed, recited over a wax crocodile could turn it into a real one, or cause a man to remain alive for 7 days under water. Communication through language is the important medium whereby we realize ourselves in terms of our identity as human beings; that communication provides the glue that connects one generation to the next. When communication breaks down, however, and the generations are unable to understand each other, the result is the well-known phenomenon, the generation gap, which has probably never been greater in the last 100 years.⁴ That interference in communication, in turn, can create alienation and psychosocial distress (Rieber, 2004).

⁴The generation gap was quite prominent in the 1960s and 1970s in the West and, at the time, was commonly acknowledged as a serious problem. However, today it is hardly acknowledged as a problem at all, and it is just that that makes it all the more dangerous. Unnoticed, it is more likely to continue and cause more harm.

If words have power – and they clearly do – then words might be mobilized therapeutically for the treatment of pathological mental conditions as Freud observed: “Foremost among such measures is the use of words; and words are the essential tool of mental treatment. A layman will no doubt find it hard to understand how pathological disorders of body and mind can be eliminated by ‘mere words.’ He will feel that he is being asked to believe in magic. And he will not be so wrong, for the words which we use in our everyday speech are nothing but watered-down magic, (due) to their former magical power” (Freud, 1890–1905, p. 155). It has been acknowledged by scholars for many years that the rational and supernatural elements are regularly combined in primitive medicine. It was largely because of Freud’s insight that we accept as a given that disturbed mental states can affect and disturb the body, but we should acknowledge that the ancient Egyptian physicians in one way or another got there first. Let us give credit where credit is due, even if Freud did not.

As Paul Roazen notes, Freud explicitly associated the mystery of ancient Egyptology with “unknown territory of the unconscious” (Roazen, 1974, p. 259). So once that correspondence was made, the next logical step was to delve into ancient Egyptology for the vocabulary that could be used to explore and explain that unknown territory.

Freud needed a language and mythology – specifically Egyptian mythology – to provide him with the conceptual foundation and the vocabulary for the language of myth. Freud observed, for instance, that dreams of flying “have invariably the meaning: ‘I can mate, I am a bird, I am sexually mature’” (Freud, 1910, p. 134). And, as we have seen, in his essay on Leonardo, he equated a vulture with the androgynous mother goddess Mut (and by extension all mothers) and a vulture’s tail with a penis. Leaving aside for the time being the questionable value of drawing associations between phallic mothers and vultures’ tails and penises, let us consider the construction of the equations themselves, the ability to make such symbolic and verbal correspondences, for in them we can catch a glimmer of Freud’s thinking as he developed his famous therapeutic tool, free association.

We will never know the true origins of free association mainly because Freud chose to conceal them, whether intentionally or not. David Bakan records that as a youth, Freud read an 1823 essay by a writer named Ludwig Borne which clearly anticipates the method. Evidence suggests that “at best” Freud was unconscious of his sources, Bakan declares, adding: “It is difficult to maintain that the whole tapestry of psychoanalysis could have been drawn out of seeming historical nothingness.” In addition, Freud was probably influenced by John Stuart Mill’s classic study *A System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive*, which he translated into German. In the book, Mill had embroidered on ideas developed by Jeremy Bentham that seem to anticipate the technique of free association. But Freud does not seem to acknowledge adequately any influence of the works of John Stuart Mill, either. I would contend that ancient Egyptian sources were among the sources that Freud seems to have conveniently forgotten. There is a lot of buried treasure in that nothingness.

In some way, free association must have seemed a marvelous solution to a vexing problem for psychoanalysis: how the analyst could draw his patient out to uncover

the patient's secrets without influencing or distorting his or her expression. The problem was more pressing since Freud had rejected hypnosis as a therapy as too dangerous (Rieber, 2006, pp. 53–56). Hypnosis, Freud believed, made the patient too susceptible to suggestion; there was always the possibility that the patient would “remember” events that never took place. As it turned out, though, free association was not the magic bullet that it must have seemed at the time. It is impossible to avoid the influence of the analyst since the analyst's silence itself plays an important role in the analytic session. In that respect, even free association can be considered an intervention. In spite of their best intentions, psychoanalysts to a large extent are remaking their patients in their own image.

Free association was intended to unburden the patient of his or her secrets. In Freud's view, secrets acted like poisons on the subconscious mind (Rieber, 2006, pp. 60–64). Freud was practically obsessed by secrets. Here again, we find another affinity he shared with ancient Egyptians. They, too, were obsessed with secrets. Each new god that entered their pantheon brought its own secrets. That their secrets were sexual in nature should come as no surprise. Freud's fascination with secrets seems almost puerile. “Freud was thrilled by the idea of a ‘secret council,’” Ernest Jones wrote, “and it took hold of his imagination ‘immediately,’ though he recognized its ‘boyish and perhaps romantic element’” (Jones, 1955–1956, p. 43). He goes on: “To Freud ‘the affection of a group of courageous and understanding young men is the most precious gift that psychoanalysis has brought me.’” Freud's inner circle known as the Committee, consisted of Jones, Otto Rank, Hanns Sachs, Sandor Ferenczi, Karl Abraham, and Max Eitingon; the first two breakaways were Wilhelm Stekel and Alfred Adler, followed by Jung (Jones, 1955–1956). Of course, every secret group needs its special sign and The Committee was no exception. Freud gave the members gems from his collection mounted in gold rings (Fromm, 1957).

Of course, free association was only one technique that Freud used that, if not directly, might well have been influenced by ancient Egyptian symbolism. Freud also embraced another technique – namely, dream interpretation – where it was much more difficult for him to deny ancient Egyptian influence. In fact, so obvious was the influence that he went out of his way to deny it. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, for instance, Freud dismissed *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* – the Baedeker of the afterlife – as a cryptology codebook, one in which he said an image or a word merely stood for another rather than as a means to explore the psyche. While insisting that he had not used the Egyptian dream book as a model for his book of dream interpretation, he nonetheless acknowledged as much in a letter to William Fleiss in which he half-jokingly thanked him for his “cooperation” in consulting on the Egyptian text (Freud, 1985, pp. 366).

All the same, Freud was certainly aware that he was following in the footsteps of Joseph, Egypt's most famous practitioner of dream interpretation. Even so, Freud realized that he was making a big gamble. He had to distinguish his method of dream analysis from “the older symbology,” while reassuring his readers that it had nothing to do with “quackery and superstition.” Freud understood that “it seemed quite inconceivable that anyone who had done serious scientific work could make

his appearance as an ‘interpreter of dreams’” (Freud, 1900–1901, p. 614).⁵ Even the title of his book inevitably aroused suspicion because it brought to mind the disreputable dream books sold in stores. But Freud insisted that “the respect paid to dreams in antiquity was based on ‘correct psychological insight’ because it emphasized ‘the uncontrolled and indestructible forces in the human mind’ and the ‘daemonic power which produces the dream wish.’ Instead of dismissing dream divination, Freud instead tried to circumvent the problem by asserting that ‘psychoanalysis arrived at a different conclusion’” (Freud, 1926, p. 43).

For Freud, the meaning of a dream inhered in the dreamer and in his associations rather than as a clef, according to the “Egyptian” decoding method with its ready-made symbols. Freud argued that the interpretation should depend on the dreamer’s personal, spontaneous, yet determined, associations to the dream scenes, images, thoughts, and emotions. In that way, the dream and the memory of the dream emerged from the unconscious depths in the form of a personal experience. But Freud again fell into a trap just as he had by championing free association. In effect, he did what the Egyptians had done and created his own dream book (Freud, 1900–1901, pp. 97–98). The title page of *The Interpretation of Dreams* has this illuminating quotation from the *Aeneid*: “If the gods above are no use to me, then I’ll move all hell.” Freud cites this quotation in his discussion of the way in which “suppressed material finds methods and means of forcing its way into consciousness in dreams” in the words of David Bakan. God is identified with the superego and his antagonist is the Devil. The analyst stands between the two as the forbearing, understanding father figure who also allows the patient to violate the superego. According to Roheim, the dream “is a refutation or rebuttal of an attack made upon the Ego by the Super-Ego.” Although the dream is the beginning of a rebellion against the superego, its ultimate purpose is, as Bakan puts it, an even more rebellious act: “to strip the dream of its disguise...” (Bakan, 1965, pp. 210–211). That is to say, dream interpretation, like free association, is intended as a therapeutic technique to pull the lid off the Id and help the patient put his feelings back together. Freud ignored the lesson of Humpty Dumpty, believing that he could marshal all the king’s horses and all the king’s men to put him together again.

Silberer has proposed that symbols represent a movement away from the intellect toward the senses, from the idea to the image (Dalbiez, 1936, pp. 107–109). Freud seized upon this notion to reverse the process, to use the symbols as “derivatives of thought which have to be constructed before the ‘real’ business of interpretation can start.” Those symbols, however, reach far back into the personal history of the patient – to infancy – where sexual secrets have their origin.

⁵In writing about his own analysis of dreams, Freud, in recalling a dream from his early childhood, sees his mother in a peaceful sleeping state being carried into the room by several people with bird beaks and laid upon a bed. The dream was a nightmare, and Freud woke up screaming. Freud believed that the tall bird-like figures were derived from the illustrations to the Philippon’s bible. He fancied that they must have been gods with falcon heads from an ancient Egyptian funereal relief (Freud 1976, p. 163 and Freud 1900–1901).

If Egyptian mythology offered Freud the underpinnings – and at least some of his inspiration – for his theories on the unconscious, it is possible that Egyptian history was equally important in his theory of the conscious mind. Assmann and Fitchner have both cited evidence indicating that Freud was influenced by the work of James Henry Breasted, the famous Egyptian scholar (Davies and Fichtner, 2006). Freud was especially drawn to the heroic figure of the pharaoh Akhenaton, who has been called the “first individual in history” because he appeals to “no myths, no ancient and widely accepted versions of the domination of the gods” (Assmann, 1997, pp. 275–282). Whereas Egyptian mythology was preoccupied with darkness, chaos, and the afterlife, Akhenaton draws back the curtains and lets in the light. It is the sun and not the gloom of the pyramid that characterizes Akhenaton’s worldview. No wonder Freud identified with him because was not it the purpose of psychoanalysis to throw a bright, purgative light on the secrets bottled up in the unconscious?

Although the solar monotheism that Akhenaton introduced did not survive his death in or about 1535 BC, scholars have suggested that it paved the way for the adoption of the more abstract monotheism adopted by the Hebrews. Breasted even finds echoes of Akhenaton’s Hymn to the Sun in Psalm 104. A reading of the first few verses would seem to give weight to Breasted’s view:

Praise the Lord, my soul.
Lord my God, you are very great;
you are clothed with splendor and majesty.

²The Lord wraps himself in light as with a garment;
he stretches out the heavens like a tent

³and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters.
He makes the clouds his chariot
and rides on the wings of the wind.

Akhenaton’s religious experiment introduces a groundbreaking idea – monotheism – to the world. His conception of monotheism is distinctly different from that of the Hebrew people who might or might not have been dwelling in Egypt in 1279 BC when Ramesses II came to the throne. Nonetheless, once the seed has been sowed, there is no telling where it will spread or in which soil it will grow best.

It is at this point that I would like to consider how Jewish mysticism shaped Freud’s thinking. Far from representing a digression from my topic, I would argue that, on the contrary, a discussion of the influence of ancient Egyptian belief on Freud would be incomplete without reference to the interaction of the Egyptians and the early Hebrews.

The Influence of Jewish Mysticism

In spite of the impoverishment of archeological evidence, historians believe that the triangle at the eastern end of the Mediterranean formed by Greece, Canaan, and Egypt was the nexus of a robust cultural exchange among the inhabitants of those lands. It is possible that concepts of mind, soul, and body arose among these cultures

as a result of this exchange rather than developing independently of one another. Both Egyptians and Hebrews of the second century BC shared concepts of body and mind. Both viewed man “as an indissoluble psychophysical unity, whose thoughts, emotions, and actions issued from his total being” (Hankoff, 1980, p. 28). Evidence is emerging that this cultural exchange has a long history. In 2002, for instance, archeologists turned up what possibly might be the oldest Semitic text ever found. The inscription was discovered in an underground chamber of a pyramid near Cairo. Written about 5,000 years ago, it consisted of a magic spell to keep snakes away from the mummies. Evidently, the ancient Egyptians believed that some snakes spoke the same Semitic language as the Hebrews and Phoenicians, and so it naturally followed that they should use a language the snakes could understand. Interestingly, the Semitic text was interspersed with the hieroglyphics. Even medical terminology was borrowed or shared between the cultures. References to physiology and medicine in the Old Testament reflect Egyptian influence (Hankoff, 1980, p. 3). The well-known Hebrew word for madness, *meshugga*, is derived from the Egyptian word referring to imbecility or stupefaction. The vocabulary of madness would not, of course, be possible without the concept of madness. In the Old Testament account of the slaying of Goliath, for example, written before 722 BC, we learn that David feigned madness in order to escape revenge by the Philistines “and with such successful and repulsive verisimilitude that the Philistine king ordered him driven from court” (Hankoff, 1980, p. 3). As Hankoff points out, this incident illustrates that ancient man had already a fully developed grasp of how the mind works. “It portrays the meaning of losing one’s mind, the stark difference between madness and sanity recognized by all, and the possibility that states of mind could be consciously simulated” (Hankoff, 1980, p. 3).

There are, to be sure, significant differences between these ancient cultures. The principal distinction is found in the Hebrews’ and Egyptians’ view of life after death. There is no reference to a soul minus a body or a body minus a soul after death in the Old Testament. Biblical language which is used to describe the human emotional and spiritual experiences is almost never used in connection with the dead. The soul ceases to exist at the death of the individual. In marked contrast to the ancient Egyptians, the early Hebrews had no cult of death and forbade any representations of the deity. For the ancient Hebrews, the concept of spirit – *ruach* – was only used in connection with the living – as the indwelling principle of life derived from God – which “in all of its usages supports the concept of psychophysical unity and is never used as a spiritual reality apart from the rest of man” (Hankoff, 1980, p. 3).

Moses and the Ancient Egyptians

If there is one figure that represents the intimate, yet ambiguous relationship between the ancient Egyptian and Hebrew peoples, it is Moses. Was Moses a Jew or an Egyptian? Freud effectively made Moses an Egyptian, a gentile and an aristocrat, which in Roazen’s opinion amounted to something akin to outright theft. “By transferring Moses into an Egyptian,” Roazen writes, “he deprived Jews of their greatest

figure, perhaps unconsciously expressing his own discomfort about being Jewish” (Roazen, 1974, pp. 530–531). To be sure, Freud never attempted to deny his cultural roots as a Jew, but he wanted to distance himself as much as possible from Judaism as a religion.

Bakan writes that in his treatment of Moses and the Jews in Egypt, Freud “not only possesses an extraordinary gift for making the most fanciful hypotheses seem plausible, but admits the inadequacy of the evidence to support his conclusion” (Bakan, 1965). Moreover, Freud also discounts the sole known Egyptian reference to Israel because it does not fit into his chronological scheme. The argument that Moses was an Egyptian and not a Jew is based on flimsy etymological evidence concerning the origin of Moses’ name (Cohen, 1950, pp. 139–140). Even Freud has to admit in *Moses and Monotheism* that he was grasping at straws: “If there was no more certainty than this to be attained,” he writes, “why have I brought this inquiry to the notice of a wider public? I regret that even my justification has to restrict itself to hints” (Freud, 1955, p. 14). Freud ignored multiple sources when he wrote *Moses*, including the work of every major scholar of ancient Egypt including Spencer, Warburton, Reinhold, Schiller, and extending as far back as Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Maimonides, and Ben Ezra. Although Freud was familiar with the Latin and Greek sources, he acted as if “only he is capable of bringing forth” the truth (Assmann, 1997, pp. 144–145). Certainly, Freud recognized that his interpretation of Moses was bound to get him in trouble. “To deprive a people of the man is not something to be gladly or carelessly undertaken, least of all by someone whom they take pride in as the greatest of their sons” (Freud, 1939, p. 7).

Schiller even went further and argues that Moses derived his concept of monotheism from his involvement with an elite circle of Egyptian priests. According to Schiller, Moses then inspired the “degenerate Hebrews” to accept a supreme god as their own. In Schiller’s opinion, the Jews do not deserve any credit for introducing monotheism to the world; in the divorce proceedings, the Egyptians are awarded both Moses and monotheism. Here is an instance where a whole group of people do not get credit where credit is due (Assmann, 1997, pp. 275–282).

Whether a small group of priests were truly custodians of the one true god of whom ordinary Egyptians were unaware is doubtful. What is not in dispute is that these priests were thought to possess extraordinary powers. It is worth noting that in the seventh and eighth books of Exodus, Egyptian priests were referred to as “wise men, sorcerers and magicians.” They also functioned as physicians. For instance, a priest would recite the myth of a god recovering from the same affliction as the patient he was ministering to (Gordon, 1949, p. 217). The job description sounds could equally well apply to the psychoanalyst.

The Root of All Evil

It is not so farfetched to relate the role of the psychoanalyst with that of the witch hunters of the middle ages, either. I am referring to the men who scoured Europe in search of people in league with or possessed by the devil. Before they could conduct

their trials and their purges, though, they first needed to identify the manifestations of satanic possession.

The idea that sickness could be caused by evil may call to mind the exorcisms of the Catholic Church, still occasionally sanctioned, by the way. But it is a notion that seems to have bewitched Freud, too. According to Bakan, Freud “saw sexual instincts as the root of all evil” (McClelland, 1964, pp. 128–129). The infant was born with powerful drives which, if he were only strong enough, would lead him to commit every crime – incest, rape, murder, etc. In other words, given the chance, infants would behave very much like Egyptian gods.

Freud was playing a dangerous game, Bakan says. Freud felt that in his psychoanalytic work, “he was entering into a pact with the Devil, that by exploring the underworld of the mind he could gain control over the evil forces within it” (McClelland, 1964, pp. 128–129). Here in a nutshell is the psychoanalytical dilemma. If the Devil resides in the unconscious, and if the analyst wants to penetrate the unconscious in hope of understanding the dark irrational forces in man’s nature, then he was obliged to forge an alliance of convenience and make a pact with the Devil. What the analyst was doing was embarking on a journey into the underworld of the psyche. For Freud, sexuality was no mere metaphor but an expression of power to heal and as such “reveals most clearly its mystical character” (McClelland, 1964, pp. 195–196). In other words, the root of evil – sexuality – responsible for producing the illness was also potentially its cure.

To recapitulate: However widely separated by time and place, Egyptian seers, European witch hunters, and practitioners of psychoanalysis were all united by their belief that in order to understand and tame the dark forces of man’s nature, it was necessary to make a pact, actual or metaphorical, with the Devil to understand and gain control over them. This required a passage into the underworld that in some sense is related to the journey the deceased Egyptians made into the afterlife. Certain rites must be followed, certain gods propitiated, and certain deeds performed. So it is instructive to note that psychoanalysts, too, “carried out their treatment with their patients, in the beginning unusually women, stretched out on a couch as if ready for sexual intercourse and also if dead on a bier, and the treatment involved a specifically a sexual relationship between the woman and her ‘hidden’ male analyst (transference)” (McClelland, 1964, pp. 195–196). Yet there was also a sexual element to this ritual: at least in the early days of psychoanalysis, the patients were usually women and their position on a couch suggested that they were prepared for sexual intercourse. In addition, the treatment involved a specifically sexual relationship between the woman and her male analyst – namely, transference. David McClelland in his *Roots of Consciousness* sees this symbolic relationship as possibly playing out as a recreation of the eternal Harlequin theme – “of a woman being sexually seduced by Death.” In this role, psychoanalysts were perceived as dark, foreign “devils,” facilitating the transition between the consciousness and the unconsciousness, between this life and the afterlife (McClelland, 1964, pp. 195–196). So not only did they make a pact with the devil, they *were* in effect assuming the role of the devil!

Once again the paradoxical nature of psychoanalysis reveals itself; the reductionist theory (sexuality is the big secret and source of evil) is in conflict with the therapy upon which it is based (understanding sexuality is the cure).

I have referred to the parallels between psychoanalysts and ancient Egyptian magicians and medieval witch hunters. To this list I would like to add rabbis. As Bakan noted, the aims of psychoanalysis and Jewish mysticism are quite similar. Both psychoanalysts and rabbis employ techniques that have a good deal in common. Rabbis specialized in making complex interpretations and reinterpretations of Jewish law. Psychoanalysts, too, are in the interpretation business. But some rabbis preferred to dip into the murkier, more treacherous waters of Jewish mysticism. As someone who had plunged into those waters himself, Freud was naturally drawn to their work. There was interpretation business to be done there as well, but it was a much stickier enterprise.

Freud and the Kabbala

There is no question that Freud was acquainted with the Kabbala. He owned a copy of the French version of the Zohar, one of the principal works of the Kabbala (Bakan, 1965, p. xviii). For someone who was an advocate of rationalism, he seems to have taken the Zohar a little too much to heart. The Zohar ascribes numerical meaning to all words that appear in the Old Testament. Convinced that he would die around the age of 60 years, Freud developed a fear of the number 60. On a visit to Athens when he was 63 years, for instance, he kept encountering the number 60. Spending a night in Room 31 at a local hotel caused him considerable distress because 31 doubled equals 62. That was close enough to 60 to stir his anxieties. He allowed how his superstition about numbers was “another confirmation of the specifically Jewish nature of my mysticism...” (McGuire, 1974, p. 219).

Aside from feeding his fear of certain numbers, the Kabbala, specifically the Zohar, also appears to have influenced the way in which he conducted his therapy. Jewish mystical tradition adopted the same detailed textual approach that Torah scholars used but in a freer, less rational, more metaphorical manner – “skipping and jumping” in the words of the Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia. Obviously such an approach invites comparison with free association. Freud would have found the Kabbala more fertile territory to mine than the legalistic texts that formed the body of Jewish law. Moreover, many of the elements of ancient Egyptian mythology that appealed to Freud have resonance in Jewish mysticism. There are two major books in the Kabbala – the Zohar which means light or radiance, and the Sefirot, which is usually translated as emanations. Jewish mystical tradition and psychoanalysis had something else in common since they both aim to understand human nature. The Zohar, for example, suggests that man may be conceived as a text requiring exegesis. As we have seen, Freud believed that if the analyst were to gain mastery over the unconscious irrational forces in human nature, it was necessary to “skip and jump,” to employ techniques that relied on the imaginative use of free association, dream interpretation, and metaphors. Only in this way was it possible for man to be released from the bonds of oppressive rationalism and moral obligations. As I have noted previously, the knowledge that the analyst – and the patient – uncovered in the journey

to the uncharted territory of the unconscious was knowledge of a very special kind. It was healing sexual knowledge. In Hebrew, the word for “knowing” (*yada*) can have a sexual connotation as illustrated in the Book of Genesis. Adam knew Eve, the Bible says. “And the eyes of them both were opened and they knew they were naked.” McClelland maintains that Freud’s emphasis on the power of sexual knowledge places him “at the very center of the Jewish mystical tradition.” Nowhere in Jewish mysticism do we find this association exemplified more than in the Zohar which recasts much of the Jewish religious tradition in sexual terms. God is described in terms of “a provocative anthropomorphism” according to the great Kabbalistic scholar Gershon Scholem, in which “the body of the Divine Presence” is concealed in a garment of light which God wrapped himself in at the moment of creation (Scholem, 1978, p. 17). The Kabbalistic conception of God includes a female principle known as the Shekinah who has variously been identified with Israel and as the Bride of the Sabbath. In some texts, she is cast aside and then redeemed by God in a mystical union described in sexual terms.

In the Zohar, the beginning of creation is preceded by a series of acts that take place between the Ein-Sof – that is the Infinite or the Being without End – and the first Sefirah or emanation. In one of the earliest stages preceding creation, a well emerges from the primordial ether that surrounds the Infinite “like an aura.” To quote Scholem: “The organic symbolism equates the primordial point with the seed sown in the womb of the ‘supernal mother’... ‘The palace’ is the womb which is brought to fruition through the fertilization of the semen and gives birth to the children, who are the emanations.” In other words, God creates existence from his own seed. Scholem continues: “References to male and female appear not only in the symbolism of father and mother, son and daughter...but also in the striking use of sexual imagery which is a particular characteristic of the Zohar...The use of such phallic and vaginal images is especially prominent...” (Scholem, 1978, p. 110). There is vigorous dispute among scholars of Jewish mysticism about the influence of pantheism in the Kabbala, whether God “is everything” and whether everything is unified in him, or whether the discontinuation of his presence would cause the annihilation of all existence. Nonetheless, as Scholem freely admits, the “problem of pantheism” does indeed exist. The descriptions of the origins of the universe and humanity found in the Zohar sound curiously reminiscent of ancient Egyptian mythology. We seem to have come full circle.

“Psychoanalysis did not spring full born from the head of its Zeus, Freud,” as Bakan puts it, although analysts subsequently took great pains to pretend that it did (Bakan, 1965, p. 23). That brings us finally to the question as to why Freud and his disciples failed to acknowledge their debt to these earlier mystical – and mythological – belief systems and traditions. For one thing, many psychoanalysts may not have realized that they were borrowing from these traditions. But even if they had been, as Bakan points out, they would not have had any motivation to do so. Because Freud was convinced that he was practicing a scientific technique, any admission that there was anything religious about it would have undermined its reputation. The cover-up, if I can call it that, can also be accounted to Freud’s discomfort with his Jewish roots. To admit that Jewish mystical tradition might have influenced his

theories or techniques might also have made psychoanalysis even more susceptible to skepticism and ridicule than it already was, and provide added ammunition to anti-Semites who surely needed no extra encouragement. Additionally, the acknowledgment of such a link would upset many Jews themselves who felt that the sexual aspect of Freud's theory might reflect poorly on their traditions (McClelland, 1964). Even as he downplayed his Jewish roots, he nonetheless derided Adler for renouncing his faith – for example, doing what Freud had done. But, of course, Adler's real sin lay in his betrayal of psychoanalysis. Learning that Adler had died on a visit to Scotland, Freud wrote to Zweig, telling him not to be too upset; having abandoned both Judaism and psychoanalysis, Adler deserved to die far from home. In Jewish tradition, dying far from one's family was considered an ignominious fate, almost a curse (Rieber, 2011). Talk about hammering another nail in the coffin!

But Freud had other, less savory motivations in promoting psychoanalysis as a revolutionary approach that owed nothing to historic antecedents. Freud seemed to have suffered from a Messiah complex and at least unconsciously saw himself as the founder of a new quasi-religious movement which would replace outworn traditions of orthodoxy (Fromm, 1957). He spoke about the creed of analysis that he had created which would eventually replace the Jewish law and predicted that "our results" will last long after his own name "had been wiped out" by the passage of time (McClelland, 1964, pp. 128–129). Like Moses, he worried about a successor who would carry on his "creed." He could try to dismiss the importance of his Jewish roots all he wanted, but he could not escape from them; Judaism was like a ghostly presence hovering over him, accompanying him wherever he went – just like Ba.

Freud faced other antagonists who threatened the future of his "creed." Recall the quote from Virgil that I cited earlier which appears on the title page of *The Interpretation of Dreams*: "If the gods do not recognize me, I'll raise all hell" (Rieber and Salzinger, 1998). That expression of rebellion applied not only to the Church but also even more so to the Viennese medical establishment with which Freud had tussled after their tepid reception to his 1886 paper on male hysteria. I believe that Freud consciously or unconsciously – we will never know for sure – was protecting psychoanalysis from the external threat of the establishment by hiding its true name. It is worth noting as an aside that even the name Freud gave to the therapy he conceived, psychoanalysis is problematic. Linguistic scholars have pointed out that a more accurate derivation from the Greek should be psych-analysis. To be sure, the added O makes the word trip off the tongue more easily, but perhaps at the price of precision (Gunduah, 2002). It is conceivable that Freud might have been using his own word magic to protect his precious newborn baby Psychoanalysis from danger.

The Riddle of the Sphinx

We will now return to the place where we began – Freud's library. I have in my possession a facsimile of a bookplate of Freud's found in several of his books. The bookplate is particularly telling. At the time, bookplates were used not so much to



Fig. 2.1 The Sphinx

identify the owner of the book as they were used to reflect his interests, temperament, and preferences. The bookplate in this case is a reproduction of the embossed image on the famous bronze medallion created by Karl Maria Schwerdtner and presented to Freud on the occasion of his 50th birthday. Its face portrait is typical for such an item; its side portrait is in bass relief and on the reverse we find a classical Greek depiction of Oedipus encountering the sphinx. It bears a quotation from Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*: "who divined the famed riddle and was a man most mighty" (Freud, 1976, pp. 186–187). Like Oedipus, Freud saw himself as a seer; it is the image he wished to impress on his colleagues – "as a mighty man with a mighty intellectual sword who wished to unveil the hidden knowledge of the sphinx" (Jones, 1955) (Fig. 2.1).

The Sphinx, as represented on the birthday medallion, is a much different creature than the one that was depicted on the Greek vases in Freud's collection. The Greek Sphinx is much less imposing than her Egyptian counterpart. On the medallion, however, she is portrayed as aggressive, poised for attack (see Chap. 3, p. 165).

Freud acknowledged his identification with the sphinx (presumably the more imposing, aggressive incarnation) on more than one occasion. He even collected several different images of the sphinx as if "exploring the various meanings she offered," including "a tiny Egyptian amulet... a sturdy compact terracotta figure from the late fourth century BC."

On a visit to Paris, Freud went to the Louvre where he was able to feast his eyes on an impressive sphinx carved from a single slab of red granite; originally found at

Tanis, it stood nearly two meters high and five meters long, with powerfully articulated legs and paws and “the calm visage of a pharaoh....” “I am under the full impact of Paris,” Freud wrote to Minna Bernays on December 3, 1885, “and, waxing very poetical, could compare it to a vast overdressed Sphinx who gobbles up every foreigner unable to solve her riddles” (Freud, 1975, p. 173). Obviously, Freud did not believe that he was among them.

The origin of the Sphinx’s name remains a mystery: its first representations are male; in Egypt it was a wise and benevolent guardian, a protector of entrances and passages in palaces and temples – a far cry from the enigmatic temptress of Greek myth. The Egyptian sphinx had more in common with the winged Assyrian Lamassu, which also served as a protector of entrances. By the time that the sphinx arrived in Greece, she had been transformed into a winged female with an ecstatic smile. In the fourth century BC, Sophocles cast her as the destructive trickster who had besieged Thebes, forming the image of her in words that has proven more enduring than any conceived in stone.

During the Age of Enlightenment and throughout the early nineteenth century, scholars were perplexed by the Sphinxian riddles involving the relationship between body and mind. They sensed that the solution to the riddle might have universal application but were baffled about how to go finding it (Falconer, 1788). Freud was undaunted. Where others had failed before him, he believed that he had solved the riddle.

Here is how Freud himself put it: “Corresponding with the history of this awakening, the first problem with which he (the child) occupies himself is not the question as to the difference between the sexes, but the riddle: Where do children come from? In a distorted form which can be easily unraveled, this is the same riddle which was proposed to the Theban Sphinx” (Freud, 1938, p. 595).

I have often wondered what would have happened if instead of Oedipus it had been the young Freud who had encountered the Sphinx on the road to Thebes. I imagine that Freud would have posed the same question to the Sphinx: Where do children come from?

And I imagine the Sphinx would have replied: Ah, that’s my secret, isn’t it?!

Whereupon Freud would say: I’ll tell you mine if you tell me yours.

The Sphinx relents and agrees to answer. From stardust and flowers, the Sphinx says.

Stardust and flowers? Freud exclaims How’s that?

Stardust, the Sphinx repeats, the Big Bang

Then Freud wakes up and psychoanalysis is born.

If we were to put Freud under analysis as it were, and in a sense that is what I have tried to do in this paper, I believe that we would find sufficient evidence to support a finding that he had hypnotized himself. He had fallen under the sway of Egyptian mythology and Jewish mysticism and then awakening from his dream he had “forgotten” where he had gotten his ideas. This evidence would surface even though he would doubtless try to conceal or camouflage his influences, asserting again and again that his theories were *sui generis*. But as much as he might deny his

debt to ancient Egypt, he would be doing so in an office crowded with relics of that civilization. The images of the sphinx are only one piece of the evidence. Similarly, the presence of the Zohar in his library – not to mention his Kabbalistic obsession with numbers – argues in favor of the influence that Jewish mysticism held over him. The two currents converge in the figure of the Egyptian and the Jewish Moses. Freud's struggle to come to grips with Moses consumed him from the beginning to the end of his career. According to his own admission, he spent a week in Rome, staring at Michelangelo's Moses in a trance-like state. But when it came to putting his name on the Michelangelo article in *Imago*, he balked – another sign of his conflicted feelings toward a subject with whom he identified perhaps too closely. Furthermore, he waited until the last years of his life to write *Moses and Monotheism*, realizing that he was likely to stir up considerable controversy in doing so. Moses seemed to defy his efforts to categorize him; on the one hand, Moses was the Egyptian seer and magician, on the other, he was the leader of the Jewish people, the man who gave them the problematic gift of monotheism. Moses represented the lure of the seductive gods of ancient Egypt and the austerity of the all-powerful Jewish God. In Freud's interpretation, the Moses of the Old Testament had been stripped of his Egyptian identity so that the Hebrews would have no rival claimant over him. In the same way, in constructing his own theories of psychoanalysis, Freud covered up the traces of ancient Egyptian influence. But once he had begun down that road, he had to conjure up a similar dissociation when it came to his debt to Jewish mysticism. Only in this way could he promote psychoanalysis as a substitute for the old religions, Egyptian or Jewish. However, as his struggle over Moses and his preoccupation with the Sphinx's riddle vividly illustrate, the project was fraught with difficulties. Freud could not escape his influences or his debts to the past. All he could do was pretend as if they did not exist at all.

In the final analysis, I do not wish you to assume that it was my intention to contribute to the current fashion of Freud-bashing. On the contrary, we would be doing a grave disservice to Freud if we did not assume the role of constructive critics of his psychoanalytic theory. In fact, I believe that only by subjecting Freud's theory to critical analysis is it possible for us to obtain a better understanding of his contributions to abnormal psychology. For it can safely be said that even Freud's shortcomings – perhaps as much as his remarkable insights – have helped us penetrate the mystery of human nature to which he had devoted his life trying to unravel.

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Freud on Interpretation

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