

Freud and the Devil: Literature and Cocaine

IN THIS AND THE NEXT chapter, we break from the chronological treatment of our subject to investigate a complex and in many ways sinister theme that makes a persistent appearance throughout Freud's life. This theme is Freud's relation to the Devil, and closely connected to it are the topics of Heaven, Hell, damnation, and the Anti-Christ. An alternate title for this and the next chapter, therefore, might be "Sigmund Freud's Anti-Christian Unconscious."

One important point before beginning is that the present concern is only with the psychological reality of the Devil for Freud. The question of the actual existence of the Evil One is a separate question, a question that properly belongs to theology and philosophy and thus is outside the scope of this book. As we will see, the psychological question, by itself, is a rich and complex one.

Freud's Pact: Part One

The idea of a Freudian "Faust pact" was initially but briefly raised by Velikovsky in 1941. Later the possibility of a Freudian pact with the Devil was given extensive biographical treatment by David Bakan in his stimulating 1958 book, *Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition*. I take up Bakan's thesis, which first introduced me to this topic, in more detail later, but I should say right away that I do not agree with Bakan that Freud's interest in and involvement with the Devil were primarily derived from his proposed contact with Jewish mysticism (especially the Sabbatian tradition). To begin with, the Devil does not receive much emphasis in Judaism, and typically may be entirely absent from the thought of liberal or enlightenment Jews such as Jakob Freud, who interpret Judaism primarily as a kind of ethical monotheism.¹ There is no evidence that the idea of the Devil was ever part of Freud's Jewish education. Second, and more importantly, there is not a single explicit reference by Freud to any of the writings of the Jewish mystical tradition. Bakan's case is based mostly on some similarities in preoccupations between the writings of Freud and those of the Jewish mystics—and, indeed, in large part on what he considers to be the general Jewish character of Freud's thought. That there may have been some slight connection is possible, but a major one

¹ The absence of the Devil from the beliefs of the great majority of "liberal" or "enlightenment" Jews such as Jakob Freud has been confirmed by many of my Jewish sources. In particular, it is attested to by Dr. Philip Miller, librarian at the Hebrew Union College, New York.

is most unlikely. My skeptical response has apparently been that of most of Bakan's readers.²

There is still another reason for doubting that Judaism had anything to do with Freud's "demonic" preoccupation. As Trachtenberg³ has documented, there was a well-established anti-Semitic tradition linking the Jews to the Devil and to magician figures like Faust. This linkage was especially strong in Germanic and Central European popular cultures, and it was used to justify all kinds of persecutions. A Jew would normally actively avoid anything connected to such a dangerous stereotype.

Now if the Devil is a fairly minor figure in the Jewish tradition, he certainly looms large in much of Christianity—as do various themes connected with him, such as damnation and Hell. Hell was a topic of very considerable concern to Protestants and Catholics alike in the 19th century, as in preceding centuries. Certainly the New Testament clearly sets out the Christian view that Heaven and Hell exist, and frequent references are made to the Devil or Satan.⁴ Since Christianity does have a serious concern with the Devil, and since Freud was (as already shown) strongly influenced by Christian concepts, it is a reasonable a priori assumption that Freud's relationship with the Devil was also significantly conditioned by the religion of his early childhood and of the surrounding environment. Before returning to Bakan's thesis and the question of Freud's "pact" with the Devil, I examine the extensive evidence, in sources typically overlooked by his biographers, of Freud's Christian connections to the Devil.

His Nanny and the Devil

Where and when did Freud first hear of the Devil? There can be little doubt that his Catholic nanny, who taught him about Heaven and Hell, also told him about the Devil. It is almost impossible to talk about Heaven and Hell without also talking about God and the Devil; in any case, the kind of sophisticated theological discourse that can describe Hell without mentioning the Devil would have been well beyond a simple peasant woman instructing a young child. Within Christian theology, Hell only makes sense in terms of the existence of evil, and evil for the orthodox Christian is not an abstraction: There is an Evil *One*, a spiritual and personal expression of evil—in short, the Devil—to tempt others to do evil.

Again, although there is no direct evidence, one must wonder whether the nanny was anti-Semitic and made hostile remarks about Judaism. She may have laid some of the foundation for Freud's rejection of Jewish religiousness.

In any case, as the Devil is a compelling topic in himself, and as Freud first learned about him at the impressionable age of two or three from his functional mother, it

² Ellenberger (1970, p. 544); Ostow (1982, p. 6, note).

³ Trachtenberg (1943/1966) shows how the topics of Faust, the Devil, the wandering Jew, sorcery, the Anti-Christ, and so on were all ingredients in a gruesome anti-Semitic interpretation of the Jews that became a significant social force in the later Middle Ages.

⁴ Bakan inaccurately describes the Devil as "a Christian legendary figure" (1958, p. 181). However, the Devil's existence and character are scriptural in origin, as a consequence central to much of traditional Christian theology. (As examples, see Matthew 4:1-11; Matthew 12:24-29; Mark 8:33; Luke 10:17-20; John 8:44).

should not be surprising that this topic had a permanent impact on him. As noted in Chapter One, Freud said that he had guilt feelings about the death of his younger brother Julius. Now, any death viewed in a Christian perspective raises the question of what happens to the soul of the dead person. It is clear that Julius's death, at a time when Freud was close to his nanny, must have been connected for him with Heaven and Hell (and the Devil). Freud's extraordinary association of the gas lights at Breslau with souls burning in Hell is both a primitive Christian image and one virtually certain to be connected with the notion of Satan, who is central to that iconography.

Not only did Freud get his initial grounding in the concept of Hell within the Christian tradition, but his subsequent involvement in this and related ideas was continuously maintained by his thorough and ongoing immersion in texts permeated by the Christian concept of the Devil. These texts were the most important literary influences in Freud's adult life; they were texts that he read and admired, to which he referred often, and that he frequently quoted in his letters and in his scientific works. As such, they represent an immediate, undeniable source, as well as an expression, of Freud's attraction to the idea of the Devil. There is no need to seek out remote or esoteric sources for this interest.

Freud and Literature

As Sulloway has shown, biological science certainly had an impact on Freud's theorizing; he was a physician and a research scientist.⁵ But there was an even greater source of ideas for Freud, and this was literature. The foundation text of Freud's literary approach, amply documented by Pfrimmer, was the Philippon Bible so important in his childhood.⁶ When he was an adult, the influence of novels, poetry, biography, and similar types of material became profound and pervasive throughout his work. It is not just that Freud was preoccupied with Biblical figures, nor yet that such concepts as the Oedipus complex have literary sources; what is most striking is the enormous frequency with which Freud cited literary texts in order to exemplify his crucial psychological insights.

Indeed, I believe it is fair to say that psychoanalysis (and with it much of modern psychology) was created by the collision and integration of literature and biology, and that literature was the dominant force in this process. Evidence of the central importance of literature to Freud comes from a number of sources, not the least of which is Freud himself. He once said in an interview:

[T]he first impulse which led to the discovery of my method came to me from my beloved Goethe. As you know, he wrote *Werther* to free himself from the morbid oppression of sorrow: for him literature was *catharsis*. And in what consists my method of curing hysteria save in making the patient tell everything to free him from obsession? I did no more than force my patients to act like Goethe. Confession is liberation and that is cure. The Catholics knew it for centuries, but Victor Hugo had taught me that the poet too is a priest; and thus I boldly substituted myself for the confessor.⁷

⁵ See Sulloway (1979).

⁶ Pfrimmer (1982); the humanistic and literary character of Freud and his writing is also a central point of Bettelheim (1982).

⁷ Papini (1973, p. 100).

In short, Freud defined his method of healing as a *literary* method, one that makes of the patient a narrator; he also asserted that he learned this method from Goethe and Hugo, two major writers, to whom I return below. (The reader, no doubt, has also noted in this quotation the identification of the doctor as poet and priest and of confession as a cure. In Freud, as we will see, literature is intimately connected with religion.)

Many years before the interview quoted above, Freud commented in *Studies on Hysteria* (1893-1895): “It still strikes me as strange that the case histories I write should read like short stories and that, as one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science.”⁸ Here again Freud acknowledged his literary bent and style. Even a brief glance at the index of a work by Freud readily reveals the rich use he made of literary material. Unfortunately, as the literary culture of the 19th century fades, Freud’s intellectual framework has become increasingly alien to the contemporary mentality.

If by a theory’s fruit one shall know it, then the literary quality of Freudian theory is overwhelmingly apparent in the impact of psychoanalysis on the world of the literary arts. Not only were writers as different as D. H. Lawrence and André Breton directly influenced by Freud, so countless others have been at least indirectly influenced. And in the last few decades Freud’s ideas have had really an enormous effect on literary criticism, as well as on other fields in the humanities, such as history and biography.⁹

In marked contrast, Freud’s impact on the biological sciences has been minimal. If anything, the possibility of finding a biological grounding for most of Freudian theory looks more remote today than it did in the early part of the century. There was also almost a total absence in Freud’s life of any youthful interest in natural science; this alone suggests a fundamentally nonscientific mentality. It is a routine observation that superior talent for natural science expresses itself very early. Certainly, by the age of 16 or 17, a future great biologist would have shown his interest in nature, physics, chemistry, or mathematics. Except for a minor interest in plants and flowers (a theme that showed up in his dreams), Freud showed none of this; in contrast, his youthful involvement in languages and literature, such as the Philippon Bible and the works of Cervantes, Goethe, and others, was already substantial. In his autobiography, Freud made his fundamental cultural and nonscientific mentality explicit:

My interest, after making a lifelong *détour* through the natural sciences, medicine, and psychotherapy, returned to the cultural problems which had fascinated me long before, when I was a youth scarcely old enough for thinking: At the very climax of my psychoanalytic work, in 1912, I had already attempted to make use of the newly discovered findings of analysis in order to investigate the origins of religion and morality.¹⁰

⁸ Breuer & Freud (1893-1895, S.E., 2, p. 160).

⁹ D. H. Lawrence was the author of *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921), in addition to many novels with psychoanalytic overtones; Freud’s significance for André Breton’s surrealist writing is well known. I suppose that at least since Lionel Trilling (e.g., 1955), the pervasive significance of Freud for literary theory has been quite generally acknowledged. For a good recent example of Freud’s impact on literary theory, see Meisel (1981).

¹⁰ S. Freud (1925, S.E., 20, p. 72). Elsewhere, Freud explicitly said that he had no talent for natural science; see Jones (1955, p. 397).

And, in fact, it has been on literature, the humanities, cultural theory, and religion that Freud has made his mark.

With this in mind, I now take up a discussion of a series of literary works that made up a large proportion of those important in Freud's life. These works give star billing to the Devil.¹¹

Flaubert's *The Temptation of St. Anthony*

Along with *Don Quixote* (discussed in Chapter Two), the other book that, according to Jones, made the deepest impression on Freud in his late 20s was Gustave Flaubert's *The Temptation of St. Anthony*. He read this book in July 1883, while on his first visit to the Alps with his mentor Breuer; he was visiting with the very successful Breuer at his vacation home in Gmunden.¹²

The book is worth summarizing, for it provides a good example of Freud's immersion in a heavily "Christianized" piece of literature. But first, a description of Freud's reaction to *The Temptation* is in order. Jones quotes a letter of Freud's:

I was already deeply moved by the splendid panorama, and now on top of it all came this book which in the most condensed fashion and with unsurpassable vividness throws at one's head the whole trashy world: for it calls up not only the great problems of knowledge, but the real riddles of life, all the conflicts of feelings and impulses; and it confirms the awareness of our perplexity in the mysteriousness that reigns everywhere.¹³

Jones says about this letter: "Then comes a long and lively description of the contents of the book, which he [Freud] likens to a *Walpurgisnacht*" [Witches' Sabbath].¹⁴

St. Anthony is shown as a solitary monk living in a mountain hut, removed from civilization. Discouraged with prayer and the holy life, he is under constant attack by temptations, which come in the form of visions or hallucinations, the vividness of which so impressed Freud. These hallucinatory scenes often involve St. Anthony in dialogues with various figures. One of them is the Devil, who, as a black, shadowy flying figure

¹¹ One writer of some importance to Freud, but not discussed here, is Emile Zola. Freud read Zola's *Germinal* and *La Terre*, and in *The Interpretation of Dreams* he discussed a memory lapse involving these works: He attributed an association to *Germinal* that actually came from *La Terre*. Both works are similar and are "concerned with such themes as primal scene material, violent aggression against the father figure, castration material, etc....aspects of the polymorphous perverse orientation of the child" (Grinstein, 1980, p. 123). That is, they were works of personal biographical significance for Freud, but without any direct reference to demonic elements. Grinstein's discussion (1980, pp. 111-150) of the personal relevance of these works to Freud's is quite interesting; he even notes (p. 111) that Freud's slip may have been linked through "dandelions" to his screen memory experience.

¹² Jones (1953, pp. 174-175). This was an emotion-laden trip, as it was Freud's experience of the "yellow flowers" here in the Alps that triggered his childhood recollection of the meadow scene with its yellow flowers (dandelions) when he was aged three and still in Freiberg. This memory was the source of *Screen Memories*. See Swales (1983b) for the fascinating details of the context of this trip, and for a discussion of the significance of the screen memory with respect to his relationship with Martha at the time.

¹³ Jones (1953, p. 175).

¹⁴ Jones (1953, p. 175). The summary of the novel that follows is taken from a 1920s edition in the original French (Flaubert, 1874/1924).

with bat-like wings, makes an early appearance (in the second section) and brings with him the seven deadly sins. In this same section St. Anthony is confronted with sexuality and lust, embodied by the Queen of Sheba. Next comes perhaps the greatest temptation of all for him: that of knowledge, which his former disciple Hilarion offers to him. In the middle sections of the work, the hermit confronts a series of figures representing many of the great Christian heresies (the Manichaeans, the Arians, the Montanists, and others), as well as the old gods of the Mediterranean world (Apollo, Jupiter, Juno, Diana, and Isis). In the sixth and penultimate section, St. Anthony, in a lengthy dialogue, is tempted by the Devil himself. In some instances, St. Anthony gives in to the temptation, but before he has the chance to carry out his sin the hallucination suddenly vanishes. At the very end of the seventh section, after confronting Death, Luxury, and the Sphinx, St. Anthony still hopes for God's love. He lifts his face to the rising sun, which has on it, as on a great disc, the face of Christ; then, crossing himself, he returns to prayer.

Flaubert's portrayal is always ambiguous with respect to the experiences of the hermit. We can never be sure whether what is being described is an hallucination of a psychopathological kind or a true religious vision, or perhaps some mixture of the two. Freud explained the experiences depicted in part with a reference to Flaubert's epilepsy.¹⁵ In any case, *The Temptation* is a book saturated with Christian cosmology and theology. This traditional Christian material is here in the hands of an ambivalent, early modernist writer. Flaubert portrays the experience of temptation, as when nightly this poor, wretched, and somewhat unprepossessing hermit struggles in his mind (or psyche, or soul) to resist evil, and to save his soul. There is much of *Faust* in this work, and indeed Flaubert acknowledged the influence of Goethe's classic.¹⁶

Goethe's *Faust*

Goethe was Freud's most admired writer, and thus in many respects it was fitting that Freud, who never received the Nobel Prize, was awarded the Goethe Prize.¹⁷ Much of Freud's identification with Goethe is captured in the following remarks, made in an interview near the end of his life:

I am a scientist by necessity, and not by vocation. I am really by nature an artist. Ever since childhood, my secret hero has been Goethe. I would like to have become a poet, and my whole life long I've wanted to write novels.¹⁸

Later in the same interview, Freud referred to his "beloved Goethe." The only other literary candidate for such an influence might be Shakespeare. Freud had great admiration for the English playwright, but Goethe as a German and as a modern figure was clearly much closer to his heart, and in the case of Shakespeare Freud had almost no biographical information that could permit a strong personal "identification" with him. Goethe's *Faust* was the literary text that Freud most frequently cited and referred to; it was the piece of literature that most powerfully influenced him throughout his

¹⁵ Jones (1953, p. 175).

¹⁶ See Buck (1966, p. 53).

¹⁷ Eissler (1978, pp. 28-29).

¹⁸ Papini (1973, p. 99).

life.¹⁹

It might be well to refresh the reader's memory about this classic. The major point to keep in mind is that the central event of the work is a pact between Faust and the Devil. Now this *Faust* is one in a long line of works of the same title and on the same theme, which can be traced back to medieval times. All of these works are set up within a decidedly Christian framework.²⁰ This is not to imply that Goethe's *Faust* is a "Christian" work; on the contrary, if anything, it is closer to an *anti-Christian* piece. That is, its hero, who signs up with the Devil, is clearly someone with whom the readers are to identify. It is indeed the positiveness of this depiction of the Faust figure that breaks with the tradition. The work is at times explicitly hostile to the Catholic Church and the clergy, and disparaging remarks are made about theology. We should, however, note that Christ himself is not referred to negatively. And the sincere, simple faith of Margaret (or Gretchen²¹) and the villagers is portrayed with considerable sympathy. Though this kind of faith is considered impossible for the intellectual, jaded Faust, the inability to believe is presented essentially as a loss.

But let us look briefly at the story, paying special attention to those aspects of it that bear most directly on Freud's life and situation.²² The play begins with a short scene set in Heaven, in which God (*der Herr*) and the Devil (Mephistopheles) are in conversation: The upshot is a wager that Mephistopheles cannot get the soul of Faust. The story then begins as Faust is alone in his Gothic study-laboratory. The time is the late evening just before Easter Sunday (i.e., late Holy Saturday or Easter Eve)—incidentally, a time of year that makes of *Faust* another part, and a significant one, of Freud's already documented Easter complex. Faust is a disgruntled scholar who is depressed and sarcastic about the meager results of his years of study. He jibes at himself, at theology, and at the Church, while bragging that he is not afraid of the Devil. His glance happens to fall on a bottle filled with an extract, a poison. He decides to swallow it and escape this life by passing over into death. He raises the cup to his mouth to drink, but just as he does this, Easter morning is announced by a loud chiming of bells and choral music. The Easter music makes him pause and then decide not to drink the poison. The words of Faust that describe his reasons for not going ahead with his suicide are quite relevant.

(Bells and Choral Songs Announce Easter)

FAUST: Has the time come, deep bells, when you make known the Easter holiday's first holy hour?...

Although I hear the message, I lack all faith or trust
And faith's favorite child is miracle.
For those far spheres I should not dare to strive,

¹⁹ See the many references to Faust throughout Freud's books and letters. One example of the influence of Goethe and especially *Faust* was the tribute to Freud that accompanied the Goethe Prize awarded by the city of Frankfurt in 1930; see E. Freud et al. (1978, pp. 251, 334). As another example of many, Freud was critical of Breuer because there was "nothing Faustian in his nature" (E. Freud et al., 1978, p. 139).

²⁰ For example, see Kaufmann (1961, pp. 16 ff.); the major earlier Faust works from which Goethe's version was such a moral departure were Spies's *Faustbuch* (1587) and Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus* (1604).

²¹ Gretchen is a nickname for Margaret commonly used in *Faust*.

²² The summary of *Faust* is taken from the translations by Kaufmann (1961) and Macneice (1951).

From which these tidings come to me;
And yet these chords, which I have known since infancy:
Call me now, too, back into life.
Once heaven's love rushed at me as a kiss
In the grave silence of the Sabbath day,
The rich tones of the bells, it seemed, had much to say,
And every prayer brought impassioned bliss.
And unbelievable sweet yearning
Drove me to roam through wood and lea,
Crying, and as my eyes were burning,
I felt a new world grow in me....

Now memory entices me with childlike feeling
Back from the last, most solemn deed.
Sound on, O hymns of heaven, sweet and mild!²³

In these dramatic passages, there is much that would have reminded Freud of his own childhood. The most likely "Freiberg" lines would have been those referring to bells, Easter, childhood and infancy, memory, yearning, and even roaming through wood and lea.

The next part of the play is set in the Easter holiday, and there are references to the resurrection of Jesus and to the general religious atmosphere and activities. It is during this time that Faust, just as disillusioned as ever, meets (or in fact calls up) Mephistopheles, with whom he signs a pact. The agreement is that Mephistopheles is to be Faust's servant in this life; after Faust's death, the situation will be reversed. The pact is made in writing—in blood. A short time later, while traveling with Mephistopheles, Faust sees a young girl in her early teens; this is Margaret with whom he falls in love. He asks Mephistopheles for help in seducing her, which is duly provided. Faust then drinks a narcotic brew concocted by a witch; this fully seals the pact. The witch's brew gives Faust youth and virility. Shortly after taking the drink, Faust first actually meets Margaret, who is simple, beautiful, religious, and pure. Mephistopheles and Faust are, of course, more than a match for the girl, and her downfall is assured. As a result of Faust's blandishments, Margaret gives her mother a sleeping potion, so that she and Faust can spend an undisturbed night together. But the potion causes the mother to die. Then Margaret's brother is killed by Faust in a duel, with help from Mephistopheles. Later, Margaret bears Faust's child, whom she drowns. She eventually goes mad in prison from the horror and shame of her situation. At the end of Part One of the work, Margaret dies, but her soul is carried to Heaven; she is saved. It must be said in defense of Faust that Mephistopheles has kept Margaret's suffering from him by taking him off to a *Walpurgisnacht*; this is one of the most dramatic scenes in the play. *Walpurgisnacht* is, according to European tradition, a gathering of witches from all over Europe on the night of April 30, for a celebration of evil, sex with the Devil, and a general orgy. In Central Europe, *Walpurgisnacht* is especially well known, and in peasant communities it was celebrated with many local folk customs. It is something like America's Halloween, though is not for children, and in rural areas it was dreaded by many.²⁴

²³ Kaufmann (1961, pp. 119, 121).

²⁴ For example, see J. G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1911/1966, entries in index under *Walpurgisnacht*).

Part II of *Faust*, written later, shifts from the Germany of Goethe's day to an entirely different environment. In this part, which has tended to be less popular (and which Freud cited much less often), Faust travels through an imaginary world of scenes and characters taken from the myths of classical Greece and Rome. He is still traveling with Mephistopheles, but the general atmosphere of ancient myths seems, shall we say, more "Jungian," whereas Part I has a "Freudian" feel. At the end, four Grey Women approach: They are the personifications of Want, Need, Debt, and Care (*Sorge*). The last of these, *Sorge*, is a harbinger of Faust's approaching death. As she leaves Faust she breathes on him, making him blind. (This is reminiscent of the fate of Oedipus.) Shortly afterwards the blinded Faust dies, and to the deep disgust of Mephistopheles, Faust's soul is carried off to Heaven. Faust's final salvation does not seem convincing to many readers (including myself): He never shows remorse for his actions, and indeed never renounces his pact—yet saved he is!

Now there are various aspects of the play that would have spoken directly to Freud. The text is filled with references to dreams and fantasies; in fact, the whole atmosphere is dark, romantic, and dream-like. (In this respect, there are strong resemblances between *Faust* and Flaubert's *The Temptation*.) Faust himself is an academic, a scholar, whose worldly, disillusioned attitudes would have struck a strong responsive chord in Freud's pessimism and in his skepticism about any higher ideals. Faust is portrayed as a doctor, and in an early scene he expresses his awareness that many of his "cures" are not cures at all. That is, Faust is a "bad doctor," providing false cures, or cures resulting from coincidence. Of course, the central theme and meaning of the entire work is Faust's pact with the Devil—a pact portrayed by Goethe as worth making. This pact is made in spite of reservations and longings, dating from childhood memories of an "Easter faith."

The Faust-Margaret relationship has certain important structural similarities to the Freud-Martha engagement period. The two adversaries with whom Freud had real conflicts over Martha were her very Jewish mother, who was unenthusiastic about Sigmund, and Martha's brother Eli, who functioned as head of the house (the father having died several years earlier). Freud held the "heartless" mother responsible for Martha's leaving him in Vienna and going to live near Hamburg.²⁵ And of course, Freud, who was so conscious of name similarities, must have been struck by phonetic parallels in the names of the two couples: *Faust-Margaret* and *Freud-Martha*.

Cocaine and the Devil

We need now to develop a deeper understanding of *Faust* by showing the story's connection to Freud's use of cocaine. Freud's important, rather lengthy involvement with cocaine is now being widely recognized.²⁶ (Jones discusses cocaine briefly as an episode, but he plays down the subject to the point of distorting the record.²⁷) Quite

²⁵ For Freud's conflict with Martha's mother and brother, see Jones (1953, pp, 115 ff.); also Eissler (1971, p. 262).

²⁶ *Cocaine Papers by Sigmund Freud* (Byck, 1974) is the first volume to have focused on the presence of this drug in Freud's life.

²⁷ Jones (1953, Ch. 6). For example, Jones doesn't note the *Walpurgisnacht* April 30 date; he also restricts Freud's use of cocaine to a three-year span, without pointing out that Freud was still using it ten years later.

recently, both Swales,²⁸ to whom this section owes much, and Thornton²⁹ have made clear the pervasive effects of cocaine on Freud's thoughts, moods, and fantasies.

Freud began experimenting with the drug in 1884, when he was 28, at a time when cocaine was almost unknown in scientific circles.³⁰ During the period 1884-1887, Freud took cocaine frequently, sometimes in heavy doses.³¹ After taking the drug himself and getting some preliminary reports from others, Freud published glowing descriptions of cocaine. Not only did Freud think at the time that the drug had anti-morphine effects; he was enthusiastic as well about its contributions to mental well-being. It was an antidote to his frequent depressions, and also provided increased physical strength and sexual potency. Like Faust, Freud was enamored of the idea of a drug-induced rejuvenation. Freud's initial involvement with cocaine thoroughly captured both his emotional and intellectual interests. He enthusiastically recommended it to others, including his fiancée.³² He administered the drug (very likely via hypodermic needle) to his friend and colleague Ernst Fleischl, who was suffering from a drawn-out, terminal nerve condition that required the use of morphine to ease his pain.³³ Freud got Fleischl to take cocaine, which he thought would cure his friend's morphine addiction and have no undesirable effects of its own. Instead, after a brief period of benefit from the drug, Fleischl became addicted to cocaine as well as to morphine, and suffered particularly from cocaine-induced hallucinations (e.g., crawling "cocaine bugs") and delirium tremens.³⁴ Freud later bitterly acknowledged that he might have hastened his friend's death, saying it was "the result of trying to cast out the devil with Beelzebub."³⁵

In the eyes of many, Freud was soon seen as a public menace: One prominent doctor wrote of Freud as having unleashed "the third great scourge of mankind," the first two having been alcohol and opium.³⁶

In Freud's defense, it should be said that at the time little was known about the drug, although he clearly displayed very poor judgment. His overenthusiasm for cocaine stemmed from three pressing personal desires, which the drug promised to satisfy. First was his intense desire to get married soon, for he was "pathologically" anxious about his separation from and lengthy open-ended engagement with Martha, who was in northern Germany. He was afraid he might lose her. He had already been separated from her for a year when he began using cocaine, although it seemed much longer to him, for he recalled it once as a two-year separation and once as lasting several years.³⁷ A second driving concern was career ambition.³⁸ A medical success, such as the discovery of positive effects from a new drug, would at once advance his career and

²⁸ See Swales, (1981, 1983c).

²⁹ See Thornton (1983).

³⁰ Byck (1974, p. xii).

³¹ See S. Freud (1884/1974, pp. 48-73, e.g., p. 58); see also Thornton (1983).

³² Jones (1953, pp. 81, 91); Merck (1884/1974, pp. 78-79).

³³ See Jones (1953, pp. 44, 80-81); Bernfeld (1953/1974, pp. 326, 348).

³⁴ See Jones (1953, pp. 90-92); Bernfeld (1953/1974, p. 342).

³⁵ Jones (1953, p. 80).

³⁶ The doctor was A. Erlenmeyer. See Jones (1953, p. 85) for quote; also see S. Freud (1887/1974, p. 172).

³⁷ Jones (1953, pp. 78-79).

³⁸ Eissler (1971, pp. 258-259) calls Freud's ambition "pathological"—at least up to his early 40s.

improve his financial situation, enabling him to marry. Thus, both of these desires would be satisfied by a “cocaine” success. The third need was Freud’s desire for an escape from his deeply neurotic depressions, induced to a large degree by his separation anxiety. (We may recall some of his letters to Martha, as discussed in Chapter Three.³⁹)

Jones summarizes Freud’s motives for working on cocaine as involving the enhancement of virility, as well as promising to speed up marriage with Martha; Jones also notes that in getting involved with cocaine, Freud had “forsaken the straight and narrow path of science to seize a short cut to success.”⁴⁰ His attitude toward the new “soma” was expressed in a dramatic passage from a letter to Martha on June 2, 1884, shortly after he first took it:

Woe to you, my Princess, when I come [for a planned visit]. I will kiss you quite red and feed you until you are plump. And if you are forward you shall see who is the stronger, a gentle girl who doesn’t eat enough or a big wild man who has cocaine in his body. In my last severe depression I took coca again and a small dose lifted me to heights in a wonderful fashion. I am just now busy collecting the literature for a song of praise to this magical substance.⁴¹

Freud received some scientific acclaim for bringing cocaine to the attention of the medical world, but within a year of his official reports the negative effects of the drug were being reported. These criticisms Freud himself described as “grave reproaches,”⁴² and they put him under something of a cloud. Jones admits, “It was a poor background from which to shock Viennese medical circles a few years later with his theories on the sexual etiology of the neuroses.”⁴³

Ironically, it was a young doctor friend of Freud—Carl Koller, an ophthalmologist—who became famous overnight by discovering that cocaine was an effective local anesthetic for the eye, thus enabling anesthetic to be given for eye operations for the first time.⁴⁴ Freud had suspected this, but had not immediately investigated the possibility; Koller did. As a result, Koller, to whom Freud had introduced the drug, reaped the career advancement and financial rewards of which Freud had dreamed.

Now the Devil comes into all this through two facts, whose importance Peter Swales has recognized and which he brought to my attention.⁴⁵ The Swalesian theory is thus the third published interpretation of a Freudian pact with the Devil.⁴⁶ Freud first took cocaine on the night of April 30, 1884—that is, *Walpurgisnacht*.⁴⁷ In doing this, Freud, who took the drug in liquid form (as a “brew”), was clearly imitating Faust in his pact with Mephistopheles.⁴⁸ The whole affair could easily have been primed by the fact that Goethe’s *Faust* was the talk of Vienna in early 1884, following a series of well-

³⁹ Also see Jones (1953, p. 84).

⁴⁰ Jones (1953, p. 85).

⁴¹ Jones (1953, p. 84).

⁴² Jones (1953, p. 94).

⁴³ Jones (1953, p. 94).

⁴⁴ Jones (1953, pp. 86-88); see also Becker (1963/1974).

⁴⁵ Swales (1983c, p. 6, note); Gillie with Swales (1981); Swales (1984).

⁴⁶ The first two have been provided by Velikovsky (1941) and Bakan (1958).

⁴⁷ Byck (1974, p. xii).

⁴⁸ Faust drinks the potion at the end of the Witch’s Kitchen scene (e.g., Kaufmann, 1961, p. 255).

publicized performances at the Old Burgtheater.⁴⁹

The yellow smoke gets thicker when another aspect of the situation is considered: Freud obtained his cocaine, which was expensive, from the drug company of Merck in Darmstadt, Germany. He got a local chemist to contact Emanuel Merck, the head of the company. Later, Freud and Fleischl corresponded with Merck personally.⁵⁰ (An example of the Merck bottle of cocaine, and of a prescription, written by Freud to Merck for cocaine, is available. This particular prescription is from a later date, June 1893; it proves Freud's continued connection with the drug.⁵¹) What Swales has pointed out is that the Merck who founded the company was Goethe's model for Mephistopheles when he wrote *Faust*. Goethe, in his well-known autobiographical work *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, not only referred to Merck as a "great negator" and as a man of the world "who had the greatest influence on me"⁵²; more significantly, he compared Merck to Mephistopheles at least three times.⁵³ Freud knew Goethe's work well, and was presumably familiar with this text. In writing to the great-grandson of the first Merck, Merck's "revenant," he was, psychologically speaking, contacting the Devil.

It is remotely possible that in 1884 Freud had not yet read Goethe's famous autobiography, in the second half of which Merck figures so prominently. Freud certainly did read *Dichtung und Wahrheit* at some time, though, since in 1917 he published an analysis of a childhood memory of Goethe cited in this work.⁵⁴ The memory in question, which Freud interpreted as an expression of sibling rivalry, was one he said he had long known but had only written about for publication when he had come to a psychoanalytic understanding of its meaning.⁵⁵ Freud also pointed out in his review of the history of cocaine, published in July 1884, that the Spaniards, who first wrote of the use of the coca plant by South American Indians, suspected that it was the work of the Devil.⁵⁶

In conclusion, it is clear that cocaine for Freud was thoroughly linked to the Devil, and, indeed, was connected from the beginning to some kind of pact. Thus, while Freud was still a young physician—years before the beginning of psychoanalysis, and some 10-12 years before the psychological "pact" that Bakan proposes—he was already very strongly involved with the Devil. The exact nature of the pact is still not clear, but it appears to have been modeled on Faust's pact, and it was certainly precipitated by Freud's admittedly "severe" depressions, his longing for Martha, and his "pathological ambition."⁵⁷

⁴⁹ Gillie with Swales (1981).

⁵⁰ Jones (1953, pp. 78, 88); Merck (1884/1974, p. 78).

⁵¹ Eissler (1978, p. 110).

⁵² Goethe (1831/1949, p. 444).

⁵³ Goethe (1831/1949, pp. 488, 542, 638).

⁵⁴ S. Freud (1917a, C.P., 4, p. 360).

⁵⁵ S. Freud (1917a, C.P., 4, p. 360). Earlier, in the "Rat-Man" case history, Freud noted in a familiar manner how the patient had read and reacted to an incident in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (S. Freud, 1909b, C.P., 3, p. 341).

⁵⁶ S. Freud (1884/1974, p. 50).

⁵⁷ Eissler (1971, p. 259).

Thornton's Cocaine Thesis

E. M. Thornton has very recently published an extensive discussion of the effect of Freud's cocaine use on both his personal psychology and his theories.⁵⁸ Although, for reasons given below, I think Thornton has overgeneralized the significance of cocaine for understanding Freud, she does make a number of important contributions to Freud scholarship.

To begin with, she identifies two time periods when Freud took cocaine⁵⁹: the first from 1884 to 1887, first noted by Jones, and a second period, beginning in late 1892 and continuing into the middle or late 1890s.⁶⁰ Thornton is not especially clear on when Freud last took cocaine, but she clearly implies that he took it well after 1900, perhaps until 1912.⁶¹ However, because of the complete and uncensored letters of Freud to Fliess, very recently published, it appears that Freud permanently ceased taking cocaine in October 1896, when he wrote to Fliess that he had put his cocaine brush aside.⁶² An important consequence, in the following months, would be that Freud was often struggling with cocaine withdrawal experiences, especially depression. Thornton also points out that Freud used pure, unadulterated cocaine; he used it frequently and often in strong doses.⁶³ Thornton's major claim is that Freud suffered from cocaine poisoning and from powerful drug-induced psychological states.⁶⁴ In particular, she claims that Freud's psychological theory was simply the natural consequence of extensive cocaine usage.⁶⁵ It is well known that cocaine causes hallucinations, vivid dreams, and extensive fantasies in frequent users. Cocaine use can also cause sexual preoccupation to become obsessive. Other reliable psychological effects from taking too much cocaine are periods of elation, optimism, and an almost messianic belief in having discovered the great secrets of life; these intervals are followed by periods of deep depression often accompanied by paranoia and murderous impulses toward friends.⁶⁶ All of these symptoms, Thornton argues, are clearly shown in Freud's letters to Fliess and often in Fliess's ideas as well, since Fliess was also a heavy user of cocaine. (Both suffered from severe headaches and from nasal and sinus infections during this period as well. Such symptoms are typical when cocaine is taken through the nose, as was the case during these years for both Freud and Fliess.⁶⁷)

My primary critique of Thornton is that much of Freud's psychology was clearly apparent before he took cocaine. Therefore, although the drug would have accentuated and sometimes distorted Freud's already existing psychology and intellectual interests, it would not have caused them in the first place. For example, Freud was mentioning his extreme depressive reactions to Martha's absence before he took cocaine. For example,

⁵⁸ Thornton (1983).

⁵⁹ Thornton (1983, p. ix; also Chs. 2, 8, etc.).

⁶⁰ It is quite possible that Freud used cocaine in the intervening years between 1887 and 1892, but at present there is no evidence for this, since most of his letters from that period remain to be published.

⁶¹ Thornton (1983, p. 243).

⁶² S. Freud (1985, p. 201).

⁶³ Thornton (1983, p. xi).

⁶⁴ Thornton (1983, Ch. 15).

⁶⁵ Thornton (1983, e.g., p. 199).

⁶⁶ Thornton (1983, pp. 113, 125, 141, 149-150); for examples of Freud's use of cocaine and of his nasal problems, see S. Freud (1985, pp. 106, 126, 127, 132).

⁶⁷ Thornton (1983, pp. 125-126, 139, 177-178).

on August 18, 1882, he wrote, “Without you I would let my arms droop for sheer lack of desire to live”⁶⁸; on February 14, 1884, he exclaimed, “Do you realize it is two whole days since I heard from you and I am beginning to worry!”⁶⁹

Likewise, Freud’s previously discussed expressions of religious preoccupation—his lengthy letter about the Christian paintings in Dresden, his many youthful references to God, his early quotes from *Faust*, and his references to the Devil—all preceded his cocaine use. Most of his involvement with Brentano and the letters to Fluss and Silberstein that have been cited also antedate his use of cocaine, as does his attraction to Flaubert’s *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, with what Freud called its wild *Walpurgisnacht* character. Finally, we can observe Freud’s very early expression of extreme self-confidence in a letter written when he was 17 to his friend Emil Fluss. Freud was writing about his high grades in his school (Gymnasium) examinations. One of his professors told him that he had an outstanding writing style, and Freud remarked:

I was suitably impressed by this amazing fact and do not hesitate to disseminate the happy event, the first of its kind, as widely as possible—to you, for instance, who until now have probably remained unaware that you have been exchanging letters with a German stylist...preserve them [the letters]—have them bound—take good care of them—one never knows.⁷⁰

Another way to place Thornton’s cocaine claims in perspective is to compare the very different effects of the drug on Freud and on Fliess. Both became somewhat megalomaniacal; both showed occasional signs of sloppy (probably drug-affected) thinking; both became preoccupied with sex. But the differences were even greater and can be plausibly explained by the different personal psychologies and professional backgrounds of the two men. Fliess focused on the sexual significance of the nose⁷¹; Freud never seriously theorized about the nose. Fliess emphasized his proposed female and male sexual periods of 28 and 23 days, respectively, while Freud turned to sexual experiences in childhood between the ages of two and four. Freud analyzed dreams and fantasies, but Fliess seems to have had no real interest in these phenomena. In short, these were very different ways to approach sexuality, and therefore I conclude that the major effect of cocaine was to accentuate or heighten Freud’s pre-existing thought patterns and psychological preoccupations. At times, cocaine may have distorted his reactions; for example, it may have made his depressions darker and harder to fight. But cocaine did not create the primary content and structure of Freud’s mind and thought. (The question of whether Freud’s theories are correct is also one that Thornton addresses extensively. This issue, however important in its own right, is not of concern here; instead, the present discussion is focused on understanding the origin and nature of Freud’s thought with respect to religion, especially Christianity. The question of the validity of Freud’s theories is treated only with respect to his interpretation of religion, and then only in the last chapter of this book.)

⁶⁸ Letters (p. 28).

⁶⁹ Letters (p. 98).

⁷⁰ Letters (p. 4).

⁷¹ Thornton (1983, Ch. 8); Sulloway (1979, Ch. 5).

Milton's *Paradise Lost*

In 1907, Freud received a letter in which he was asked to name “ten good books.” In his response,⁷² Freud noted that he was not asked to name the ten *greatest* books, in which category he would put the tragedies of Sophocles, Goethe's *Faust*, and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Nor was the request for *significant* books, like Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Nor again was he asked for his *favorite* books; nonetheless, he provided the titles of the two works that he termed his “favorites.” (No other titles were mentioned as favorites.) These two, which presumably were those he found the most personally satisfying, were Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Heine's *Lazarus*. Let us look briefly at the former. (The *Lazarus* poems are discussed in Chapter Six.)

Paradise Lost is, of course, a Christian classic by a great English Puritan, with a theme identified in the title. It is the story, first, of the revolt of Satan and his banishment from Heaven, then of the fall of man and his expulsion from Paradise (Eden). About this work, Freud, as a young man, wrote to Martha:

I don't know how it came about, but today I was thinking that everyone ought to have someone great and powerful to be his lord and protector, to whom he could turn in dark, heavy hours. I reached out for John Milton, with his sublime enchantment that can transport me as nothing else can from the dull, unsatisfying world of daily care, so that the earth becomes like a little dot in the universe, and the vast heavens open.⁷³

Aside from Milton's “sublime enchantment,” there are various characteristics of this work that would have appealed to Freud—that would have spoken to his memories and to his patterns of thought. Freud's remark about himself as “the happy child from Freiberg” is relevant here as a description of his own lost Eden.⁷⁴ In another text as well, Freud evoked these memories:

When I was seventeen...I returned for the first time to my birthplace for the holidays...I know quite well what a wealth of impressions overwhelmed me at the time...I believe now that I was never free from a longing for the beautiful woods near our home.⁷⁵

Paradise Lost would have been, even more than the early part of *Faust*, a powerful literary redintegration and representation of Freud's own lost childhood world. (One is reminded here that while in Rome Freud particularly enjoyed staying in the Eden Hotel.⁷⁶) The main character of *Paradise Lost* (i.e., the one given the greatest literary prominence and power) is, of course, Satan, who, after rebelling, seduces Eve by assuming the form of the serpent, and then Adam through Eve. So again we find a Freudian fascination for the literary celebration of Satanic power.

At the heart of Milton's work is the great opposition between Heaven and Hell.⁷⁷

⁷² Letters (p. 368).

⁷³ Unpublished letter, July 12, 1883; cited in E. Freud et al. (1978, p. 96).

⁷⁴ S. Freud (1931, S.E., 21, p. 259).

⁷⁵ S. Freud (1899a, S.E., 3, p. 312).

⁷⁶ E. Freud et al. (1978, pp. 184, 331).

⁷⁷ The summary of *Paradise Lost* is taken from the Signet Classic edition of the poem (Milton, 1667/1968).

God is in Heaven with the Messiah and the angels; Satan has “fallen into Hell,” into the “great Deep,” where as the poem begins he is “lying on the burning lake.” He has been driven out because of his disobedience, because of his attack on God the Father—an Oedipal rebellion, if you will. Satan comes to earth at night, and enters the serpent. (Throughout the poem, Satan is associated with the night and with a lower, darker world. He is described as an evil spirit who has escaped from the deep.) The next morning Eve relates a disturbing dream to Adam, a dream anticipating her coming temptation. She is soon in fact seduced by Satan into eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge; Adam, rather than live without her, also eats the fruit; their joint fall is the result. Considering Freud’s own intense desire for knowledge, one wonders if he didn’t side with Adam and Eve—and Satan—on the fundamental question of knowledge. Relevant here is a letter written by Freud to Martha in the summer of 1883. Freud, feeling quite depressed about their separation and worried about their future, quoted from *Paradise Lost*:

Let us consult
What reinforcement we may gain from hope,
If not, what resolution from despair.⁷⁸

What Jones, who cites this letter, does not mention is that Freud was quoting Satan here. The passage in question occurs when Satan is licking his wounds after being thrown out of Heaven; he is speaking with one of his fallen helpers and planning a new attack on God.

The story continues with Adam and Eve’s expulsion from Paradise, but at the end of the poem they learn that redemption will come many years in the future: It will come through the seed of Eve, and with it Paradise will be restored. (It is interesting to note that Eve learns of all this through a dream, just as she dreamed of her temptation in advance. That dreams are to be taken seriously was assumed by Milton, and by many other writers who influenced Freud as well.) The major explicit expression of this final redemptive outcome is, of course, found in Milton’s sequel to this work, *Paradise Regained*. Freud does not appear to have read this poem, though, given his knowledge of literary culture, he must have known of its existence and general theme.

There is an interesting parallel between Milton’s three-tiered world of Heaven (God)-Earth (man)-Hell (Satan) and the Superego-ego-Id of Freudian theory. Moreover, the greatest power appears to lie with the id (Satan), who is the energetic leader of rebellion, seduction, and violence. Adam and Eve, as representations of the ego, are certainly the weakest in this trio, while God, Jesus, and the loyal angels (the superego) are portrayed in Milton, but not in Freud, as the ultimate victors. But despite the eventual future victory, it is Satan who at the end of *Paradise Lost* has won the first great battle by bringing about the loss of Paradise for mankind, and it is Satan, the spirit from the deep, who comes across within this work as the true power to be reckoned with.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Jones (1953, p. 173); the quotation is from *Paradise Lost*, Book I, line 191 (Milton, 1667/1968, p. 52).

⁷⁹ One might add that Milton’s creative life was apparently influenced strongly by a visit to Italy (Rome in particular) during his youth; see Parker (1968, Vol. 1, pp. 169-182) and Freeman & Low (1984, pp. 87-148). Also, Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* after he had become blind (cf. the fates of Oedipus and of Faust).

Mozart's *Don Giovanni*

Freud expressed an unusual, and indeed most peculiar, attitude toward music. Here was a man living in perhaps the major music capital of the world, during a period of great creative musical activity—a man who, moreover, was very open to culture—but who explicitly said that he did not like music. Freud's words on the subject are revealing: "[W]ith music, I am almost incapable of obtaining any pleasure. Some rationalistic, or perhaps analytic, turn of mind in me rebels against being moved by a thing without knowing why I am thus affected and what it is that affects me."⁸⁰ In general, this self-description seems to have been quite accurate, for Freud rarely if ever went to concerts, and showed little interest in music. As I have already proposed above, I believe that this rejection of music came from Freud's early experience of church music. To hear organ, instrumental, and choral music, and also bells, would have activated painful, unconscious memories in Freud—memories of his lost nanny and her world. And yet there were a few exceptions to Freud's categorical rejection. Freud did occasionally go to the opera, and he definitely enjoyed a few of them. Now an opera, of course, has a plot or story, and as a result Freud's penchant for rational understanding would be much less thwarted than in the case of "pure" music, so it is not difficult to understand this exception.

But what particular operas did Freud like? Jones, in discussing Freud's personal life, refers to only three operas. One was *Carmen*, an opera he seems to have enjoyed moderately⁸¹; the other two were operas by Mozart, who was clearly Freud's favorite composer. Two of Mozart's operas figured with some frequency in Freud's letters and other writings: *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*. Without a doubt, the latter was Freud's favorite. Jones relates:

[Freud] was shocked to find that his friend...did not know that *Don Giovanni* was composed by Mozart, so he insisted on taking him to see it...Martha and he had seen the opera in their days together in Vienna. Then...[Freud had] decided to complete his Mozart education by seeing the *Magic Flute*. This proved rather disappointing. "Some of the arias are wonderfully beautiful, but the whole thing rather drags... The action is very stupid, the libretto quite crazy, and it is simply not to be compared with *Don Giovanni*."⁸²

Let us take a look at this one opera that Freud so especially liked. The opera is set in Spain, and the plot is established in Scene One.⁸³ Don Giovanni (Don Juan), who has

⁸⁰ S. Freud (1914a, S.E., 13, p. 211). One wonders whether Freud ever read Shakespeare's powerful comment about those who get no pleasure from music:

The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
And his affections dark as Erebus.
Let no such man be trusted.

The Merchant of Venice, Act V, scene i, lines 83-88

⁸¹ Jones (1953, p. 178).

⁸² Jones (1953, p. 178).

⁸³ The summary of *Don Giovanni* is taken from the Dover edition (Mozart, 1787/1964).

spent his life successfully seducing women, is now in Seville at the palace of an elderly, dignified nobleman, the Commendatore (or commander). Don Giovanni is accompanied by his servant Leporello, who has helped Giovanni in many of his escapades. The action begins with a struggle on the stairs of the palace between Giovanni and Donna Anna, the daughter of the Commendatore. Giovanni is pressing his physical attentions on Donna Anna, who is resisting him. As they lurch down the stairs, suddenly the Commendatore appears, sees his daughter struggling with her would-be seducer, and challenges Giovanni to a duel. Don Giovanni, goaded by the old gentleman, draws his sword and swiftly kills him; Giovanni then leaves hastily with his servant. Donna Anna and her betrothed, Don Ottavio, discover the body; grief-stricken Donna Anna makes Don Ottavio swear to avenge her father's death. Together they vow vengeance in a duet that ends the scene: "Che giuramento, O Dei" ("What an oath, O Gods").

The action then portrays Donna Anna's attempt to avenge the death of her father, the Commendatore. Because she was unable to see the face of Giovanni in the earlier scene, this takes some time. Other important parts of the opera concern Giovanni's attempts to seduce other women and to avoid the consequences of similar past actions. The climax occurs in Scene Four of the second and final act. Don Giovanni is in a graveyard with Leporello; in the graveyard is a statue of the late Commendatore. Giovanni is jocularly relating his recent adventures when a deep, sepulchral voice suddenly declares that they will soon end. Don Giovanni commands Leporello to ask the statue to dinner the following evening. The statue nods acceptance; to make sure, Don Giovanni repeats the invitation; the statue replies "Yes."

The last scene is set in the banquet hall of Don Giovanni's castle. There is beautiful music and a lavish meal. Suddenly, Donna Elvira, with whom Don Giovanni has had a prior affair, appears. Don Giovanni dismisses the musicians and his other lady friends. Donna Elvira pleads desperately with her former lover to mend his evil ways; Don Giovanni finds her pleas amusing. Donna Elvira, rebuffed, rushes toward a door. She opens it, shrieks in terror, and runs out through an opposite door. Don Giovanni goes to the door, opens it, and discovers that the statue of the Commendatore has arrived. The marble statue enters, grasps Don Giovanni's arm, and orders him to repent; Don Giovanni stubbornly refuses. At this, the statue announces that the time has come; it pulls Don Giovanni along toward the door through which it entered. "Smoke and flames begin to develop Don Giovanni; a chorus of hollow demon voices summons him to hell, where worse agony awaits him. Don Giovanni, with a final scream, vanishes amid hellfire and smoke."⁸⁴

Now there are a number of what we might term "Freudian" elements in this opera. The initial killing of the Commendatore is an obvious Oedipal conflict, in which the old father is killed by a son-figure. The killing, and Giovanni's sexual crimes, lead to his final damnation. Also, this opera is another example of Freud's early preoccupation with three-layered universes: the gods above, then Earth, and Hell with damnation below.

Many of the names in Mozart's work would also have struck deep responses in Freud. The heroine's name of "Donna Anna" would have evoked his nanny, and possibly his sister (also, eventually, his daughter). "Don Giovanni" (Don Juan) would

⁸⁴ Mozart (1787/1964, p. 64).

have suggested his “cousin” John. “Leporello” is the Italian for “Lipperel,” the diminutive of “Philipp.” It is as if Mozart chose his names precisely from the Freud “family romance.” Finally, the marble man, the statue of the Commendatore, can be viewed as an expression of many of the elements that Freud found so powerfully fascinating in the statue of Moses: Both statues are, in particular, judgmental, stone father-figures.

Victor Hugo’s *Notre Dame de Paris*

While Freud was in Paris for several months from the fall of 1885 to early 1886, studying with Charcot, he read Victor Hugo’s *Notre Dame de Paris*. He wrote to Martha that to understand Paris “it is the novel to read, for it is the truth about Paris.”⁸⁵ But he declared that one should only read the book in Paris, and if one is in a calm mood. Jones says that Freud entered into the spirit of *Notre Dame*, which he had not previously thought highly of, but which he now preferred to neuropathology, his field of study.⁸⁶

The novel centers around the young, beautiful Esmeralda, and three men with dramatically contrasting natures who compete for her love. They are Quasimodo, the devoted hunchback; Frollo, the diabolical archdeacon; and Phebus, the handsome, somewhat superficial captain. By far, the most powerful characters are Frollo and Quasimodo. Frollo, portrayed as possessed by the Devil, is responsible for the death of Esmeralda. Once he knows that he cannot have her love (she loves Phebus), he arranges for her to be falsely accused of murder and witchcraft, which results in her being publicly hanged. As she dies on the gibbet, Frollo watches from the parapets of *Notre Dame*, and his Satanic laughter is a chilling expression that he is possessed and no longer really human. Quasimodo avenges his beloved by pushing Frollo off the cathedral tower to his death. The omnipresent cathedral is virtually a character in itself in the novel; it is at any rate a powerful context—a physical, almost living presence—in which the action is set.

There is much in Frollo that would have interested—even attracted Freud. Frollo is an intellectual; what he thirsts for is knowledge (“science”). Like Faust, he first studies theology, then (among many other things) medicine. He is celibate, in love with an attractive girl; he is, moreover, hard pressed for money. In short, he is not so very unlike Freud! (Note also: *Freud-Frollo-Faust*.)

As for Quasimodo, this character is named for the first Sunday after Easter (“*Quasi modo...*” are the first words of the Introit of the Mass of that day). He is ugly and deformed, but in the text he is the embodiment of goodness and devotion. He is the bellringer of *Notre Dame*. I would like to suggest that Quasimodo was associated for Freud with his nanny, who was also ugly, devoted, and associated with church bells and Easter.

Freud’s favorite part of *Notre Dame* was, incidentally, the platform high up on the

⁸⁵ Jones (1953, p. 188).

⁸⁶ Jones (1953, p. 184). The summary of the novel that follows is taken from an 1880s edition in the original French (Hugo, 1831/ca. 1885).

tower, among the gargoyles and demons—the place, in fact, from which Frollo falls to his death.⁸⁷

The novel has many other “Freudian” properties. Esmeralda and Quasimodo do not know who their true parents are, and the theme of ambiguous parentage is a significant one in the work. As to the bells, not only is Quasimodo (as noted) the bellringer, but Hugo devotes entire pages to bells and their powerful auditory and emotive powers; they provide an important part of the novel’s atmosphere. Still more Freudian are the visual hallucinatory experiences of Frollo, which are described in great detail. These hallucinations would have been very interesting to Freud because of their similarity to dream images; because such images or visions constitute the method or mode whereby the Devil is experienced; and because, at the time, Freud’s use of cocaine would have made him especially liable to hallucinations of his own.

While Freud was in Paris, he was frequently taking cocaine. Three of the published letters from him during this stay in Paris refer to this: “a little cocaine to untie my tongue” (January 18, 1886); “I, quite calm with the help of a small dose of cocaine.” (January 20, 1886); and “a bit of cocaine I have just taken is making me talkative” (February 2, 1886).⁸⁸ Both Swales and Thornton have suggested that part of Freud’s strange reaction to the Parisians was due to cocaine-induced moods. On December 3, 1885, he wrote Martha that “the city and its inhabitants strike me as uncanny; the people seem to me of a different species...they are all possessed of a thousand demons.”⁸⁹ Freud also reported that in Paris he heard Martha calling his name—an auditory hallucination attributable to his cocaine use.⁹⁰

A final note: We may recall (see quote, p. 104) that Freud said of this work that in it Hugo “taught me that the poet too is a priest; and thus I boldly substituted myself for the confessor.” Here we see Freud with a literary identity as poet describing himself as both like, and as in competition with, a priest.

The Interpretation of Dreams: Rome, Malleus Maleficarum, Witchcraft, and Related Themes

Thanks to his letters to Fliess, there is considerable information available concerning Freud’s personal motivations during the time, about ten years after his stay in Paris, during which he was writing the “dream book,” generally considered to be his greatest contribution to psychology. The Devil and related topics made repeated appearances in these letters as Freud worked out his ideas. Let us look through this correspondence for references to the Devil and to related Christian themes.

In the spring of 1896 came the first mention of a book that would eventually become *The Interpretation of Dreams*, some three and a half years later. In December 1896, Freud mentioned three chapters, and he gave the introductory quotations that would precede them. He wrote that one chapter would be preceded by these lines:

⁸⁷ Origins (p. 172).

⁸⁸ Letters (pp. 193, 195, 201).

⁸⁹ Letters (p. 187).

⁹⁰ Swales (1983c, pp. 9-10); Thornton (1983, p. 202).

They are exceeding all bounds, I fear a breakdown; God does not present the reckoning at the end of every week.⁹¹

The meaning of this is not entirely clear, since Freud did not identify the source, but anxiety and the fear of God's reckoning are obvious. For another major chapter, Freud suggested a quote from Goethe (from *Zahme Xenien*), which translates as "Cut it short! On doomsday it won't be worth a fart."⁹² Here again the theme of final judgment can be seen. With respect to this work, Walter Kaufmann writes: "The *Xenien* who revere Satan, 'our sire and singer,' were polemical verses written by Goethe and Schiller."⁹³

Finally, for the chapter on symptom formation, Freud proposed a line from the *Aeneid*: "*Flectere si nequeo superos Acheronta movebo*" ("If I cannot bend the higher powers [the gods], I shall stir up Hell [the river Acheron]."⁹⁴ This quotation is most significant, since Freud ultimately selected it as the motto not merely for a chapter, but for the entire book. These words, Schorske points out,⁹⁵ are spoken by Juno, who hates Aeneas and struggles unsuccessfully to prevent the founding of Rome. Here is another example of Freud's Hannibal complex. Once again, then, we have a powerful literary expression of a three-tiered universe, with Freud taking the side of the lower level, Hell, against the higher powers, who are on the side of Rome (and implicitly of Christianity). Freud's ambivalence was clearly present here, in that he associated himself in this quotation with an enemy of Rome who is fated to lose: We know Juno cannot keep Aeneas from his destiny—his kingdom.

Three letters later in the correspondence (January 3, 1897), Freud was writing about his new psychology and about his optimism in the new year. First he commented (and here we can note that he was siding with the angels!): "When I am not afraid I can take on all the devils in hell..."⁹⁶ The letter continued with the idea that the first three years of life are the most important for the development of a person's psychology. Freud then mentioned his hope of being with Fliess at Easter, perhaps in Prague. In the letter's final paragraph, he proposed a motto to introduce his chapter on sexuality: "from heaven through the world to hell," a quote from *Faust*. (With this, Freud was back in more familiar company.)

A short time later (January 17, 1897), Freud took up the medieval notion of possession, which he said was "identical with our theory of a foreign body and the splitting of consciousness."⁹⁷ In this important letter, Freud proposed that the Devil is a psychological experience of part of the unconscious—one that is due to a split in the person, or one that can give rise to a splitting in consciousness. One part then comes under the control or influence of the unconscious "demons" (more is said on this in Chapter Five).

⁹¹ *Origins* (p. 172, note 1).

⁹² *Origins* (p. 172).

⁹³ Kaufmann (1961, p. 31).

⁹⁴ *Origins* (p. 172).

⁹⁵ Schorske (1980, p. 200).

⁹⁶ *Origins* (p. 183).

⁹⁷ *Origins* (p. 187).

In his next letter (January 24, 1897), Freud continued to note parallels between his own ideas and the medieval theory of demonic possession.⁹⁸ He mentioned that he had ordered a copy of the book *Malleus Maleficarum* (*The Witches' Hammer*), which he planned to study diligently. Since we can assume that he did this, it is useful to describe briefly something of the content of this still well-known (and infamous) treatise.

This 15th-century work was written by two Dominicans on the subject of witchcraft, and it defines witches as possessed, either consciously or unconsciously, by the Devil.⁹⁹ The Devil, demons, and evil spirits are featured in every chapter. Several chapters take up the ways in which a conscious pact or arrangement with the Devil is made; thus one section is entitled “On the Way Whereby a Formed Pact with Evil Is Made.”¹⁰⁰ The pact may be made in a gathering of witches in a *Walpurgisnacht* setting, or alone. A clear rejection of God, Christ, the Church, and Christianity is an essential ingredient of such a pact. Although most witches (like hysterics) are women, some are men, and one important such male, possessed by the Devil, is noted in this book: He is the Anti-Christ.¹⁰¹

Now it is clear that Freud saw hysterical patients as people who in earlier centuries would have been described as witches. We should also note that Freud often thought of himself as an hysteric—as one with hysterical symptoms. Hence, Freud as a male hysteric would have been in his own eyes like a male witch. This understanding of hysterical symptoms as similar to what once was called “possession,” Freud proposed as early as 1886 and 1888, when he published his earliest papers commenting on the subject of hysteria.¹⁰²

Let us return to the January 24 letter. Freud discussed witchcraft with respect to a patient, Herr E., who as a child had had a nurse or nanny whom he deeply loved (a patient not unlike Freud himself, as is so often the case). In his fantasies, this woman's money was always turning to excrement. Apparently E. saw his nurse as a witch; this was what his associations of her money with excrement implied. Freud reported in the letter that he had just read (in the medieval accounts of these phenomena) that it is when the Devil gives money to his victims that they become witches.¹⁰³

Later, Freud reported that he was “beginning to dream of an extremely primitive devil religion.”¹⁰⁴ The whole issue of the similarity between the stories of alleged witches and his hysterical patients had greatly captured his imagination.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ *Origins* (pp. 188-191).

⁹⁹ Kramer & Sprenger (1486/1971).

¹⁰⁰ Kramer & Sprenger (1486/1971, p. 99).

¹⁰¹ Kramer & Sprenger (1486/1971, p. 126).

¹⁰² See Freud's remarks on his visit to Charcot (S. Freud, 1886, S.E., 1, p. 11) and also *Hysteria* (S. Freud, 1888, S.E., 1, p. 41).

¹⁰³ *Origins* (pp. 188, 189).

¹⁰⁴ *Origins* (p. 189).

¹⁰⁵ A few months later, in May 1897, Freud quoted in a short letter (*Origins*, p. 202) a phrase from *Don Giovanni*; the phrase is from a song by Leporello, in which he humorously lists the many conquests of his master. Freud implied that his intellectual accomplishments, as reflected in his bibliography, were like the list of Don Giovanni's sexual seductions. Some weeks later, in June (*Origins*, p. 211), he referred to the Almighty, and then wrote: “...I am in a cocoon, and heaven only knows what sort of creature will emerge from it.” Then came the letters in which he discovered his nanny and her great importance for him.

The theme of the Devil next appeared with a Freiberg association in a letter of October 27, 1897, when Freud quoted *Faust* again: “And the shades of loved ones appear, and with them, like an old, half-forgotten myth, first love and friendship”¹⁰⁶ (a reference to Freud’s just-emerging memories of his Freiberg childhood?). Next came many of the letters speaking so powerfully of Freud’s longing for Rome, especially for Rome with Fliess at Easter. In one of these letters, Freud quoted from *Faust* yet again: “The best that you know you cannot tell to the boys”¹⁰⁷—a statement made by the Devil to Faust, implying the constant need for censorship, since most people are not sophisticated enough to understand. This line was one of Freud’s favorites, and he quoted it often in his letters. It implies that Freud was aware that many of his central motivations and associations were artfully concealed, not only from the public but perhaps from “the boys” (his friends, perhaps even Fliess) as well. In this context, it is worth noting that Freud evaluated Goethe, his favorite writer, as “a great revealer” but also “in spite of the wealth of autobiographical hints, a careful concealer.”¹⁰⁸ Several letters later in the correspondence, in April 1898, Freud was recounting a visit to Italy (the letter included the description quoted in Chapter Three of the pretty girls gathered outside a cathedral for Easter Mass). Freud described a visit to the dramatic caves of St. Canigian, which he likened to the *Inferno* as depicted by Dante.¹⁰⁹ Four letters later (July 7, 1898) Freud wrote again of Dante and of the secret theme of “unsatisfied revenge and inevitable punishment, represented by Dante as continuing through all eternity.”¹¹⁰ The theme of Easter and Rome surfaced once more in the early months of 1899, with his longing to visit Rome.¹¹¹ In July of that year, he told Fliess that he would use the line from the *Aeneid* as his motto¹¹² for the “Egyptian Dream Book,” which was about to go to press.¹¹³

The correspondence continued with many Easter references, and one letter (March 23, 1900) contained the statement: “No one can help in what oppresses me, it is my cross, which I must bear, and heaven knows my back is getting noticeably bent under it...”¹¹⁴ All in all, this was quite a Christian definition of his situation, especially since the next sentence referred to his plan at Easter to visit Trent. The cross Freud referred to was a deep inner crisis involving depression and the collapse of intellectual or

¹⁰⁶ *Origins* (p. 225).

¹⁰⁷ *Origins* (p. 236).

¹⁰⁸ *Origins* (p. 237, note).

¹⁰⁹ *Origins* (p. 253).

¹¹⁰ *Origins* (p. 258).

¹¹¹ *Origins* (p. 279-280).

¹¹² *Origins* (p. 286).

¹¹³ *The Interpretation of Dreams* actually came out in late 1899, although its copyright date is 1900; Freud’s reference to this work as the “Egyptian dream book” (e.g., *Origins*, p. 294) obviously links with the Egyptian images he pored over in his childhood in the Philippon Bible. Curiously, Freud also expressed reservations about his major work in the same language. In 1925, in *An Autobiographical Study*, Freud describes his disillusionment over an early electrical cure of neuropathology: “[W]hat I had taken for an epitome of exact observations was merely the construction of phantasy. The realization that the work of the greatest name in German neuropathology had no more relation to reality than some ‘Egyptian’ dreambook, such as is sold in cheap book-shops, was painful...” (S. Freud, 1925, S.E., 20, p. 16). With this language, he provided an unconscious expression of doubts about the validity of his own ideas.

¹¹⁴ *Origins* (p. 314).

emotional illusions, the exact nature of which was unspecified.

In a letter of May 1900, Freud wrote:

[I]t will be a fitting punishment for me that none of the unexplored regions of the mind in which I have been the first to set foot will ever bear my name or submit to my laws. When breath threatened to fail me in the struggle I prayed the angel to desist, and that is what he has done since then. But I did not turn out to be the stronger, though since then I have been noticeably limping. Well, I really am forty-four now, a rather shabby old Jew...¹¹⁵

In this passage, Freud was comparing himself to Jacob, who wrestled with the angel of the Lord (Genesis 32), the result being a wounded thigh and a limp.

There is further evidence of Freud's concern with the Devil in a letter to Fliess, dated July 1900. *The Interpretation of Dreams* had now been out for some months, but I think that these words of Freud's (which evoke Dante's *Inferno*) very accurately describe the intellectual struggle that led to the "dream book" and that continued for some time afterwards:

The big, problems are still unsettled. It is an intellectual hell, layer upon layer of it, with everything fitfully gleaming and pulsating; and the outline of Lucifer-Amor coming into sight at the darkest centre.¹¹⁶

Presumably this passage refers as well to Freud's new book, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), which he was working on at the time. When some time later he was told of the popular success of this book, Freud replied by quoting from *Faust*: "Not even if he had them by the scruff of the neck, I swear, would ever these people smell the devil."¹¹⁷ This disturbing statement, along with the two preceding quotes, certainly implies that, in some sense, Freud saw himself as actively working against the angels of the Lord.

Conclusion

If we look back on Freud's life from the time of his late 20s up until his self-analysis, and for a few years afterward, it is apparent that the issues of Heaven and (especially) Hell, of the Devil and damnation, were deeply connected to his personal motivation. What were the works that most powerfully moved him? *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, *Faust*, *Notre Dame de Paris*, *Paradise Lost*, *Don Giovanni*, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the *Aeneid*, the *Inferno*, and much of *Huttens Letzte Tage* all belong in this list. All these works are centrally preoccupied with the Devil or with evil; with Heaven and Hell; or with hostility to Rome as a symbol of Catholicism. When the Devil does appear in person in these works, it is invariably as a compelling and fascinating figure; God may be the ultimate and highest good (and the final victor), but the Devil and Hell are

¹¹⁵ *Origins* (p. 318-319).

¹¹⁶ *Origins* (p. 323).

¹¹⁷ Gillie with Swales (1982, p. 27); Wittels (1924, p. 100).

psychologically and literally dominant in this literature.

Furthermore, it was to themes that Freud was drawn in a work, and not much to an author or his style. Thus, there is no evidence that Freud read any Flaubert except *The Temptation* (he never read, for example, the much more famous *Madame Bovary*). The only Victor Hugo Freud seems to have read is *Notre Dame*. There is no evidence that Freud read *Paradise Regained* or Dante's *Purgatorio* or *Paradiso*. No doubt Freud knew of these great works and their general meaning, but he apparently never read them.

These writings constituted the core of Freud's involvement with literature, and much of this core is focused on the Devil, on the demonic. Although the material cited in earlier chapters shows Freud's positive attraction to the Christian God, the evidence cited here makes a strong case that a very important part of Freud sided with Satan against God and Heaven and Christ, and sided with the enemies of the Church.

But what is one to make of all this? Before again taking up the thesis of a pact with the Devil, and offering a new interpretation, we must take a detour into some major and almost unexplored aspects of Freud's own psychology.