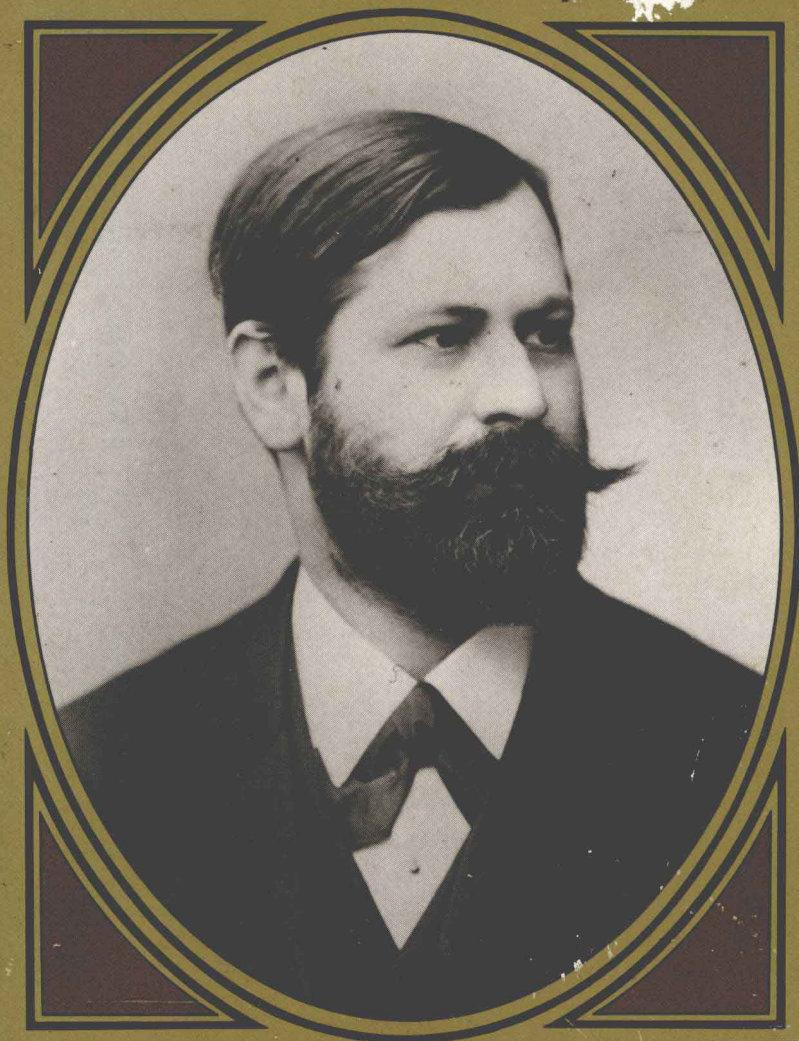


# The Young Freud



Billa Zanuso

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*The Origins of Psychoanalysis in  
Late Nineteenth-Century Viennese Culture*

BILLA ZANUSO

Basil Blackwell

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*Part I*

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# The Age of Freud

# 1

## Vienna, the Bourgeois City

### The Freud scandal

‘Psycho-analysis brings forward so much that is new, and among it so much that contradicts traditional opinions and wounds deep-rooted feelings, that it is bound at first to provoke denial.’ So Freud warns in his preface to the Hebrew edition of *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (standard edn, vol. XV, p. 11).<sup>1</sup> This series of lectures outlining his theory of psychoanalysis was originally delivered to an audience of doctors and laymen in Vienna between 1916 and 1917. By the time of this preface, published in 1930, the importance of psychoanalysis had long been recognized in international scientific circles. Yet Freud admits that the new perspectives opened up by this science can, and even should, produce an adverse reaction. This view is easier to understand when one considers the period in which Freud published his works and takes into consideration the traditional and deep-rooted feelings Freud offended with his theory.

Let us go back to Habsburg Vienna in the second half of the nineteenth century. Vienna, where Freud lived and worked, was the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The major

<sup>1</sup> See also *Complete Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (London, 1971).

influence in Europe at that time was Germany, which under Bismarck had become a threatening military power while enjoying at the same time extraordinary industrial and commercial growth. Second in importance, but only just, was France, which was less militarized and had a less developed industry, but none the less challenged Germany's scientific, artistic and commercial supremacy. Paris was then the great cultural centre of Europe, where painting, music and literature flourished in an atmosphere conducive to intellectual, artistic and personal freedom. Unlike Germany and France, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was not one nation, but a mosaic of different peoples — Czechs, Italians, Serbians, Croats, Slavs, Hungarians, Poles and Austrians. Over all of these reigned the Emperor Franz-Josef, who had come to power in 1848 at a critical point in the fortunes of the Habsburg dynasty, for a mood of revolution had threatened to undermine the oppressive rule of the previous Emperor, Franz I, and of his henchman, Metternich.

'My kingdom is a worm-eaten house', observed Franz I bitterly, to justify his lack of flexibility. 'Take away part of it, and the rest might collapse.' When Franz-Josef succeeded, he found himself in a difficult situation. The vast composite Empire was threatened from without by the expansionist ambitions of Germany and France, and from within by its subject states whose nationalistic claims perpetually threatened its stability. Franz-Josef, like his predecessor, Franz I, strove to maintain the status quo. In his book on the Habsburg myth in modern Austrian literature, Claudio Magris points out that during his 68-year reign even Franz-Josef's apparently progressive political moves were really conservative in purpose. The Emperor's motto was Law and Order, which he achieved by means of bureaucracy and the army. The vision which was intended to give this fundamentally static programme the semblance of a sacred long-term mission was one of many peoples united under the sovereign sway of the

divinely appointed Habsburg Father, in the name of peace, harmony and prosperity. As capital of the Empire, Vienna had to project this ambitious image with a show of magnificence. In 1857, a year after Freud's birth, the ancient walls, which could no longer contain a rapidly increasing population, were pulled down; the city was encircled by a broad avenue, the Ringstrasse, flanked by buildings that would house the newly emerging industrial and commercial middle class which had replaced the now impotent aristocracy. More buildings were erected: a university, museums, scientific institutes, cultural centres, libraries and art schools testified to the cultural revolution in which the middle classes played the leading part. During the second half of the nineteenth century the University of Vienna was renowned throughout Europe for its high standards of research and teaching, especially in the field of medicine. New theatres, including the Opera House, were also built, as were a number of concert halls and musical academies, where performers and public alike were drawn from the cultured middle classes, giving the Vienna of the day its particular tone.

It was a hybrid culture, showing signs of the aristocrat's refined aestheticism, the scientist's impartial search for truth and the moral rectitude and sense of tradition of the emergent managerial class. It was this image of man, the product of this moral tradition and this culture, that Freud's discoveries most vigorously attacked.

We are not concerned here with that section of Viennese society which expressed in art, drama and literature the anxieties, ideas and discoveries of a class which, as the Empire itself crumbled, nurtured an incredibly rich cultural movement. On the contrary, our interest lies in that mass of people 'possessed with an indestructible concept of life' who, unaffected by the atmosphere of febrile excitement that permeated the 'thin, inconsistent strata of the intelligentsia, continued to exist, to act and to evolve according to a

traditional human pattern — who were that is, traditionally bourgeois' (Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*).

### The good citizen

In this respect Viennese society was no different from other contemporary Western societies, the archetype being Victorian England where, conscious of representing his age, country and class, a man was expected to behave in a certain way and exhibit certain qualities, these having been formed by his education within his family, his school and the society in which he lived. These qualities were perseverance, a sense of duty, obedience to moral and civil laws and a respect for the rights of others; but he should also show initiative, be hard working and be able to seize any opportunities life might offer in order to improve his position through honest and responsible effort. He should appreciate honestly earned and well-managed wealth, but live frugally in order to fund other ventures. Here was the perfect model for those classes which saw industrial expansion as an excellent opportunity for consolidating their own positions.

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* Max Weber observes:

When the limitation of consumption is combined with this release of acquisitive activity, the inevitable practical result is obvious: accumulation of capital . . .

What the great religious epoch of the seventeenth century bequeathed to its utilitarian successor was, however, above all an amazingly good, we may even say a pharisaically good, conscience in the acquisition of money so long as it took place legally . . .

A specifically bourgeois economic ethic had grown up. With the consciousness of standing in the fullness of God's grace and being visibly blessed by Him, the bourgeois business

man, as long as he remained within the bounds of formal correctness, as long as his moral conduct was spotless and the use to which he put his wealth was not objectionable, could follow his pecuniary interests as he would and feel that he was fulfilling a duty in doing so. The power of religious asceticism provided him in addition with sober, conscientious and unusually industrious workmen, who clung to their purpose as to a life purpose willed by God.

Finally, it gave him the comforting assurance that the unequal distribution of the goods of this world was a special dispensation of Divine Providence, which in these differences, as in particular grace, pursued secret ends unknown to men. (pp. 176—7)

### Edifying literature

During the latter half of the nineteenth century popular edifying works that presented this model in a more or less alluring light were published throughout Europe for the benefit of young people and 'the masses', these latter being considered equally immature and in need of guidance. These books were bought by schools and parents, and they were recommended reading for adolescents, but they were particularly meant to be read aloud by parents and teachers so that the principles they expounded might be communicated 'live', as it were.

The Scot Samuel Smiles wrote books in the genre which enjoyed enormous success in England, but they were also translated into most European languages, and into Indian and Japanese. It is evident therefore that the ethics peculiar to that time were the ethics of a class: they were not restricted by national frontiers, and were intended to provide a working model for the managerial class on whose success the ascendancy of Western societies depended.

The titles of Smiles's books speak for themselves: *Self-Help*

(1850) praises personal initiative in the form of hard work and study; *Character* (1872) praises tenacity and perseverance, whereby a man may acquire the qualities which ennoble those not born titled and wealthy; *Duty* (1880) praises the self-educated man who, through strict self-discipline, becomes his own master and wins public acclaim.

Michele Lessona's *Volere e potere (To Will Is To Achieve, 1928)* is written in similar vein ('since in Italy the time for revolutions is over, and our future depends entirely on intelligent hard work'). It is a collection of anecdotes, biographies and portraits of his well-known and less well-known compatriots aimed at providing an example to Italian youth. The theme of the book is that if you work hard and are thrifty you will earn the approbation of the powers that be, and if you know how to take advantage of this you too may become rich and powerful, will enjoy the respect of your neighbour and God's blessing and will serve your country well. Then comes the conclusion:

contempt for wealth is a terrible ill, a hereditary disease, as it were, since we have inherited it from aristocrats . . . By contrast, the benefits of honestly pursued and honestly earned wealth are immense. Satisfaction is to be gained from labouring in pursuit of it, the mind is given something to aim at, to consider from every angle — looking for flaws, correcting and improving on original ideas, coaxing something into being, dealing with difficulties and hardship, sometimes having to start again from scratch, to abandon one attempt and make another; then after all the set-backs and disappointments comes renewed hope, success, then further reversals followed by further triumphs, and the final achievement that makes up for everything and brings with it the energy and courage to undertake something new and worthwhile.

In the meantime, people who hitherto never spared you a thought, and who perhaps even laughed at you, begin to make way for you, to eye you benevolently, to show signs of

respect; you will be surrounded by flattery; but since you have learned from experience to recognize its blandishments you keep your distance and are not its dupe.

Life does not become easier, on the contrary, new and unforeseen mishaps occur; but you know how to win through, you sprint off again; you are motivated by thoughts of a bright future and a good education for your children, establishing your own good name, and the pleasures of the improving conversations you will have with them, all of which help you to overcome the inevitable trials of life; and there is also the joy of being able to put your honourably acquired wealth to a more public use, by helping those who deserve help and by supporting the nation's charities that are useful and decent. (Translator's version)

The image of man which emerges from these texts is extremely encouraging, or, one might say, edifying. If a man is of a willing disposition, no obstacle will stand in the way of his progress. He will be in control of his material and spiritual world, since both respect the will to do what is right. This is not difficult to achieve since all that is required is obedience from the start to the moral code inherent in a healthy family upbringing. According to Smiles, the civilization of a nation depends on the character of its individuals, and it is on these that the well-being of a society rests.

We find an exact replica of this ideal man or citizen in the work of the Austrian writer Adalbert Stifter. He too sees the strength of the state as being dependent on the moral fibre or self-discipline of its inhabitants. As Carl Schorske points out in *'Fin de Siècle' Vienna: Politics and Culture*, Stifter saw the subjection and control of the passions as an integral and indispensable aspect of both individual and state freedom: 'genuine freedom demands the most self-control, the constraint of one's desires . . . The foremost and only enemies of freedom therefore are all those people who are possessed by powerful desires and urges, which they wish to gratify by any

means' (p. 281). In his story *Der Nachsommer* (*Indian Summer*) Stifter gives a fictional example of what he means by *Bildung* or that inner strength which is conducive to true freedom: 'Whoever is morally free can be politically free and always is so; not all the powers of the earth can make the others free. There is but one power which can do so: *Bildung*' (p. 282).

The author deals with Heinrich's journey throughout life, but of particular interest is the description of his childhood which recreates that atmosphere of benevolent paternalism based on a strict hierarchy, that painful apprenticeship in obedience and duty and that tireless diligence which we have already come across in the edifying propaganda mentioned above. Schorske comments here:

In this household [Heinrich's] old-style commercial enterprise and an upright family life are felicitously united under the sober justice of the father-master . . . Heinrich Drendorf begins his story with the lapidary sentence 'My father was a merchant.' Domicile and shop were under the same roof. The employees ate at the master's table as members of an enlarged family. The ethic of fatherhood governed the elder Drendorf's behaviour as entrepreneur. The obverse was equally true: Drendorf's early capitalist ethic informed his exercise of paternal authority. He managed his family and his household, one might say, like a business in an era when probity, thrift, simplicity, and strict personal accountability were the principal economic virtues. Every person had his appointed duties in the household. Time and space were precisely subdivided and organized in such a fashion that every segment fulfilled a specified function. Heinrich's mother, a warm and good-natured soul who would have allowed her children a more spontaneous life, enforced 'out of fear of Father' the appointed tasks laid down by the master of the household. The well-ordered environment was the key to the well-ordered soul, and together they composed the well-ordered world. (Ibid., pp. 284—5)

If this was indeed the conventional image of man, Freud's theories must have caused a considerable scandal among his contemporaries. Freud's research began as a therapeutic method of dealing with psychoneuroses and was therefore mainly the concern of those whose specific function was to cure similar affections; but research in this field revealed certain aspects of psychic activity hitherto ignored or neglected, and it gradually became a general psychology involving the study of both pathological and normal behaviour. An image of man began to emerge from Freud's inquiries that was in total contrast to the conventional one. It particularly shocked the methodical, conservative middle classes who believed (and were determined to believe) that they were the foundations upon which the Habsburg Empire's vast realm was built and that the structure of their private family life was a replica in miniature of the great imperial structure personified by the paternal and immutable figure of Franz-Josef.

### **Man is not master in his own house**

What was becoming apparent through Freudian research was that that part of an individual which acts in accordance with existing conventions, which manages to bridle emotions and passions in obedience to an accepted authority and is able to achieve whatever it sets out to do, is only a fraction of the human personality, that fraction which is most easily seen. Beneath and beyond this part lies a whole range of psychological phenomena, inaccessible to the conscious mind, interacting with it and unknown to it, determining its behaviour.

Thus man, far from being master of the world and of exterior events, is not even master in his own house. Freud was well aware of the scandalous nature of such an assertion.

But in thus emphasizing the unconscious in mental life we have conjured up the most evil spirits of criticism against

psycho-analysis. Do not be surprised at this, and do not suppose that the resistance to us rests only on the understandable difficulty of the unconscious or the relative inaccessibility of the experiences which provide evidence of it. Its source, I think, lies deeper. In the course of centuries the *naïve* self-love of men has had to submit to two major blows at the hands of science. The first was when they learnt that our earth was not the centre of the universe but only a tiny fragment of a cosmic system of scarcely imaginable vastness. This is associated in our minds with the name of Copernicus, though something similar had already been asserted by Alexandrian science. The second blow fell when biological research destroyed man's supposedly privileged place in creation and proved his descent from the animal kingdom and his ineradicable animal nature. This revaluation has been accomplished in our own days by Darwin, Wallace and their predecessors, though not without the most violent contemporary opposition. But human megalomania will have suffered its third and most wounding blow from the psychological research of the present time which seeks to prove to the ego that it is not even master in its own house, but must content itself with scanty information of what is going on unconsciously in its mind. We psychoanalysts were not the first and not the only ones to utter this call to introspection; but it seems to be our fate to give it its most forcible expression and to support it with empirical material which affects every individual. Hence arises the general revolt against our science, the disregard of all considerations of academic civility and the releasing of the opposition from every restraint of impartial logic. (*Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, standard edn, vol. XVI, pp. 284—5)

### Dual personality

The idea that the personality had a deeper layer over which we have no control was not something Freud himself had discovered. Nor was this notion considered particularly

surprising or scandalous. The possibility had already been suggested, and even put to the test, to a certain extent. As we shall see, famous physicians specializing in nervous illnesses, particularly hysteria, had acknowledged the scientific value of hypnosis, that is, of a therapeutic method whereby an artificial sleep is induced during which memories, emotions and impulses surface that the patient when awake cannot recall; there were even some stage hypnotists who would make spectators perform a series of actions after putting them into a state of trance. Several novels of the period features heroes whose 'doubles' surfaced under the influence of mysterious drugs or of evil or hypnotic powers of one sort or another.

The theme of the double runs through nineteenth-century literature from the tales of E. T. A. Hoffmann in the first years of the century — notably in *The Devil's Elixirs* (1813—16) — to Poe's *Tales* (1839—46), while a number of works, some popular then but now forgotten, others of lasting literary merit, interpreted this theme in various ways. Ellenberger's *The Discovery of the Unconscious* gives a brilliant account of the genre and is well worth reading. I shall therefore restrict myself to a few words on the most important works.

One of Dostoevsky's earliest novels, *The Double* (1846), tells of the painful experiences of the clerk Goljadkin, initially a quiet, irreproachable character, who gradually deteriorates into madness and the madhouse. In this book psychotic disturbances are seen as 'another self' which the hero holds responsible for his strange behaviour. This other self is identified as the dreaded persecutor who first insinuates himself in the guise of a humble and needy companion, and then becomes invasive and hostile until he finally deprives the protagonist of all his possessions and friends and drives him to his ruin.

Another type of dual personality is depicted in *The Picture*

of *Dorian Grey* by Oscar Wilde, still widely read today. Here the duality occurs between a portrait of Dorian painted in the immaculate bloom of youth and the hero himself destined as are all men to age and decay. Through the supernatural fulfilment of a wish it is the portrait which shows all the scars of the hero's depraved existence, while he himself still radiates youth and beauty. But the trick cannot last, and as Dorian contemplates the evidence of his moral decadence as depicted in the features of the portrait, he is so overcome with anguish that he stabs the canvas; whereupon he falls dead, and assumes in death the ravaged corrupt appearance which is his by rights. The portrait alone remains to immortalize his lost youth and beauty. In this instance the theme of the double has been used to represent the perfection and nobility of the work of art which survives the creator and his corruptibility.

*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* by R. L. Stevenson (1886) is undoubtedly the most popular and imaginative example of this kind of literature. The tale hinges on the struggle between good and evil in the human soul. Dr Jekyll is kind and humane to such a degree that he cannot tolerate the tension between his mind and his instincts and therefore invents a mysterious drug that enables him to suppress at will the side of his nature that threatens the other. In this way he can be in turn the good, kind, helpful doctor his neighbours have come to respect, or the frightful disruptive beast he harbours within him. Unfortunately the scheme gets out of hand: the evil self gradually gains the upper hand and takes over spontaneously, regardless of the mysterious drug. The story ends with the suicide of Dr Jekyll who has become incapable of restraining the evil being to whom he himself had given free expression.

The recurrent theme of these novels is that of the dual personality. It is important to note that the main characters are always highly respectable persons — priests (in *Le*