Dear Wilhelm,

Here I am again, since yesterday morning, refreshed, cheerful, impoverished, at present without work, and having settled in again, I am writing to you first.

And now I want to confide in you immediately the great secret that has been slowly dawning on me in the last few months. I no longer believe in my neurotica [theory of the neuroses]. This is probably not intelligible without an explanation; after all, you yourself found credible what I was able to tell you. So I will begin historically [and tell you] where the reasons for disbelief came from. The continual disappointment in my efforts to bring a single analysis\(^1\) to a real conclusion; the running away of people who for a period of time had been most gripped [by analysis]; the absence of the complete successes on which I had counted; the possibility of explaining to myself the partial successes in other ways, in the usual fashion — this was the first group. Then the surprise that in all cases, the father, not excluding my own,\(^2\) had to be accused of being perverse — the realization of the unexpected frequency of hysteria, with precisely the same conditions prevailing in each, whereas surely such widespread perversions against children are not very probable. The [incidence] of perversion would have to be immeasurably more frequent than the [resulting] hysteria because the illness, after all, occurs only where there has been an accumulation of events and there is a contributory factor that weakens the defense. Then, third, the certain insight that there are no indications of reality in the unconscious, so that one cannot distinguish between truth and fiction that has been cathexed with affect. (Accordingly, there would remain the solution that the sexual fantasy invariably

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seizes upon the theme of the parents.) Fourth, the consideration that in the most deep-reaching psychosis the unconscious memory does not break through, so that the secret of childhood experiences is not disclosed even in the most confused delirium. If one thus sees that the unconscious never overcomes the resistance of the conscious, the expectation that in treatment the opposite is bound to happen, to the point where the unconscious is completely tamed by the conscious, also diminishes.

I was so far influenced [by this] that I was ready to give up two things: the complete resolution of a neurosis and the certain knowledge of its etiology in childhood. Now I have no idea of where I stand because I have not succeeded in gaining a theoretical understanding of repression and its interplay of forces. It seems once again arguable that only later experiences give the impetus to fantasies, which [then] hark back to childhood, and with this the factor of a hereditary disposition regains a sphere of influence from which I had made it my task to dislodge it — in the interest of illuminating neurosis.

If I were depressed, confused, exhausted, such doubts would surely have to be interpreted as signs of weakness. Since I am in an opposite state, I must recognize them as the result of honest and vigorous intellectual work and must be proud that after going so deep I am still capable of such criticism. Can it be that this doubt merely represents an episode in the advance toward further insight?

It is strange, too, that no feeling of shame appeared — for which, after all, there could well be occasion. Of course I shall not tell it in Dan, nor speak of it in Askelon, in the land of the Philistines, but in your eyes and my own, I have more the feeling of a victory than a defeat (which is surely not right).

How nice that your letter has arrived just now! It induces me to advance a proposal with which I had intended to close. If during this lazy period I were to go to the Northwest Station on Saturday evening, I could be with you at noon on Sunday and then travel back the next night. Can you clear that day for an idyll for the two of us, interrupted by an idyll for three and three and a half [of us]? That is what I wanted to ask. Or do you have a dear guest in the house or something urgent to do elsewhere? Or, if I have to leave for home the same evening, which would then not be worthwhile, do the same conditions obtain if I go straight to the Northwest Station on Friday evening and stay with you one and a half days? I mean this week, of course.

Now to continue my letter. I vary Hamlet's saying, "To be in readiness": to be cheerful is everything! I could indeed feel quite
discontent. The expectation of eternal fame was so beautiful, as was that of 
certain wealth, complete independence, travels, and lifting the children above 
the severe worries that robbed me of my youth. Everything depended upon 
whether or not hysteria would come out right. Now I can once again remain 
quiet and modest, go on worrying and saving. A little story from my collection 
occurs to me: “Rebecca, take off your gown; you are no longer a bride.”³ In 
spite of all this, I am in very good spirits and content that you feel a need to 
see me again similar to mine to see you.

There remains one small anxiety. What can I still understand of your 
matters? I am certainly incapable of critically evaluating them; I shall hardly 
be in a position to comprehend them, and the doubt that then sets in is not the 
product of intellectual work, like my doubt about my own matters, but is the 
result of mental inadequacy. It is easier for you; you can survey everything I 
bring and criticize it vigorously.

I have to add one more thing. In this collapse of everything valuable, the 
psychological alone has remained untouched. The dream [book] stands 
entirely secure and my beginnings of the metapsychological work have only 
grown in my estimation. It is a pity that one cannot make a living, for instance, 
on dream interpretation!

Martha came back with me to Vienna. Minna and the children are staying 
in the country another week. They have all been exceedingly well.

My pupil, Dr. Gattel, is something of a disappointment. Very gifted and 
clever, he must nevertheless, owing to his own nervousness and several 
unfavorable character traits, be classified as unpalatable.

How all of you are and whatever else is happening between heaven and 
earth, I hope — anticipating your reply — to hear soon in person.

Cordially your

Sigm.

Notes to "Letter from Freud to Fliess, September 21, 1897"

Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson

1 The manuscript previously was misread here. The German text printed in 
Anfänge reads, “die fortgesetzten Enttäuschungen bei den Versuchen, meine 
Analyse zum wirklichen Abschluss zu bringen,” which Strachey correctly 
translates as “continual disappointments in my attempts at bringing my 
analysis to a real conclusion.” But the original manuscript reads eine Analyse 
(a single analysis), not meine Analyse.

2 Strachey (S.E. 1:259) resurrected this phrase, “mein eigener nicht 
ausgeschlossen,” which had been omitted in Anfänge and Origins.

3 Schur (1972, p. 191) writes: “The meaning of this Jewish joke is 
obvious: ‘You were once a proud bride, but you got into trouble, the wedding 
is off — take off your bridal gown.’” Another interpretation, which I believe 
to be correct, was suggested to me
by Anna Freud — namely, that Freud, with his theory of the neuroses, had believed himself privileged and happy as a bride. Those days were now over and he had to return to his earlier ordinary status; he had made no discovery. *Kalle* is a slang word that can also be used for a prostitute instead of a bride.
The important letter of September 21, 1897.

Herr v. Rich. Pless
v. d. Heydelstr. Berlin
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